



Guidance Notes for Small Learning Groups

LWOL Education Project

Introduction

The unprecedented spread of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) across Sierra Leone prompted the nationwide closure of all schools in July 2014 as one of the government strategies to minimize further spread of the virus in the country. Evidence shows that extended school closures inevitably result in learning loss among students among other adverse consequences of children staying out of school. To mitigate such learning loss during school closure, the Sierra Leone Government introduced the Emergency Radio Education Program (EREP) which broadcasts 3 hours of lessons each day for each level of schooling – primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools. It is clear that the EREP is by no means a substitute to formal schooling.

The LWOL project, in support of government efforts, initiated continued learning activities, such as reading at home and small learning groups, in all 20 project target primary schools in October and November 2014. The move to organize these continued learning activities was enthusiastically embraced by parents who were desperate to see their children continue schooling. In support of these activities, parents provided several spaces within the communities to help organize continued learning activities for their children. The active participation of students, teachers and parents has motivated the LWOL project to continue to support these learning activities until such time as schools will be reopened.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to LWOL staff and teachers in understanding and better organizing continued learning activities, specifically the small learning groups for pupils in classes 2-6.

What are Small Learning Groups?

LWOL Small Learning Groups are a safe forum where small groups of pupils can come together and meet on a regular basis to interact with their peers and to engage in activities that contribute to positive well-being and improved learning outcomes.

Purpose and Goal

The overall purpose and goal of LWOL Small Learning Groups is to resume normalcy and routine in the daily lives of Class 2-6 pupils amidst the current nationwide crisis as well as provide opportunities for continued learning in order to help mitigate potential loss of their learning due to the extended national closure of schools. Small Learning Group sessions will be organized

outside of the time table of EREP lessons for primary school students in complement to MEST initiatives and to allow time for teachers to follow up on and reinforce the lessons from the EREP.

Participation and Facilitation

Who are the participants?

The participants of the LWOL supported Small Learning Groups are Class 2-6 pupils from 20 LWOL supported primary schools in Kandou Leppiama and Tunkia Chiefdoms in Kenema Districts. Each Small Learning Group constitutes four to six pupils within the same class level (Class 1-3, or Class 4-6) either from the same household or from 1-2 households in close proximity to each other.

Who are the Small Learning Group facilitators?

For each Small Learning Group, there is one lead facilitator. Facilitators are community and government paid teachers from LWOL supported primary schools.

Location

With support from MEST and LWOL staff, community members including parents, school management committees, mothers' clubs, Head teachers, and teachers, will be responsible for identifying and or improving on existing Small Learning Group sites that are safe and child friendly. **No school premises will be used for these activities.**

Frequency and Duration

Each Small Learning Group will meet at least twice per week. During each meeting, teachers will spend approximately one and a half hours with each learning group. However, teachers will be supporting many small groups on a daily basis but not all groups every day. It is critical that the timing of the sessions do not conflict with the EREP. It is recommended that Small Learning Groups come together to listen to the EREP together and sessions meet immediately afterward. However, it is recognized that this may not be possible in some communities given a lack of access to radios in the community and/or lack of access to a radio signal.

Content

Small Learning Groups are not meant to substitute normal schooling but rather complement the EREP established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to alleviate learning loss due to extended school closure. Small Learning Groups will place emphasis on Language Arts using knowledge, skills and practices acquired through series of workshops conducted by LWOL over the years on teaching of reading, writing and critical thinking. Skills focus will include but not be limited to print concepts, phonological awareness, alphabetic abilities, reading, writing and comprehension. To increase student exposure to other subjects, teachers will also utilize

core textbooks for reading lessons and assignments. School libraries will be major source of resources and any additional program supplies during this period.

A Buddy Reading program will also be structured as an activity to take place during Small Learning Group sessions. Within each small group, teachers will identify stronger readers or siblings who are fluent in reading to read with their peers at least twice a week. Pupils will be allowed take the book home to read and practice on their own time until they meet again. The teacher will monitor the Buddy Reading program on a regular basis using a tracking tool that records the buddy pair and the story that has been checked out and read together.

Project staff will work with teachers, students and community members to ensure communities provide hand washing facilities at all Small Learning Group sites.

Structure of Small Learning Group sessions

To ensure consistency across groups and to help teachers properly plan for sessions, it is recommended that all groups follow the same structure. Teachers can vary in the stories used and/or content of the sessions, but should follow the below structure:

- I. Follow-up to Radio Program (10 minutes)
- II. Buddy Reading Sharing (10 min)
- III. Reading Stories or Text (20 minutes)
- IV. Comprehension Questions on reading (10 minutes)
- V. Reading Response Activity (20 minutes)
- VI. Psychosocial Activities or Games (15 minutes)
- VII. Concluding Activity and Assignments (5 minutes)

Follow-up to Radio Program (10 minutes)

This time can be used for a review or question and answer session to content that was on the radio program. If more support is needed on understanding a concept, teachers may also work with pupils on additional activities that will help reinforce what was covered in the radio program for that day. In the event that a Small Learning Group has not been able to access the EREP, the teacher can start meeting with the next activity as described below and use the extra time for other activities as needed.

Buddy Reading Sharing Time (10 minutes)

This is an opportunity for pupils to share what they read that week with their buddies. For each session, teachers allow 1-2 pupils to share their Buddy Reading experiences. Pupils can share who they read with that week, what did they read, and what did they think about the reading. Did they like it? If so, why did they like it? What did they not like about it? Pupils who did not share in one session will have the opportunity to share in the next session.

Reading of Text (15-20 minutes)

This is an opportunity for pupils to engage with print and reading. Depending on class level and pupils' reading abilities, teachers either choose a story or text to read-aloud to pupils and/or allow the opportunity for students to read a text or story independently or together with a peer. Stories and text can come from books and materials from the library, *Tell us a Story* poems and stories, and/or core textbooks. **Prior to reading**, teachers can remember to use their pre-reading activities to help with comprehension such as introducing new vocabulary words or asking *prediction questions*.

Comprehension Questions on Reading (10 minutes)

After pupils have finished reading, teachers can either ask simple comprehension questions about the text or provide other activities where pupils can demonstrate their understanding of the text. Other activities might include asking pupils to retell their story in their own words or summarize story through writing. Teacher might also want to write comprehension questions on black board and have pupils write answers to the comprehension questions in their exercise book.

Response to Reading (20 minutes)

This time is an opportunity for pupils to respond to the reading through drawing, writing or drama. In lower grades, drawing may be more appropriate response while writing and role-play might be more appropriate for upper grades. Examples of activities where pupils respond to reading might be to ask pupils to draw a picture of what the story means to them, draw a picture of a key event in the story, write a new ending to the story, write a letter to one of the characters, or work together to create a drama of the story and role-play together.

This period can also be used to practice and reinforce other language arts skills such as print concepts, phonemic awareness, alphabetic abilities, vocabulary or writing. For example, a teacher may want to focus on unfamiliar vocabulary from the text by have children write words in their copy books and draw a picture illustrating what it is. Or a teacher may want to focus on specific writing skills such as punctuation and relate this to the story.

Psychosocial Games and Play (15 minutes)

During this time, teachers create organized opportunities for children to enjoy themselves through play and fun. This does not have to be academic or related to the reading or to the radio program. Activities might include a fun game for children to play, a sports activity, singing or dancing.

Concluding Activity and Assignments (5 minutes)

During this time, teacher will bring pupils back together and review what was done that day before dismissing the group. During this time, teacher can assign homework and/ or notes for pupils to study at home. This can also be a time to make sure pupils all have their story titles that they will read with their buddies.

Roles and responsibilities

The role of **TEACHERS**

- ✓ Work with community structures and LWOL staff to identify pupils for Small Group Learning.
- ✓ Meet with parents/guardians on the purpose of Small Learning Groups and nature/scope of community participation;
- ✓ Work with pupils and parents/guardians on the appropriate time, space and materials to support pupils participation; Ensure time does not conflict with the EREP schedule;
- ✓ Make sure that all pupils are aware of the time and agreed location of their Small Learning Group;
- ✓ Support LWOL staff on distribution of learning materials to pupils;
- ✓ Plan for and be prepared to facilitate each Small Learning Group session
- ✓ Initiate positive strategies that promotes punctuality, regularity and active participation of pupils;
- ✓ Adhere to suggested guidelines on conducting meetings (number of pupils, time duration, content, structure, etc);
- ✓ Work with pupils to set rules and expectations for the group;
- ✓ Ensure all activities are done within community laws and adhere to EVD safety precautions (public meetings, don't touch-keep social distance, sick children must be referred to nearest health center, etc.).
- ✓ Provide child friendly and accurate Ebola messages when needed;
- ✓ Protect children in the group from physical and emotional harm
- ✓ Encourage proper hand washing techniques in each meeting;
- ✓ Sick children must be suspended and advised to seek medical treatment, and resume activities upon recovery.
- ✓ Support children to listen to and understand the radio program giving them feedback during and after the radio program;
- ✓ Identify and pair buddies for the Buddy Reading program and encourage buddy reading at least twice a week;
- ✓ Monitor Buddy Reading program using tracking tool;
- ✓ Liaise with other teachers to address any challenges that may arise;
- ✓ Document each Small Learning Group session with attendance and a summary of what was done in each session.

The role of **STUDENTS:**

- ✓ Ensure regular and prompt attendance at Small Group Learning sessions;
- ✓ Wash hands at designated hand washing stations;
- ✓ Take reasonable care of all materials assigned to them;
- ✓ Actively participate in Small Group Learning activities as led by the teacher;
- ✓ Read to buddy pairs during the week outside of the Small Group Learning sessions;
- ✓ Do assignments as directed by teacher in charge.

The role of **PARENTS:**

- ✓ Encourage children's attendance to Small Learning Groups by allowing them time in day to attend;
- ✓ Attend some small learning group sessions to understand what they are about and ensure they are happening as planned;
- ✓ Support children's independent and/or buddy reading and assignments at home by allowing them time, space, and proper place to work;
- ✓ Liaise with teachers to fix-up challenges that may arise.

The role of **HEAD TEACHERS:**

- ✓ Collaborate with communities to support and monitor pupils and teachers to be effective and efficient in achieving desired learning outcomes.

The role of **SMCs/MCs/CTAs** is to work with community, teachers and project staff to:

- ✓ Identify safe, appropriate places for learning activities;
- ✓ Promote pupils and teachers commitment;
- ✓ Ensure activities are safely implemented as planned;
- ✓ Monitoring to ensure continued learning activities are happening.

Monitoring of Small Learning Groups

Monitoring and support to Small Learning Groups will be conducted by LWOL CBOS, TTOs and MEST School Supervisors to ensure that they are meeting regularly, are safe, and are on target with the set objectives to provide quality continued learning opportunities for children in the communities. A monitoring tool will be used to help guide and record their monitoring visits.