CHILDREN’S BOOK NETWORK POLICY DOCUMENT

* Children. That is the one word that roots our project and that has inspired – and continues to inspire - everything that we do.
* Reading. Is what we can offer children as a way to enable them to change their future.

HOW?

Through themed reading materials – stories, poems, non-fiction, articles, books … links to websites ... that interest the reader and excite both imagination and thinking.

We package reading in a way that encourages participation. Words are a two-way strategy. They have to go in – and bounce back. A reader is not a reader when they can answer ten questions and move on. True reading engages and absorbs. It promotes deep thinking and fires the imagination. It is for life. It is for a better life.

WHAT CAN WE OFFER?

We couldn’t find what we were looking for, so we made it. The material in our three Reading Toolboxes can be packaged any way, changed, translated, adapted to circumstances. As a prototype project we developed a collection of interesting, age-appropriate reading that can be used over a year of reading out of school – for fun as well as better reading.

THEN …

We filled in the huge gaps between what we could find in published material by writing our own. All the stories, activities and ideas in the collection are specially created and are the intellectual property of CBN and writer Lesley Beake.

* For age ten the focus is on books and stories – reading that will help the reader through the difficult stage involved in converting from ABC to ideas and thinking about text.
* For age eleven we took reading into a non-fiction world (sprinkled with stories) and involved the environment – the *reader’s* environment.
* For age twelve and upwards, we expanded the limits as wide as they can go, with topics related to Time and Landscape. A Star Trek of reading with immense challenges and possibilities.

HOW IS THIS MATERIAL PRESENTED?

READING TOOLBOXES

Each box contain around 40 reading books and a collection of specially created stories, activities, and inspiration packaged in themed Book Bags.

LINK to toolboxes

READING BOOK BAGS

The bags include, in addition to books, writing, illustrating and reading activities that relate to the books and the stories, but challenge the reader to read more and to read with imagination and involvement.

LINK to book bags

READING HANDBOOKS

There are twelve themes spread over three reading years. Each of these has an associated handbook full of other writing and reading that extend the involvement, imagination and thinking of new readers.

LINK to handbooks

BOOK-BOOKS

Each reader is encouraged to keep a Book-Book – a reading notebook for noting ideas, creative writing, illustration – thoughts. There are no tests, no checks on handwriting or marks. No competition. We offer young people the chance to read freely and go in the directions their own imagination takes them.

This makes evaluating the results challenging. We monitor our trial groups closely and our community Book Boxes offer a chance to monitor reading progress of individuals.

LINK to monitoring

RESULTS

Our workshops are closely linked to and inspired by the Reading Toolboxes. They are voluntary, after school – and oversubscribed. Many children consistently attend and enjoy a completely novel learning experience.

CONCLUSION

This approach works. In over ten years of engagement, we have learned a lot, adapted, and refined our material. Two people create the reading handbooks and they have been made on a very tight budget. We are aware of the shortcomings, but we power along anyway. Because we believe this project to be potentially life-changing for many, many children. And that is what inspires us. The children.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We want to spread our story – and our stories – so that they reach as many children as possible.

We will continue to write and trial new material, but we need to belong to a larger network before we can grow.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

Three things:

To be part of a provincial or national plan

To expand our training programme to be more inclusive and effective

To invite participation from new writers – and to include many different voices.

WE ARE A SMALL ORGANIZATION

Two people with a garden hut and a spare room. Our funding has come – with a few exceptions - from concerned overseas individuals or entities. This is a South African issue and we need to be part of a bigger programme locally with better connections and resources..

WHAT CAN WE CONTRIBUTE

Our material is designed to help young readers jump the huge gap between Early Learning and Upper Primary School. This is where children often stop reading. Technically they can read (occasionally, and with difficulty). Practically, they don’t. We can find very little energy directed towards this critical age-group.

We aim to change that by providing challenging reading that interests new readers enough to make them continue the difficult process of reading with ease and enjoyment. We try to involve them in the participatory nature of reading. A book means nothing if it cannot somehow fly into the reader’s mind and thinking.

We have not finished. This project is enormous – and much bigger than originally planned. So is the problem. Now more than ever, we feel obligated to spread the words – to bring more children everywhere to the joy reading brings when it is appropriate in theme, level and interest. Reading can be – should be fun for children who already live in challenging circumstances.

\*