Module 2

2.1 How to make the library environment friendly for early childhood literacy development

Learning objectives

- Understanding how the look and feel of a library can aid in a child's early literacy development.
- Understanding that there is a lot more to early literacy than reading and writing.
- Thinking innovatively about the different ways we can prompt creativity in children.
- Making the most of story hour and other early literacy programmes at the library.
- Considering mother tongue languages when it comes to early literacy learning and how we make this part of our library offering.
- Looking at what we can do to improve the mother tongue language resources in our libraries.

Designated early childhood areas within the library

Caption 1: A young child reading at the National Library, Uganda.
[Alt text: A young child is seated on a blue plastic chair facing a bright yellow bookshelf looking through a selection of picture books.]
Caption 2: A librarian guiding children through the alphabet at the National Library, Uganda.
[Alt text: Two young children are seated on a carpet while a librarian kneels next to them showing them the alphabet on a white and pink toy. The toy allows them to select a letter and then to hear it pronounced through an audio function.]
Caption 3: Happy children in the Msunduzi Library, South Africa

[Alt text: A group of young children are gathered with librarians in front of a mural. The children are each holding brightly coloured paper flowers. The mural is a scene from the Lion King featuring characters from the original animation, including Simba.]
Caption 4: The reading room at Msunduzi Library, South Africa
[Alt text: A young boy in a blue sweatshirt looks towards the camera with a smile on his face. There are children seated at desks behind him reading picture books. The walls are lined with bookshelves which are packed with picture books.]
Caption 5: Young children making the most of the picture books at the library in Ejere, Ethiopia.
[Alt text: A group of young children are sitting on a green and red carpet in the library in Ejere. They are looking at a display of picture books. Some children are reading and some children are talking.]

A quality early childhood educational environment, whether it is indoor, outdoor or temporal, should encourage engagement, stimulate learning and promote growth in all areas of development. - Kristin Breeve and Jennifer Paris

Discussion prompt 2.1 – Moodle forum

Discuss these points within your cohort group and contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. Describe what the early-childhood space in your library looks like? Share pictures if you have them. You can upload these to the Moodle.
2. What makes it attractive to the children who visit?
3. What would you like to improve?
4. If possible, please upload pictures of the space you have set aside in the library for children. We would like to include these pictures as part of this course going forward.

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Through your efforts as librarians and library staff, you'll know that a dedicated library space for children promotes the use of library services, and increases visits to the library. However, there is no single correct way of creating a reading space for children within your library. Most often it comes down to doing the best with the resources available to you. It's important to make a start though, because as we're going to establish in this course, reading to children, and encouraging them to become readers, is critical to their future success.

In the AfLIA survey, respondents were asked if their library had a children's corner or a children's section. 82% of 415 respondents said yes, while just over 17% said not yet.

Most of the respondents described their children's corners as quite basic spaces, containing chairs, tables, and a carpet.

To that, some respondents added book shelves and story book displays, and cushions; while a few others included computers, a kids' sofa, educational games, posters, puzzles, soft toys, a television, and CD player.

While these are all nice-to-haves, the principal ingredient of any successful children's space within the library is a staff member who cares, who is passionate about children and reading, and who has access to books.

While we would all like a catalogue of the 'best' books for the children in our communities, often the books we have are as a result of donations - possibly stories that are very American or British-centric, maybe the stock that we have is getting old, or our books are only available in English. We need to do the best with what we have, but we also need to do what we can as librarians and library staff to offer the children in our communities a richer, more appropriate early literacy experience by creating new materials and resources, or adapting and translating openly licensed resources that we have access to.

Later on in this course we will focus on producing these materials and resources, and creating a community of practice with other librarians and library staff so we can exchange what we create.

So, what do children love about the library?

In a study conducted in Indonesia, and titled *My Library: Involving Children in the Improvement of School Library Space*, the authors report on children's responses to a questionnaire in which they were asked to rate their library space.

> In the questionnaire, the children were asked to mention factors that encouraged and discouraged them to visit the library. They mentioned that they often visited the library because there were lots of books (78.7%), because the books were interesting (16.2%), because the space was comfortable and good (11.7%), because they could do many activities (13.5%), and because the librarians were nice (7.2%). When they were asked the factors that discouraged them to visit the library, they mentioned insufficient number of books (15.3%), uninteresting books (12.6%), unfriendly librarians (14.4%), restriction to do many activities (11.7%) and uncomfortable spaces (7.2%).

You could do a similar survey among the regular young visitors to your library, because as this study, and similar studies have found, 'participation of children and young people in the space-improvement activities has promoted their sense of belonging towards that space'.

Based on the children's feedback in the study above, review this checklist for the requirements of a child-friendly library space, and see how it compares to your own:

- ☐ A large number of books (Do you have enough books for every child visiting the library? What is your current stock of reading materials? Is it just books or do children have access to comics and magazines too? Do you have books in the languages spoken within your community? How do you source your books?)
- ☐ Interesting and appropriate books (when last did you carry out a 'weeding' exercise? Getting rid of books that don't serve your patron's needs is an important and necessary exercise.) You might be asking yourself, what is an 'appropriate' book? Think about the children who come to your library, who they are, which languages they speak, where they come from and what they need to support their early literacy learning journey. Are your books too old? Do your books feature ideas, story lines and characters that are predominantly American or British.
- ☐ A comfortable space (Does your children's section offer a cool refuge when it's hot outside, are there soft furnishings, is it possible to make it feel less like a school room - think about how your furniture is arranged.Is it bright and colourful, do you have posters on the walls.)
- ☐ A variety of activities (Do you offer story hour, is it interactive? Are there arts and crafts supplies available? Is there an opportunity to sing and dance?)
- ☐ Friendly library staff (Think about your attitude towards the children who visit your library, do you keep them coming back again and again, or do you keep them away?)

Is there anything you would add to this checklist?

Additional reading: African Children Deserve Stories about Themselves: The Intersecting Roles of African Authors, Illustrators, Communities and Languages in Story Creation.

Activity 2.1 – Moodle

In this activity, you're going to work on your own to create a moodboard that represents how you would like your child-friendly space to look, and what kind of feelings and emotions you'd like this space to evoke. Don't let the limitations of your current reality hold you back, let your mind wander and allow your creativity to take the lead.

*A **mood board** is a type of visual presentation or 'collage' consisting of images, text, and samples of objects in a composition. It can be based on a set topic or can be any material chosen at random. A mood board can be used to convey a general idea or feeling about a particular topic. They may be physical or digital, and can be effective presentation tools.*
- Wikipedia

Source: Jordanhill School D&T Dept on Flickr (CC-BY 2.0)
[Alt text: image created from a collage of different images to construct a mood board, features rockets, cars, lake-side views, a family, a child playing a toy guitar, an inflatable swimming pool, a motor car, and other technology]

There are some steps that need to be followed to put you in the right frame of mind, to let your inspiration flow, and to allow you to get creative with your moodboard.

Let's begin:
Step 1: Gather some supplies. You will need a few old magazines and newspapers that you are prepared to cut up, a pair of scissors, some glue, some colourful paints or pencils and crayons, and a big sheet of paper or board - at least A3 in size.
Step 2: Now go ahead and find a quiet place, and think about these questions. There is no need to research anything, or to write anything down, just let your mind wander:

a. How do we rethink the library as a space for children first?
b. How do we encourage children to love their library?
c. How do we encourage children to love and care for books?
d. How do we harness the power of the imagination?
e. How do we make the most of the physical space we have available?
f. If we don't have a lot of resources, how do we make the best of what's available to us?

Step 3: Still in your quiet space, close your eyes and meditate towards inspiration for between

10 and 20 minutes.
Step 4: Use the materials you have gathered to create your moodboard. Give yourself a time limit of no more than 40 minutes. Don't overthink what you are doing, just let your inspiration and creativity guide you.
Step 5: Take a photo of your moodboard and upload it to the Moodle. Show it to your cohort group while explaining your thought process to them.

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Learning through play

Where and how does 'play' fit into early learning?
Traditionally, and based on what we may have seen on TV and in the movies, libraries are perceived to be quiet places, with strict librarians who spend their time telling people to shhh! Does your library fit this stereotype? Or does your library offer children the space to express themselves and to learn through play? Let's talk more about what learning through play means, and the benefits.

What do we mean by 'play'?
As adults, we might be under the impression that when it comes to children, learning and play are two separate things, however, 'it is now understood that moments often discounted as 'just play' or as 'fiddling around' are actually moments in which children are actively learning'.

This OER curriculum text talks about why children should be encouraged to play?
Because play:

- Inspires imagination
- Facilitates creativity
- Fosters problem solving
- Promotes development of new skills
- Builds confidence and higher levels of self-esteem
- Allows free exploration of the environment
- Fosters learning through hands-on and sensory exploration

Okay, that's good to know. But how does play actually translate into learning?

Source: [UNICEF / Lego Foundation - Learning Through Play]

This Unicef video goes even further to illustrate how different types of play contribute to early learning and development.

Video title: The Power of Play

Play is a natural part of childhood and is inherently human. Play is an important way for children to acquire new knowledge and skills from birth. Play can take many forms. When children play, they learn to socialize and they develop early foundational concepts in maths, science, geography, the universe and virtually all aspects of existence.

The brain thrives on experiences that establish new neural connections and pathways and play is a perfect way to provide these experiences for infants and young children.

Changing school performance, exam results and outcomes of education do not start with the textbook – it starts with the foundations that are laid and sustained through play from the start.

When we talk about 'play' in this way, we are not only talking about organized, adult lead or child lead games. Yes, these count as play, but so do the spontaneous interactions children have with each other, where games are invented on the spot; as well as the moments children play on their own, absorbed by the imagination. This is all play, and it's all learning.

Tanzanian based edutainment platform, Ubongo, does not believe that work and play should be seen as separate things, and has done a lot of work in Tanzania to promote the fact that play is an important, and integral aspect of early learning. They have written a case study on a survey done with parents and caregivers in Tanzania to see how play is perceived in the context of education. Read the case study below and then contribute to the discussion that follows.

Case study - Ubongo
Promoting Positive Caregiver Engagement

Ubongo's work focuses on teaching kids the skills they need to succeed in school and in life. However, young kids learn the most from the behaviour of the adults around them, so to be fully effective, we also need to invest in teaching parents (and caregivers / educators / adults) the skills and mindset that will help them better support their child's learning – especially in early childhood.

Consequently, it is through parents and caregivers that we can truly help children develop critical early cognitive skills so that they are well equipped to succeed when they start school. There is still a great need for caregiver education in Tanzania. Many parents and adults value discipline and obedience, and focus on their children developing early academic skills (such as writing letters) without realizing that much of early learning comes through play and interaction. They may thus may unknowingly curtail the development of their children through common practices like corporal punishment, silencing questions, and stifling curiosity and creative expression.

[Note for participants: this is just a brief excerpt, please read the entire case study and the results of the case study on the Ubongo website here.]

Source: Ubongo

[ALT text: Bright blue poster created by Ubongo with a call to action to 'play hide and seek with your children today' and an animated image of a parent / caregiver playing with a child. The Ubongo character Akili has a speech bubble with the words 'this will help us build our confidence'.]

Discussion prompt 2.2 – Moodle forum

In the context of what you have read and watched in the lesson so far, discuss these points within your cohort group, then contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. Have you embraced learning through play in your library setting? What does it 'look' like? How are children encouraged to play in the environment you've created?
2. When watching the Unicef 'The Power of Play' video, which ideas stand out for you the most? As an example, you might find this quote thought provoking: 'play is not an optional extra in early learning and development…'
3. The Ubongo case study talks about adults in Tanzania, and their understanding of what early learning entails - do you recognise a similar attitude within your own

communities?

4. Think about how you might explain to another colleague, adult / parent or caregiver why you think learning through play is important and beneficial for early literacy?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Learning through play within the context of the library

So now that we've got an idea of how learning and play intersect and we're able to recognize it, how do we incorporate more playful learning into our library spaces? Keep in mind that play can be adult or child lead, but it doesn't need to be. Children are capable of coming up with their own games when provided with an environment that promotes playful learning.

Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills. For this reason, play opportunities and environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective pre-primary programmes. - UNICEF, The Lego Foundation, Learning Through Play

Types of play within the context of the library

This literacy teaching toolkit lists a number of different types of play, but for the purposes of play within the context of the library, let's narrow it down to five.

1. **Functional play:** this is physical play that involves repeated actions and manipulations of sounds, objects and muscle movements; or exploring the properties of things.
2. **Imaginative / dramatic play:** children pretend or engage in make believe, they become characters, and use visual texts as props, or pretend to read or write.
3. **Constructive play / play with objects**: using objects creatively to build something from their imagination; can also include the use of letters and numbers to make real or imagined meaning.
4. **Symbolic play:** using an object symbolically, to stand in for something meaningfully, for example using a box as a car, using a banana as a phone.
5. **Play with rules:** these games usually have predetermined rules, but these rules can be decided on by the adult leading the game, or the children leading the game.

Activity 2.2 – Moodle

In this activity, you're going to describe a 'learning through play' style game that a. you've used in the library, or b. that you'd like to introduce to the library, or c. that you've observed the children in the library playing.

1. Describe the game in detail.
2. Note which of the type(s) of play you think the game references, and why.
3. Present the game to your cohort group, enquire if they have engaged with / have observed something similar.

*For example, when planning to use a librarian-led game in the library, you need to think about:

4. the content of the game, so that it helps the participants reach specific learning objectives;
5. the organization of the game:
    - How do you play the game?
    - How will you give instructions to the participants?
    - How will you check they understand how to play?
    - Will they play in pairs or groups?
    - Where will they play – inside or outside?
    - How long will they play for?
    - Can they adapt the game and play on their own?

*Adapted from the Tessa Open Edu course - Primary: Life Skills

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Additional ideas for games to play at the library

Now that you've shared some of your own ideas with your cohort group. Here are some more games that promote learning through play. Echoing what we have already discussed in this lesson, the World Bank Read@Home manual explains that 'games can be a fun and engaging way to interact with children and promote emergent literacy skills'.

The following games have been adapted from their manual for use in the library. Note, this resource was designed with parents and caregivers in mind, but much of the content can be adapted for library use.

Games that don't require reading or writing skills:

- **Rhyming:** Say a word and ask the children to think of a new word that rhymes with it. For example: can, ban, man, Fran, Jan.
- **Name, place, animal, thing:** Pick a letter of the alphabet. Think of a name, a place, an animal and a thing that starts with that letter. For example, with the letter S, a name is Sulaiman, a place is Somalia, an animal is a spider, and a thing is sugar. Try all the letters of the alphabet!
- **Outside:** When you are outside ask the children to point out all of the things they can see that start with the letter A. Then work through the alphabet. You can also do this while looking through a window.
- **Opposite/same:** Tell the children a story. Pick a word from the story and ask for its opposite. Ask for another word that means the same.
- **What am I?:** Gather a few everyday items like a leaf, pencil, or spoon, in a bag. Show the items to the children one at a time and ask them to describe the objects using different adjectives. For example, a metal spoon is shiny, metallic, cold, hard, and long.
- **I Spy:** Choose an item in the room and give a brief description of the item. Ask the children to guess what it is. For example, I spy with my little eye, something that is round, sweet and delicious. What am I? (A mango).
- **Concentration:** Choose a category, like fruits, and ask the children to take turns saying the names of different fruits as fast as they can. Then move on to the next category.
- **Line by line:** Take turns making up a story line by line. One person starts and the other person adds on. If the children are of an age where they can write, ask them to write each sentence down to create their own story book. Put the story books on display in the library.

Games for older children that make use of reading and writing skills:

- Last letter: Choose a word from a book you have read and say the word out loud. Ask the children to identify the last letter in that word and to say a word that starts with the last letter. For example, Glad. Dream. Marble. Elephant.
- Antonyms: Talk to the children about opposites: hot/cold, light/dark etc. While reading a story, choose a few words whose meaning your child knows. Ask them to define the word. Then ask them to name its antonym or opposite.
- Anagrams: Choose a word from a book that the children know. Ask them to make new words from that word. For example, from the word 'elephant' we can make the words 'peal' 'tap' 'hat' 'plan' 'pan' 'leap' and 'help'.
- Fill in the blanks: Copy some sentences from a book you are reading. Include a word in each sentence that is missing. Ask a child to choose the best word to complete the sentence. For example, "It was _____ outside so I took an umbrella." (raining)
- Make a list: Name items that you need from the store and have the children write them down. Check to see that the words are spelled correctly.
- Make a dictionary: When reading out loud, ask the children to write down new vocabulary on small pieces of paper. Later work together to define the words and write them down. Create a dictionary of new words and put it on your word wall in the library.

Video title: African Children's Games from Ghana

Games have been a part of many cultures for thousands of years. They have been used to bring whole communities together, teach history, values and to provide entertainment. Learning African Children's games provide the opportunity to teach traditional and contemporary customs, beliefs, values and culture as a whole of the different ethnic groups of Africa.

Music teachers of all grade levels should integrate games especially African Children's games into their music curricula to help students learn the history, traditional and contemporary customs, beliefs, values and culture in addition to teaching social, musical and dance skills.

Enjoy this video based on our research at Anlo-Afiadenyigba Roman Catholic Primary School from Ghana.

Transcriptions, Lyrics in Ewe / English, Descriptions and Lessons derived from the Games will be posted soon. A comprehensive curriculum on teaching Ghanaian Children's Games will also be available soon.

Produced by Prof. Paschal Yao Younge and Prof. Zelma Badu- Younge

Story Hour (and other formalized activities)

Source: Reading aloud at the National Library of Uganda

[Alt Text: A woman in a striped shirt is seated at a low table with an infant wearing a white dress seated on her lap. The woman is paging through a picture book, reading aloud while the infant appears to be engrossed in the story. There is a yellow bookshelf on the one side, filled with picture books on display, and a blue bookshelf on the other side, also filled with books.]

The results of the AfLIA survey revealed that most of the participating libraries have hosted a story hour, or host a regular, recurring story hour event. So then, based on your experience as librarians and library staff, what do you need to know and do in order to confidently read aloud to children, and to engage them in a story?

Discussion prompt 2.3 – Moodle forum

Think about story hour events you've hosted, or that have been hosted at your library and discuss the points below within your cohort group. Then contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. What makes a great story hour event?
2. Which kind of stories work best for story hour?

3. What did the children who participated in the story hour events enjoy the most?
4. What would you do differently next time?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Story Hour activity

You might be a seasoned story telling pro, but not everyone is a natural when it comes to the art of storytelling. Yes, it can be a daunting prospect… especially when faced with a room full of eager and excited children! Luckily, there are a number of tips and tricks that can help you make the most of your story hour activity, and ensure the children are learning a lot while being entertained.

Watch the video / read the transcript below.
YouTube video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YScUYPwKdz8

Transcript

What does it take to successfully read aloud to children?

By Dr Nkem Osuigwe

As children begin to develop language skills, they listen to learn words, ideas and concepts. Their ability to say words and to understand language more and more does not always mean that they can read in their mother tongues or in the country's lingua franca. Telling them stories at this age stirs up their imaginations and makes them want to learn. Even after they learn to read on their own, children still love to hear stories read to them.

First: It is important to understand that libraries as literacy-rich environments play significant roles in introducing children to stories and the love for reading as stories are read aloud to them.

Plan for a read-aloud event even if it is a regular activity. Identify stories that are easy to read with words that are not so high-sounding, easy to pronounce and explain, with concepts that children can immediately relate to. For children within the African continent, it is better to choose stories about the sun, moon, stars, wind, trees, sand, colours, animals, sisters, brothers, parents and electricity, rather than

stories about snow, autumn and winter. As children grow older and start schooling, they can delve into stories with other backgrounds different from theirs. By then, their brains would have been built up to understand the differences in different environments.

Be careful about choosing wordy story books. It may be better to choose storybooks with pictures that help to explain the themes, plots, characters or objects in the story. If a book with many words is chosen, you may have to decide whether to read the entire book at once or divide into bits or leave out parts that don't add to the story.

Make reading stories a fun time for children. As a librarian or library staff, reading stories to children should not be approached as a chore or as a routine that is done all the time.
First! Make it fun, ad lib, add words where necessary including simple questions as Why? How? Is it possible? This will create some elements of suspense.
Secondly! Use facial expressions and hand gestures to show emotions as expressed in the book whether it is fear, joy, wonderment, hunger, tiredness, agreement or distaste. This moves the story along and makes it come alive to the children.
Get involved in the story. As much as possible, don't get stuck in one spot as you read stories to children in the library. Move around and flow with the story but do not let the movements distract the children from the story.

Draw children into the story being read. Make sure that the children you are reading to are following the story. Stop intermittently to repeat a line with the prevailing emotions of that line - wonder, anger, joy or tiredness.
To do this, pull kids into the story by asking questions as you read. For example, let's say you are reading the story about the race challenge between the tortoise and the hare. You can ask children as you start the story who they think will win the race while demonstrating the natural speed rate of the tortoise and the hare. Asking them and getting answers from them will make them more interested in the story. Another example is the fable from Aesop on a contest between the Wind and the Sun. The two entities needed to find out who is stronger and engaged in a contest. As the story begins ask the children to choose who may win. Get their answers. Note that some children may not talk but have an opinion! You can think of ingenious means of overcoming that. The important thing is to try to get all of them engaged.

You may add activities that engage children while reading the story. Is there a rhyme or a song you can coin up or that is in the book? Repeat it as often as possible and get the children to sing along with you. If possible, show pictures in the story to all the children as you read. Drawing on cardboard sheets about objects or characters can be done and mounted where the children can also see them.

Another aspect to note when reading to children is your voice. If your voice as the reader comes out flat, the children may likely lose interest. When children are read to, they follow the story through the voice of the reader. As much as is possible, modulate your voice to reflect the 'movement' of the story. Use your voice to build up tension, create excitement and resolution in the story. Reading the story and rehearsing before the read aloud event is advisable. Most importantly, make read aloud sessions fun for children!

Follow the steps below to help you host a successful Story Hour activity:

Before the Story Hour event:

1. Plan to host a regular Story Hour activity session at the library - stick to a specific time and day so that the children who attend know when it's going to happen, can look forward to it, and won't miss out.
2. Market your story hour event by putting up posters, telling parents, care-givers and teachers and distributing flyers. If your library has a Facebook page, or a WhatsApp group, advertise the event on social media.
3. Create a comfortable place for the children to sit. Provide different seating options for younger and older children. You can also invite parents and caregivers, and when possible, ask them if they'd like to narrate a story. This is a great way of introducing different mother tongue stories at story hour events.
4. Prepare a few different story options ahead of time. When choosing books, think about the following:
    a. What are the children's interests at this time?
    b. What are the children learning at school? Can we read something complementary?
    c. Do we have this story available in their mother tongue language? If not, is it possible to translate it?
    d. Can the children recognize themselves and their surroundings in this story?
    e. For more information on story book selection, read the Reach Initiative's comprehensive guide to What Makes a Great Story Book.
5. Remember, practice makes perfect so if you're new to this, read the story aloud before you read it to the children.
6. Think about the general theme of the story. Do you know any songs or rhymes that fall under this theme? You can make these part of your story hour event.

7. Find other books on the library shelves that are similar to the book you are going to read during Story Hour. Encourage the children to read these once the story hour is finished, or to borrow them from the library.
8. Prepare a sensory table that incorporates some of the aspects of the story in a tangible way so the children have something to touch and feel while recalling different parts of the story. For example, if the story is about going shopping, have a few items available that the children might hear about in the story, these can be empty boxes or packages.

During the Story Hour event:

9. Involve the children from the get go by asking one of them to choose a book from the selection you made ahead of time.
10. Children may need time to settle before you begin reading. Young children respond well to singing a song or saying a rhyme. Ask older children to recall what happened in a novel at the end of your last read-aloud session.
11. When everyone has settled down, make sure they can all see the book. Show the front and back covers. Ask an open-ended question: 'What do you think the story is about?' Allow time for some guessing and interactive discussion among the children before you proceed.
12. Continue by reading the name of the author (and illustrator). If your books are written and illustrated locally, celebrate this fact by pointing out to the children that books are created by people just like them! If the children are new to books, show them the different aspects of a book - the cover, the title, the blurb on the back etc. Show them how to turn the pages gently.
13. When you're ready to start reading, keep in mind that reading aloud is always a performance! Put lots of expression in your voice to create the mood! Speak with expression and use different voices for different characters.
14. Try to be aware of your listeners and don't read too fast. Allow time for them to look closely at the illustrations or to create a mental picture as you read.
15. We all have to learn how to listen to and engage with a story. Draw the children into the story, for example, ask open ended questions, like: 'What do you think might happen next?', 'Where is the story taking place?', 'Who is the main character?'. Alternatively, discuss one of the illustrations. *See box below with additional information about the types of questions you can ask during a Story Hour event.*
16. Books with rhyme, rhythm and repetition make good read-aloud books for young children and to introduce a new language. As they get to know the story, encourage children to join in as you read.
17. Picture books are useful when reading to children of different ages.When you read a picture book, make sure that all the children get a chance to see the pictures. You might like to pause to show the pictures and allow comments or questions as you read or after you've read the whole book through once.

After the Story Hour event:

18. Ask the children if they have any questions about the story. Allow the other children to answer these questions.

19. Ask one of the children to retell the story in their own words.
20. Ask the children to draw a picture or comic book that illustrates the story.
21. Ask one of the children to retell the story, but this time from the point of view of one of the other characters in the book. This is a fun exercise when you have read the same story with the children on a few different occasions and they know the story well. Remember, children enjoy hearing the same story again and again, especially one that contains rhyming words and repetition.
22. Ask a group of children to act out the story.
23. Add new words to your libraries 'word wall' - we will discuss this in more detail during a later module.

Types of questions that can be asked during a Story Hour event to promote early literacy

Literal questions:
These questions allow children to recall simple facts from the text. For example, ask the children: What is the name of the story? What is the name of the main character? What kind of animal is this character?

Inferential questions:
These kinds of questions are more complicated than literal questions and give the children an opportunity to guess at or imagine outcomes for the story, based on what they have heard in the text, or seen in the illustrations. These questions can be asked to check the children's comprehension of what's happening in the story, when they are not explicitly told what's going on.
For example, ask the children: What do you think happened? Why do you think (this) happened? What does (this word) mean?

Evaluative questions:
Based on evidence from the story being told, these questions ask children to make judgements about the story. These questions don't have a right or wrong answer, but children should be able to back up their opinions with facts from the story. For example, ask the children: How would you feel…? Why?; How is the life of the person in the story different from your life? Why? What makes you say that?; What would you have done differently if this happened to you? If you were the main character? Why?.

**Information adapted from Nal'ibali tip sheets and the World Bank Read@Home Manual.*

Video title: Best Afrobeats Kids & Family Party Mix Vol.1 - Bino & Fino
Party time. Put this Bino & Fino Afrobeats mix on at your next kids party and let the fun and dancing begin! Play it at home, in the car, with the kids, or by yourself :-) .

Story Hour is not just about reading

In its Open Educational Resources for active learning, TESSA shows the benefits of having children participate in stories, songs, dramas and role play.

Stories and songs:

- Entertain and stimulate
- Connect children in a shared experience
- Develop language and ideas
- Explore feelings and problems

Dramas and role play:

- Explore real life situations
- Develop understanding of other's lives and feelings
- Actively involve children
- Promote higher level thinking

When working on your ideas for story hour events, think about how you can incorporate these kinds of activities going forward.

Adapted from source: poster created by TESSA Open Educational Resources for active learning. [CC BY-SA]

Activity 2.3 – Moodle

Having read through the steps on how to host a successful story hour, and after your Moodle discussion on how you've hosted story hour events in the past, complete the following activity with your cohort group.

1. As a group, brainstorm an idea for a story hour concept, including interactive elements and questions.
2. As a group, write down the steps you are going to take to host this event, including details on what you plan to do before story hour, during story hour and after story hour. This must relate to a specific event, with a specific book selection and specific questions.
3. As an individual, try your activity with the children during story hour at the library. If this is not possible, rehearse your activity on your own from start to finish. Record your story hour session or take photos to share with your group.
4. Provide feedback to your cohort group on the results.
5. As an individual, submit your work on the Moodle: this includes a write up of your plan, as well as a summary of the experience and the results.

Option:

6. If you would like to select this as your long-term project, work with your group on refining the activity based on your shared experiences of completing it, then write it up so it can be replicated by other librarians. This work can then be submitted to

Moodle as your long term project. For more information about long term projects, revisit the course introduction.

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Additional optional reading:

- Read this blog post about an interesting project set up by the SOMA Book Café in Tanzania to successfully encourage young children to write and publish their own storybooks. You can also view a video on YouTube about the project.
- Read this lovely story about an eight-year-old boy who wrote a book and snuck it on to the library shelves. The librarians loved the book and its illustrations and have added it to the library catalogue. Other children have been inspired to do the same!
- The World Bank Read@Home manual.
- Do a story walk, as an alternative to a read aloud event.
- Nal'ibali tips for story activities.

2.2 The use of mother tongue / local languages to drive literacy development and to help children learn to understand and speak English

What languages are our children speaking, writing and learning?

Based on the AfLIA survey, these are some of the languages being spoken, written and read in our communities. From the 483 responses to the survey question about language use, it was discovered that over 230 different languages and dialects are spoken in the 18 countries targeted. **More than 40 of these languages are used by the libraries for story hour events**.

Early literacy development in African libraries – survey findings

Based on the 483 responses to our survey we discovered that over 230 different languages and dialects are spoken in the 22 African countries surveyed. More than 40 of these languages are used by the libraries for story hour.

African Library & Information Associations & Institutions @AfLIACon

nba excellence in education @NBA_SouthAfrica

Discussion prompt 2.4 – Moodle forum

Think about the early literacy resources you have in your library and discuss the points below within your cohort group. Then contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. In what language/s are the children at your library learning to read?
2. What mother-tongue resources do you have for children and caregivers in your library?
3. Is there an expectation or demand from parents and caregivers that the library should offer more mother-tongue resources?
4. If not, why not?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

Why is the use of the mother tongue language important when it comes to early literacy and learning?

Languages form a pivotal role in our lives as they are inclusive of our different cultures and identities. An African language is not just a series of words but includes certain African nuances that emerge in the form of idioms, metaphors and euphemisms as well as praises. Language is therefore intrinsically tied to a sense of belonging, which is in turn linked to society and its values. Teaching in African languages is critical as it can help learners to grasp concepts more easily, pass well, and support their success later in life. - Somikazi Deyi (Lecturer at the University of Cape Town, School of Languages and Literatures: Department of African Languages)

In 2016 UNESCO published a paper about the importance of teaching children literacy in their mother tongue. It was titled, *'If you don't understand, how can you learn?'* Think about the title for a minute or two. It really makes you think, doesn't it?

This paper puts forward these key messages:

1. Children should be taught in a language they understand, yet as much as 40% of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand.
2. Speaking a language that is not spoken in the classroom frequently holds back a child's learning, especially for those living in poverty.
3. At least six years of mother tongue instruction is needed to reduce learning gaps for minority language speakers.
4. In multi-ethnic societies, imposing a dominant language through a school system has frequently been a source of grievance linked to wider issues of social and cultural inequality.
5. Education policies should recognise the importance of mother tongue learning. Unfortunately, sometimes even if the policies are there, implementation might be lacking. Therefore we need to do what we can in our own community spaces.
6. Linguistic diversity creates challenges within the education system, notable in areas of teacher recruitment, curriculum development and the provision of teaching materials.

Think back to your experience as a young person going to school for the first time. What was the first language you spoke at home - your mother tongue? What was the language of instruction for you at school? Were they the same? If we look at the statistics, we can probably guess that they were not.

These key messages drive home the important notion that children learn better in their mother tongue first. As librarians and library staff, we are in an excellent position to support mother tongue early literacy initiatives, if we are able to secure books and other reading materials in the languages relevant to the languages spoken in our communities, and if we make a concerted effort to build our story hour events and other activities around the use of these languages.

Adding to this, the World Bank's Read@Home manual explains that, 'when children have access to books in their mother tongue, their parents and communities are also more likely to be involved in their learning.'

Ubongo, the Tanzanian NPO that created the animated, educational series, *Akili and Me*, is also invested in translating their content into as many languages as possible. Currently the Youtube series is available in English, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, Chichewa, and Hausa.

Case study: Ubongo - Deepening Engagement and Learning Through Adaptation

> There's something undeniable about being greeted and spoken to in a language that you know and understand. In fact, various studies by UNESCO highlight the benefits of instruction of kids in their mother tongue or what we at Ubongo like to call their heart language – a child's first and usually more familiar language.
>
> These benefits include increased likelihood to enroll and succeed in school, and increased likelihood of parents involvement in and communicating with teachers about their child's learning. Indeed, research has found that skills and concepts gained in the learner's mother language don't need to be re-taught when they transfer to a second language. This is why the adaptation of our content is critical to achieving higher learning outcomes and better engagement with kids.

Additional reading or viewing:

Loud and Clear: Teach Children in a Language They Use and Understand

World Bank live event - Loud and Clear: Teach Children in a Language They Use and Understand (2021)

How do we make 'mother tongue' activities an important part of our library offering?

To assist with the acquisition of materials, in Module 4 we are going to look at adaptation and translation, and how adapting or translating existing openly licensed books may help boost what our libraries can offer.

While translation is one option, this type of community-based resource creation is possible too:

> In some countries, such as Ethiopia, communities play an important role in writing and illustrating stories. These stories not only help capture oral traditions before they die out, they can also give elders, teachers, children, and others a role in maintaining their own cultural heritage in their own language.

The case study above is highlighted in In this Early Literacy Resource Network report '*African Children Deserve Stories about Themselves*', the authors look at 'the intersecting roles of African authors, illustrators, communities and languages in story creation'.

Caption: Solomon Ato and his grandson, from Fiche in Ethiopia, holding the two books he wrote.
[Alt text: An elderly gentleman wearing a cap and white scarf draped around his torso over beige trousers and holding a red hand-bound A4 size book. He is standing next to and holding the hand of a young boy who has been identified as his grandson. The boy is

CODE Ethiopia (CE), which receives core funding from CODE, works with 97 community libraries throughout Ethiopia. Community story writing is a part of its remit for some of these libraries. Community involvement starts with a three-day workshop for librarians, teachers, and school directors on story-writing; illustration; story evaluation; and library organization and use. Trainees go home with the responsibility of training 30 other community members. This nucleus then forms the basis for a community's efforts to create, illustrate, and evaluate stories.

Is this something you would consider doing or have done at your library?

wearing a black and white checked long sleeve shirt, gray tracksuit pants and sandals. Both are standing at the bottom of a set of stairs leading up to what looks like a community hall. There is an Ethiopian flag strung up on the stoep.]	

Activity 2.4 – Moodle

In this solo activity, you're going to complete a research exercise looking at the early literacy mother-tongue resources available in your library, or within the broader community. If there is more than one mother tongue language spoken in your community, select at least two for this exercise.

1. In your library, what early literacy learning resources are available for the mother tongue languages used in your community. This can include books (fiction and nonfiction), readers, text books, magazines, flyers, orthographies, alphabet posters, informational posters, radio programming etc.
2. Are these materials old or recently acquired?
3. How were these materials acquired?
4. If the materials are stocked on the shelves, how often are they being 'booked out' by patrons?
5. Is there an existing orthography for the language? Can the children read and write in the language?
6. What languages do the parents speak at home? If parents and guardians are from different language groups, which language is selected as the mother tongue?
7. Are the children learning the language at school?
8. What languages does the teacher use in class?
9. Are there songs available that teach the alphabet in mother-tongue language/s?
10. Is there a guide to learning and teaching the mother tongue language for parents and caregivers?

Write your report, share your findings with your cohort group, and submit the report to

Moodle.

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

What can we do if we encounter resistance to mother-tongue learning from parents / guardians or even children?

In your experience, have you ever encountered resistance from parents or guardians to having their children taught in mother tongue languages? Is English seen as superior, or as the language needed to achieve 'success' in your communities?

Read an extract from this study below, it references one reason why communities may have been reluctant to learn to read in their mother tongue, and how they changed their minds about this:

> Through initial success in non-formal or informal reading initiatives, positive attitudes towards reading have been observed to emerge from recently reticent or antagonistic communities. As has been my personal observation in DRC, Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, and among Darfur refugees, many communities are convinced that their own language is not readable since they have never seen it written and so believe that it cannot be written. Once taught to use even a few rudimentary reading techniques or guided to transfer their reading skills in another language to the reading of their own, they quickly deduce that their language is indeed readable and enthusiastically set about the task of learning to read and even write in their own language. This is often the first step in the process of developing that language for use in formal school and elsewhere.

Discussion prompts – Moodle forum

Think about resistance to mother tongue learning you may have encountered in your library or community. Discuss the points below within your cohort group. Then contribute towards the discussion on the Moodle forum:

1. How do you feel about mother-tongue learning?
2. Are there any concerns, or resistance to mother tongue learning within your communities from parents / guardians or caregivers? From teachers? From voices of authority within the community? If yes, do you know what the reasons may be?
3. Think about some of the ways that as librarians, you might be able to address these concerns?

*This is a completion exercise, although the discussion won't be marked, feedback must be provided within the group via Moodle, this counts towards your course completion requirements.

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