

Report on Computer and Internet Training

Sabre Foundation

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1. Introduction

The inclusion of Computer and Internet training into Sabre Foundation's programmes must be commended as it has allowed many who may not have had the opportunity to train to become conversant with this most valued information tool.

I was pleased to participate in Sabre's Internet Training programme organized in Accra 2002 during the "Dialogue for African Partners Conference." This training was immensely beneficial to me as my knowledge of the Internet at the time was very limited.

The invitation therefore to travel to Sabre for Computer and Internet training was an opportunity not to be missed.

The visit was to last for two weeks, from the 27th March 2003 to 11th April and was to include visits to children's libraries as well.

2. Purpose of Visit

The purpose for my trip was twofold:

1. To undergo training in an aspect of Information Technology which would help enhance and improve my work back at home.
2. To visit children's libraries and familiarize myself with their mode of operations. My main focus in this area was that of reading promotion and it was my hope that I would be able to obtain new ideas and activities which I could introduce into our library's reading promotion programmes.

3. Visits

3.1 Libraries

Visits were made to Central Square Library, Cambridge Public Library and Boston Public Library.

All these libraries have very extensive collections of books for children and these collections cover everything from books to videos to tapes.

The Central Square Library includes comic books in their collection and librarian Amanda Gazin said these were favorites with the children.

I also observed that popular series books such as “The Babysitters Club,” “Animorphs,” “Goosebumps,” etc., were arranged separately from the main collection. This I thought was a good idea as it helped to attract children to these popular titles and provide easy access for them to retrieve the material. Library registration is free and access to the internet is also available in all the libraries I visited.

In the Boston Public Library as many as 70 books can be borrowed at a time. The library even offers homework assistance to children. Children are given free homework help from professional online tutors.

All the libraries have summer reading programmes where reading incentive activities are held. Children are provided with reading packs which include reading lists, and certificates and prizes are awarded them for diligent reading. The Cambridge Public Library had a theme for one of its summer reading programmes called “Go Wild and Read” and they had reading packs consisting of T-shirts with the theme inscribed on them, carrier bags, reading lists and stickers.

The activities that were held for toddlers were of special interest to me. The Boston Public Library organizes a reading readiness programme for children ages 2 ½ to 5 years old. Children are introduced to shapes, colors and sizes. They are told stories and do activities such as craftwork and finger plays. I attended a sing along session at Central Square Public Library and at the Cambridge Public Library. Children were accompanied by their parents or child minders and were taken through story time and singing sessions. It was really interesting to see parents and children alike fully participating in all the activities.

I also visited a music school on Brattle Street in Cambridge with Betty Falsey, Reader Services Librarian at Houghton Library, where children as young as 2 years old were talking through songs involving hand and body motions.

I met with Daryl Mark, Coordinator of Children's Services at Cambridge Public Library, and she elaborated on the library's reading promotion activities. We also discussed the possibility of our two libraries doing some activity together. The idea of a pen pal programme came up but this would be more effective with email and unfortunately Ghana Book Trust children's library does not yet have internet access.

3.11 Houghton Library

I visited the Houghton Library which is the rare book and manuscript library of the Harvard College Library. I was impressed by its vast and well organized collection. I had the opportunity to read a few letters written in the 17th/18th century by some missionaries to Africa.

3.2 Y.M.C.A

The Y.M.C.A in Cambridge has a small library for their after school programme for children. I was shown around the facility by Denise Jillson, the Director for Development. Activities held for the children include dance, storytelling, literacy and computer use and from Monday through Friday, there is homework help and tutoring.

3.3 Bookshops

I visited two bookshops in Cambridge. Harvard's COOP bookshop was extremely big. The children's section had a wide choice of books and I observed that provision had been made in one small section for parents to sit and read to their children.

3.4 Sabre Warehouse

I went with Tania Vitvitsky, Sabre Foundation's Executive Director, to Sabre's warehouse in Lawrence, Massachusetts. I was astounded by the size of the warehouse and very impressed at how well organized it was with so few staff managing it. Boxes of books had been arranged by type of material to make for easy packing to Sabre's partners. I was highly impressed.

4. Training

I asked to do training in desktop publishing as I was already planning a children's magazine for the library. The publishing software had already been purchased and children had even begun sending in articles. My problem was my lack of training in how to use the software.

Training was done by Roger Gill, Sabre Foundation's IT Consultant. I was taught how to scan pictures, insert them into text and generally everything there was to know about the software. At the end of my visit I had come out with a four page leaflet, complete with photographs, which I intend to expand.

I was also introduced to web page design by Ruth Levitsky, IT Consultant. There was not too much time to go into it in depth, but I was able to understand the basic ideas and can build upon what I was taught.

5. Visits - Places of interest

I went sightseeing with Betty Falsey and neighbor Trudy, to South Boston and toured some nice sights. They also took me to a wonderful restaurant by the river called "Jimmy's."

I also had the occasion to join both Betty and her colleague Susan from Houghton Library to an anti-war protest march. It was an eventful time and I

really enjoyed it and had fun reading some of the very hilarious inscriptions people had on their placards.

I attended a talk at Houghton Library about rare book collections. It was very educational learning about how the library is able to decide which private collection to include in its university collection.

I also sat in at a lecture on research work at Boston University where Betty does part-time lecturing and it was refreshing to go over this subject again.

6. Observations/Summary

I have benefited enormously from my visit, especially in the area of training. I am now conversant with desktop publishing and extremely glad that I can now go ahead and put together the magazine which is actually long overdue. The training in web design was helpful and I intend to try my hand at designing a web page for the children's library.

On my visits to libraries I was struck by how much attention was given to toddlers and about the enthusiasm of parents as they took part in whichever activity their child was engaged in. These children are drawn into the habit of using a library at a very young age. I have recognized that these groups of children back in Ghana tend to be ignored and there is the need for Ghanaian parents to be encouraged to spend a few hours with their toddlers in the library; as well as for librarians to plan programmes with this important group in mind.

7. Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Sabre Foundation for extending this invitation to me. The training I received was very practical and has served to enhance my work and equip me for better service.

Thanks to all Sabre staff for the warm welcome they gave me and for making my stay a pleasant one. Tania, thank you for the wonderful dinner and Colin for that Mexican meal. It was delicious.

I am equally grateful to Sarah for planning my visits and accompanying me on them. Thank you Sarah.

I am also grateful to my trainers Roger Gill and Ruth Levitsky for their patience and for being such good teachers. Thank you Roger, especially for ensuring that I complete a sample of the magazine to take back to Ghana with me.

I especially wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to Betty Falsey, whom I lodged with during my visit. She opened up her home to me and made me feel very welcome. I thank her also for her concern in making sure I had just the right clothing to keep me warm and taking the time to show me around the city.

I would also like to thank Denise Jillson at the Cambridge YMCA, Daryl Mark, Coordinator of Children's Services at the Cambridge Public Library, and Amanda Gazin, Children's Director, Central Square Public Library, for showing me around their establishments and having the patience to answer my numerous queries.