READ TO BE HAPPY: CHILDREN AND THE COMMUNITY LEADING EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS IN LEMPIRA, HONDURAS

Authors: Sara Nikolic, Haritz Goya

To move education beyond traditional boundaries of western pedagogy towards the principles that learning is stimulated when not imposed, we need to open the educational transfer to community participation. Such an opening can have practical outcomes for learning.

In this presentation, we attempt to outline some of the mechanisms through which the Blue Lupin Library model, as implemented in the rural community of La Union in the department of Lempira in Honduras, has been able to overcome the negative perspective in Honduran society of libraries as ‘armeniosos’ and reading as a mandatory and boundless reading activity, to task centre stage of hot only children and community creative learning activities and communal life, but also to reach impact at levels beyond the whole community by using democratic self-government (Pediatria del trabajo) (Freire). Finally, there is grounding in the Pedagogy of the oppressed and in the construction/understanding/conceptualization of the learner as co-creator of knowledge (Freire).

The model takes the constructivist perspective of recognizing the learner’s prior background, knowledge and experiences that are often determined by social, economic and linguistic factors. The learner’s “construct” knowledge through their previous and present experiences. Social constructionism (Vygotsky) emphasizes the importance of sociocultural learning in its various dimensions, including interactions between years. The child’s learning is based on a “whole-to-part-to-whole process” also called as “top-down processing”. Literacy (mostly reading) develops from real life situations and other literacy-related activities such as theatre play, collaborative writing, etc. That means there is a spark inside, like a light, they spend reading and when visitors arrive they talk, share their library, talk about what they know. Before, girls and boys hid from us, or never spoke to us, now it is we who are silent to listen to them because they tell us about the world.

The methodolgy also focuses on learning happening through experience, also “learning through reflection on doing” (Kolb), with a strong hand-on and cooperative approach. The motivation for learning is also based on the idea that learners work to ‘make products to be later be used’ (art festivals, book publications, community presentations), enquiry-based and cooperative learning based on process of interest, following on a ‘hands-on method’, also described as “authentic” learning by using real experiences of children in a ‘democratic’ way (taking responsibility for their own work and for the whole community by using democratic self-government) (Pediatria del trabajo) (Freire). Finally, there is grounding in the Pedagogy of the oppressed and in the construction/understanding/conceptualization of the learner as co-creator of knowledge (Freire).

An organic reading and writing approach
The Blue Lupin project encompasses a variety of reading and writing activities that are taught and practiced in an organic manner. The children’s starting point is reading for pleasure, and from there, they embark on many other literary activities that are taught and practiced as a result of the children’s reading activities, etc. The models characteristics provide a cognitive view based on a “whole-to-part-to-whole process” also called as “top-down processing”. Literacy (mostly reading) develops from real life situations and other literacy-related activities such as theatre play, collaborative writing, etc. That means there is a spark inside, like a light, they spend reading and when visitors arrive they talk, share their library, talk about what they know. Before, girls and boys hid from us, or never spoke to us, now it is we who are silent to listen to them because they tell us about the world.

The starting point of the model is the notion that sustainability needs to be built from day one, and that ownership is ensured through community engagement. Both the library construction and its subsequent management saw the involvement of a variety of community actors, from municipal government and the educational ministry representatives at the departmental level, to the community members, parents, teachers and the children themselves.

The Education Development Council (CED). composed of mothers, fathers, community leaders, church representatives and a teacher’s council, supported library construction in-kind (materials and labor) and was in charge of the overall management of the library and its subsequent management.

Library creation
Even before the library is inaugurated, children are already engaged in the work of different art clubs, in preparation for the inaugural event which features mime, theatre and storytelling, etc. Once the library is set up, the children take on the role of librarians, library schedule planners, and coordinators of the different artistic and reading engagement activities. They also participated in the development of the book catalogue for the libraries by sharing their thoughts on what they would like to read.

The Little Reading Bag project involved creating checklist up system allowing children to take books home with them on the weekend. Additionally, the reading bags themselves are a communal product, made by parents for their children. Over time, the little reading bag book bag system was expanded to also include books from parents, other community members, and visitors of all ages and education levels from other communities as well. The strategy of taking books home has had a powerful impact on the families, with testimonials available of previously illiterate parents slowly learning to read thanks to the books brought by their children.

One clear sign that the ‘read to be happy’ activities have been embraced by teachers across the Blue Lupin Libraries, as books helping them advance and enhance their teaching, is the constant emergence of new partnerships. The Departmental Directorate of Education of Lempira looks at the library activities and included into annual work plans of both the Departmental Directorate and the schools themselves.

The Blue Lupin Library model in practice

The Blue Lupin Library model is based on the Præca model, but the Præca model is a project that has not yet been in place in 2014, and in 2014 can have close to 25% of the library’s constitution and equipment costs.

Conclusions

Having started with 6 school libraries and communities in 2014, the project gathers today 10 788 girls and 10 882 boys of 30 Blue Lupin Libraries and 334 associated educational centres of the respective municipalities. This includes as well 132 mothers and 138 fathers CED members, and 379 teachers.

The project was shown as a great complement to supporting the educational system, through building the love of reading as a gateway to learning. The Blue Lupin Library has become a bridge, strengthening the school and community connection. As a result. Children are learning. Children, who until a few years ago, did not have access to libraries and had difficulty reading, have now gone ahead and published compilations of their own stories and theatre plays, in addition to becoming advocates for reading and libraries across Honduras. I thought it was going to be living. When I heard that we were going to read a dot, it didn’t scare me. But now I want to come to the library every day and read a book.

In the following weekends and in interviews carried out to the teachers, they express that “it is not that we send them to read, but that they read on their own. They just look for them, they look for their own readings, share with each other.

Children: Two girls from the Blue Lupin library project spoke at the National Children’s Congress of Honduras, convincing all the child congresswomen and congressmen, who unanimously adopted the same proposal to build 1 197 libraries in the nation to read. As a result: Over 200 libraries were built in the nation; book loans were made available in all 200 libraries; nearly 1 300 visiting libraries and discussion groups were established; and 1 300 parents were trained to open the educational transfer to community participation. Such an opening has many outcomes for learning activity.

Many outcomes of the reading motivation activities reached beyond their original intervention spaces – through the community children’s theater festivals organized in Lempira urban centers, the participation of child bookmaking and broadcasting clubs, both within Honduras and internationally. Both the school and the two municipal libraries are the target of many visits.

In early 2015, it was submitted to Honduran National Congress to assign funds so that the following year, the Blue Lupin model can be constructed in each municipality of the country. It was followed by a similar motion presented by a Congresswoman of the Honduran department of Choluteca. By year’s end, MoC had signed an agreement of understanding with Plan International Honduras for joint scaling-up of the libraries model, and in early 2016, the Blue Lupin Library model was endorsed by the Nation to the Ministry of Education and Congress, who unanimously adopted the same proposal to build 250 public libraries based on the model of the Blue Lupin municipal library.

It is a pride that our children stand out for being the most read in Honduras. It is amazing what is happening in Lempira, we must continue working hard at the libraries that are exemplars for the country.” Wilfredo Prudencio (Political/Governor of Lempira)