

THE SYNERGEIA READING PROFICIENCY PROGRAM

1. The Challenge

Filipino families look at education as a means to improve their way of life. Education provides children with opportunities to develop skills, gain knowledge and develop their talents. Poverty however limits access of students to quality education.

Our assessment studies show that only 8 percent of grade one children are independent readers.¹ The rest of the children do not even have a chance to develop basic skills (reading, writing) since two out of ten children drop out of school before they reach grade two.

The inadequacies of basic education have severe consequences. Children from poor families will never have the chance to improve their lives and the poverty problem will be more severe.

2. The Opportunities

In partnership with local governments, parents, Department of Education (DEPED), the business sector and the community, Synergeia implements a Reading Proficiency Program that addresses the problem of very poor reading skills of children at their roots. **The goal of our Reading Program is to make every elementary school children starting from grade one an independent reader in English.**

The Value of Reading. Reading is the most important subject to be learned by a child. A child who knows how to read will be able to learn all other subject matters in school. Better reading means better schoolwork, better preparation for the future and greater personal and social accomplishments.

Why Start from Grade One. Grade one is a critical stage in the development of skills, habits, values, and attitudes of a child. A good learning system in grade one provides a solid foundation for the progressive development of comprehension, communication, and thinking skills of students.

Systems Approach. The Reading Program develops systemic and collaborative processes to improve the learning system at home and in school. All the components of the learning system are strengthened to increase the performance of a child.

- Training of teachers on content and the effective teaching of reading
- Continuous assessment of students' performance
- Organization of parents into a learning support system
- Involvement of barangay and Samahan ng Kabataan (SK) in supporting the reading program
- Enrichment of learning activities

¹ They are only able to answer 1 to 2 questions correctly out of 5 questions testing comprehension.

Building a Learning Community. We fully believe that it takes a village to raise a child. The Reading Proficiency Program serves as entry point in developing collaborative efforts among major stakeholders in the community: local government officials, teachers, parents, school officials, and non-governmental sector, religious and spiritual leaders. It is designed to actively engage community members in improving the processes of delivering basic education.

A multi-sectoral team led by the local chief executive manages the project.

3. The Reading Proficiency Program.

The model that Synergeia uses is systemic, collaborative, and community-based.

Systemic: to address all the major components in the learning system

Collaborative: to engage all major stakeholders in implementing the reforms

Broad coverage: to address the problem of scale and to assist all children in public elementary schools in the locality

Bottom to top: to enjoin local governments and communities to take a proactive role in improving access of children to quality education

The model is flexible and is customized relative to the needs and priorities of the community. Synergeia believes that the articulation of these priorities should be based on correct information and not merely on perceptions. This is the first problem that the proposed program addresses: the community needs to know how students and schools are performing.

- 1) The first step is the assessment of performance of children in sight reading (word recognition), and comprehension through a diagnostic test. Teachers are also given a diagnostic test to establish their proficiency in grammar and comprehension.

Synergeia communities make use of several instruments in assessing reading skills of children. Most often, program localities use the DOLCH Basic Sight Words Test or the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory. Teacher skills are assessed using diagnostic tests developed by the DEPED division offices.

- 2) The second step is the conduct of education summit where assessment results are discussed with village leaders, DEPED, parents, and other stakeholders. The summit incorporates workshops on the following:

- What are your dreams for your children in school? (e.g. obtain an average grade of 85%, read and write English well, complete grade six)
- What factors hinder these dreams from coming true?
- If government had additional funds, how would you distribute them among different education programs?
- What can you do as an individual to help improve the learning performance of your children?

The summit's output is the formulation of suggestions on targets and goals of the education reform program. Participants are consulted on the important components of the program and most importantly, on what they can do to make the program work.

- 3) The third step is the development of an education reform plan that incorporates the results of the summit. Generally the program provides for teacher re-training, development of instructional materials, organization of a parents' support system, and engaging the barangay.
- Teacher Training – DEPED Officials, teachers and resource persons from academic institutions like the Philippine Normal University design training modules on the theory of learning and strategies for teaching reading. Analytic phonics is used to enable children to draw phonic relationships among words that have the same letter patterns. Using words that the child recognizes “at sight” the student identifies the sounds of letter groups by making analogies to known words. Synthetic phonics teaches sound-symbol relationships in words to facilitate word identification. The student is taught to blend sounds together. Comprehension is developed using contextual clues, use of new words in diverse settings, and a variety of instructional strategies e.g. mental pictures, visual aids, kinesthetic associations, comparison and contrast.
 - Parents training – The training program is designed to enable parents to appreciate the value of a good education for their children and what are their responsibilities to enable their children to obtain a good education. These include how they can assist teachers, how to supervise the completion of home assignments, and how they can help their children develop good habits and developmental values.
 - Engaging the Barangay in Education – The barangay is brought into the program as a vehicle for meaningful participation of the community in the delivery of quality basic education. A workshop is conducted for the barangay providing opportunities for them to be a key partner of the school and the PTA.
 - Provision of Teachers' Manuals - As support material, teachers' manuals containing lesson guides for teachers are provided.
- 4) The fourth step is program implementation following timelines and targets. Meetings are regularly held to promote collaboration among team members in planning and operations. Activities to promote team building and to encourage productivity are also held.
- 5) The fifth step is regular monitoring and evaluation of programs to systematize benchmarking progress and program impact. At the end of the school year, an assessment of student performance is made to check whether the interventions had any impact. The PMT shall also weigh which activities has made an impact
- 6) To complete the development of learning communities, the sixth step is providing learning enrichment programs. Synergeia partners with institutions like Museo Pambata to implement storytelling and crafts workshops to inspire a deeper love for reading among young learners.

4. Program Results

The results are visible in the improvement of reading skills of children, organization of parent-support system for learning, high morale of teachers and empowerment of other stakeholders through participatory governance.

At the end of one year, the program is expected to achieve the following:

- At least a four -percentage point increase in the test scores of children in a reading proficiency examination
- An organized parent support system
- A plan from the community on how to continue the reading program up to the next grade level
- Improved teaching performance of teachers