

‘INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAMMES IMPACTING EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDIES FROM THE CARIBBEAN

Kingston, Jamaica

The impact of information literacy programmes on educational development within Belize, Bahamas, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago were explored on February 17, 2009 in a panel discussion entitled “Information Literacy Programmes Impacting Educational Development: Case Studies from the Caribbean” carried out with the support of UNESCO Kingston Cluster Office for the Caribbean at the Jamaica Library Service 60th Anniversary International Conference. The conference which was held at the Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort & Spa in Ocho Rios, Jamaica was themed “Public & School Libraries: Your Partners in National Development.”

The panel consisted of Mrs. Norma Amenu-Kpodo, University Librarian, University of the West Indies (UWI), Jamaica; Mrs. Dorcas Bowler, Head, the Bahamas Public Library Service; Mrs. Joy Ysaguirre, Chief Librarian, Belize National Library System and Mrs. Annette Wallace, Executive Director, National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS), Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Norma Amenu-Kpodo explored the use of the marketing function to maximise awareness and use of ‘Our Virtual Learning Environment’ (OurVLE) which is an online platform for learning support at the UWI, Mona Campus. Workshops, flyers, skits and other marketing tactics have contributed to the University’s recognition of its goal to train approximately 2000 (under/post graduate) students from all disciplines annually.

Online tutorials were designed to provide potential UWI students with the requisite information skills for survival in the tertiary institution. The UWI Distance Education Centre has utilised its online platform to prepare secondary level students for the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations, administered by the Caribbean Examination Council. Through the Generating Genius programme, the institution has trained first form males in the United Kingdom in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine

Mrs. Dorcas Bowler highlighted the Bahamas Public Library Service’s partnership with UNESCO to promote information literacy clubs and recruit library cadets in Bahamas in order to stimulate an interest in librarianship and as a method of sustaining the profession within the country. The initiative which began in 2005, involved training of students from various counties; the set up of computer labs to train cadets in basic library and information skills and the launch of the first community radio station to promote literacy and research skills from elementary grades to tertiary level and beyond through educational broadcasts to the wider population. The Bahamian programme has been

noted to provide lifelong skills and parents and teachers are reported to have noticed the positive effects on the quality of the participants' school work.

The case study of Belize explored the School's Wide Area Network (SWAN) project and highlighted the government's role and responsibility in determining policy and the importance of highlighting its commitment to facilitate growth in education. Mrs. Joy Ysaguirre concluded that the SWAN which was supposed to harness Information & Telecommunications Technology for enhancing education, improving national welfare and securing Belize's place in the new global economy through the linking of public schools and libraries failed because of several reasons that included loss of national control of the telecommunications industry to foreign investors; minimal progress in Information Literacy at the national level; the presentation of Internet services as the ultimate resource, implying that there was no longer a need for libraries and other information services as well as the inability of government institutions to maintain the technology.

Among the positive outcomes of the failed SWAN project were the achievement of a modest level of Information literacy; heightened expectations throughout the school system, especially at secondary school level, due to an awakened awareness of the power of the technology and self-education through equitable access. She posited that the way forward would be paved by the lessons learnt: well-targeted plans; training for trainers and individuals responsible for maintaining the equipment, as well as discussions and compliance with all stakeholders.

Mrs. Annette Wallace highlighted several information literacy initiatives that positively impacted the educational development of the Trinidad and Tobago population. The successful partnership of the UNESCO/NALIS Community Information Literacy Skills Project yielded several clubs within the territory and six other Caribbean countries. The partnership also led to the creation of the Caribbean Network of Information Literacy Clubs website which served to highlight the work of the Information Literacy Clubs and provided an online environment to facilitate the sharing of literacy experiences, ideas and documents. An Information Literacy Club Manual was developed as a guideline for the teachers of Information Literacy.

The Queens Royal College is noted for the success of information literacy initiatives implemented in the institution; the information literacy curriculum which involved collaboration between teachers and librarians provided students with relevant library and information literacy skills.

Constraints faced in implementation included shortage of professionally trained staff. The positive outcomes of the initiatives included the empowerment of adults and students to become sophisticated researchers and users of information through Information Literacy classes; an increased awareness of the library and its service and an increase in internet use.

The conference highlighted the critical role played by public and school libraries in advancing national development and served as a medium through which library and information professionals, local policy makers and relevant technocrats shared experiences and best practices to provide greater success in service to clients.

The Jamaica Library Service began its 60th Anniversary celebration in May, 2008 with the Governor General of Jamaica, the Most Honourable Prof. Sir Kenneth Hall, ON. CGMC, OJ, issuing a proclamation on April 30, 2008, declaring May 1, 2008 – April 30, 2009 the official anniversary year. This was followed by a variety of activities island-wide.

The Jamaica Library Service has been providing free library and information services to the Jamaican public since 1948. It now offers 614 public library access points and 926 school libraries. Since its establishment, the organisation has constantly repositioned itself to secure its continued relevance as the largest library network in Jamaica and one of the most comprehensive in the Caribbean.

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