

## The Children's Literature Project

In 1981, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World launched the «Children's Literature Project» to train librarians, writers and illustrators of books for children between the ages of 2-12. This project is financed by the Kuwait Society for the Advancement of Arab Children. The project aims at promoting quality children's literature in the Arabic language and providing essential base line data about children's literature for writers, illustrators, librarians and educators of Arab children.

Research was conducted to identify vocabulary comprehended by children in each developmental age level, as well as basic themes, concepts and styles of writing and illustration that are appealing to specific age groups. Training workshops were sponsored to train writers, illustrators and librarians to be sensitive to children's development needs and to sharpen the literacy and artistic skills to meet these needs. Educational material was prepared to educate Arab parents and librarians about the uses of children's books and to encourage communities to promote children's books and children's libraries.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World held sessions and workshops for children's librarians in Cairo, Amman, Abu Dhabi, Manama and Rabat. These workshops were part of a comprehensive programme that included training writers and illustrators of children's books in Arabic.

*Workshops on Writing and Illustrating Quality Books for Arab Children.* (August 25-September 10, 1985)

Thirty young potential artists and writers attended the workshops in Cyprus representing four different

Arab countries, namely: Bahrain, Jordan, Aden (PDRY) and Lebanon. The instructors for this training programme were international experts on Children's literature. Over 200 books were displayed as samples

of good literature and were carefully studied by the trainers as part of their programme. The selected illustrators attended another workshop in Cyprus (August 1-23, 1986), in order to put the final touches to the manuscripts. A professional artist was invited from the United States as consultant and supervisor.

### Librarian's workshops

*Cairo* (December 14-22, 1985)

The invitation to schedule a training workshop in Egypt was forwarded to *Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak*, since she has a special interest in children's libraries. She and the members of the society, Friends of the Children's Libraries, arranged for publicity, location, accommodation and selection of 37 participants. UNICEF provided necessary supplies, materials and transportation. The sessions consisted of lectures, demonstrations and practical experiences such as cataloguing, book evaluation, programming, preparation of an original book, policy and procedure developments.

*Jordan* (December 29-January 4, 1986)

The contacts for this workshop were initiated by Beirut University College Alumni Chapter President *Mrs. Janette Mufti Dahkan*, and members of the executive committee of the Library Association of Jordan. *Dr. Hani al-Amad* and the executive committee of the association arranged with Jordan University for the use of their facilities, materials, supplies and for providing transportation.

Thirty-three participants attended the training sessions that were held with association members to stress their role in promoting children's libraries and the importance of reading for children. Recommendations were made for changes that would improve the use of facilities and the quality of programmes provided.

*Abu Dhabi* (January 6-12, 1986)

The workshop was held at the Baraim al-Mostaqbal School in Abu Dhabi. *Mrs. Nelly Bajali Lama*, the President of Beirut University College Alumni Chapter, and *Mrs. Jehan Nasr*, headmistress of the school, arranged for publicity, location and selection of participants.

Thirty-five participants and five observers attended the workshop and sessions. The programme contained the same elements of that followed in Egypt, with modifications to meet the needs of the group and the restrictions of the schedule.

*Bahrain* (January 14-23, 1986)

The initial contact for the arrangement of the workshops was made by Beirut University College Alumni Chapter president, *Dr. Sofia Doweigher Aubry*, with the Ministry of Education which offered to arrange for facilities, materials, supplies, recruitment of participants and accomodation.

The sessions were held in the Um el-Husam school for boys. The workshop was opened formally by *Mr. Ali Abdel Haq*, Director General of the Training Bureau of the Ministry of Education, representing his Excellency the Minister, and *Mrs. Hassan Mehri*. The programme was similar to that implemented in Egypt with necessary modifications for limitations of time and large number of participants, ninety in all.

*Rabat* (July 1-7, 1986)

The workshop in Rabat was organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Artisanat and Social Affairs. *Mr. Mohammed Boulasri*, Director of the Ministry of Social Affairs, opened the sessions by stressing the importance of reading for children and the role of the librarian. The programme covered the same content and procedure as prior librarians workshops.

The books that were evaluated were taken from the



British Council, the French Cultural Centre and the Cultural Centre of Rabat. The sessions were attended by thirty participants.

This is only a brief overview of the training workshops for children's librarians as held in five countries of the Arab World. The content of the workshops not only included basic literary skills for organization and administration, but also presented the concept of programming and extension services to promote reading. The workshops seemed to result in a change of understanding of the role of the librarian, from the traditional custodian of books to the motivating force for reading promotion. Participants developed an awareness of what constitutes quality in children's books and how to select them. The limited number of quality books was felt, thus training of writers and illustrators who are sensitive to children's needs became imperative. Participants acknowledged the importance of a standard system of cataloguing and classification to be used in all children's libraries in the Arab World, be it a public or a school library.

More information and material on the workshops could be obtained from The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College. P.O.Box 13-5053, Beirut - Lebanon. Tel. 811968/9/70, Cable Address: BECOGE. Telex: 23389LE.