

LIBRARY OF  
CONGRESS

LITERACY AWARDS

2013



BEST PRACTICES



## A Preface from John Y. Cole

This year marks the debut of three awards presented by the Library of Congress to recognize and support achievements in the field of literacy, both in the United States and abroad. Made possible through the generosity of David M. Rubenstein, the three awards are:

*The David M. Rubenstein Prize* for a groundbreaking or sustained record of advancement of literacy by an individual or entity worldwide

*The American Prize* for a project developed and implemented successfully during the past decade for combating illiteracy or aliteracy

*The International Prize* for the work of an individual, nation or nongovernmental entity working in a specific country or region outside the United States

Applications were due to the Library on April 30, 2013, and 187 submissions were received from 28 U.S. states and 21 countries. The Advisory Board narrowed the field to 26 semifinalists, and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington made the final selections. Dr. Billington and Mr. David M. Rubenstein, the program's originator and sponsor, announced the winners on Sept. 22, 2013, at the National Book Festival. They are:

*The David M. Rubenstein Prize: [Reach Out and Read](#)*

*The American Prize: [826 National](#)*

*The International Prize: [PlanetRead](#)*

The Library of Congress Literacy Awards 2013 Best Practices is a review of the 26 semifinalist applications, giving the Library the opportunity to highlight exemplary practices implemented by programs that address illiteracy, aliteracy, or both, in the United States and globally. It should be noted that much has been documented in the literature, both in print and online resources, on how best to approach the problem of illiteracy at the instructional level, whether for adult learners or K-12 students. The practices cited here address the topic from the programmatic level, and they highlight the extraordinary efforts of the 187 individuals, governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations that applied for the Library of Congress Literacy Awards.

The Library of Congress thanks Micki Freeny, an experienced public librarian in the Washington, D.C., area, for drafting this publication, the members of the Advisory Board for their energetic and valuable advice and assistance, and David M. Rubenstein for his generosity and enlightened self-interest in establishing these awards.

—John Y. Cole is chair of the Library of Congress Literacy Awards  
and director of the Center for the Book

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## BEST PRACTICES

By Maralita L. "Micki" Freeny

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Some of the best practices of large-scale programs as presented here overlap with those for direct instruction and intervention at the student level. However, this document focuses on the programmatic strategies and approaches to combating illiteracy as exemplified by the 26 semifinalist applicants in the 2013 awards cycle.

The challenge of identifying a list of best practices is that the problem of illiteracy/aliteracy is so broad in scope. Barriers faced in developing countries are different from those in the United States and other developed nations. Strategies that address the issues of the adult learner are different from those of the K-12 student and pre-readers who need early intervention if they are to become proficient readers. Yet, there are common threads among preferred practices across these locations and ages, and those are the ones identified here.

The best practices highlighted herein are:

- Facilitating access to print
- Cultivating diverse partnerships
- Leveraging of community resources
- Assuring cultural relevance
- Using technology
- Developing writing skills
- Reading aloud and storytelling
- Fostering early intervention and family engagement

How these practices can be used as models for similar initiatives will be demonstrated by drawing on the successes of many of the individuals and groups nominated for these awards.

Through its new literacy awards, the Library of Congress is striving to bring worldwide attention to the issues of illiteracy and aliteracy. The number and quality of the nominations for the three prizes demonstrate that great work is being done throughout the world to address the problems. Individuals and groups in the U.S. and abroad bring passion, creativity, innovation, skills and knowledge to the effort that is required to help adult learners and youth to achieve reading proficiency and to acquire a love of reading, as



## GREAT WORK IS BEING DONE AROUND THE WORLD TO ADDRESS ILLITERACY AND ALITERACY.

well as to prepare very young children to arrive at school ready to learn to read and to become motivated readers.

It is hoped that the three extraordinary prize winners as well as the high-achieving nominees cited here and in the other applications inspire others to embark on the important work of combating literacy and aliteracy so that the skill and pleasure of reading will prevail and flourish throughout the world.

## Facilitating Access to Print

Perhaps most obvious of all the best practices is one of the most critical as well: the provision of free materials, also referred to as access to books or access to print. When addressing illiteracy and aliteracy, the need for access to free high-quality reading materials is universal, but the solutions vary. In the United States where the culture of lending libraries is well established, emphasis is usually on ownership of books. Two national organizations address this issue with exemplary programs. *Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)*, the oldest and largest children's literacy nonprofit in the United States, in existence since 1966, addresses the motivation to read among children (especially its target population, children living in poverty) through the simple process of providing them the opportunity to own their own books—books that they choose themselves.

THE NEED FOR ACCESS TO FREE HIGH-QUALITY READING MATERIALS IS UNIVERSAL, BUT THE SOLUTIONS VARY.

*First Book*, another U.S. nonprofit social enterprise, likewise works diligently to close the gap in access to print between poor children and children from families of means. It is *First Book's* focus on book ownership that helps to create a culture of reading among at-risk children and ultimately improves their reading proficiency. Although both *RIF* and *First Book* employ other notable strategies to combat illiteracy, book ownership is a hallmark activity of both organizations.

In developing nations, while book distribution is also a valued practice, the creation of lending libraries where they have been lacking is an equally important, and perhaps even more far-reaching, strategy to combat illiteracy. To this end, the *Osu Children's Library Fund* has built several community libraries in Accra, Ghana, and is assisting with the development of hundreds of similar initiatives

throughout Africa. In Oaxaca, one of the poorest states in Mexico, *Libros para Pueblos (LPP)* has helped establish 66 libraries in various communities. *Banco del Libro*, a nongovernmental organization working in Venezuela, first addressed access to books in the 1960s through a book-exchange program. Subsequently, its efforts expanded to include the development of networks of public and school libraries, including community libraries in poor barrios and a bookmobile service, with two unique features—a *Book Mule* and a *Book Boat* that visit remote towns, schools and jails.



## Cultivating Diverse Partnerships

A best practice that is standard to ensure sustainability for any modern intervention program in the 21st century is the development of partnerships. A key to success is that there is diversity of partnerships, that collaboration is strategic and varied. In the United States, *Reach Out and Read* represents a longtime public-private operation that has established, through its partnerships, a diverse, committed funding base and a sustainable model of service for the country's most at-risk children. In addition to obtaining financial support from the U.S.

Department of Education, *Reach Out and Read* partners with local and national foundations and corporations and state governments for additional funding. Through collaboration with clinics, hospitals, health centers, physicians and nurse practitioners, *Reach Out and Read* delivers its message about the importance of early literacy intervention in poor communities throughout the country. The engagement of the medical community, on both a local and a national basis, to deliver its message and direct services with funding from diverse sources has resulted in a model network of partnering that achieves extraordinary results in closing the achievement gap.

In the international arena, collaboration is the cornerstone of the success of Australia's *National Year of Reading*. Starting with minimal funding from library-based foundations, the program grew to encompass corporate sponsorship and buy-in from local, state and federal governments and participation from more than 200 partner organizations.

These two programs demonstrate the benefits of engaging a diverse network of partners to achieve success in the field of literacy intervention. In its 25-year history, *Reach Out and Read* has served more than 4 million children; the 2012 *National Year of Reading* alone reached 200,000 active participants nationwide in Australia.



## Leveraging Community Resources

Closely related to the best practice of developing key partnerships is the involvement and engagement of the local community in order to leverage its resources. This practice contributes immeasurably to the success of literacy initiatives as shown by the examples below. In the United States, community engagement is exemplified by the *Queens Library Literacy Zone Welcome Centers*, an adjunct to the library's *Adult Learning Center*, which has been involved in literacy instruction to adults since 1977. As a one-stop



educational facility with social supports, the *Welcome Center* offers instruction and resource referrals to families whose socioeconomic circumstances often interfere with their learning. Whatever the barrier, the *Welcome Center* case manager refers students to social services and other community agencies through a network of community partnerships. By leveraging its own free learning resources with the community resources that address the socioeconomic challenges of its students, the *Queens Library* is removing obstacles to literacy success.

Working abroad, *Room to Read* has developed a Challenge Grant model that engages community members by expecting them to co-invest in its literacy project. This involvement gives the local community a greater stake in the continued success and sustainability of the project. This grassroots approach, in concert with *Room to Read's* global expertise in literacy, leverages the talent and passion of local communities to achieve local solutions to illiteracy.

One of any community's most valuable assets is its human capital. Across the world and over many decades, people giving of their time and talent have contributed immeasurably to the efforts to combat illiteracy. Two individuals, a U.S.-based nonprofit and a global organization stand out for their work in developing models of volunteerism to address literacy issues both in the United States and abroad.

Ruth Johnson Colvin founded the nonprofit organization *Literacy Volunteers Inc.* in the early 1960s. In time, *Literacy Volunteers* established chapters in communities across the United States, and combined they have served more than 1 million adult learners. Colvin is a pioneer in the use of volunteers to deliver literacy instruction in this country, and her work has served as a model for others to emulate.

Rana Dajani, the founder of the *We Love Reading (WLR)* program, which originated in Jordan and has expanded to more than a dozen countries on several continents, developed an innovative model that draws on the volunteer service of women in each of the local communities served. The women, trained by *WLR* experts, voluntarily give of their time to focus on the read-aloud and storytelling experience to plant the love of reading among children in their neighborhoods and communities.

*826 National*, which operates in several American cities, is a grassroots, community-based program that relies on the donation of significant talent and time from dedicated volunteers that include locally based writers and well-known authors and other celebrities. Its writing-focused program, which has already been replicated throughout the United States and in cities in Europe and Australia, will use its community-based model of literacy intervention as it expands its reach in current chapter cities and beyond and strives to take its cost-effective and student-centered model to scale.



The *Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA)* provides a free national literacy program in Trinidad and Tobago through a cadre of more than 300 volunteers trained to deliver its culturally relevant instructional program to its learners. With more than 20 years of success, *ALTA* has demonstrated how effective a model of volunteerism can be in addressing illiteracy.



## Assuring Cultural Relevance

Including culturally relevant materials and services into literacy programs is another significant and essential best practice. Without it, programs risk alienating the very people they seek to serve, and attention to this practice can contribute greatly to learner participation and results.

*PlanetRead*, a nongovernmental organization located in India, uses subtitling on mainstream TV to provide reading practice, which is especially critical for struggling readers. *PlanetRead* leverages the power of this technique with the appeal of Bollywood to address the issue of illiteracy in a culturally relevant manner. *PlanetRead's* so-called karaoke approach to literacy allows nearly 200 million people, many of them functionally illiterate, to get reading practice.

A U.S.-based program *El día de los niños/El día de los libros*, known as *Día*, is an initiative of the American Library Association that emphasizes the provision of literacy activities to children in ways that honor and embrace every child's home language and culture. *Día* has evolved from a single-day celebration into an ongoing commitment to linking children and their families to culturally relevant resources to enhance their reading proficiency. This includes not only English-language materials that relate to a child's heritage and culture but also books in the child's native language.

In Venezuela, *Banco del Libro* addresses the need for more high-quality books in Spanish for its children by stimulating the production of such materials. *Room to Read's* adherence to the principle of providing culturally relevant materials is demonstrated by its achievement of publishing close to 900 original children's books in 26 languages. The importance of children having access worldwide to literature that reflects their heritage in languages they know cannot be overemphasized.

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## Using Technology

While access to print remains a critical component of effective literacy programs, in the 21st century the use of technology has become an important best practice, especially in programs that serve adult learners and K-12 and college-level students. Integrating the use of computers in instruction is a basic application of this practice. *Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB)* ensures that its program stays relevant to its adult and youth learners by incorporating access to computers. Marty Finsterbusch, himself an adult learner, who achieved a rewarding career in the field of adult literacy, emphasizes not only the use of computers but also the need to take the lead of each student in how technology is used in literacy instruction.



Online services and social media also play a significant role in successful 21st century literacy efforts. *Reader to Reader*, a program that seeks to help students want to read, capitalized on the interest of youth in online communication when designing its literacy program that pairs college mentors with struggling elementary and high school readers. The online mentoring forum combines technology with distribution of free books, writing and rich discussion of books

chosen by each participant. Similarly, the National Literacy Trust of the United Kingdom increased the reach of its *Premier League Reading Stars* program by providing free online access. In one year, 18,000 children beyond those in the targeted schools participated in the trust's football-themed literacy intervention program. With online challenges and digital enhancements, the program remains relevant to the original participants in economically deprived communities and connects the program to students throughout the U.K. and beyond. *FunDza Literacy Trust* in South Africa commissions the writing of original stories and delivers them in a serialized format to readers' cell phones, taking full advantage of a central feature of youth culture today—the prevalent use of cell phones for aspects of everyday life.

In the United States, *Reading Rockets*, a national public television multimedia initiative, is a leader in employing a vast array of online, social media and mobile technologies to disseminate its literacy messaging. Among the platforms they have used are RSS feeds, web widgets, podcasts, webcasts and a fully mobile website. They deliver literacy tips in multiple languages via Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube. Undoubtedly, this innovative use of technology extends the reach of its literacy messages and has special appeal to the generation of digital natives and others who have fully embraced social media and other online resources.



Yet *Reading Rockets* continues to rely on the traditional technologies of television and video to deliver its literacy messages and services. Its original series, "Launching Young Readers," has been augmented by "Meet the Expert" video interviews with top reading researchers, video interviews with children's authors and teacher professional development workshops on video. *PlanetRead* in India uses the traditional and continuously popular medium of television to reach hundreds of millions of viewers, of whom more than half lack reading proficiency. Using this accessible, mainstream technology, a staple of Indian pop culture, *PlanetRead* provides valuable reading practice through the simple and effective technique of subtitling.

Technology is an integral part of culture and education in the 21st century. Its role in combating literacy and illiteracy is indisputable.

## Developing Writing Skills

In the area of literacy instruction, writing is closely linked to reading, and getting students to express themselves in writing is a critical instructional strategy. For that reason, incorporating writing into literacy programs is another best practice of large-scale literacy initiatives.

*826 National* has worked for more than two decades to give tutorial assistance in writing to K-12 students who have limited educational resources at their disposal. Each of the five core programs of *826 National* includes a writing component that helps students to become better readers and writers and to gain confidence in their overall communication skills. Students are given recognition for their written works through the program's *Young Adult Publishing Project*. Participants in the *Write4Life* workshops of the *FunDza Literacy Trust* of South Africa have their written works showcased on the mobi network, where the young aspirant writers are also profiled. Seeing their own writing published, as accomplished by *826 National* and *FunDza*, is a strong motivator to young people working on their reading and writing proficiency.

GETTING STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN WRITING IS A CRITICAL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY.



Recognizing that without proficient writing skills young people will be at a serious disadvantage when they enter college or the work force, the *Reader to Reader* initiative has incorporated writing at the heart of its program. Targeted to youth, *Reader to Reader* uses an online forum to connect struggling readers to college mentors. By writing about the books that they choose for themselves, the young readers improve their literacy skills with guidance from mentors closer to their own age than the traditional adult tutor.



## Reading Aloud and Storytelling

According to the landmark literacy report “Becoming a Nation of Readers,” the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children. This is as true in 2013 as it was in 1985, when the report was released.

With the corollary activity of storytelling, reading aloud is a core function of the most effective intervention programs that target children, regardless of location in the world. *Read Aloud 15 Minutes. Every Child. Every Parent. Every Day* is a national campaign that seeks to reach every family in America with its simple, straightforward message.

While reading aloud is recommended as an activity to share with all children, it is an especially effective and necessary strategy to use in literacy intervention with youngsters who are struggling with reading. Sharing books aloud links books and reading with pleasure and serves as a strong motivator for children who otherwise associate reading with work, failure and struggle. In China, where there is no lack of emphasis on academic achievement, the *Chen Yet-Set Family Foundation* discovered that it could improve children’s writing and comprehension skills and increase the number of books they read by adopting what it

calls a “radical approach” by Chinese standards that proclaims that reading should be fun. Their literacy tutors instill the love of reading through the practices of reading aloud and storytelling and help the children achieve greater skills as well.

Working in the Middle East, where traditionally reading has not been viewed as a pleasurable



activity and steadfast in her belief that reading aloud is the key to fostering a love of reading, Rana Dajani, the founder of *We Love Reading (WLR)*, uses this activity in her program to help children achieve success in learning to read. Her innovative, grassroots literacy intervention program involves training women to hold read-aloud sessions in neighborhood spaces such as mosques and community centers. *WLR* has changed attitudes about reading and has inspired parents and children to read for pleasure. The result is that participants increase their educational and professional opportunities through the improvement of reading skills.

## Fostering Early Intervention and Family Engagement

The last of the best practices encompasses how parents play a critical role in the eventual reading success of their children and how an intergenerational approach to literacy benefits both children and their families. Basically, if children are engaged in literacy activities from an early age, and this normally requires the participation of parents, they will be prepared to learn to read when they enter school, and all of the practices that precede this one will become less necessary. Granted, some literacy intervention will always be needed because of various socioeconomic barriers and learning disabilities that interfere with effective learning. However, wherever they live in the world, parents who take an active role in their children’s educational development, starting in infancy, will help them avoid the problems of illiteracy and aliteracy and will contribute to their ultimate ability to achieve reading proficiency. Furthermore, these problems will become less pervasive.

*Reach Out and Read* has been a national leader in the United States in the quest to ensure that all children develop the language and literacy skills they need to enter school ready to learn to read. By offering “prescriptions for reading,” pediatricians, nurse practitioners and others in the medical community who serve young children and their families communicate to parents that reading aloud is as critical to their children’s future success

as immunizations, nutrition and physical activity. They ensure that families have age-appropriate books, and they show parents how to include literacy-rich activities into daily routines. *Reach Out and Read* has reached millions of children over its 24-year history, and its results in helping at-risk children be prepared to learn to read are extraordinary.

Sharon Darling, founder and president of the *National Center for Family Literacy*, began to tackle the intergenerational aspects of illiteracy when, in 1985, she created her *Parent and Child Education (PACE)* program. The approach is predicated on the principle that parents and children learn best when they learn together. Darling’s program became a national model in the United States for family literacy initiatives.

Belief in the intergenerational approach to literacy is also at the core of *Motheread/ Fatheread Colorado (MFC)*, a U.S.-based program administered by Colorado Humanities that emphasizes engaging parents in their children’s education and development starting in their preschool years. *MFC* shows that when reading and books are made a part of homes, including those where adults struggle with reading themselves, learning environments are created that are essential to getting children ready for school and the process of learning to read. In addition, adults are motivated to improve their own reading skills.

*Better Beginnings*, an initiative of the State Library of Western Australia, likewise based its program on evidence that intergenerational learning and parental involvement positively affect the literacy of children as well as that of the parents themselves. *Better Beginnings* was the first program of its kind in Western Australia and is a model for family literacy practices. Sustained engagement with families and early intervention with children go a long way in addressing the problem of illiteracy by intervening early in a child’s life through each child’s first and best teacher, his or her parent.

*Micki Freeny is a public librarian with more than 40 years of experience in Washington, D.C., and Prince George’s County, Md.*



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### The Library of Congress Literacy Awards

Established in January 2013, the Library of Congress Literacy Awards are made possible through the generosity of David M. Rubenstein, co-founder of The Carlyle Group, philanthropist and major donor to the Library of Congress.

According to Mr. Rubenstein, "Literacy spurs innovation and creativity. Literacy is one of the basic tools for making progress in life and can open doors to many joys and wonders. I am pleased to support the work of groups that help people become literate and successfully convince those who can read to read more."

The advisory board for the Literacy Awards, named by Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, is composed of distinguished individuals in the field of literacy. The board offered recommendations to Dr. Billington, who made the final selections.

### About the Library of Congress

Founded in 1800, the Library of Congress is the nation's oldest federal cultural institution. The Library seeks to spark imagination and creativity and to further human understanding and wisdom by providing access to knowledge through its magnificent collections, programs, publications and exhibitions. Many of the Library's rich resources can be accessed through its website at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

### About the Center for the Book

Since its creation by Congress in 1977 to "stimulate public interest in books and reading," the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress ([www.Read.gov/cfb/](http://www.Read.gov/cfb/)) has become a major national force for reading and literacy promotion. A public-private partnership, it sponsors educational programs that reach readers of all ages, nationally and internationally. The Center provides leadership for affiliated state centers for the book (including the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and nonprofit reading promotion partners and plays a key role in the Library's annual National Book Festival.

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress administers the Literacy Awards. It also oversees the Library's [Read.gov](http://Read.gov) website and administers the Library's Young Readers Center and Poetry and Literature Center.



101 Independence Ave. S.E.  
Washington, DC 20540

