

Patricia Bloem, David Klooster,  
Asone Wollor, James Harris, and John-Paul Noah

## The Role of the Humanities in Post-Conflict Societies, or Do They Need Poems Here?



Patricia Bloem,  
Grand Valley State  
University, Allendale,  
Michigan, USA.

David Klooster,  
Hope College,  
Holland, Michigan,  
USA.

According to the novelist Zadie Smith, the street scene in Monrovia, Liberia, is “post-apocalyptic.” Following fourteen years of civil war, the streets of this West African nation are lined with war-damaged buildings, and populated by large numbers of unemployed citizens in search of work or food for their families. Everywhere young men stand around, waiting. Much of the infrastructure of the country is in shambles. There’s very little electricity, and no running water or functioning sewage system. The roads are often impassable, the health-care system is inadequate to the needs of the people, and the schools are struggling to cope with inadequate buildings, a dire lack of textbooks, and poorly trained, though courageous, teachers. Ports, sanitation systems, government buildings, factories, public transportation, agricultural systems—all of these have been heavily damaged by the war. To an outsider’s eye, it seems as though the country needs everything, all at once.

Even before its civil war from 1989-2003, Liberia had a complex history. Founded by freed U.S. and Caribbean slaves in 1847, Liberia was governed by a small minority of “Americo-Liberians” until 1980, in a society that reproduced many of the same master/slave and powerful/oppressed dichotomies of injustice that were part of the U.S. system on which it was modeled. Then, following a violent coup d’etat in 1980,

*The art of reading is in great part that of  
acquiring a better understanding of life  
from one’s encounter with it in a book.*  
Andre Maurois

a decade of military rule brought unprecedented levels of corruption and violence to the country. A brutal civil war ended in 2003, when the UN sent in a peace-keeping force. Approximately 250,000 people were killed during the civil war, many at the hands of some 36,000 child soldiers. For all the ways in which Liberia’s history is unique, its current anguish is representative of many places around the globe, countries that are dealing with the aftermath of unprecedented violence and inhumanity. Now, the country is engaged in the arduous process of rebuilding everything, from its physical infrastructure to its academic curriculum, under the leadership of Africa’s first-ever woman president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

In Liberia, as elsewhere, generous donors are making an enormous difference in the lives of the people. Doctors without Borders is active in many places, providing, along with faith-based organizations and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), 90% of the health care in the country. Their services range from treating cholera patients, to disease prevention (especially prevention of HIV/AIDS), to treating victims of gender-based violence. Dozens of other NGOs are engaged as well, providing everything from rural water systems, to sustainable agricultural practices, to training for police and military, to small business assistance. Over all of this, a 15,000-person United Nations peace-keeping force presides. Many Liberians believe that if the UN withdrew now, the war would resume.

A number of interconnected issues influence the work of all of these development agencies. Poverty reduction is a central concern in this nation, where 85% of the people are unemployed and 80% of the people live below the poverty line of \$1 (U.S.) per day. (For a snapshot of the economic situation in Liberia, see the *CIA World Factbook*.) The reduction of violence is a high priority; the country is full of guns and weapons, the result of foreign “aid”, mostly from the US, in an earlier Cold War era. The legacy of gender-based violence is a special cause for concern to many of these development agencies, as there are so few psychological health resources in the country. Education (particularly for girls), environmental stewardship, and HIV/AIDS are other topics of concern to every agency working in Liberia. These issues have an impact on every project, whether focused on health, economy, civil society, or education.

Does poetry belong in this list of critical issues? Do the texts from the humanities have anything useful to say here? Does the practice of reading and writing about such texts have any immediate relevance in the Liberian context? Can literacy educators contribute something meaningful in a place that needs everything, all at once? This essay is a meditation on these questions, and thus, in a sense, it is an inquiry into the larger social and political meanings of the work of educators involved in the teaching of reading, writing, discussion, and critical thinking.

### Reading, writing, and critical thinking in post-conflict societies

We arrived in Monrovia, Liberia, in late summer and again in early autumn, 2007 (or in a more Liberian way of putting it, late in the rainy season and at the very beginning of the dry season), to provide workshops for school and university teachers, offering ideas about teaching reading, writing, and critical thinking.

We came with backpacks full of stories, poems, discussion activities, role-playing exercises, writing assignments, and lesson-planning strategies. Even though we were deeply committed to this work, and had the confidence built

by ten years of similar workshops in other parts of the world, we got off the airplane, looked around, and thought, “Do they really need poems here? In the midst of all of these needs, what do we actually have to offer?”

Suppressing our self-doubts as well as we could, we began the reading and writing workshops with 25 warm and welcoming new Liberian colleagues, representing the University of Liberia and four other religiously affiliated universities in Monrovia. These intelligent and kind colleagues quickly helped us to see Liberia not just as a needy country, but also as a place with much to offer. Although these teachers wanted to learn what we had to teach, we also realized that these educators, whose dedication to their profession had survived extraordinarily difficult conditions during the war, had much to teach us.

Our African experience helped us see anew how the creation of a public library and book lending can be an act of courage and of wisdom, how poetry



speaks to bruised lives, and how putting thoughts and words to paper can be a way to lay hold of reality, a way to create structure and meaning out of chaos, an act of hope. We also learned anew that a humane classroom where participants share ideas, tell stories, listen carefully to one another, read and reflect on worthwhile texts, and even eat, sing, and celebrate together—that kind of classroom is a place that builds the shared humanity of its members.

As in critical thinking workshops elsewhere, we found a ready willingness among our Liberian colleagues to engage in the give-and-take of discussion and debate about the texts we had selected. But unlike our workshops in other places, here we selected texts not about sealskins and sea turtles, but about girls' education, children and war, and environmental preservation. We brought poems that provided opportunities for discussion about survivorship and remembrance of loss. We asked participants to write about topics that touched on societal recovery from trauma and the rebuilding of the country. Most of the texts were not directly about Liberia. We selected a poem about an African American slave, an article about education reform in Mali, and a poem about the war in Vietnam. But the

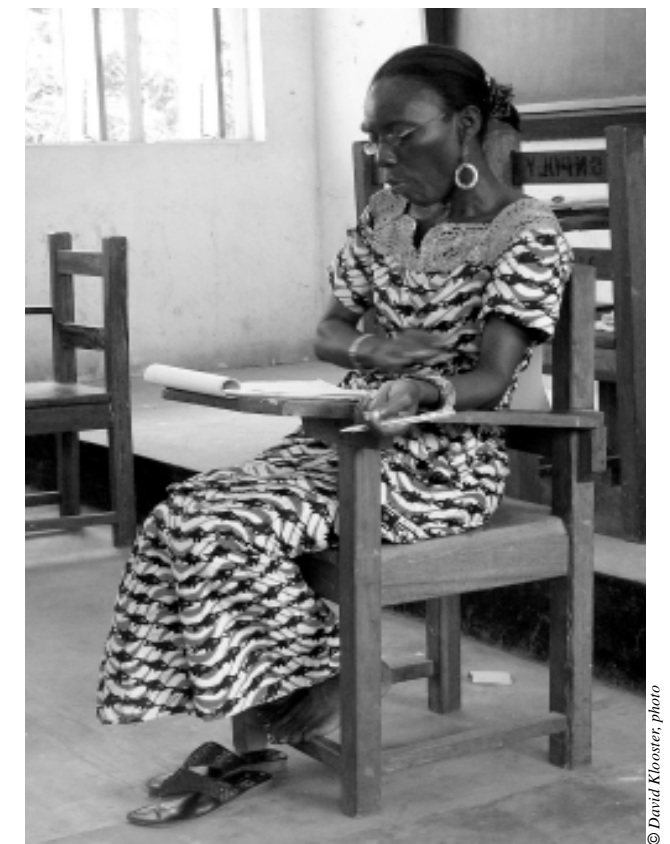
workshop participants quickly forged connections between the texts and their own experience. Although the workshop ostensibly focused on reading and critical thinking, we found that texts that raise the crucial issues being addressed by all the development agencies are highly significant for these university professors as well. As the clock hands turned, it felt to us that our time together became a small but vital part of the larger project of social and cultural recovery after the war.

Still, our questions lingered. Do they need poems here? Is there a place for books in the recovery efforts of a nation trying to rebuild after war? Others have asked similar questions after other wars, perhaps the most famous being the Jewish-German journalist, Jella Lepman, who had the difficult job of addressing the educational and cultural needs of German women and children after World War II, as part of the reconstruction effort. Her answer was to persuade the Western world to send to Germany children's literature, especially illustrated tales that showed children another reality and provided answers to their spiritual questions. "For many years, covering the Second World War period, the only reading material most German children

had had access to was propaganda of one sort or another," states Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Lepman... empowered children in one of the most efficient and effective ways, by ensuring that they had access to books in the very difficult context of post-war Germany" (Lepman, 2002, p.4). Although *Thinking Classroom* authors Barath and Sabljak (Spring 2001, p. 4) wrote from a clinical perspective on the Croatian war, they too suggest that literature and the right texts can be "a powerful tool for helping distressed children in the midst of war and long after" (p. 15). But in Liberia, we were working with adults in teaching workshops. Could the poems we brought speak to the trauma of a teacher participant whose daughter was abducted by rebel soldiers and forced into an unspeakable life of sexual slavery for well over a year? Could our essays address the grief of a man whose elderly mother was purposely shot, singled out as he was trying to bring her across the border to a refugee center? What difference could literature make to a young, dislocated teacher returning to his homeland after three years in a refugee camp?

In Monrovia we witnessed a number of examples of people's efforts to use words as a way to move forward. Visitors are struck by the numerous signs around the capital city urging progress. "Our youth need good education and jobs, not weapons," proclaims one billboard. Another says, "Don't stop the women. They can contribute!" Many hand-painted signs counsel against sexual violence. A few, evidently provided by the government, promise new roads and street lights as a result of the recently enacted tax laws. But other evidence of the power of words can be found as well.

The WE-CARE Library, the only library in the country open to the general public, is, despite its bullet holes, a gem of a place [see page 12 for a fuller account]. Run by Michael and Yvonne Weah, two teachers who participated in the workshops, the library has been a refuge for people seeking to escape the violence of the streets, a place to consider human interactions



© David Klooster, photo

throughout Africa, and a place where people can read to make sense of their lives. The library is a resource not only for reflection and escape, but also for protest, activism, and change.

One of the books available at the WE-CARE Library, a book now widely known in the United States, is Ishmael Beah's *Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). Beah's narrative takes place during the years when Liberia's civil war bled over the border into neighboring Sierra Leone, and his experience of three painful years as a boy soldier surely mirrors that of many Liberian boys. Forced into the rebel army at the age of 12, Beah both experienced and committed atrocities. He was lucky enough to be turned over to a UN rehabilitation center, and later offered a chance for an education. His memoir is an account of those awful years of warfare and recovery, but it is clearly also Beah's attempt to gain control over his life, to use words to relieve suffering and move forward. Beah used the opportunity he found in a writing workshop to claim a small piece of order and meaning—a small bit of



© David Klooster, photo

humanity—from the raging inhumanity of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars.

All of our participants had found their teaching and reading lives disrupted for years; they had been unable to keep up in their fields, and had been unable to teach regularly. Many of them, like many teachers around the

world, had not seen themselves as the kind of classroom educators who included their own writing as part of their professional identity. Coming from a variety of disciplines, including theology, psychology, math, and electrical engineering, most of them had never formally taught writing. Even the English teachers seemed more concerned

with grammar and the parts of speech than with composition. Thus, we were very explicit in outlining the writing process, and broke down each task for analysis.

We began with a model essay by Ophelia Lewis, an expatriate Liberian, called “Picking up the Pieces,” from the Liberian Writer’s Network website. It seemed fitting to read this essay about recovery from the war in a room that itself was scarred by the war—a former science classroom where the laboratory tables had been ripped out by looters scavenging for copper tubing and wires; four years after the war, the broken windows had not yet been repaired. Collectively, we analyzed the essay for the argument it presented, but also for the way the author crafted her argument and made use of rhetoric. Many of us were especially struck by the effectiveness of Lewis’ use of a repeating line to begin each paragraph: “We must pick up the pieces of hope. We must pick up the pieces of joy. We must pick up the pieces of dignity. We must pick up the pieces of prosperity.”

We invited our participants to find their own topic, by using an exercise called “Things I Might Write About,” brainstorming various ways in which we could imagine education contributing to the recovery of Liberian society. The writers gathered in small groups and shared the most promising items from each person’s list, and then talked

about possibilities and potential drawbacks for each topic. Next, a clustering exercise helped the writers develop their ideas and elaborate ways to support their main ideas. We asked the teachers to try out three or four possible repeating lines like Lewis’s “We must pick up the pieces” and heard many promising possibilities in the discussion: “Now is the time for...” one man offered as his lead line in each paragraph. “We have too long suffered,” another tried. “Everywhere I look, I see...” a woman suggested.

Before we broke for a lunch of fish stew and rice, we all took 45 minutes to write a first, tentative draft of an essay on the role of education in picking up the pieces of Liberian society.

After lunch—during which we overheard a number of conversations about what schools can do in local communities to begin rebuilding the country—the writers read their drafts to one another in small groups. Another brief period of revisions, editing, and re-copying followed.

The result was a selection of fine essays, a mere five hours after beginning the whole process. What we witnessed was the power of an essay to organize and illuminate chaotic experiences. None of the essays attempted what Ismael Beah had done, taking the experiences of their lives and helping readers to see what it was like to live through the war. Instead, they focused on what they as

## PICKING UP THE BROKEN PIECES

### De-traumatizing the War-Affected Liberian Children

*Asone Nah Wollor,  
Stella Maris Polytechnic University,  
Liberia*



The fifteen-year civil crisis in Liberia affected everybody, but most especially the children; therefore, we need to restore our children’s education. The education they need is not only how to read and write, but to learn how to live moral lives in society.

Our children who were affected by the war that stretched from 1989 to 2003 will never benefit from effective education if their minds are not turned around. They must feel accepted and respected by their communities. Many of our children have experienced the war and participated in the war in many terrible and horrible ways. Some of the children’s parents were murdered in their presence. Mothers and sisters were raped, dehumanized, amputated. Families’ property was vandalized and looted. In revenge, some of the broken children picked up arms, making them both perpetrators and victims of violence.

We need to restore childhood. The schools must put programs into place to help our children cope with the day-to-day activities. Both schools and instructors need to restore these child perpetrators and victims, socially and morally. We need to restore the broken hearts and minds of our children. The underprivileged, down-trodden, homeless, the disturbed and violent children’s hearts need to be comforted and stable. Their lost dignity needs to be restored.

We need to restore love and reconciliation among the child perpetrators and victims of war-affected children. We need to teach them God’s love—teaching them to treat one another with love by putting the past behind. Forgetting about the past and treating one another with love will bring reconciliation. After rehabilitation, healing of the painful wounds and reconciliation, integration will take place.

We need to restore hope to the less fortunate ones. Education, especially quality education, is very, very expensive in Liberia. We need to empower the less fortunate financially in order to achieve quality education. We need to give them hope for a better future. We need to place them among their peer groups where they will be respected and accepted.

We need to restore the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance. After confession and repentance comes forgiveness. Let the child-perpetrators and victims be informed that God loves them; therefore, they should forgive one another. We should forgive the war-affected children as parents whom they have victimized. Let us accept and respect them because God has forgiven these child perpetrators and victims who have committed atrocities against humanity. This gives hope of happiness and security in the community in which they live.

Our children who are traumatized and less fortunate can never be effective learners if nothing is done about their situation. We need to put the broken pieces together through healing and counseling, and we must restore dialogue between perpetrators and victims. As instructors in schools we need to give children hope for a better future.

## PICKING UP THE BROKEN PIECES

### The Rebuilding of Schools as We Pick up the Broken Pieces

*John-Paul Noah,  
Stella Maris Polytechnic University,  
Liberia*

The Liberian Government is in the process of picking up the broken pieces in transforming her educational sectors. In my view, it is important to revisit the structure or design of her various schools. Because the physical environment plays an essential role in the learning and the minds of students, our primary and secondary schools and our universities should be built up to an international standard. The buildings themselves would then enhance the enthusiasm of students to learn. Carefully built, beautifully created physical spaces make children realize that education is good. Everyone would boast about the structure in which they learn if the building included spacious classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and cafeterias. Meanwhile, these structures would motivate the minds of students as we pick up the broken pieces.

## Raising the Quality of Education in Post-War Liberia

James G. Harris,  
African Methodist Episcopal  
University of Liberia



© David Klooster, photo

Roses, fresh in their sweet scent and beautiful during the morning hours, lose their qualities when they wither as the sun becomes hot. Yet, the next morning, they revive. So the Liberian educational system must revive. Unlike the short life of roses, we must revive the withered

education system for the long term in post-war Liberia.

During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Liberian schools could boast of relative strength in terms of their ability to develop the cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor domains of each student. Those days, the school atmosphere was characterized by commitment. Those days, all stakeholders—teachers, school administrators, students, parents, guardians, political leaders—were committed to the teaching–learning process. Those days, strict discipline to encourage moral virtues and academic excellence was common. There were few negative influences, internal or external, that interfered with that discipline. All stakeholders worked in concert to maintain a high quality of learning.

Unfortunately, learning has diminished in quality since 1990 when the war began. Hence, it is extremely important that we, citizens and residents, join hands to upgrade the quality of learning in Liberia now!

What I view as key components of quality education in Liberia?

If the Liberia of today is to restore quality to its educational system, it will require the integrated contribution of five key factors: *substance*, *dedication*, *integrity*, *choice*, and *means*. After over twenty years in the classroom, some of this time as a student, some as a teacher, I have witnessed many dismaying lapses and backwards steps. However, I have also been exposed to these factors that sustain my hope for high-quality education in my nation.

*Substance* is foundational to quality education. Teachers today tend to think of substance as the amount of standard information to be taught to students or the amount of knowledge to be imparted to them. But far from simply presenting this information to our students, substance requires that the information be meaningfully engaged by the learner: that it be something observed, discovered, interpreted, explained, verified. The substance of quality learning is more than just what the teacher says, what is written on the blackboard, what is assigned in the text. It is also what is learned through in-class interaction with friends, through thoughtfully designed homework, or most appropriately during a student's personal study.

*Dedication* is commitment to a cause or an idea, and the placing of such an idea above the individual's other interests and dreams. A dedicated teacher or school administrator will say *no* to a bribe, even if this refusal moves him several steps further away from his dream of owning a house or a car. The dedicated student will intensively study his lessons, and make sure that competing desires—to spend time with friends, go to bed early, or simply relax—don't erode the time needed for study. The dedicated student will do the hard work necessary for learning, rather than spend that time contacting influential people—parents, political leaders, etc.—who can do him a favor if he fails to reach his goals through his own efforts. Dedicated students, school administrators and teachers together will create a clean and environmentally friendly campus where learning will be a way of life and teaching becomes a pleasure.

*Integrity* is closely related to the preceding two factors. But it helps to keep them separate since integrity, more than anything else, determines the quality of the education system. The student of integrity stands by what he earns, accepting an honestly achieved mark of 69 and resisting the temptation to raise it through cheating. The teacher of integrity will award the mark honestly earned, and never treat marks as currency to be exchanged for favors. The student of integrity learns beyond the minimal expectations, beyond the informational content of the syllabus. He learns to be a trustworthy and contributing member of human society.

*Choice* is a distinguishing feature of high quality education. Clearly, students cannot learn everything nor teachers teach everything: Choices must be made. The responsibility lies with all of us to make such choices wisely, and for reasons that benefit the greater good. Both teacher and student should work together to create and maintain high quality in the teaching–learning process.

*Means* (resources) are an unavoidable issue, and also an essential element, in the education process. Schooling costs money, and someone has to pay for it. However, even if school is free, there are still inequities. No one should go to school barefooted. No one should attend classes unable to write notes due to a lack of notebooks. Without resources, then, and fair access to them, high quality education for all citizens will be unrealized.

In giving my view of high quality education, I have made a case for what it *should* look like. I cannot state for certain that such an education currently exists anywhere, or even if it is now being created. My conviction, however, is that we Liberians must be ever vibrant as we search for it.

teachers could do, and what their schools could do, to help their society function again. Many of these writers volunteered to read their essays from the Author's Chair.

As we wrote, and as we listened to the many participants in the Author's Chair, we saw that despite the evidence of the war in the blown-out windows and bullet-hole-riddled walls, we were sitting in a humane classroom—collegial, friendly, encouraging—a place to get one's bearings, to reestablish a professional identity, to rebuild relationships with fellow teachers, fellow citizens.

Judging by how many of the participants were eager to share their words, either with one another in pairs or with the entire group from the Author's Chair, and judging by the warm reception they gave each others' essays and ideas, this writing workshop was a powerful experience in using literacy to find answers and direction. In our war-damaged classroom, for an hour one October afternoon, it was evident that the poems we had read together, the stories we had told one another, and the essays we had written had together contributed to the re-formation of a

community of educators, to the reestablishment of professional identities, and to the rebuilding of at least one small part of the education sector in Liberia.

It was empowering, even dizzying, to hear their final comments, such as this anonymous note written on an Exit Card at the end of the workshop, "I never thought I would be an author, but today I became one."

### References

- Barath, A., & Sabljak, L. (2001). Bibliotherapy for healing war trauma in children and youth: Experience from Croatia 1991–1999. *Thinking Classroom*, 2(4), 14–25.
- Beah, I. (2007). *A long way gone: Memoir of a boy soldier*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Liberia. *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>
- Lepman, J. (2002). *A bridge of children's books: The inspiring autobiography of a remarkable woman*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.
- Lewis, O. Picking up the pieces. Retrieved from <http://www.liberianwritersnetwork.org/essaypieces.htm> on January 10, 2008.
- Smith, Z. Letter from Liberia. *The Observer Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,,2066429,00.html> on April 29, 2007.



M. Woryonwon Roberts

## WE-CARE Library

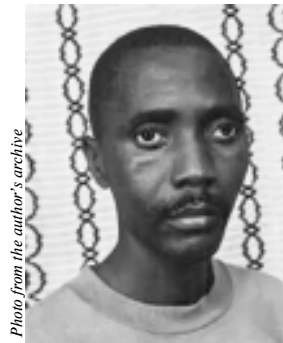


Photo from the author's archive

**M. Woryonwon Roberts** is an RWCT trainee. He currently serves as a librarian assistant at WE-CARE Library in Monrovia, Liberia

The year was 1992, and Monrovia was engulfed in a civil war. A typical day began with the sound of gunfire shattering the silence—the silence that people had hoped would bring peace. The day

*The WE-CARE Library is a great place and is doing well for many students and researchers across the country. It needs to continue the good work. I was introduced to the library by one of my classmates in 2000. Since then, I've been a regular attendant. I did all my high school research here. Today, I am doing my university research at the library.*

**Kanneh Fombah,**  
Student, University of Liberia

was filled with the movement of displaced people from one end of the city to another in search of food, and was rounded out by a curfew that began at 4:00 p.m. and lasted until 7:00 the next morning, when the routine began all over again.

It was in the midst of all of this strife that a few Liberians and friends of Liberia decided that they would provide some pastime for the long hours of the curfew, when people were forced to be in their houses behind closed doors. They decided to start a book chain, through which they would provide books to the people; after reading a book, each person would pass it along to another, thus continuing the chain. Many people in Monrovia were part of the WE-CARE Book Chain, and enjoyed its books and magazines during those long hours indoors.

One of WE-CARE's success stories features a man who had been part of the chain, and who had subsequently emigrated to the U.S.A. After ten years there followed by a sojourn in Iraq, he had returned to Liberia. During a speech celebrating the release of a book he had written, he had this to say about the WE-CARE Library: "It was here it all began. In those dark rooms under the flicker of candles, I got to appreciate what it meant to be able to read, but most importantly, [to appreciate] having something to read. Today, I too want to contribute a book which I have written." We have his book in the library.

That is where WE-CARE Library began in 1992. Today, she has evolved into a small library in the inner city, and is proud that more than 3000 people from all walks of life, including students, use her facilities every year. When most people think of libraries, they first think of books; and with good reason, for books are the most visible of any library's holdings. But in addition to books and journals, the WE-CARE Library, like any modern library, has an audio-visual room and a computer section, which provides free access to a world of multimedia information and education. Members and visitors to the library can use the Internet, take out children's books and novels, do research for term papers, and read current editions of assorted

*I think the availability of requisite textbooks and resource materials at WE-CARE greatly helps many students, teachers, writers, etc., in researching or accessing information. The ideal location of the library provides an opportunity to many of us to build up a culture of reading, especially during leisure times. I wish WE-CARE Library would grow into a larger one to accommodate many more users. I wish also that it would spread in various communities across the country.*

**E. Herodotus Payne,**  
Writer & Freelance Journalist

*WE-CARE Library is doing extremely well by providing services free of charge to students and the public to do research. I got to know about the library through a friend. I make use of the library everyday. WE-CARE, keep up the good work.*

**Abib Zack,**  
administrator, Holy Family Services

magazines and local dailies for information about events in their respective communities.

Her greatest hope and mission is to establish similar reading rooms/libraries in rural areas, as a source of reading material for entertainment and information. This mission is based on the truism that a reading people is an informed people, and that informed people make informed decisions that affect their social and economic condition.

The location of the WE-CARE Library in the inner city, where "everything" happens—for instance, all the

*I feel good about WE-CARE Library because it helps us do our school works by having easy access to information/resource materials. Having access to the Internet too is a plus. Two thumbs up to WE-CARE.*

**Dabbah Gbessay,**  
Student, St. Teresa Convent  
(an all-girl Catholicschool)

glass in the windows was stolen at one point, and businesses with service names like "Only God Knows" deal in stolen properties and blatantly offer their goods, and young men lounge on the street corners—provides the library with a unique set of users. When they come in off the street to use the Internet to find out the latest football scores, the staff go over and engage them in locating the countries from which their favorite players hail, providing information on basic geography.

Such occasions illustrate and confirm why we feel it is worthwhile that the library is *here*. Just coming to the audio-visual room and remaining to watch the news, and hearing these young people make comments and argue on local or international events, provides a lot of insight into why WE-CARE exists.



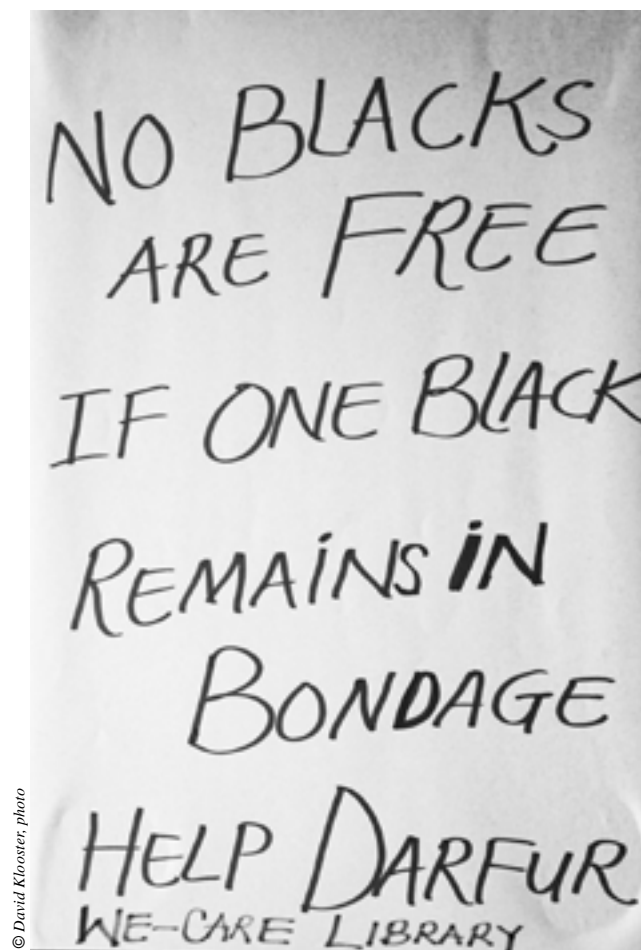
© David Klooster, photo

*Yvonne and Michael Weah,*  
teachers who run the WE-CARE Library

The WE-CARE Library is the only library in Liberia open to the general public, with the distinction of having all services absolutely free of charge—providing access to books and information to a population where more than 90% are unemployed and most people live on less than a dollar a day. WE-CARE does not want a child to have to choose between the reading of a good book and a cup of rice. On average, the library receives over 75 people daily in a space that allows for 40 people to sit comfortably. Twelve schools (elementary and high schools) affected by the war, that have no libraries, use the WE-CARE Library as *their* library.



© David Klooster, photo



The WE-CARE Library sponsors the following community activities:

- It organizes programs and discussion forums.
- It conducts a reading program called Story Hour for Kids in less fortunate communities and neighborhoods. This program, which teaches children to read and love books, is based on the premise that reading children become reading adults. The Story Hour for Kids program is WE-CARE'S way of addressing the 80% illiteracy rate that affects Liberia today. The future of Liberia lies with the children, who

*I want to thank the staff of WE-CARE for their tireless efforts and invaluable services to the public. They go out of their way to get us satisfied by making available to us the needed information. I have grown to love to use the library all the more.*

**Felecia Gbarh,**  
G.W. Gibson School

*I think the library is the best thing to happen to us in this community. I spend an awful lot of time at the library reading or using resource materials to finish up on some school work, report, or writing project. I wish WE-CARE was in every community across the country. I look forward to that.*

**Boima A. Kamara,**  
Teacher, Muslim Congress School

currently comprise about 60% of the population.

- It conducts computer literacy classes for teachers, school staff members, members of the Liberia Association of Writers (LAW), and others.
- It is affiliated with a number of community-based organizations, and provides a meeting space for the Liberia Association of Writers (LAW) and many other groups.

The WE-CARE Library is owned and

*I visit the library almost every day to read. I am grateful for its existence; proud of its kind and dedicated staff. Best of all, I feel privileged to have free access to the internet and to a world of multimedia information. Certainly, WE-CARE is a blessing to many Liberians.*

**Thomas Kpiah,**  
Social Worker

operated by the WE-CARE Foundation, Inc. The foundation is a local, not-for-profit, educational organization that is lending a helping hand by giving something back to the community, e.g. it distributes books to schools in rural areas/disadvantaged communities across Liberia.

In conjunction with the Liberia Association of Writers (LAW), WE-CARE is launching a nationwide reading program with the theme, "The Year of Reading and Writing: 2008."

All WE-CARE activities are being coordinated by two permanent staff and three volunteers, and others are hired on an ad hoc basis to implement the programs. The goals and objectives of WE-CARE are best reflected in its mission statement:

- To sensitize the public by providing information for rebuilding, on firm



# REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

P. O. BOX 10 - 9012  
1000 MONROVIA 10, LIBERIA  
WEST AFRICA



Office of the Deputy Minister  
for Planning and Research

To Whom It May Concern

Every time I enter the WE-CARE Library, it brings back memories of the time when, as a kid, I spent a great deal of time at the US Information Center, reading or using their reference materials to finish up on some school assignment. Also, when I realize that the WE-CARE Library has existed all through the civil war providing stimulants for the minds and keeping the light in the name of the love of books and the search for knowledge, my belief in books as a tool for unlocking the universality of mankind is strengthened; and I become more determined to create the same conditions for the newer generation. That is why I am resolved to support the efforts of WE-CARE Library as it contributes towards the building of a resilient Liberian people.

WE-CARE PROGRAM – The Story Hour for Kids – that teaches children from the less fortunate community to read and seeing kids reading here in the library and having access to the internet, with all services free to all comers in a country where the income of the people is less than a dollar a day, say that all is not lost.

The ministry continues to look to such organizations as worthy partner in her endeavor to give hope and opportunity to the children of Liberia; and encourages people and organizations interested in this kind of nation-building to support the WE-CARE Library.

Sincerely,

James Emmanuel Roberts  
Deputy Minister for Planning, Research & Development,  
Ministry of Education, R. L.

humane principles, the social structures in the health, education, and economic sectors, which were destroyed in the Liberian civil war.

- To develop a love for books and a love for reading among the children, as a means of reducing the illiteracy rate in

Liberia to a level at which Liberians can meaningfully participate in the knowledge-based economy that runs the world today.

As the accompanying statements from those who have used WE-CARE make eloquently clear, the WE-CARE Foundation is more than living up to its mandate.