Promoting Reading in Tegucigalpa Public Schools with Bookmobiles

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I love reading, because I am friends with those who live in the books.

Elder (8 years)

When I read Abuela Filomena (a children's book about a spunky grandmother who enrolls in primary school) I remember my own grandmother. She told me lots of stories. She has passed away now, but I still have her books.

Mariela (10 years)

Since the bookmobile started coming, recess is more fun. I like to read books as much as I like drinking juice.

Abi (11 years).

INTRODUCTION

For more than 20 years, Honduras has recognized school libraries, with their resources, services, infrastructure, technology and committed librarians, as a comprehensive and transversal component of education to which children are entitled.

As contained in the CERLALC reading public policy agenda, it is essential to frame literacy within the context of primary school teaching processes and approaches. As we recognize that reading is "a most essential prerequisite for success in today's societies," it is important that we keep school libraries and other reading spaces up to date and underscore their importance in the development of students and teachers as both readers and producers, or *reading-writers*.

Over the years, there have been several initiatives in Honduras to make literacy programs part of the national educational policy. As it has been the case, counting on efforts from other countries in the region, these initiatives have had some success –particularly when supplied with external funds and technologies resulting in the integration of networks, associations, and federations. However, the road has not been easy for school libraries and their intentions to help produce literate children. Many of the term projects do not have guarantees of continuity, and some do not comply with their commitments of sustainability of these projects. But this is not the subject we will discuss here.

¹ CERLAC-Unesco (2007). Por las bibliotecas escolares de Latinoamérica.

School libraries depend on the national education system, which shares some of the responsibility with other arms of the political, economic, and social structure of Honduras, but still takes primary responsibility for creating and enforcing public reading policies, and recognizing the importance of developing sustainable and continuous reading program at the national level.²

Reading is a human right, an emphasis in the exercise of democracy, associated with human and social development. The promotion of reading must include a guarantee of access to vocational, educational, informational, and recreational information resources in all genres, documentary typology, and media. Throughout Honduras, school libraries suffer dearly for lack of means and resources, but more importantly, teachers and librarians are not given systematic continuing education opportunities or other means to acquire

² Beatriz Helena Isaza Mejía, (2005). *Guía para diseño de planes nacionales de lectura*. "A National Reading Plan is a project led by state institutions. This plan identifies and strengthens public literacy policy through consultation with various actors of civil society, including organizations, private enterprises, and academies, among others. The purpose of a National Reading Plan is to improve literacy over the long term. This process includes such phases as design, development, and evaluation, and should be understood to be a flexible Plan that is adjusted and reconstructed as needed throughout the process."

new literacy knowledge and cultural training. National educational programs tend to be attached to political agenda projects, which change with each new governing administration. If the Unesco/IFLA School Library Manifesto is to be honored, the nation is responsible to "[...] provide students learn life skills and help develop their imagination, allowing them to lead in life as responsible citizens."

Each of the documents referenced here act as maps, compasses, and outlines showing us the way forward. The governmental bodies that promoting these initiatives can use these resources when working with educational institutions, such as the Secretary of Education, universities, INICE, the Institute for Information Access, associations, foundations, and organizations involved in the Honduran education system.

Within this context, the National Pedagogical University Francisco Morazán (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán or UPNFM) is the Honduran institution of higher education responsible for teacher training for all education levels in the country. The UPNFM assumes responsibility for developing programs that will

³ Unesco/IFLA. (1999). *School Library Manifesto*. Available online at: http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/school manifesto.html

improve the quality of education in its three lines of action: teaching, research, and extension. As an extension effort, the UPNFM Central Library, in coordination with the University Educational Social Work-study program (Trabajo Educativo Social Universitario or TESU), has developed the Bookmobile Literacy Development Program (Programa de Fomento a la Lectura mediante las Bibliotecas Móviles or PFL-BM), for literacy outreach to public primary schools in the Honduran capital city, Tegucigalpa.

The PFL-BM began five and half years ago as an idea to create open reading spaces in public schools with high student populations. As it progressed, it evolved into a literacy project which today focuses on bringing books to primary school children so that they can have a book at hand when and wherever they want to read it. This document provides an overview of the UPNFM extension Bookmobile Literacy Development Program (PFL-BM) in Tegucigalpa.

BOOKMOBILE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In 2003, weekly usage statistics for the UPNFM Central Library showed that a large percentage of external users were public primary school children. These users were coming to the library to

consult the collection, use study spaces, and complete homework assignments. The observation of this use of a university library by primary school children lead to further investigation of these children's respective school libraries, library collections, personnel, and student populations. The children were asked, in simple and short interviews, if their school had a library. If the answer was yes, they were asked if the library had the books and materials they needed and if the library had a librarian. Children from 21 schools were interviewed.

Results were that, of the 21 schools, 14 had libraries, but of those 14, six were closed (for various reasons). Of the other eight libraries, respondents made such comments as: the library is only open only during the *other* shift (Honduran schools have a morning shift or and an evening shift or); the librarian often has to close the library to substitute teach a class when a teacher is out; there is no librarian; and there are almost no books or materials in the library. Although this was a casual, not a scholarly study, it did indicate that the children using the UPNFM library were not finding the spaces or materials they needed in their own schools or school libraries.

Taking the institutional objectives of the UPNFM, included in the operating plan of the uni-

versity, into consideration, the Central Library decided to begin an extension project with a focus of supporting school librarianship and school libraries. Said support would be offered by way of school librarian internships in the UPNFM Children's Library, through offering workshops on such themes as literacy and Reading, and through other services offered through the Secretary of Education's Educational Technology Office, which oversees school librarianship in Honduras.

We sought information about school libraries from the Secretary of Education, which we finally received in 2009. Although the project was already underway by this point, the data reinforced the need for functioning school libraries—meaning libraries that are at least open, with librarians, and with bibliographic resources that meet the needs of their communities, i.e., children and teachers (*Appendix 1*).

UPNFM PARTICIPATION

The UPNFM Central Library administration wrote a series of proposals outlining the Bookmobile Literacy Development Program, and in 2004, the Rotary Clubs of Canada and the US (facilitated by the Rotary Club of Tegucigalpa or RCT) accepted one of the proposals. The RCT president at this time was Dr. Roberto Tinoco, an otolaryngologist with a

love for reading and books. It was he who managed to secure funding for the development of a bookmobile. The original support for the project consisted of one Kia minivan with shelving installed, a 3,000 volume children's and juvenile book collection, and some basic technological equipment. As counterpart, the UPNFM presented a reading plan, under the coordination of the Central Library; a space to house the collections; a driver; a librarian; and a team of 15 TESU students who would become the first literacy teachers.

Two years later the project had significant growth, thanks to the following: additional primary schools petitioning to become part of the bookmobile program; increased enrollment of children in every school; popularity of the bookmobile TESU program among UPNFM students. Based on these indicators of a successful program, the Central Library administration proposed to the Rotary Club of Tegucigalpa funding for additional buses and bibliographic resources. In 2006 two much larger buses were purchased and outfitted with shelving, more books, and the Rotary Club agreed to assume the costs of the gasoline, which costs were increasing almost daily at that time.

The UPNFM, for its part, consolidated an institutional plan complete with a profile of how schools and centers for specialized children's populations (orphans, sight impaired, etc.) would be selected for participation in the bookmobile program. This profile will be discussed in more detail in the section below. The schools and educational centers selected to participate in the program were consulted with regard to schedules for visits, services required, and how they, the resident librarians and teachers, might share responsibility for the literacy program. Partnership with the school librarians was seen as a key factor in ensuring the success of the PFL-BM as well as facilitating greater openness of the librarians and teachers toward the TESU students.

Today, the PFL-BM is no longer a project, as it has no termination date; it is now an institutional program of the UPNFM.

BOOKMOBILE LITERACY DeVELOPMENT PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Program Overview

The users and beneficiaries of the PFL-BM are children of schools and educational centers. At present, fifteen (15) of the participating institutions are public schools, three (3) are foster care centers, and one (1) is a special school for vision-impaired and blind children (Appendix 2). Each institution is located within the Tegucigalpa city limits. During

primary school vacation periods or during times when schools are closed but the university is not (schools are open from February to October, whereas UPNFM trimesters run year-round), the bookmobile relies on the TESU students to create an alternative visit plan (plan de visitas alternativo or PVA) to additional urban or rural schools, public libraries, and so forth.

Once the PVA is set, appointments are made at the chosen schools and libraries for the morning or evening shift, as appropriate.

Public Primary Schools

Public primary schools in urban Tegucigalpa take priority in the PFL-BM. The profile for school selection states that the school or center must:

- ► Have a population of more than 300 children,
- ► Be located in socially disadvantaged areas, and
- Not have a school library, or if they do, their school library does not satisfy the needs of the students and teachers of that school.

The profile is not so rigid so as to exclude out of hand any school that does not meet these general criteria. Each school that indicates interest in the bookmobile program is evaluated individually and may be included in the program in a subsequent trimester or year if the schedule permits. The visit schedule rotates each semester in an attempt to reach more schools each year, although four (4) core schools with large student populations and very inadequate library resources are permanently on the schedule.

Special Schools

When the Pilar Salinas School for the Blind asked to be included in this program, it initially proved a new challenge. We willingly accepted the challenge, however, and consulted with the Special Education Department of the UPNFM in relation to didactic pedagogical issues we might encounter there. The PFL-BM TESU students have since developed a small collection of Braille children's books and created audio books and specialized didactic materials.

Foster Care Centers

The foster care centers or orphanages (Casa-Hogares) are institutions where children are temporarily or permanently placed, and where formal education is provided. A high number of these children are orphans, abandoned, or separated from families that cannot provide for them because of economic or other issues.

Public and Community Libraries

The bookmobile visits some rural public libraries located near Tegucigalpa once per trimester. The purpose is to augment and support the local library activities and to help motivate local children to read.

These libraries are also included on the PVA visits when schools are closed or there are school teacher strikes, holidays, or vacation periods as noted above.

Reading Promoters

The curriculum for each degree program offered at the UPNFM contains one common practical-social component: TESU hours. Students completing their TESU hours are focused on teaching, research, and extension. Each student is required to complete 360 TESU hours which must be completed within a three-month period of time or one academic trimester. A student must complete the TESU hours in order to graduate. Each academic department has its own TESU projects, but there are additional institutional TESU projects, such as

⁴ UPNFM (2007). Directrices sobre el Trabajo Educativo Social Universitario en la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán

the PFL-BM. Each trimester, the UPNFM TESU Committee holds an introductory workshop in which all students preparing to enroll in their TESU hours (approximately 250 to 350 students each trimester) are given brief overviews of the various TESU projects available to them at both departmental and institutional levels. Each year about 10% of the TESU students choose to do their service hours in the PFL-BM.⁵

Each trimester the PFL-BM coordinator makes a presentation at this introductory workshop with videos and photos of previous TESU bookmobile groups. The positive impact of this program on schools, students, libraries, librarians, and teachers is emphasized and interested TESU students are asked to provide scheduling information that might be of use when planning the bookmobile agenda and calendar.

New PFL-BM TESU students are then given a general orientation to the program; provided workshops on literacy teaching and reading promotion methodologies; taught planning strategies including goal-setting and evaluation; introduced

⁵ UPNFM students who have carried out their TESU in the PFL-BM are from the following study fields: Mathematics, Industrial Technique, Education Management, Literature and Letters, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Tourism.

to animated reading techniques and how to create didactic materials; and they are given a chance to familiarize themselves with the books and other materials in the collection. They are then introduced to the services the bookmobile provides, including the Recess Book Kiosk, the Traveling Book Basket, and the school librarian training we provide participating school librarians each trimester.

After the orientation, the students are known as Reading Promoters. The permanent bookmobile staff provides ongoing support to the new Reading Promoters, working with them on visit plans, and accompanying them on all visits.

Resources and Services

Collections

The current PFL-BM bibliographic collection consists of 7,000 individual children's and juvenile books in print form; a small reference collection; a collection of books in Braille; audio books, and didactic materials. Didactic materials were created by the TESU students (or Reading Promoters). The entire bookmobile collection is classified and cataloged. New bibliographic materials are provided through the UPNFM Collection Development Department and are financed by the Rotary Club and other donors.

Spaces and Equipment

The UPNFM Central Library has provided two physical areas for the PFL-BM: one room for the collection and resources, and a workshop where the Reading Promoters can plan reading sessions and create didactic material.

The PFL-BM has its own technological infrastructure as well, which includes one laptop computer, one multimedia projector and screen for each bookmobile, two desktop computers for technical processing, database management, and updating of the Bookmobile Blog.

Reading sessions by grade level

The largest impact and the most gratifying result of the PFL-BM is the narrating and discussion of bookmobile books the children have read. Some of the children have written their own stories after having read PFL-BM books. These are signs of mission accomplished!

The PFL-BM does not only bring the schools books, but rather the Reading Promoters encourage literacy and readings via pedagogical methods and concepts, technical applications, strategies, and activities. The Reading Promoters bring resources, yes, but they also bring 45-minute lesson plans geared to specific grade levels. Each bookmobile visit lasts three hours. In the first and third hours,

the Promoters carry out their lesson plans with one or more classes of students. The lesson plans are created based on methodological foundations depending on child age, sex, and interests. The Reading Promoters select books for each visit and then both plan and evaluate their reading activities based on this information. The middle hour is recess, during which children are given time for free reading. This recess reading hour will be explained in more detail in the following subsection.

Recess Book Kiosk (or Caja Viajera)

The Recess Book Kiosk or Caja Viajera is a wooden kiosk designed for carrying and displaying books the children can read during recess. Need for a Caja Viajera was realized after the first year, when, after the first reading session, the recess bell rang, but the children wanted to stay in the library to continue reading. Because of this, a functional book kiosk was constructed. The kiosk is portable, easy to carry, and can be set up in the schoolyard where the children can play, snack, and read at their leisure.

The idea that before taking a book, the students must have clean hands and sit down quietly is not very reasonable in the case of the *Caja Viajera*, so we decided that during recess, the children can eat their snack, he or she may, as we would rather need

to replace jelly filled books than we would like to have a kiosk full of clean but unread materials.

The Reading Promoters keep track of how many books each child reads and statistics are tallied at the end of the trimester. Children who read the more than three books receive a prize.

Traveling Book Basket

The Traveling Book Basket is a collection of 40 books which are loaned to the school libraries we visit for from one to two months at a time. The librarian or principal is responsible for the Book Basket and encouraged to provide circulation of these books to the children for home-use. This service allows the children to read at home, which is of particular need in schools without functioning school libraries. It also provides the children with new books each month.

Librarian in-service training

Each trimester, the PFL-BM provides one to two in-service training workshops for the librarians (be they full-time librarians or full-time teachers given part-time librarian duties) of the schools and centers the bookmobiles visit. Training is based on issues observed in the libraries and includes such diverse topics as reading promotion, school librarianship, technical processes, collection development, preparation of didactic materials, and so forth.

The workshops are taught by the PFL-BM coordinator, UPNFM librarians, and the Reading Promoters (i.e., TESU students). These workshops have received very positive feedback from the participants and their school and center administrative bodies, as this type of training is not otherwise available.

The PFL-BM Team

The PFL-BM is a team effort consisting of one program coordinator and two full-time bookmobile librarians. This team focuses on three lines of action:

- Establishing contacts and communication with the schools and centers; planning visits, collection management, and maintenance of the *Caja Viajera* and the *Traveling Book Baskets* (the coordinator and both bookmobile librarians);
- Accompanying (driving the bookmobile) and supporting the Reading Promoters in their lesson plans and the delivery of these session in the schools (both bookmobile librarians);
- Acting as research consultant for the TESU students (the coordinator).

The Reading Promoters or TESU students also act as a team. They create their own internal governing board and organize their own teaching, research, and extension activities connected with the

bookmobile. To cite one example, the closing ceremony and distribution of awards to the best-read children of each school is their responsibility. They also are in charge of bibliographic control, coordinate fund raising activities to purchase supplies for teaching materials, and they plan and present the librarian in-service training workshop at the end of each trimester.

The Bookmobiles

Three bookmobiles have been outfitted with book shelving. These three bookmobiles transport the books, didactic materials, the *Caja Viajera*, the Traveling Book Baskets, the Reading Promoters, and the bookmobile librarians to and from the schools and centers each day. The UPNFM is responsible for bookmobile maintenance and insurance. The Rotary Club assumes the fuel costs.

PFL-BM Methodology

The principle motto of the PFL-BM is: "Read to know and do (Leer para saber y hacer)"; as such, it is a deliberate focus of the program to bring children to books and books to children. This is done through providing activities related to their interests within their own environment, in a playful, non-critical, creative, and enjoyable fashion.

Taking into account these conceptual ideas and pedagogical foundations, the PFL-BM works with a methodical, practical and integral guide, by means of which the reading sessions are planned to be developed by TESU students with the children. In this way, the planning is facilitated to them, considering that for 75% of the TESU students is the first time they are in front of a group of children, and particularly for promoting reading.

Program Socialization

Upon first visit to each school or center, the PFL-BM coordinator establishes a relationship with the principal or librarian and both each sign a Memorandum of Understanding. A presentation is then made to the administration and all teachers of the school in order to introduce the program and to raise awareness of the importance of reading and encourage cooperation in the PFL-BM.

Methodological Elements

► Profile of students and schools or centers visited:

Location:			
Student body: Girls:	Boys:	Mixed:	
Age range:	Grades:	Number of stud	ents per grade:
Children's interests:			
Session Requests : Bookmobile	Library:	Classroom:	Other:

*Diagnostic

Preparatory actions

dentification of book based on profile: Title:	
No. books per title:	
Teaching materials:	
Resources that will be used: Audio books Books in Costumes, Masks, C	
Session duration (time in minutes):	
Number of sessions needed for one book:	
Available time per reading sesión:	
Number of activities planned:	
Who will do what?:	

- ➤ Pre-reading activities. Participatory, critical, and creative activities with the children that introduce the theme, content, or argument of the book. These activities should help the children understand what they will be reading, or simply prepare them for reading.
- ➤ Reading techniques and strategies. Reading Promoters have manuals, technical guides, and reading activity resources that provide them with information on this topic.
- Didactic materials. Didactic or teaching materials are resources that are designed and created to reaffirm child learning, and attempt to stimulate creativity, autonomy, action, enthusiasm, and critical thinking. Didactic material complements reading activities, especially in children between 6 and 10 years of age. The Promoters create pictures and puppets, as well as three-dimensional materials for reading with vision impaired children.

➤ Post-reading activities. Post-reading activities reinforce learning and the reading experience, encourage critical thinking skills, and favor social participation and the children's oral expression. The methodological guidelines take the following into consideration:

Basic suggestions: Talk about the characters, ◆Draw the characters or situations, ◆Identify situations in the book that we can relate to our own lives, ◆ Act out what you have read, ◆ Discuss and look up the author and his or her life, ◆Talk about what you liked/didn't like, what would we change if we were the authors and why?, ◆ Draw a mural together as one group or in smaller groups, Etc.

Session evaluation: The following evaluation should be completed by the Reading Promoters at the end of each 45 minute session:

Did the session go as planned?	_lf not, why not?
How was the Reading selection received?	
Was the right amount of time allotted?	Did the children participate?
Did other collaborators provide support?	
Did the school librarian provide support?	
What can we do better in the next session?	

CONCLUSIONS AND VALUE ADDED

The PFL-BM acknowledges that reading provides both the children and the teachers with delight, escape, fantasy, and dreams. It also recognizes the need for commitment and inter-institutional collaboration in order to best meet the goals of this reading program. Only through transcendent reading and reflection can the participants change our society through reading.

A National Reading Plan is an urgently needed. Government, public and private agencies, authors and editors, universities, schools, and libraries, and all members of society have an obligation to take part in creating a national reading plan in order for it to take shape and be sustainable.

The Bookmobile Literacy Development Program (*Programa de Fomento a la Lectura mediante las Bibliotecas Móviles or PFL-BM*) motto is "Read to know and do/Leer para saber y hacer." This program accomplishes a trifold mission:

- First, the children involved in this program have greater access to reading; they are more motivated to read; they are exposed to creative, cognitive, and imaginative learning strategies; and they are developing reading skills that they will use the rest of their lives.
- Second, the TESU students are given opportunities to create and present lesson plans specifically centered on improving children's literacy and reading practices; they provide peer support and engage in auto-evaluation processes; they plan and produce in-service trainings for professional teachers and librarians, thus increasing their own awareness of the needs and issues that they are likely to come across when they are in their

- own professional settings in the future and thus are better capable of dealing constructively with those issues.
- And third, the school teachers and librarians are provided with greater understanding of the positive influence of reading on children.

The PFL-BM has a psychoeducational focus, providing special need children such as those at the Pilar Salinas School for the Blind, with materials in formats they can use and understand.

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Appendix 1

Secretary of Public Education of Honduras Statistics Department

Public Schools and Learning Centers of Francisco Morazan (State within Honduras in which the national capital city resides)

Urban and Rural area (Year: 2009)

Orban and Kurai area (Tear. 2003)				
Α	В	С	D	Е
Distrito No.1	10	2,632	8	u
Distrito No 2	37	2,770	0	r/u
Distrito No 3	15	1,446	1	u
Distrito No 4	21	8,044	10	u
Distrito No 5	21	9,183	17	u
Distrito No 6	8	2,830	5	u
Distrito No 7	23	10,558	15	u/r
Distrito No 8	31	13,212	15	u/r
Distrito No 9	11	1,581	10	u
Distrito No 10	25	6,216	8	u
Distrito No 11	13	2,890	6	u
Distrito No 12	20	3,670	3	u/r
Distrito No 13	19	6,217	9	u/r
Distrito No 14	19	6,879	8	u/r
Distrito No 15	20	7,945	10	u/r

A: Districts within the State of Francisco Morazán.

B:Primary Schools and Learning Centers.

C: Student Population by District.

D:Centers with Libraries.

E: Rural (r) or urban (u) area

Appendix 2

Program Fomento a la Lectura Biblioteca Móvil Schools Visited

No.	Name of School or Center	Location	Visit Time
1	Escuela Estados Unidos	Barrio el Centro	Matutinal/Vespertine
2	Escuela Canadá	Calpules	Matutinal/Vespertine
3	Escuela República de Honduras	Colonia Alameda	Matutinal
4	Escuela para Niñas José Cecilio del Valle	Barrio Guanacaste	Matutinal/Vespertine
5	Escuela Mixta Toribio Bustillo	Colonia Las Brisas	Matutinal
6	Jardín Escuela Hogar Nazareth (Casa Hogar)	La Vega	Matutinal
7	Escuela 21 de Octubre	Colonia 21 de Octubre	Vespertin
8	Escuela Club Rotario de Tegucigalpa Sur	Colonia La Pradera	Vespertine
9	Escuela República de Nicaragua	Colonia Miraflores	Matutinal
10	Escuela para Ciegos Pilar Salinas	Colonia La Campaña	Matutinal
11	Escuela para Niños José Trinidad Cabañas	Colonia Guanacaste	Vespertine
12	Escuela Guaymuras	Colonia Guaymuras	Matutinal/Vespertine

Library Services in Latin America: three outstanding cases

Program Fomento a la Lectura Biblioteca Móvil Schools Visited (Cont.)

No.	Name of School or Center	Location	Visit Time
13	Escuela Nora Gúnera de Melgar	Colonia Honduras	Matutinal
14	Hogar Amor y Esperanza	San José de la Peña	Matutinal
15	Escuela Esteban Guardiola	Villa Adela	Matutinal/Vespertine
16	Casa Alianza	Comayaguela	Vespertine
17	Escuela Ramón Rosa	El Estadio	Matutinal
18	Casa Hogar Pedro Atala	Colonia Miraflores	Matutinal
19	Escuela John F. Kennedy	Colonia Kennedy	Matutinal/Vespertine