

A thousand and one languages in Guyana

WHO ARE WE?

Le Centre Régional de Ressources (Regional Resource Centre) is the body that oversees the technical and teaching aspect of the Programme Régional d'Éducation et de Formation de Base (PREFOB) (Regional Education Programme for learning basic skills) in Guyana.

The centre gives a pedagogical support to the teams of various operators in the PREFOB network, according to its reference framework. In this capacity, it organizes training programmes and makes teaching aids available.

The Regional Resource Centre maintains ties with various partners in the social and cultural environment which maintains basic skills training programmes at the heart of local, social and economic life.

DESCRIPTION

Guyana is characterized by a great diversity of languages. 20 languages are used in daily life. A language is also associated with cultural identity. For the people from Guyana, it is important to maintain this multilingual aspect and have it recognized as world heritage.

Learners enrolled in literacy training programmes are representative of this multilingualism. In 2010, 32% of learners in literacy programmes spoke 3 languages or more. This aspect is often neglected to leave room to learn French, the language that paves the way for social and economic integration.

The idea is to gain acknowledgment of the cultural wealth associated with all these languages, that the learners recognize it as knowledge, and to have this knowledge be recognized as a world heritage.

This is how the DVD "Mille et une langues en Guyane" (A 1001 languages in Guyana) saw the light. It includes video reports that testify to the diversity of languages in Guyana, and its cultural wealth.

FROM THE IDEA TO THE PROJECT

The project was presented to learners at various literacy training centres. People interested in the theme and in learning how to use the audiovisual material could sign up freely. In this way, we were able to train 4 groups from 4 towns in Guyana: Cayenne, Saint Laurent du Maroni, Saint Georges de l'Oyapock, and Mana. Each group (representing 32 learners) worked for an average of 10 days per month on the project over a period of five months. The learners worked using various sources of documentation on languages spoken in Guyana – thanks to the audiovisual material at the Resource Centre, the learners could watch various reports, and make others themselves.

In the first preparatory phase, the groups initially thought about the concept of a cultural heritage, the word "multilingualism", languages in the world and the concept of an endangered language.

As they considered these issues, the learners reflected on their own language practice, and discussed it. To do so, the learners watched films, did research on Internet and met specialists. As they developed their thinking and analyses, the learners wrote texts in which they express their viewpoints. They also wrote progress reports on the project, and, on the basis of the many surveys they did, developed an objective analysis.

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Little by little, each group developed its roadmap for filming a report, describing the scenes to be filmed, the places, the people to contact and interview, the equipment needed, etc.

Then came the phase of making the film itself. In this phase, the learners got first-hand experience with video equipment and filming. For this, a video specialist met with each group for 10 half-days. The groups organized into teams with the filming timetable, and readjusted their specifications to suit the real situations. They talked to cameramen, operators and script technicians.

A STRONG IMPACT ON THE LEARNERS

The learners began to see things in another way. They saw that their own language practice was a skill as important as the French language in which they were trained. Their culture was emphasized in the reports on the DVD, that they themselves created, which increased their self-confidence.

By evaluating their own cultural knowledge, they were able to think about language and its practice in a more open way, and this gave them the motivation to actively invest in their training programmes. They clearly saw that they could make the most of their own potential.

Many things were learned in making this film. Not only during the formal training periods for preparing or making the film, but also during informal times, in meetings with people from the outside, like language specialists and audiovisual technicians. They were able to realize their own capacity to learn by themselves, and to realize the importance of teamwork and collaboration.

The objective of gaining acknowledgement of multilingualism in Guyana as world heritage gave meaning to their video project. With this objective, the project put literacy learning at the heart of learners' concerns, with positive recognition of what they are and their culture.

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