

LITERACY ALIVE III PROJECT
RAINFOREST READING AND ADVENTURE CAMP 2016

MEDIA INFORMATION

WHAT HAPPENED IN BELIZE (CAYO DISTRICT) IN APRIL 2016 TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY LITERACY ?

- The first annual ***RAINFOREST READING AND ADVENTURE CAMP*** provided an exciting teaching and learning initiative to support Belize teachers and students in improved reading and writing achievement.
- Over ***20 Canadian literacy experts*** in the ***Literacy Alive III Rotary Global Grant*** initiative returned to Cayo to assist with strengthening literacy teaching and learning.
- ***A three day camp packed with learning and adventure*** ran March 29, 30, 31 . Resources and teaching strategies to support reading improvement modeled by Canadian leaders co-presenting with Belize educators who are leading student literacy improvements in their schools.
- ***Students learned about becoming better readers*** in a three day camp that integrated adventure and fun activities around a Rainforest theme.
- ***Belize teachers and public librarians*** learned more about strategies to use in classrooms that positively impact student progress in reading and writing.
- ***A celebration of literacy*** was held as a closing activity for the camp where over 300 participants engaged ***in a song and dance celebration singing "What a Wonderful World"*** to capture the spirit of international friendship and peace and possibilities for good that come from peaceful collaboration between countries.

WHO PARTICIPATED in the RAINFOREST READING AND ADVENTURE CAMP?

- Over 250 children from primary schools across the Cayo district
- Children were recommended to participate by their school principals and teachers
- Student participants included children with serious reading difficulties, children who had never been away from their rural villages and others who were discouraged with their progress at school
- Parents of children participating were encouraged to attend
- Public Librarians from San Ignacio, Santa Elena and Benke
- Classroom teachers and administrators from over 20 schools
- Ministry of Education Cayo District office directors and literacy support leaders
- Community volunteers
- 23 Canadian literacy experts and community developer volunteers from Alberta, Canada

- Rotary volunteers from the Rotary Club of Red Deer, Canada and the Rotary Club of San Ignacio.

WHAT ACTIVITIES?

- Canadian Literacy Alive team provided all resources and leadership
- Students proceeded through learning stations focused on: **Phonics, Reading, Writing and Comprehension**
- Daily **Rainforest adventure activities** included sports and games for students
- Follow up professional development for educators (April 4,5) provided the Belize educators with training in effective literacy instructional skills, and sufficient training to operate literacy camps in local villages/towns. All resources to operate the camps was provided to the Belize participants.

WHY A READING AND ADVENTURE CAMP?

- Evidence of success with the concept in other countries
- Provides students with a quality reading intervention support system
- Provides teachers the opportunity to use resources and strategies that can be also used when they return to their home schools
- Method to share quality teaching and learning resources to many teachers in many schools.
- Belize educators learn about effective literacy support strategies at the same time that they can practice using them with student campers.
- The three day camp was a condensed model of a much larger camp that can be hosted by Belize communities during summer vacation blocks.
- Community members, including local public libraries, clubs/organizations engage in the literacy support process by transferring ideas, resources, and activities to Belize led initiatives.

HOW WILL THE CAMP OPERATE?

- All activities took place at Sacred Heart College in San Ignacio.
- Busses provided daily transportation to and from the camp for students who do not live in San Ignacio (town where the camp was hosted)
- Camp operated from 9:00 – 3:30 for three consecutive days.
- Each Canadian leader provided mentorship and coaching to a team of Belize educators and volunteers (referred to as Literacy Teaching Cohorts).
- Daily de-briefings for Camp Leaders followed dismissal of students
- Students circulated between a series of learning stations

SPECIAL FEATURES

- Students received reading support materials
- Snacks and lunch were provided by local community volunteers.

- Website was developed to house all literacy support materials for friendly access by camp participants.
- The Rainforest Reading and Adventure Camp was part of the activities of a project called Literacy Alive III. In the past six years Literacy Alive I and II operated in Cayo and focused on a variety of activities to assist teachers in schools with effective resource development and teaching strategies. The first two phases of the project evolved into Literacy Alive III and the student reading and adventure camp concept.

WHO SPONSORS THE CAMP?

- Rotary Club of San Ignacio works with the Rotary Club of Red Deer, Alberta Canada in a collaborative Literacy Alive project where both clubs provide source funding which is matched by Rotary International to support costs of the project (over \$50,000 US).
- Funding goes toward development of materials, camp costs, professional development costs and support for Canadian literacy leaders to travel to Belize.
- Sacred Heart College in San Ignacio has partnered with the project to generously provide the facility to operate the camp.
- The Cayo Ministry of Education Office, provided support in communication, promotion and co-facilitation of the project activities.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT SUPPORT LITERACY IMPROVEMENT IN BELIZE?

- Augments existing training and experience of local educators
- Assists in developing strategies to engage local communities (individuals, parents, community organizations, public libraries) in literacy support
- Provides many reading/writing teaching and learning resources for local schools
- Sets up a model that can be duplicated anywhere in Belize at reasonable cost
- Provides support materials to host camps and provide professional development to teachers and community volunteers in the areas of literacy learning

FIRST PHASE OF LITERACY ALIVE III PROJECT: TEACHER SUPPORT TO SMALL VILLAGE SCHOOLS IN REMOTE AREAS.

Five Alberta teachers visited the Cayo educational district and with the support of the local education office they spent one week (November 2015) in four different village schools. VTT members provided school based professional development for teachers and school administration and shared resources, modelled effective literacy teaching approaches, provided professional development and coached classroom teachers. A debrief of the project follows:

Team Debrief of Phase I activities:
(Judy, Diane, Amanda J, Amanda W, Cathy)

General Comments:

- We need more time at the schools. Two days was too short of a format to make a lasting relationship and impact for the teachers.
- If we were to follow the same format could someone come down earlier to visit with the teachers and ask them what they would specifically want to work on and how we could address their needs. We need more information ahead of time or longer time with schools.
- Another suggestion would be more people. We found a Canadian teacher matched with a Belizean teacher was a great way to build a relationship and provide them with enough feedback and resources in the short amount of time.
- We all enjoyed getting to work in and visit the village schools.
- Judith spent four days in the school and still found it challenging to address all the needs of the teachers and students by herself in the short time frame.
- All of us experienced losing some time in the schools due to covering classes for sick/teachers away on leave, or spending time (1st afternoon) with division wide activity for their 'reading competition' which was happening while we were there. We would have liked to have been aware of a few things ahead of time, such as the Infant 1&2 getting dismissed at 2:30 every day.
- Teachers need access to more appropriate levelled reading materials (or how to manage them - how do you level books, put them in classrooms, how can you use the library (connect Teresita to a contact at each school), home reading programs.
- Need to spread the word about reading coaches and getting credit for PD if that gets approved

Observations from the schools:

- Overall all the teachers were very receptive and open to the project.
- We noticed that some of the teachers were nervous because they felt like they were being evaluated. With the ministry being present they experienced some hesitation being honest about their struggles.
- The ministry did not visit all the schools involved in the project and it would have been nice to have their role balanced between all 5 schools.
- We were very impressed with the involvement of the ministry at the schools they did visit. They went above and beyond with supporting the project and did a great job at providing positive feedback to the teachers.
- We all commented on the high expectations placed on teachers in terms of planning. Majority of teachers spend their whole weekend planning and feel very rigid about their schedule and their planning.
- Principals are required to review their weekly plans and sign off on them. The teachers then feel committed to move along on their lesson plans regardless of the progression of the students.
- All of us felt that the curriculum was way above where the students were developmentally ready. For example students in Infant 1 learning about grammatical rules before knowing their alphabet.

- Noticed a huge difference in student's literacy success between classes of 33 and classes of 20- 25 or less than that in some cases
- Oral language needs to be a non-negotiable, and students need time to converse in class and outside of class in English.
- We noticed a huge difference in teachers with formal training and those who didn't, so the program must be good

Comments on materials and activities we brought:

- Teachers liked when the materials could be modeled in the classroom and activities that could be integrated across the curriculum.
- We need to bring less 'stuff' and use more of what they have and show them how to use what they have.
- Bring hands-on literacy centers ready to go to model in classrooms... Kids are sitting and waiting when they finish early.

Ideas for moving forward:

- We would love to see the schools have more opportunities for collaboration. If two schools with similar backgrounds pair up and allow teachers to meet with a colleague teaching the same grade(s) as them. This would allow them the opportunity to discuss best practice and share planning responsibilities.
- They need more access to grade appropriate reading materials.
- Helping them use the stuff they already have (computers, books, etc) rather than bringing more stuff to them.

Reading camp:

- We need to find high interest, low vocabulary activities for the reading camp so that the kids are engaged but also working at their level
- We need to focus on oral language in all the strands of the reading camp... Kids talking to kids (this is a real weakness)
- We need to focus on ways to be most effective (eg smaller numbers of kids in groups to help be most effective in the three days we have with students we don't know, activities that teach students independent strategies)
- There will be kids who don't speak/understand any English... Need to use strategies like having a student translate, and give them the English information, then have student return and speak in English

Questions:

- Do teachers have to pay for printing /photocopying at the ministry office?
- Could we get a copy of their books/readers to have in Red Deer to use when planning for future Literacy Alive projects?
- How do they keep track of the resources each school has (some are stacked and some have nothing) - could the ministry do a better job of keeping track of donations and where they go?

LITERACY ALIVE PROGRAM CONTACTS:

- Dr. Lynne Paradis, Literacy Alive Project Director: Rotary Club of Red Deer, Canada paradislynne@gmail.com cell: 587 877 8512
- Aki Fukai, President, Rotary Club of San Ignacio.
- Mr. Luis Carballo, Director, Ministry of Education, Cayo District office
- Mrs. Isaura Williams, Literacy Director, Ministry of Education, Cayo District Office

BENEFITS OF THE LITERACY ALIVE III PROJECT

- Belize educational and community participants increase leadership capacity to improve literacy practices in local schools/communities
- Red Deer volunteers are engaged in teaching/learning activities that bring added value to their vocations as educators
- Building of goodwill, friendship and shared joy between countries
- Development of follow up support projects between Red Deer, Canada and Belize
- Over 50,000 American dollars added to the Belize economy (beyond travel costs for the project) by volunteers (hotels, car rental, food, leisure activities, purchase of teaching resources, all camp supplies, tourism).
- Addition of rich teaching resources to over 20 participating schools
- Belize Ministry of Education Director for the Cayo region was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship for the outstanding work and support he has provided over the past six years for the Literacy Alive initiatives led by the Rotary Club of Red Deer.













LIST OF Alberta Volunteer PARTICIPANTS

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