What people are doing for ISLM

Country: Nigeria

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Literacy workshops for youthful prison inmates

Access to information and educational activities is fundamental human rights of all people, including prison inmates. Individual citizens need to build up varieties of skills—including reading, writing and creative skills in order to realize the advantages of lifelong learning. These skills will help enable them to effectively participate in the society.

*The Prison inmates*

For the inmates, training ushers in a reformation as well as rehabilitation to them; encouraging them during their time in prison to prepare for a time when they will be free. The significance of training is to encourage them to develop and become self-confident, become socially stable and reasonable individuals and build their skills of entrepreneurship. Training of people behind the bar is not only a means of supporting offenders in their transition from prison to the outside world; it is a right for all and prisoners should not forfeit this right to access education while in prison more especially through the information repackages of the prison libraries. This informed the decision to organize a literacy programme in the prisons of Enugu and Anambra States of Nigeria.

Prison Library Literacy Activities in Nsukka Prison

The ISLM activities grew out of a programme developed for promoting literacy through comic book writing. This was first tried out at Nsukka Prison in the same community as the Children’s Centre Library and University of Nigeria.

Week1: The programme started with 15 prison inmates who were introduced to the aim of the programme and the need for them to get involved in the programme.

The first activity was making of pocket book and creation of biography. Participants were paired to interview each other and write the other person’s biography in a pocket book. For pocket books procedure, inmates were given a plain sheet of paper, a pencil, a cleaner and a sharpener each and paired after which they were asked to interview each other on their life history—name, age, place of birth, address, phone number, academic qualifications, sex, goals and ambitions, hobbies, religion, position in the family, family background. After the interview, participants were taught how to fold the paper to make eight pages to make a pocket book and write a biography of the person they interviewed. This produced positive results as they began to acquire skills for interview, social, communication skills.

Week 2: The following week was for discussion of the stories read and the difficulties encountered. The next was introduction to comic book writing. Individuals were grouped to read comic books, notice the story, characters, use of dialogue, drawing style, panels and then present back to the general group. The next was drawing of lines and shapes; turning these into faces, houses, and different other items, and creation of word balloons: making dialog and fixing it in word balloons and creation of comic panels; discussion of comic stories—beginning, middle, end. Participants were asked to make a comic of the story discussed in class to submit the coming week.

Week 3: Discussion of the comics created and sharing of ideas

Inmates were allowed to discuss and create stories of superheroes: individuals who bring about changes in the society; not necessarily imaginary characters. They were allowed, after drilling, to take the assignment to their cell

Week 4: Creating stories of outer world—folktales, Bible stories, news events, life after prison.

Inmates were assigned to develop an outline or preliminary sketch of selected comic book story

Participants were guided to develop their own story and present into comics.

Week 5: Creating stories about the neighborhood and trending events: societal issues, news stories, personal experience—family, education, work, prison experience, or experience heard or learnt. The stories created were shared and discussed.

Week 6: Assignment of the final comics

***Awka Train-the-Trainers Workshop (on Comic Writing for literacy Development)***

The next step was to take the programme to the prisons of neighboring Anambra State. This was done by means of a 3-day intensive literacy and creative writing workshop aimed at developing prisoners’ basic literacy skills through the core activity of creating comic books. Facilitated by Prof. V.W. Dike, the programme was held in Awka Prison, Anambra State and lasted from October 16-18, 2017. Ngozi Osadebe, Gace Onyebuchi and Anthony Izuchukwu were the resource persons. This programme was envisaged as a train-the-trainers workshop targeting the welfare officers in charge of prison libraries and educational programmes, together with locally-based librarians. When equipped with these skills, participants would be able to conduct similar workshops on a continuing basis with inmates in the various prisons of Anambra State.

Day 1 – Mon., Oct. 16

Introduction of programme: What is literacy and creative writing?

Pocket book and biography creation – Participants will be paired to interview each other and write the other person’s biography in a pocket book. As much as possible a prison officer and librarian from the same location will be paired to help them get acquainted for future workshops.

Introduction to comic books – Group activity reading comic books, noticing the story, characters, use of dialogue, drawing style, panels. Each group will present for a mark.

Drawing of lines and shapes; turning these into faces, houses, etc.

Creation of word balloons: making dialog and fixing it in word balloons

Assignment: Participants to think of an idea for a comic book they’ll write, sketching out the story and characters. This could be something from their lives, a story from real life, a fantasy, etc. Ideas to be presented Tues.

Day 2 - Tues., Oct. 17

Making bookmarks, using anything of interest to them

Assigning roles in comic books; character making

Creation of comic panels; discussion of comic stories—beginning, middle, end

Discuss Monday’s assignment on story ideas

Creating stories of superheroes

Creating stories of outer world—folktales, Bible stories, news events, life after prison

Assignment: Develop an outline or preliminary sketch of selected comic book story

Day 3 - Wed., Oct. 18

Creating stories about the neighborhood and trending events: societal issues, news stories, personal experience—family, education, work, prison experience, etc.

Discussion of stories and beginning final draft

Final write-up

Presentation of final productions and certificates

This result of this programme generally was enthusiasm brought about by their involvement in the learning pocket books, book marks, art, and comic writing. The participants were also introduced to drawing and painting as well as story making, with which they were able to transform the knowledge and experience into making of comics. The next step is to conduct workshops for inmates of the four prisons early in 2018.