



## **Bringing Books to Life** Starting and managing a book collection



## Bringing Books to Life

Bringing Books to Life consists of two short guides written for teachers and librarians working in schools in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Starting and managing a book collection**

The first guide, 'Starting and managing a book collection' which you are reading now, looks at how schools can begin to establish and manage a collection of books. The guide includes an overview of five different book storage options: the school library, the classroom library, a central book store, mobile libraries and teacher resource centre libraries.

The overview of each option includes a brief description, the advantages and disadvantages of that particular approach and recommendations about the sort of schools where that approach works best.

This guide also includes some ideas about how to arrange and display your book collection however you choose to store and manage it, an overview of systems for lending books and an introduction to how books should be treated to help them last.

We hope that this guide will inspire you to think about starting a class or school book collection or if you already have one to think about how it could be improved.

### **Using books in the classroom**

The second guide 'Using books in the classroom', sets out the importance of introducing students to written materials and shares some ideas for how these materials, including books, can be used in the classroom to teach reading and improve learning. It also introduces five different approaches for using written material with students: reading aloud, shared, guided, group and independent reading. We hope you find both guides useful.



## Starting a book collection

The first step when starting a school book collection is to have a think about who will be reading the books.

If you are working with pre-school children then a collection of picture books will be required. Older children and better readers will need a broader range of books.

The key thing to remember is that you do not need thousands of books to create a great book collection.

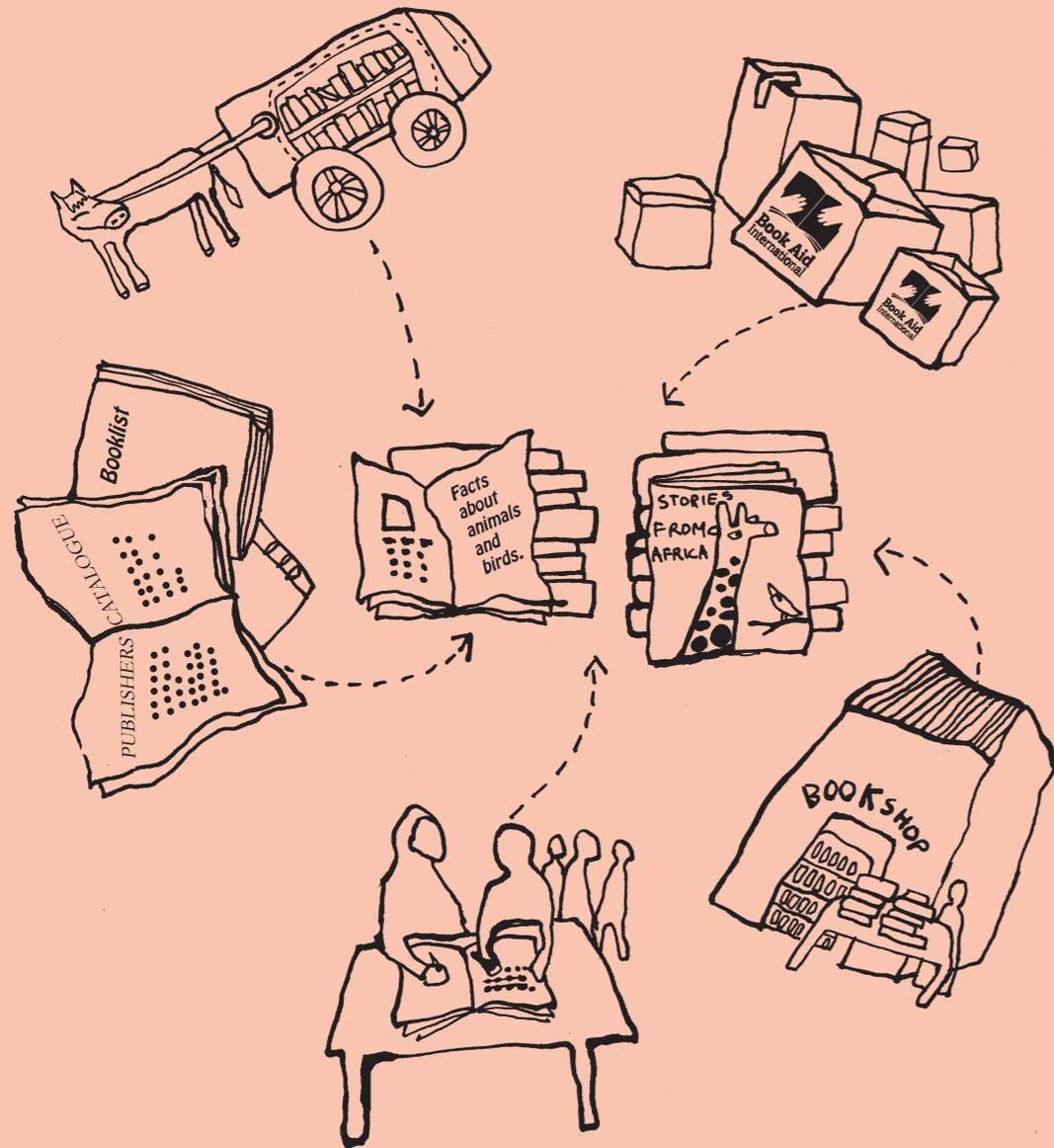
When thinking about setting up a school book collection for the first time you will want:

- Both fiction and non-fiction: some story books and some factual books.
- A collection of books for a variety of reading abilities: some easy books and some difficult books.
- Books that are fun and interesting to read... Remember: a library or book corner should be a fun, interesting and stimulating place!

A smaller number of good-quality interesting books that children like to read, is much better than a large number of boring or irrelevant books.

Once you have considered these things write down a short list of the kinds of books you would like. You might like to ask your colleagues to suggest the sort of books they'd like to see in your collection too. You should also ask your students what sort of books they'd like to be able to read.

This can be useful as you build up a book collection over time, returning to this list to check that you are buying or acquiring the sort of books that your students want to read and which your fellow teachers think are valuable.



## Acquiring books

Once you know what types of books you want in your school, how do you find out what specific books are available?

There are a number of ways in which you can identify books to acquire, including:

- Visiting local libraries to see what books they have.
- Identifying the publishers that operate in your country, and asking them for a catalogue.
- Visiting any local schools that have book collections and asking to browse their books.
- Asking for ideas of good books from your local education authority, or from any local organisations working in education.

These things will help you get a sense of the kind of books you may be able to get hold of.

Once you have some idea of the books you want, there are several ways of acquiring them:

- If you have some funding available for this purpose you can purchase the books from a local or national book shop. If you don't have funds you might consider raising those funds within your community.
- If you have a local library you may be able borrow books for your school from them. Some library networks also donate books to schools. Speak to your local librarian or if you have a national library contact them and ask if they have any schemes that provide books to schools.
- If you have any educational organisations in you area they may be able to put you in touch with a book donation agency.
- You can also encourage your teachers and pupils to write and produce their own books...



## Producing your own written materials

If your school cannot acquire any published books, you can always produce your own books! All you need is a good-quality exercise book, a pen or pencils, and some creative pupils.

Encourage the pupils in each class to speak to their relatives and elders and ask them for some traditional stories and tales. Each pupil needs to write this down so they can read it out to the class.

Have a competition within the class for the best traditional folk-tales. The winning stories are then written up into a book. The pupils who come up with the winning stories are thanked by the whole school.

In the exercise book, the pupil with the neatest handwriting writes up the stories. Other children can illustrate them.

This is just one idea of how to preserve the stories and memories of your local community, produce valuable books for your school, and motivate pupils with a competition.

But creating a rich literate environment isn't just about books. Exposure to written and printed text in all its forms plays an important part in developing the ability to read.

'Bringing Books to Life: using books in the classroom' includes a range of simple suggestions for helping your students become familiar with written and printed texts.



## Storing your books

Once you begin to develop a collection of books, you and your school need to decide how to store them. There are various ways in which you can choose to store your books.

How you choose to store your books will depend on:

- The size of your book collection.
- The size of your school.
- The type of books being stored.
- How your existing school buildings and facilities are used.
- Whether you can identify any free or underused space.

You should talk about these things with your fellow teachers to see what approach they think is best for the school.

You should also talk to the students in your class or the school as a whole about how they would like their books stored. They'll probably have some interesting ideas that might not have occurred to you.

When reading the description of options remember that your school may have some textbooks and some books that aren't textbooks. The difference is that textbooks are a curriculum-specific book, where all children follow the same book in the class, whereas non-textbook materials are more varied, and can include stories, readers, general non-fiction, and reference books.

Textbooks may need to be managed in quite different ways to books that aren't textbooks.



## The School Library

### A school library...

- contains a general school book collection, containing a variety of titles, for use by students and teachers across the whole school.
- contains supplementary books, with no more than a few copies of each.
- does not contain large numbers of textbooks.
- is housed in a central location: usually a separate, dedicated room.
- has books that are kept on shelves.
- is managed and supervised by a librarian (could be a teacher librarian (a teacher with time off for library duties) or a parent librarian).

### Advantages

- School libraries are a very common approach to storing and managing books in a school, and there are many handbooks and guidebooks to assist schools in setting up the school library.
- School libraries raise the status of literacy and books in the school.

- School libraries provide sufficient space for the schools' book collection to be built up over many years.
- School libraries provides a dedicated space for reading and to promote reading activities.
- School libraries help teach children independent research and study skills, allowing them to browse through books in their own time.
- School libraries can be a relaxed, fun, and child-centred study space.

### Disadvantages

- Constructing and allocating space and facilities can be expensive. School libraries can involve costly investment in buildings, infrastructure, and books.
- Having lots of books does not necessarily mean that a library has the best or most relevant books.
- Teachers may not feel ownership of the books available in the school library, and may not use them.

- Unless libraries are made very welcoming, they may make new or less experienced readers feel uncomfortable.
- A teacher-librarian is needed to staff the library and manage the collection, which may be hard when a school's existing staff are already thinly stretched.
- Due to the extra staff needed, opening hours may end up being irregular, and pupils may not be able to make best use of the library.

### School libraries are recommended for

- Larger schools with enough space to devote a room to the library.
- Schools that already have a substantial book collection or the resources to acquire a large collection over time.



## The Classroom Library

### A classroom library...

- is a small book collection, containing books that are appropriate and will be used by a particular grade.
- has books that are kept on shelves or in a lockable cabinet in a classroom.
- has books that are managed by the classroom teacher.

### Advantages

- Book selection can be made appropriate for the age and ability of the class.
- There can be strong teacher involvement and commitment. Teachers feel ownership and understand the contents of the library.
- Teachers can be encouraged to enrich and enlarge their classroom collections by block-borrowing new books from larger libraries and public libraries.

- Books are integrated with learning as they are close to the teacher and students and constantly available.
- Books are readily available to the pupils and teacher to supplement lessons and encourage a reading environment.
- Books can be used as a stepping stone to access larger libraries, encouraging pupils to search for further information.

- No separate library room is needed, so can be cost effective.

### Disadvantages

- Classroom libraries require a considerable number of appropriate books per school.
- Classroom libraries require training for the teacher in using the contents of the classroom library, and follow-up to ensure the teacher is well trained.
- Classroom libraries require security in each classroom, or the provision of a lockable, immovable display cabinet.

- Classroom libraries do not work in small schools with insufficient space in classrooms for books, or schools without security.
- Classroom libraries do not work for schools with a double shift system, where classes of different ages share a classroom.
- Classroom libraries do not provide a space where the children can select books for themselves and pursue their interests – the teacher remains central.
- Classroom libraries do not bring children of different grades together in one space.

### Classroom libraries are recommended for

- Schools that receive regular support for teachers in the form of training and follow-up.
- Schools with motivated teachers.



## Class sets of books stored centrally

### A central book store...

- consists of a book collection used by the whole school or a large part of it that is kept in a secure office or cupboard.
- has a book collection consisting of class sets – multiple copies of certain titles for the class to use together. Class sets might be novels or textbooks.
- allows teachers or pupils collect the class sets from the central storage location, take them to the classroom for the lesson, and then return them for other classes to use.

### Advantages

- Can provide a secure way of storing books if your school or building only has one lockable room.
- Is a good method of sharing small book collections between many classes.
- Provides multiple copies of fewer titles, allowing teachers to familiarize themselves with the books.

### Disadvantages

- Teachers have to plan their use of the books in advance and ensure that other classes do not need them on that day.
- Teachers and pupils have limited access to books and a limited selection of books, so it's harder to develop a rich literate environment.
- Only appropriate when you have a relatively small number of books.
- Students do not get to choose their own books, or learn research and self-selection skills.

### Class sets stored centrally are recommended for

- Schools with limited resources.



## Mobile Libraries

### A mobile library...

- is a collection of books shared or rotated between several schools or locations.
- could be a small collection (a 'book box') or a large collection (a library van).
- can be transported in different ways including by motorbikes, vans, bicycles, donkeys and camels.
- allows schools and teachers to select books and loan them for a set period, after which the books are returned and new books are loaned.

### Advantages

- Books can be shared between schools and the cost spread between the schools.
- In rural areas where there are no school buildings, this may be the only way to get books to children.
- With book boxes, if the number of books in the box is small, it can be managed by the teacher with little training.

### Disadvantages

- Teachers have limited opportunities to get to know the books on offer, which is crucial to the success of any book provision to schools.
- Books may not be specific to the reading level and interests of students using the library.
- A strong local infrastructure and good roads are needed to transport the books from place to place. Fuel costs can also be considerable.
- If there is a general lack of locally available reading materials, there is a danger that books will be kept at individual locations, and not returned. Circulating books relies upon cooperation and mutual understanding.
- The number of books made available in book box schemes or mobile libraries may be small and therefore insufficient.
- Access to books may be limited to when the mobile library visits, or when the book box is open and available.

### Mobile libraries are recommended for

- Rural areas where schools have no buildings or facilities.
- Sharing books that teachers are familiar with, such as basic texts for which teachers need little training and support.



## Teacher Resource Centre Libraries

### Teacher resource centre libraries...

- usually consist of a large book collection, containing a variety of titles.
- are housed in a regional teacher resource centre, which serves a number of surrounding schools.
- have books managed by a librarian in the teacher resource centre, who may also be the centre manager or a teacher trainer.
- allow books to be loaned to teachers who attend in-service trainings or events at the teacher resource centre.

### Advantages

- Encourages teachers to browse new books during meetings or teacher trainings at the resource centre.
- Allows teachers to share books and make recommendations to each other.
- Allows the provision of pedagogical and theoretical material to teachers.

### Disadvantages

- Students don't get direct access to the books, thereby limiting their exposure to the range of books available.
- Teachers must travel long distances to access books.
- Teachers cannot carry more than a few books back to their schools.
- Teachers are not able to familiarize themselves with the books available, and therefore may not have the confidence to use the books in the classrooms.
- Teachers have to return the books after a certain period, and do not feel any ownership of the books.
- Libraries at teacher resource centres may have limited opening hours, or limited loaning abilities.

### Teacher Resource Centre Libraries are recommended for

- A number of schools in close proximity, who can all access a central teacher resource centre with ease.



## Organising your book collection

Whatever method you choose to store your books it is important to organize your books so that your students, and their teachers, can find what they want easily.

Comprehensive cataloguing systems exist, such as the Dewey Decimal system, or the Library of Congress Classification system, but for a primary school collection you really do not need to worry about these.

The best way to start organising your collection is to split the books into fiction and non-fiction, or story books and school books.

After that the complexity of your organising depends on the size of the book collection. In general it is better to group books by subject than by author. Most children do not seek out particular authors until they are older; they are more interested in what the book is about rather than who it's written by.

Your non-fiction books can be organized into subjects such as 'science', 'religion', 'history' and 'reference'.

Your story books can be organised into subjects such as 'animals', 'families', 'adventure', 'fantasy'.

It may also be worth organising your book collection according to grade or level, with easier books for younger readers on a lower shelf, and more difficult books for older readers on a higher shelf.

If you have locally-produced and international books in your collection, put them all together, so children can see and browse them both.

Classroom libraries can be kept on a small shelf, or placed in baskets or cabinets. You might have a story book basket and a science basket for instance. But it is less important to keep smaller classroom collections rigidly organized, because you'll know what books you have.

Keep the system simple, and remember that it is more important to make the library attractive and fun, and to encourage pupils to browse through the collections!



## Loaning books

Books do not have to be loaned – many schools do not let children take books out because of the concern that they may be lost or damaged, and children cannot afford to pay for replacements.

If you decide not to loan your books you need to ensure that your book collection is available so that your students can come in and out and spend time reading and looking at the books.

If you do decide to loan your books then your system for doing so should be simple and easy to use.

For small collections such as classroom libraries, you simply need to keep a ruled notebook with the title of the book and the name of the pupil who has taken it home. When the book is returned you can cross out that entry and start another one.

For multiple copies of a book, you can give each copy a short identification number, such as Things Fall Apart 003.

For larger collections you can develop a card system. A simple technique is to have a card for each pupil. You write the details of each book the child takes out on his or her card. You then store the card in box along with all the other students' cards. Each card can be stored in a section for the day the book is due back.

At the start of each day, you can immediately see which pupils have borrowed books that need to be returned on that day.

You will need to decide for how long students can borrow books. For example for three, four or seven days.

If you do decide to loan out your books, keep the system simple, and ensure that there is always a teacher, parent, or librarian keeping an eye on what's being loaned and what's being returned!



## Care and maintenance

Books are a fantastic but expensive resource and need to be looked after carefully.

If you do the following things your book collection will remain in good order for longer:

- Dust the shelves regularly so that the books stay clean.
- Keep the shelves and books away from any damp or wet areas so that the books stay dry.
- Ensure that the people coming into the library to look at books have clean, dry hands. You might provide a sink near the library and ask all people to wash their hands before they enter.
- If you can, try to cover each book with a plastic jacket. This can be done with plastic bags and tape.
- Teach pupils and teachers not to break the spine of books and to handle them carefully.
- If the cover of a book is damaged, try to repair it straight away.
- The library should have a store of tape, glue and cardboard, for use when books have been damaged.
- If a book has been badly damaged and is unreadable, it should be removed from the shelf.



## The reading environment

It is important that you develop a welcoming and enjoyable library or reading area. Reading is and should be enjoyable, and children should feel relaxed when browsing and using their book collection. There should not be too many scary rules, and teachers should try to take a light-handed role during library times. This is a chance for your students to explore what's available and discover the power of reading!

Things to consider in the library environment:

- There should be as much space as possible for reading and enjoying books.
- Try to put some comfortable chairs or mats in the space that your students use to read.
- Ensure there is enough natural light for pupils to read.

- Paint the library a nice bright, attractive colour – remember: you want people to spend time in the library.
- Books can be displayed by having new or interesting books arranged with their front covers showing.
- Have a space near the entrance of the library for users to leave their bags. This reduces the risk of theft, allows more space in the library, and ensures it is a comfortable area to be in.
- Don't over stuff your shelves which makes it difficult to remove the books.
- Books should be at a level where readers of all ages and heights can reach them.
- One colourful and interesting book can be used for a big display. The display can also be made up of objects that appear in the book and perhaps puppets or toys that readers can use to re-enact the story.

- Displays and posters in the library should be encouraged. Perhaps you can display some of the best children's work on the walls.
- Remember you can also put newspapers and magazines in the library.
- Rather than having 'library rules', consider a 'library guide'. Write them in positive language. Rather than saying, 'Do not eat food in the library', write, 'Please leave all food outside the library'.

## References

There are lots of other books about starting and managing book collections. We hope that this short guide will encourage you to get started. If you'd like more information on school libraries here are some ideas.

### **Books for Schools: Improving Access to Supplementary Reading Materials in Africa**

Published in 2000 by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, written by Diana Rosenberg.

### **Setting up and Running a School Library**

Published in 1994 by Heinemann and Voluntary Service Overseas, written by Nicola Baird.

### **Running a School Library: A Handbook for Teacher-Librarians**

Published in 1990 by Macmillan, written by Colin Ray.

### **Reading has the power to change lives**

Reading opens up our understanding of the world. Through reading we can find out what's happening in our local community or discover a community in a far away land. Reading also gives us the power to discover what others have written thousands of years ago and to understand the technology and process that are shaping our future. Reading has the power to change our lives.

As a teacher you have a vital role to play in helping transform your students lives, including by helping your students to read.

We hope you'll be inspired by this simple guide to use the books and written material that you have access to in your school to support your students to read with confidence.

If you've found this book useful you might also be interested in 'Bringing Books to Life: Starting and managing a book collection' which looks at how schools can begin to establish and manage a collection of books, including options for the storage of books, systems for lending books, and how books should be treated to help them last.

You can order more copies of both guides by contacting Book Aid International [info@bookaid.org](mailto:info@bookaid.org)

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