

CHILDREN'S LITERACY PROGRAMME

Paolo Freire Institute, Zejtun

Report for October 2008 to January 2009

- Objectives** Assisting children in acquiring the basic literacy skills, in the Maltese or the English language is the main objective of this program. This is achieved by providing children a positive learning experience, celebrating their effort and success. Tutors have a fundamental role in this, creating a nurturing environment by being aware of the various strengths and needs of these children, most of whom have a history of academic failure. Good session preparation, and tutor training are essential for the effectiveness of this program.
- Methods and Resources** For this first semester, 23 children, all of them attending the local primary school are attending this basic literacy program. Of these 9 are attending sessions in the Maltese language while the remaining 14, in English. Sessions are held weekly, on Tuesdays, by 17 volunteer tutors. Some students are offered one to one sessions, to address better their particular needs. The availability of the neighbouring parish hall was indispensable to be able to offer our service to such a large group of children. Most of the children are new to the centre, while others are in their second or third year, since they changed from Maltese to English.
- This year we decided to have a ten minute game and some time for the children to greet each other as a group before the one hour literacy session with their tutors.
- At the centre, resources are plentiful. These should be better organised, to be more readily available to be used during the sessions.
- Before the beginning of the year, training sessions were held for our tutors, as regards the use of phonetics in basic literacy skills training. Ongoing training is essential, as our centre is attracting students from Junior College and University, who join our program as part of their studies.
- Difficulties encountered** It is not possible to have one session per room since the number of rooms is limited. Having multiple sessions in one room creates some disruptions.

Some tutors were taking the 30 minutes for preparation very seriously, filling the session plan and vary the activities in the sessions to make them more interesting. Others were taking session preparation lightly, resorting to improvisation.

As more young tutors are joining the program, discipline is harder to maintain, as some of these young tutors lack personality as well as the necessary skills to help these children in their learning and behaviour difficulties.

Strengths

The major strength of this program is the volunteer tutors. Their positive and caring attitude is encouraging not only for each other but also for the children who attend the centre. The atmosphere they create is very positive, establishing a very good relationship, which help the children boost their self esteem and their academic progress.

The children attending the course made progress at different levels. Many of them improved their basic language skills. Improvement could be noticed on the social level, in the way children related with each other and with their tutors.

The Way Forward

More training to tutors, in the areas of literacy training, pastoral care and promoting positive behaviour.

Upgrading of the premises as this needs a face lift, since this would help the children's learning.

Working closer with parents, to help them improve their parental skills.

Finding ways to improve children and tutor attendance, for the program to be more fruitful.

Patrick J Mercieca
Course Coordinator
January 2009