

‘A Springboard’

Making and Using Pictorial Learning Aids in Liberia



Report of a Training Workshop held at the LIVAP Academy, Paynesville, Liberia

November 21 - 25, 2011

This is a report of a training workshop on the design and use of pictorial learning aids (PLAs) for primary and pre-primary level education in Liberian schools. The work was funded by Health Images, The Eva Reckitt Foundation and through generous donations from several individual supporters.

The workshop was organised by the Liberian Visual Art Project (LIVAP) in collaboration with Health Images (HI). It was held at the LIVAP Community School, SKD Complex, ELWA Road, Paynesville, Monrovia from November 21 - 25, 2011. The workshop was facilitated by HI trainers Bob Linney and Alfie Linney with assistance from Topiyoo Nya Blimie of LIVAP, who was also the main organiser of the workshop in Liberia. The workshop participants were all either schoolteachers or student teachers from LICOSSES, a local teacher-training college. A list of participants is given in Appendix I.



There is currently a huge need for teacher training in Liberia. During the long civil war, the education system was destroyed. The war affected every single part of the country. School buildings were damaged or destroyed and most of the trained teachers fled into exile. The war ended in 2003 and since 2005 the country has had a stable government so that, at this time, some physical signs of reconstruction are becoming evident. It is encouraging to see that much effort is going into the various aspects of teacher training at this time. In addition, school building is going on in many places - for example, two new schools have arisen in the area near the LIVAP school since our visit four years ago.

The broad aim of this workshop was to help participants learn how to make and use low-cost, participatory learning aids for use in the classroom. This was a very practical, hands-on workshop during which participants designed, made and practised using a range of interactive PLAs appropriate for several different subject areas.

Mostly, schools in Africa and other developing countries have few resources. Often there are no books in the classroom and the walls are usually devoid of pictures or wall charts. Learning aids are rarely available. The Liberian situation is an extreme example of this scenario, having suffered two decades of civil war, Liberia is now one of the poorest countries in the world, with very low rates of literacy, female education,

high rates of teenage pregnancy, and other indicators.

The development of simple PLAs by teachers (or students), using low cost, locally available materials is one step in a process of trying to make learning more interesting and stimulating for the students. If they are designed and used in an interactive way, PLAs can help learners to be more actively involved in their own learning, instead of simply being the recipients of information from a teacher standing at the front of the class and talking at them.

Another benefit of using pictorial learning aids is that they provide young pre-primary and primary schoolchildren with a degree of visual stimulation. Pictures are not common in poor schools, so there is often little chance for children to develop visual literacy skills at an early age. This is in marked contrast to the situation in developed countries, where children are exposed to many kinds of pictures through books, comics, computers and television. Visual stimulation, if only through the use of learning aids at school, plays an important role in the development of young children. Simply using PLAs, or having some pictures displayed on classroom walls, can alleviate the sensory deprivation of many Third World classrooms.

Using PLAs in a participatory and interactive way can mean that students are stimulated by active learning, can interact constructively with one another through discussion and can develop creativity, critical awareness and self-confidence.

Day 1

The workshop began, in traditional Liberian style, with a song followed by a prayer.

Topiyoo gave a short talk about the background to the workshop. He said that it was difficult for 'people like us' to get training from the Ministry of Education - because of corruption and other factors.

Williams added that he himself had already done some work in his school using pictorial learning aids and said that 'children who used to be quiet now come alive'.

Participants and facilitators sat in a circle and briefly introduced themselves to the group. They also expressed something of their expectations for the training.



We then did a portrait drawing exercise. Working in pairs, participants drew a portrait of their partner. These pictures were displayed on the wall, and, as well as providing a source of amusement, provided a benchmark on participants' drawing skills.



Facilitators then demonstrated various types of PLAs for participants to think about re. their own work. The flexibility of using separate images, rather than drawing all images on one large sheet of paper was well illustrated by the visual about the four stages in the mosquito life-cycle. Initially the four pictures were drawn on one sheet, with arrows from one to the next. Then a pair of scissors was used to cut the paper to make separate pictures which were then used in a more interactive way.

The types of PLAs that were demonstrated were :-

- 2 pile sorting cards (good/bad for environment)
- 3 pile sorting cards (HIV/AIDS risk categories)
- cause and solution cards (crop yields, Uganda)
- story cards (school building story)
- sequence cards (plant growth)
- matching cards (matching words and pictures)
- maps (adding name labels; using as jigsaws)

Day 2

Started with a review of yesterday's work of demonstrating various types of PLA. Participants were encouraged to try to invent new types of learning aid relevant to their particular teaching needs.

The rest of the day was spent doing a session about basic drawing guidelines, at the request of participants. Facilitator demonstrated how to go about drawing simple portraits and figures. We exhibited the resulting

portraits on the wall next to the portraits participants had drawn on Day 1. There was a very striking contrast between the two sets of drawings. Participants were very pleased to see how much their drawing had 'improved' in such a short time.

The drawing session was taken at a very slow pace so that everybody could keep up. This meant that it took up most of the day but since it was certainly a session that participants felt they really needed, there was no alternative.



The workshop day was, as usual, finished off with a prayer. "Dear God, thank you for improving our skills".

Day 3

We began by displaying, on the floor of the workshop, all the different PLAs that had been demonstrated earlier. This gave participants the opportunity to remind themselves of the different types of PLAs and to refer to them easily. We also displayed a number of resource pictures which participants could use for inspiration or copying. We also made available a copy of Petra Rohr-Rouendaal's very useful book of resource drawings "Where There Is No Artist".

Participants then began the work of planning and making their own learning aids for use in their classes. Everybody worked well and there was a very pleasant industrious and co-operative atmosphere at the workshop. By the end of the day a wide range of materials was being made while facilitators gave individual help with drawing and design when necessary.

By this stage, participants were feeling more confident about what they were trying to do and began, as it were, to take 'ownership' of the workshop.



Day 4

Participants spent the morning finishing off the PLAs they had made.

After lunch, we started the process of each participant demonstrating their their PLA to the group. This gave them an opportunity to practise using their materials and gave other participants the chance to see what their colleagues had been working on. It also gave people the chance to comment on the way PLAs were or were not used by each individual.

Presentations began after lunch.

Ozonga made a set of story cards on the subject of drinking water.



Esther made some story cards about children being on time for school.



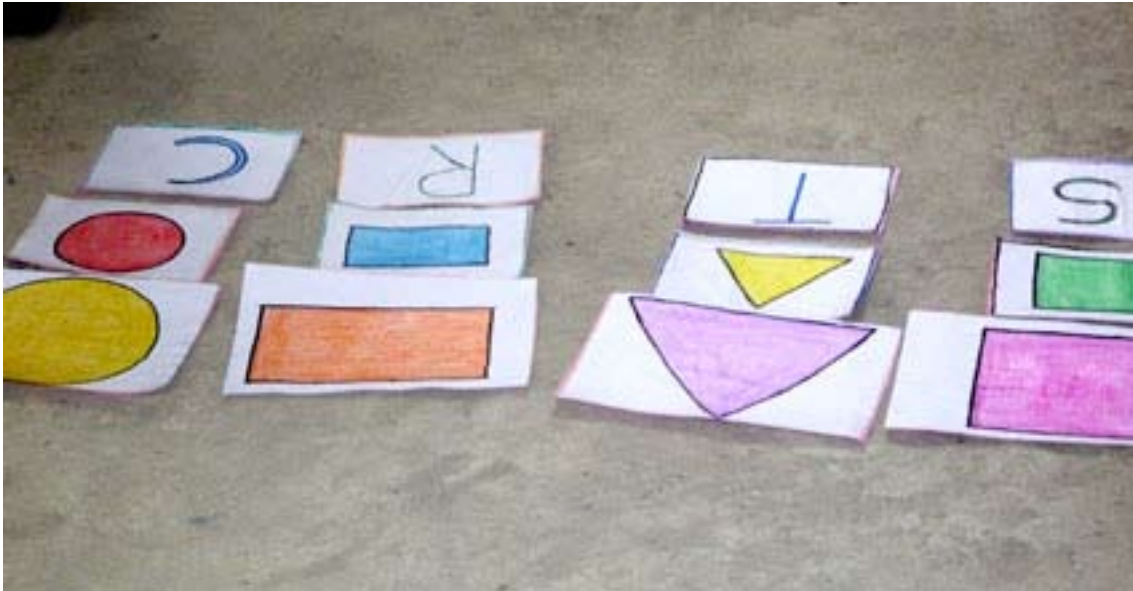
Susan made a set of 2 pile sorting cards in which the two categories were 'living things' and 'non-living things'. She had also prepared word cards which could be matched with the appropriate pictures. One of the facilitators also pointed out that these cards could be divide into two other categories 'food' and 'non-food'. Participants grouped the pictures accordingly into two piles. The picture of a dog was placed in the 'food' pile, to the initial puzzlement of the facilitators, but apparently dog is commonly eaten as a food in Liberia. "Yes, dog food is very good" remarked one of the participants.



Michael made a set of 2 pile sorting cards about good and bad hygiene practises.

Keziah made some matching cards about nutrition.

Ruth Wleh made some interesting matching cards on the subject of basic shapes - small shapes were to be matched with larger versions of the same shapes; subsequently, children would be asked to match letter cards with the four shapes (circle, rectangle, square, triangle).



Janelle mad a set of sequence cards about the things a child has to do when taking a bath.



Mabiah made some cause and solution cards which needed some revision, as he had slightly misunderstood the way such cards are used.

Day 5

We started the last day of the workshop with a moving and inspiring prayer by Saah T. Williams, one of the participants. To begin with everybody sang and clapped and then Williams started on an extended prayer improvisation - "Thank God that you are not in the funeral home you are not in the hospital....." This continued for a good twenty minutes, ending with "If you are happy jump up and down three times!".



Presentations of work done then continued :-

Malbiah had revised his cause and solution cards about malaria so that he was able to present it in a more structured and interactive way.

Williams demonstrated his sequence cards on plant growth

Faith had made a set of matching cards about the 'basic needs of man'

John made several images about nutrition although he did not seem to have fully understood the idea of using his PLA in a participatory, interactive way.

Regina made some pictures for learning about the extended family.



Christina made a set of 3 pile sorting cards about what was healthy and what was not.

Harriet made a set of 2 pile sorting cards about 'good food' and 'bad food'

Ruth (Zeon) made a set fo 2 pile sorting cards about health



Fatu made some matching cards showing numbers of different objects - children would be asked to put the appropriate number card next to the picture showing that number of objects.



Isaac made some rather disorganised images of fish which could be used to tell a story about children not being wise to stray away from their parents at any time - they might get eaten by a bigger fish!?



Benjamin made some sequence cards about plant growth.

Harrison made a PLA for use in social studies - basically matching pictures and words, although he had made all the pictures on one sheet (against the advice of facilitator).



Christopher made a set of story pictures about rural life.

Janelle made a nice 'jigsaw' for learning about different parts of the body.



Glorious made a set of sequence cards about plant growth.

Rufus made some really good story cards on the subject of environmental hygiene.



Several participants worked at using maps to make PLAs. Maps of Africa and Liberia were made together with small cards showing the names of countries or counties. The learner is asked to place the name cards in the appropriate place on the map.



Maps were also made and then cut up to make jigsaws which the learner puts back together. These map-based PLAs proved to be very popular with the participants.



At the end of the day, group members sat together and each said a few words about the workshop, by way of informal evaluation. All participants appeared to have found this work potentially very useful. Typical comments were -

“Thanks and appreciation to your sponsors”.

“It will never only be limited to us but extended to all our brothers and sisters who may need it”.

“! want to thank God for making it possible for me to participate in this great workshop”.

The ending of Williams’ morning prayer (by which time he had been shouting in quite a loud voice) was particularly gratifying - “Never give up learning - you can make it! So father I say to you ‘Thankyou for the knowledge.....and thankyou for this workshop, Oh God, and let it be a springboard, Oh God, for the people of Liberia”.



Discussion

Participants made a wide range of potentially useful PLAs. In spite of their unfamiliarity with drawing and design, every participant managed to produce their own learning aid. Although this is very basic work, it is worth pointing out that, having acquired these new skills at a short workshop, participants' employment opportunities are significantly improved. Two participants actually lost their teaching jobs as a result of spending five full days at this training. They were not, however, too concerned, as they said they would now be able to get better paid teaching work as a result of learning these new techniques. This serves as a reminder of the extremely low point that Liberia's education system had reached in recent years.

Most participants facilitated their PLAs very well. Only a very few found it somewhat difficult to move away from traditional didactic teaching and to use their materials in a participatory, interactive way. This was possibly because the majority of participants were young, several being trainee teachers at the LICOSSES college.

Follow Up

Topiyoo is continuing to run weekly sessions at the LIVAP centre on making and using PLAs. Workshop participants can attend these sessions. The materials left after this workshop will be kept at LIVAP. Participants will be able to refer to resource pictures and borrow them for photocopying or other purposes.

Topiyoo announced, at the end of the workshop, that the president of the LICOSSES college has agreed that LIVAP can be an annex of the college. The LIVAP centre will be the department where arts and visual communication teaching take place.

Individual workshop participants will be able to continue this work independently, also, in their workplaces, since materials are very low-cost and readily available locally.

HI would also like to do more work along these lines, in other countries and contexts, in order to explore further the potential for using low-cost PLAs for stimulating young children and actively involving them in the learning process. We would also like to extend the scope of this work by investigating the possibilities of children actually making and using their own PLAs.

Thanks

Thanks are due to Topiyoo Nya Blimie of LIVAP for organising the workshop and providing the venue. It was a pleasure and a privilege to work with him again.

Thanks are also due to the Eva Reckitt Foundation and to the many individual supporters who generously donated the funds that made it possible to carry out this work.

(Bob Linney/Alfie Linney, December 2011)

Appendix I

List of Participants

Garmia G. Johnson
Susan T. Koffa
Michael S. Zordyu Jr.
Wah Christopher VII
Esther J. Nielson
Christina M. Kollie
Regina G. Tokpah
Ruth S. Wleh
Faith W. Mentee
Benjamin N. Wouan
Saah T. Williams
John W. Dopoe
Janell Eastburn
Harriet N.P. Gborlee
Ruth M. Zeon
Isaac Daniel
Ozonga F.K. Gmah Jr.
Harrison G. Weah
Kaziah M. Proud
Rufus B.S. Kamujai
Mabiah K. Slehwah
John P. Doeyou
Fatu Gaye
Glorious M. Gonyor
Ruth N. Gaye
Christiana Dossen



Facilitators

Bob Linney
Alfie Linney
Topiyoo Nya Blimie



