

Book Review

Farmer, Lesley (2020). *Impactful community-based literacy projects*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions. 140pp., \$54.99, ISBN 978-0-8389-4803-3 (Paper)

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Impactful community-based literacy projects was inspired by the Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program (<https://www.loc.gov/programs/library-of-congress-literacy-awards/about-this-program/>), which honors “nonprofit organizations that have made outstanding contributions to increasing literacy in the United States or abroad [...]. The awards illuminate the importance of literacy while also showcasing and disseminating innovative and effective methods across the states and around the world that promote literacy” (p. vii).

The author of this slim volume (140pp) is California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) Professor Lesley S. J. Farmer, who coordinates the Teacher Librarian Program and manages the CSU Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Project. Professor Farmer, a past editor of SLA’s *Education Libraries*, has written extensively about ICT, media literacy, and school libraries. In this book, they explain the importance of literacy, which they define as more than simply the ability to read.

Illiteracy affects individuals, families, and society. In *Impactful community-based literacy projects* Farmer uses the UNESCO conceptualization of literacy, which includes traditional reading, writing, and numeracy skills, contextualized as they are applied to situations and cultures, and the result of a deliberative learning process. Farmer focuses on textual information and uses LC Literacy Award-winning projects to illustrate successful community efforts in tackling illiteracy.

In Chapter 1 (*Steps to Literacy*), the author explains how people learn and cultivate the literacy habit, which must be nurtured throughout life. The text helps us understand how people acquire reading skills, providing multiple examples of effective instructional practices. *Steps to Literacy* includes an extensive list of digital resources for parents and early childhood educators (preschool), elementary school for early readers (ages 6-7), transitional readers (7-8), and fluent readers who read independently and confidently (ages 8 and older). The chapter also recognizes the special needs of adults learning to read.

“Literacy benefits the individual, the family, the community, and society” (p. 21). Literacy projects vary in terms of many factors, but all strive for similar outcomes: better and more reading, improved academics and careers, greater self-esteem and confidence, and community improvement. *Literacy Projects* (Chapter 2) describes the constructs needed to ensure impactful literacy projects. According to the author: “[t]he typical project has a defined beginning and end, often with the intent that the target entity will integrate, institutionalize, and sustain the new literacy practices permanently” (pp. 21-22).

Farmer turns to the literature to identify factors that contribute to literacy, including:

- The importance of early literacy - through the intervention of parents and guardians + timely intervention should a child be struggling to read and require assistance (e.g., poor vision, hearing, dyslexia).
- The choice of what to read - which gives the reader a sense of power, control, and personal responsibility. Encouraging reading beyond a prescribed textbook, on topics that interest them, builds grammar, vocabulary, verbal and writing fluency, and general knowledge.
- Intellectual access to literacy resources - through trained, competent, and caring teachers who can unlock the intellectual gate, motivate the reader, and provide time for self-selected independent reading, and “incorporate tests that build on prior knowledge and that link concepts” (p. 28).

In Chapter 3 (*Literacy Partners*), the author builds on the nature of literacy projects by describing the partnerships necessary for them to succeed. According to Farmer, it takes a community that believes in the value of literacy to foster and sustain literacy efforts through groups and strategic partnerships. In *Literacy Partners*, Farmer describes how to establish and nourish partnerships for community-based literacy projects that include parents, families, schools, higher education, libraries, government, nongovernmental not-for-profit organizations, and for-profit groups (e.g., commercial businesses).

Many groups identified in Chapter 3 choose projects devoted to specific literacy issues, including social, community-based, linguistic, educational, technological, economic, and political/governmental (Chapter 4, *Literacy Issues*). Chapter 5 (*Applied Literacies*) discusses associated applied literacies, including health, fiscal, environmental, media, and cultural.

Chapter 6 (*Planning Literacy Projects*) is devoted to planning literacy projects using an action research approach. Here, Farmer advises planners about needs assessment, goals and objectives, literacy review, target audience, project personnel, resources, setting and timing, communication, support, implementation, communication, and continuous assessment and improvement.

The book’s conclusion suggests the *Next Steps* for building capacity, empowering the community, and sustaining a literacy culture. Community-based literacy projects, such as those recognized by the Library of Congress Literacy Awards, provide the callout text box examples included in each chapter as models for literacy projects. Each chapter ends with an extensive collection of resources to consult for further study.