

Who is Ready to be the School Librarian with a Vision in Serbia: How to Empower and Gather School Librarians Through the Activities of the Serbian Association of School Librarians

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Summary

This paper aims to show the current position of the school librarians in Serbia, including proposals in a way that can be improved. The paper includes reviews of the individual activities of Serbian Associations of School Librarians (SASL), which, from the establishment in 2006 has attempted to empower and gather school librarians, unfortunately, without a success.

The position of school librarians in Serbia today is often marginalized, but librarians themselves are partly responsible because they have not imposed themselves as leaders of educational- practice in improving the quality of teaching in their schools.

The position of school librarians was further exacerbated by the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, passed in 2015, because they reduced the number of librarians in elementary schools, and in 2018 in secondary schools, too. The basic problem of the state, the negative natural increase and the poor demographic situation, caused a long-term decrease in the number of

students, and thus also contributed to the reduction of the number of teachers who became technological surpluses.

That problem was often solved by taking several teachers into the school library and given them a part of the librarians' standard. In this way, on one side, we have librarians without too much interest in the work of a school librarian, and on the other we have librarians who have been unemployed.

How can, in such working conditions, school librarians in Serbia can be encouraged to work autonomously and interactively, empowered or motivated to improve their own quality of work?

Each school librarian should receive concrete testimonies for continuing self-evaluation processes that show, confirm, illustrate and document his weaknesses and shortcomings, but at the same time emphasize the quality and good patterns of the set goals. He needs to see specific needs and create specific conditions in the library in which he works, in order to be able to work more successfully.

A school librarian should encourage, exploit, and browse through the media good ideas, visions and strategies in order to popularize the book, reading, the culture of using the library, since creating an active user creates an active consumer of a culture that will always recognize the true value of the book, knowledge, information and libraries.

The most important thing is that a school librarian, following the vision that leads to success and recognition, realizes that he needs to gain the trust and reputation on the basis of his continuing work.

Part of the recent activities of Serbian Associations of School Librarians stimulates, engages and brings librarians together, working with teachers, parents, members of the local community, activating pupils for reading, as well as researching, expressing and affirming creativity.

By strengthening own professional capacities, gathering and empowering, a school librarian should realize that he can transform himself into a leader in the realization of cultural activities, not just in school, but also in the local community, even at the state level.

Introduction

At the beginning of the school year 2018/19 according to the data of the Republic Institute for Statistics (2019), 3319 regular primary schools, 1132 motherboards and 2187 separate departments (which are related to the performance and realization of teaching and other forms of educational work outside the headquarters schools) had been working in the Republic of Serbia. The teaching was attended by a total of 527834 pupils, 472748 in motherboard schools as headquarters and 55086 in separate departments.

In school 2018/19 506 regular secondary schools enrolled pupils (454 state and 52 private schools) and 41 public schools / departments for students with disabilities. There were 252108 students enrolled in regular secondary schools, while 1993 students attended classes for students with disabilities.

According to the database of the Serbian Library Network (2017), which is intended for collection, processing and statistical presentation of data on libraries in Serbia, out of 2686 libraries in Serbia, there are 407 school libraries in secondary schools and 1093 in primary schools.

Although it is envisaged that each school should have a school library, we can see, according to the available data that this is not true. In Serbia, however, the largest number of school libraries' network is least developed. Almost all school libraries in Serbia have a problem of lack of space and reading room and are inadequately equipped, and the library fund has become outdated. The renovation of the book fund depends largely on the enthusiasm of the librarian.

School libraries in Serbia are an integral part of two systems: school and library, and therefore their work is governed by two laws, education regulations and regulations in the field of librarianship. From this arrangement of the work of the librarians, there are many problems that school librarians in Serbia encounter every day. Regulations in the field of librarianship are applied in the segments of the work of school libraries that refer to professional library-information work, and the supervision of the parent services has an advisory, but not binding character.

The Position of School Librarians in Serbia

According to the current Law on the Foundations of the Education System (2017), the school is obliged to have a school library, and its basic task is to develop the habits of reading and using library services. It should also enable students to use information in all forms and on all media and enable them to master the skills necessary for learning throughout their lives.

Expert work on the improvement of educational work in each school in Serbia is performed by an expert associate: psychologist, pedagogue and librarian (depending on the type of school, professional associates can still be: social worker, defectology worker, speech therapist, mediator, notary, andragogy specialist). Their main tasks are to improve their educational and other forms of work in the institution as a whole, to provide professional support to teachers and educators to improve their work, as well as to monitor, encourage, provide support (within their competencies) to the overall development of children and pupils, but also provide professional support to parents, teachers and educators on issues of relevance to education and upbringing.

According to the earlier Rulebook on the work program of the expert associate (1994), which ceased to be valid, the fields of librarians' work were: educational activity, library-information activity, cultural and public activities and other activities. According to the current Rulebook, the forms of work of all professional associates (2012) are regulated in the same way in the school and are being conducted for all professional associates through the following unique fields of work:

1. Planning and programming of educational work
2. Monitoring and evaluation of educational work
3. Working with teachers
4. Working with students
5. Working with parents or guardians
6. Working with the director, professional associates, pedagogical assistant and attendant of students
7. Working in professional bodies and teams
8. Cooperation with competent institutions, organizations, associations and local self-government units
9. Keeping records, documentation, preparation for work and professional development

In this way, the activities of all professional associates are harmonized, but the program of work of the school librarian, unlike other professional associates, in addition to jobs in the field of education and upbringing, involves both library and information activities, as well as cultural and artistic aspects of

education. Since the school is obliged to realize the students' free-time activities, the school librarian, while performing tasks in the cultural and artistic fields of his work, can position himself as the leader in school, as well as in the local community and become basic support for both literary and cultural events, but also for media and information interests of students. The school library is a stimulating environment for development and for the challenges of growing up. By offering students a wealth of creative opportunities, through teaching and extracurricular activities, the school library creates a stimulating environment for learning and for the overall development of students, thus helping young people to address future challenges ahead of them in a creative way.

We stated that there are schools that have neither a school library, and in some undeveloped areas we know that they do not have computer equipment nor Internet connection, they have outdated book funds, although this situation should be overcome. On the other hand, there are schools with spacious libraries and reading rooms, media outlets, technically well equipped with modern teaching facilities where multimedia teaching can be performed. Problems with inadequate space, (non-existent) equipment, lack of financial resources are constant, which tells us about the position of libraries and librarians in schools. It is commendable that for the last three years the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has approved some funds for the acquisition of books for primary school libraries, and the sum depends on the level of development of the municipality and the number of students in the school as well.

However, additional major problems and changes for school librarians have been adopted by the Rules on the criteria and standards for financing the institution that performs primary and secondary education activities, which are being implemented from 2015. Namely, in a lot of schools there has been a decrease in the number of students, and consequently a decrease in the number of classes. Therefore, it is stipulated that professional associates and non-dedicated staff are engaged in the number of classes in the school. It is also precisely prescribed minimum and maximum number of pupils to form a class. In school libraries there was a paradoxical situation: the problem was often solved by taking a few teachers by giving them a part of the librarian's standard (norm of work) in the school library. And now in this way, on one side, we have librarians - teachers with no great interest in doing the work of a school librarian and without knowing the professional library-information segment of the work, and on the other we have librarians who are left unemployed, dissatisfied school librarians who have lost their jobs or without parts of the norm, whereas some have returned to teaching.

The status of a school librarian should not be equated with the position of other employees in education and culture, because school libraries have become excellent, for management personnel we can say the best places to take care of technological surpluses, and this lasts for years, perhaps more precisely for decades. According to the authors of this paper, about two decades ago, many teachers of the Russian language worked in school libraries, because of the lack of interest in learning Russian among pupils and introducing English as a compulsory foreign language, as well as the second foreign language, mostly French, German, Italian or Spanish.

The biggest problem in our country - the negative natural increase, the birth of small number of children, and therefore the long-term decrease in the number of students, caused a decrease in the number of teachers, and the simplest way for the school managements was to allocate 5 teachers with 10% to the school library, which was crucial on the quality of the school library's work.

By 2015, at least one librarian was employed in each school, and many schools, working in two shifts, employed two librarians and school library was available to all students during all day. However, the Rulebook of 2015 reduced the number of librarians and stipulated the following: in a primary school with 24 or less departments, there should be 0.5 librarians working, and in a school of 25 to 64 departments, one librarian should work, whereas only a school with 65 or more departments can have 2 executives in the work of librarians. According to the author's knowledge, only 10 primary schools in Serbia had such a number of departments and could have 2 librarians employed. However, a high school of 16 to 24 departments employed one librarian, and could employ the maximum of 2 librarians, increasing the employment rate of 25 and more departments.

Reducing the number of librarians meant that part of educational work would not take place in accordance with the requirements of modern education. This is particularly felt in small schools, where the school library starts working two and a half days a week or only one day if the school has more separate departments. The number of librarians, i.e. the number of jobs in primary schools has been reduced to half.

And among the librarians there was a misunderstanding, because for 24 departments a librarian in high school has a full fund of work and receives the whole salary, and in the basic for the same number of classes only half of the fund is employed and receives half of the salary.

According to the last valid 2018 Financing Regulative, it is stipulated that an elementary school with 24 and fewer classes has 0.5 executives in the jobs of librarian. School from 25 to 43 departments has 1 executive in the affairs of librarians. School of 44 to 64 departments has 1.5 executives in the affairs of librarians. A school with 65 or more departments has two executives in the affairs of librarians. A better position is for high school librarians, where it has been prescribed as following: High school with up to 15 classes has 0.5 librarians. School from 16 to 32 classes has 1 executive in librarian affairs. School from 33 to 42 classes have 1.5 librarians. School with 43 or more departments has 2 executives in librarian affairs. Considering that in the elementary school there are over 15 different types of professors, mainly philological sciences and teachers, and all employed professors in all secondary schools and gymnasiums can start working in a school library in addition to educated librarians, the impression is that, for the performance of school librarians' work knowledge of library and information activities is not necessary, which leads to the constant collapse of the profession.

For years, even directors in the library have been deploying unsuitable staff for teaching, those who are retired, ill or as a kind of punishment. There is no particular professional title needed to work in a school library. A professional examination for teaching is enough condition, while for librarians, a professional exam has been required in the National Library of Serbia or the Library of Matica Srpska until 2004. After that year, all employees in the educational system are being subjected to the license exam. A school librarian who is taking the exam for a license writes an essay and a license acquired in that way does not apply to teaching work. By contrast, of course, a teacher license is automatically suited for working in a school library.

The problem continues worsening, the number of students continues to decline, the number of teachers who lose (part of) their jobs increases, and the state continues to train staff for librarians at two colleges, although school librarians can hardly find a job. (In the Republic of Serbia, in addition to the largest number of school libraries, there are 2 national, 6 university, 213 libraries at faculties and colleges, 240 special libraries, and 227 public libraries.)

Let us also add that the Government of the Republic of Serbia also adopted a temporary measure banning public sector employment, which was introduced at the end of 2013, and that regime is still in force.

The position of school librarians in Serbia can be briefly assessed as unenviable, a state of serious imbalance and disharmony. The authors of the paper consider that all the above changes are degrading the profession of school librarian and their position within the school system. Instead of going to the increasing number of executives in the place of the school librarian, who would improve the educational and cultural quality of the work of school institutions, it leads to the reduction. The savings are insignificant, and the loss is permanent and irrecoverable.

The personnel policy of most (non) professional persons in primary and secondary school libraries, which has been implemented in recent years, is certainly one of the most controversial and perhaps most complicated problems when it comes to the poor condition and position of school libraries in Serbia.

School library-the place of joy and relaxation, as well as the place of learning and knowledge for children, the place of quality and purposeful spending of leisure time, is necessary and very important. It should be opened during all day and the librarian should have enough time for all students, talking to a person who has the ability to spread perspectives in a relaxed conversation and allow the student to see things differently. Having a casual conversation with a person who does not grade, in addition to reading book recommendations, a lot of different information, all of this contributes to the lifelong learning goals. Students are accustomed to going to the library not only when they need to borrow a book, but to spend a lot of time researching different sources of information. In addition to the library section, the library organizes creative workshops, meetings with writers, literary events, realizes school projects through extracurricular activities ... The role of librarians and the programs implemented in the library are very important for the development of children and young people, for their education and creativity. In addition to enriching the school life, the library makes the school a place for students to come into. In children and young people, it develops love for reading and for culture in general, and thus forms critical thinking and establishes a system of values.

Serbian Associations of School Librarians - A Gathering without Too Much Success or without Too Much Effort

Serbian Associations of School Librarians, which is trying to strengthen and gather school librarians, unfortunately, has little success generally. Serbian Associations of School Librarians is a professional association founded in Belgrade in 2006 to raise the quality of school librarianship in elementary, secondary and high school with students with special needs, to encourage professional improvement of library activity and the professional status of school librarians. At the founding meeting, there were formed professional councils of school librarians, municipal assets, and branch offices at the county level, but there was never a real gathering.

The Association's website was founded, namely several of them, the online magazine "School Librarian" is established, professional meetings and other forms of professional development (events, stands organized, the award "Mina Karadzic" to the best librarians during the previous school year established).

Serbian Associations of School Librarians has been appearing since 2010 as an organizer of professional development with two seminars: "A Review of Creating School Librarians" and an electronic seminar.

The event was conceived as a mutual exchange of experiences among fellow librarians, but also as promoting the work of a school librarian. Up to 2013, it was organized five times in total, each time with a different theme dedicated to different areas of work for librarians and the activities of the school library. But it was stopped with organizing it. An initiative for the development of competency standards for professional associates has been launched, the Ministry of Education has formed a working group for its development, but they have not been adopted so far.

Through exchanges of experience and good practice, seminars and conferences promoted the profession of school librarian and librarians acquired new knowledge and skills, could innovate their working programs and organize new activities.

The Association has received support for organizing three major projects:

- Sharp Feather (2011/2012 funded by the City of Belgrade, Secretariat for Education),
- School Librarians and the Internet (implemented in 2011/2012 funded by RNIDS (Serbian National Internet Domain Registry),
- Web technology to increase the efficiency of communication and interaction in a modern school that lasted two years, 2011 and 2012 (funded by the Digital Agenda. The project ended with a conference "Communication - Interaction - Action", December 8, 2012 in Belgrade, and the papers presented therein have been published in the Anthology of works).

The Sharp Feather project (co-authored by Anđelka Tancic and Sladjana Galushka, both former presidents of the Serbian Associations of School Librarians for 2 terms each), as it continued under the name Sharp Perce and in May 2018, its eighth season ended. The authors of the project collaborated with publishing houses, which sponsored the competition in which students, teachers and librarians of about 10 schools, mainly from Belgrade and the surrounding area, participated.

Serbian Associations of School Librarians lost a lot of members and reduced its activities due to inadequate organization and reduction of activities, non-accreditation of seminars and conferences, and the magazine "School Librarian" has not been published for several years.

In 2012, more than 200 librarians paid membership fees, which is the highest number of members of Serbian Associations of School Librarians for all years of existence, and regarding the number of about 1500 school libraries, this indicates that school librarians did not recognize the Associations as an organization whose work they should actively participate in. We must admit that it is still the same situation today. (One of the authors of the paper has been a member of the Steering Committee of the Association since 2017.)

Lack of interest of a large number of school librarians, a dose of distrust and skepticism, a workplace where only retirement or transfer to a teacher's workplace is being waited for, lack of coordination and organization of ambitious networking of all school librarians, lack of awareness of the need for the Association to become mass, ignorance of the real situation in which school libraries and its staff are being, the unprecedented importance of collecting the necessary data on space and funds and inadequate access led to constantly small number of members of the Association. The number of members of the Association is still small, but the Association wants to establish permanent activities for students and school librarians, which will be implemented regardless of the removal of the members of the Board.

New management of Serbian Associations of School Librarians has been trying to make the work of school librarians and the Association more visible by engaging more seriously in 2017. Several affiliates

are starting working. A new issue of the magazine is coming out again after a few years of break. A literary contest "A Year Without Care Carries Out the Book" and a Photo-Contest "Postcard from a School Library" are being held, with numerous students taking part in, and awards to the best are given at the regular Annual Assembly of the Association.

School librarians participate in conferences and discussions in the country and the region, organized by Serbian Library Association (SLA) and other professional societies and institutions and represent the activities of school librarians and their contribution to the knowledge society. School librarians write authorized papers for professional journals about their segments of work, participate in competitions organized by publishing houses, the Serbian Teachers Society, IFLA, etc.

At the suggestion of the author of this paper, the Serbian School Librarians Association began the "Read Out Loud" campaign in 2018 as the first national promotion of reading, seeking to empower and bring together Serbian school librarians on a common mission - to inspire as many children and adults as possible, to encourage them to share their enjoyment in reading and to show that reading contributes the quality of life. The purpose of this mutual activity is to encourage reading, but also to connect the school library and the school with the local community, to connect with institutions and associations that promote culture and arts, and to promote the work and cooperation of school librarians. This collaborative activity by school librarians makes our work more visible and recognizable. This action, which is being carried out for the second year, has received a great response and has been read in almost every city: in parks, squares, school yards, in all places where passers-by could stop and devote themselves to listening at least for a moment which caused a lot of attention.

In addition to promoting books, school librarians have an additional mission nowadays - to create competent young people who can move through large flows of information themselves, and to teach them how to make themselves choose the right one among numerous information. In this way, students are trained for learning that never ends.

We believe that school librarians should implement activities that will promote the work of school libraries and librarians, among primary and secondary school students, among fellow teachers, among parents, and for which we, school librarians of Serbia, will be recognizable. We want our good solutions to be seen, shared, inspired, and there are really encouraging examples because in small schools - school libraries are the only actors of cultural and artistic events.

Instead of Conclusion

The position of school librarians in Serbia today is often marginalized, but librarians themselves are responsible for this part because they have not imposed themselves as leaders of educational and educational practice in improving the quality of teaching in their schools, not even as promoters of culture in local communities.

An integral part of the work of a school librarian, among other things, should be the continuous evaluation and self-evaluation of their work, and one of the guiding ideas - the awareness of the importance of lifelong learning for all the actors of school life, and for the school librarians themselves. Self-initiative, pro-activity and the use of all the potentials and opportunities offered by new media can contribute to improving the position of school librarians, who must believe in themselves and their own visions.

The most important thing is that a school librarian, following the vision that leads to success and recognition, understands that he needs to gain the trust and reputation on the basis of his continuous work.

We need to set high, inspirational goals to ourselves and strive to achieve them. The circumstances of the work in the school library are never ideal, but there is no reason to be considered unsuccessful if our vision moves us and if we want to use all our resources.

Every day in the school library is exciting and unpredictable. Love for the book, knowledge and contribution to the general education of young readers can and should empower everyone (school librarian especially).

"Sometimes, for better understanding of what we had read, it is necessary to change the aspect of view ..." This was the first sentence that arrived on mail on the occasion of the action of Serbian Associations of School Librarians "Let's Read It Loud 2019". Perhaps it reflects our position best and tells us what we need to do: we need to change the aspect of view - on ourselves, on our job, on our position ...

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Biographies

Mirjana Radovanović Pejović, born on February 10th, 1967 in Belgrade, graduated the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade with a degree in philology of general literature and theory of literature. Since 1994, she has been working in education at various positions, from the professor to the principal. Since 2000, she has been employed as a school librarian at the elementary school "Dušan Jerković" in Užice. She passed the professional exam in librarian activity in 2004. Areas of interest range from the formation of personal and cultural identity of students, encouraging reading and acquiring cultural habits, to professional development, lifelong education and self-evaluation, which she undergoes both practically and theoretically. She has been participant of conferences, expert meetings in Serbia and the region. Winner of the Award of Serbian Associations of School Librarians (SASL) "Mina Karadzic" for the best school librarian in 2016. Married, mother of one child.

Ana Duković, born on August 4th, 1976 in Užice. She graduated the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade with a degree in philology of general literature and theory of literature. Since 2005, she has been employed as a school librarian and professor at elementary school "Dušan Jerković" in Užice. She passed the professional exam in librarian activities in 2009. In her work, she places special emphasis on developing students' competences for lifelong learning, media and information literacy, as well as self-evaluation. Participant of conferences, expert meetings in Serbia and the region. Married, mother of two children.

Marina Jevtić, born on July 15th, 1978 in Užice. She graduated the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade with a degree- professor of the English language and literature, and started working in education in 2001. Since 2003 she has been employed as an English language and literature teacher at the elementary school "Dušan Jerković" in Užice. In her work, she puts emphasis on the importance and correlation of extracurricular activities. She has been the participant of conferences and expert meetings in Serbia and the region. Married, mother of three children and the president of the humanitarian Association "Parent" in Užice.