How do School Libraries Promote Student Success? School Libraries Supporting Reading and Curriculum

Ana Martins
School Library Advisor
School Libraries Network Office – Ministry of Education
Portugal

Rosa Martins
School Library Advisor
School Libraries Network Office – Ministry of Education
Portugal

Education in Portugal is undergoing significant changes related to the government-led Technological Plan. This is a consequence of the major reconfiguration introduced by educational technologies now available to schools. Such a process presents challenges to schools libraries, which must respond adequately, change management and information management practices and engage in collaborative work with teachers. School Libraries aim at developing reading and information literacies and at implementing creative problem solving-based approaches to learning, such as inquiry based learning. Since its establishment under inter-ministerial initiative in 1996, the School Libraries Network (SLN) has strived to incorporate critical success factors identified in international literature. SLN has moreover implemented the School Libraries Self-Evaluation Model, to reinforce school libraries' educational role and promote quality and accountability. This paper aims at confronting the realizations and shortcomings of SLN with internationally identified concepts, standards and critical success factors, whilst revealing aspects of the Portuguese reality.

School libraries; reading and curriculum; change management; student success; school libraries and ICT

1. The landscape of Portuguese school libraries. Challenges facing change management

In 1996, the Portuguese Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture have jointly established the School Libraries Network (SLN) - a programme aimed at creating and developing school libraries across public schools of basic and secondary education levels[1].

Before the inception of this programme, only a very limited number of schools, mostly high schools (160), was equipped with a school library. And even those existent structures could not respond adequately to the multimedia and technological challenges already taking place.

---

[1] DESPACHO CONJUNTO N.º 43 /ME/MC/95 in Veiga, I. et al. (1996) *Lançar a Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação.

Most of the collections offered a predominant majority of print resources, which were outdated and misadjusted with its users' interests and needs.

The generalized non-existence of these essential infra-structures determined major misalignments with educational goals, with negative impacts in the country's literacy levels and socio-cultural progress. On the other hand, it represented a challenge and a unique opportunity to improve quality in education and open access to valuable information resources.

The development of an efficient network of school libraries counted on significant public investment and on the best use of distributed cognitions and intelligence from key educational stakeholders. The programme strived for partnership-based solutions, bringing regional structures onboard the planning and development process: Regional Directorates of Education, Municipalities and Public Libraries.[2]

The governing structure of the programme is SLN, since its establishment a unit of the Ministry of Education, which has the autonomy and capacity to forge strategic partnerships and alliances with Municipal Councils, Public Libraries and Training Centres at local level. This concerted action is now translated into very significant achievements: all post-primary schools benefit to date from a school library and local knowledge and collaborative networks are very active, especially within and across groups of schools.

Throughout its existent, SLN redefined processes and functions, always thriving for the affirmation of school libraries as empowered structures servicing best educational practice and contributing to the development of well prepared schools and communities of users. This management process is not alien to major shifts in the Portuguese education system and to the wider changing social context. The demands of the knowledge society and of the digital paradigm determined that policies and guidelines were carefully thought through.

This is especially true if the relationship between the school library and the teaching and learning processes is considered, which inevitably leads to contemplating the impact on educational performance and student's attainment[3]. Looking at the school library through this lens transforms it from the traditional information and resource centre into a knowledge hub. This shift (1) determines a new rapport between the teacher librarian and the whole school community, (2) redefines the teacher librarian role, and (3) calls for a new leadership – a transformational leadership, with impact in educational processes and practice. Research and practice suggest that co-operation with the teaching staff is paramount to success, as collaborative work solutions are pivotal to students' achievement. Thus, the teacher librarian can no longer be seen as an information specialist. He or she now embodies the mission of knowledge specialist, scaffolding learning, training and assisting students in handling the 21st century challenges[4].

Such challenges are related, on the one hand, to an exponential complexification of student required skills and, on the other hand, to the emergence of new knowledge practices, new media and new learning environments, through which students navigate and interact with

[2] Acordo de cooperação (Agreement Cooperation) <http://www.rbe.min-edu.pt/np4/19.html> (accessed 20/05/2009)
[3] Farmer, L. (2003) *Student Success and Library Media Programs: A Systems Approach to Researchand Best Practice*. Englewood , CO: Libraries Unlimited.
[4] Zmuda, A., Harada, V. (2008). *Librarian as learning specialists: meeting the learning imperative for the 21st century*. Westport, London: Libraries Unlimited.

ever rich informational landscapes. It is this drive towards teaching and training that shapes the new role for the school library: operating between the local and the global, it must be omnipresent, responding to users' requests wherever they are. These users are the ICT proficient millenials, which require flexibility and adaptability of the school library as a learning environment.

The relationship between school library and school undergoes itself a transformation, because a rupture must take place with traditional, long entrenched practice. The school library holds educational value, which generates from its action and interaction with the school as a whole. Commitment, accountability and responsibility of the teacher librarian as a connector are the mantras of this role re-definition, As Todd[5] argues, the teacher librarian must transform the school library into a "knowledge space, not information place". He or she must understand the school library beyond the traditional boundaries of space and collection constraints, because it is now essentially made of "connections, not collections". He or she must commit to define, deploy and deliver "actions, not positions; evidence, not advocacy".

The meaning and strength of the school library's impact are to be extracted from evidence. It is the measurable impact of evidence that induces coherent and well informed change or, as Todd[6] purports, the emancipation and development of the school library occurs "through accountability", which requires a "move from rhetoric to evidence".

The Portuguese school libraries are well equipped with ICT and rich, varied collections, adjusted to users' needs. Such quality standards are the consequence of reforming policies led by SLN, which contributed greatly to the full development and institutional empowerment of school libraries:

1. Reinforced investment in facilities, equipment and collections;
2. Investment in qualified human potential: progressive increase in the number of hours of professionally-trained staff allocated to the school library; creation and delivery of training courses; concerted action towards increasing the offer of specialized post-graduate education in the field[i];
3. Strong leadership of SLN and institutional capacity and agility to induce change and progressively transform school libraries into innovation clusters and educational support structures[7];
4. Constitution of a specialized body of teacher librarians geographically spread and taking on the role of municipal coordinators, whose task is to locally monitor school library development and improve the quality of practice;
5. The newly decided allocation of a teacher librarian to groups of schools, providing that student population dimension requirements are met. This allocation, as well as the profile and responsibilities of the incumbent are institutionalized by ministerial decree[8].

---

[5] Todd, R. (2001) *Transitions for preferred futures of school libraries: knowledge space, not information space place connections, not collections actions, not position evidences, not advocacy.* Keynote addressed for the International Association of School Librarianship, Auckland, New Zealand. <http://www.iasl-slo.org/virtualpaper2001.html> (accessed 30/05/2009)

[6] Todd, R. (2008) The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians. The School Library Journal <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6545434.html> (accessed May 28/05/2009)

[7] Costa, F. (2009) (coord.) *Estudo de avaliação do Programa Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares* [Evaluation Study of the School Libraries Network Programme]. Lisboa: CIES/ISCTE

[8] <http://www.rbe.min-edu.pt/np4/np4/521.html> (accessed 30/05/2009)

6. Full integration of the teacher librarian in each school's National Educational Technology Plan team[9];
7. Establishment of multi government programme partnerships and networks: National Educational Technology Plan; National Reading Plan, etc. Establishment of local collaborative work networks with libraries and other institutions;
8. Inception of the SLN-led School Libraries Self-Evaluation Model to assess performance and contribute as an instrument of continuous improvement[10].

Managing change implies keeping a track of advancements and constraints and a continuous reality check and assessment process. For this endeavour to be successful, it is necessary to make best use of the evidence collected (1) from the school libraries self-evaluation, (2) from the data gathered by inter-municipal co-ordinators' systematic monitoring, and (3) from the results compiled in the yearly updated database integrating findings about school libraries' development. Moreover, this practice strengthens policy making and the discussion of needs tailored strategies to implement at central and local level.

Particularly at local level, the deployment of a shared, integrated vision leading to a clear understanding and appropriation of the school library's value and impact is of utmost importance:

1) For the school to acknowledge the library's value and integrate that vision all the way through curricular planning and development phases. This vision has to be shared by all stakeholders, with particular emphasis on the school Head and pedagogical decision-making boards;
2) For the school Head and staff to co-operate and generate synergies leading to the full integration of ICT at the classroom – a direct consequence of the National Educational Technology Plan – within the teaching practice. Again, the school library plays a pivotal implementation role:
   2.1) Offering training and professional development in the field of information and digital literacies;
   2.2) Positioning itself as a the leader and aggregate centre of various distributed intelligence clusters, managing and smoothing the change process through collaborative work, engaging students and teaching staff.
3) For the school to develop a pro-active awareness of the value generated by its pedagogical action and services, continually subjected to evidence-based assessment, and ultimately leading to a positive impact on students' learning and performance[11].

At central level, an incentive structure backed up by substantial policy shall continue to strengthen this politics of recognition, grounded in tools and institutional support structures tailored to accompany school libraries in their transition to the digital paradigm and to continuously enhanced performance.

---

[9] Law n.º 700/2009 <http://dre.pt/pdf2sdip/2009/01/006000000/0087300878.pdf> (accessed 15/05/2009)
[10] Portuguese School Libraries Self Evaluation Model (2008)
<http://www.rbe.minedu.pt/np4/?newsId=427&fileName=ModeloRBE2009.pdf> (accessed 10/05/2009)
[11] Todd, R. (2002) *School librarian as teachers: learning outcomes and evidence-based practice*. 68th IFLA Council and General Conference, August 18-24.
<http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:ZIuzS3ZA4eYJ:www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/084-119e.pdf+part+of+making+actionable+all+the+information+todd+2002&hl=pt-PT&ct=clnk&cd=1&client=safari>
[accessed 30/05/2009].

2. School libraries: learning and curriculum

The school in today's society must fulfil a substantially different role from what was required only two or three decades ago. The changes introduced by information and communication technology, both in economic and social organization, and the body of knowledge and skills that are required today from young people, give school increased responsibilities in their educational background.

The school library is therefore central to the construction of learning, in a collaborative approach with teachers, allowing the development of teaching strategies based on research and problem solving, which are requirements to the development of literacies, including information and reading literacy. This is one of the axes of any knowledge, and the school library plays a crucial role in literacy skills development and lifelong reading habits.

The learner-centred curriculum that is either established or emerging in many countries is actually leading to the creation of school library learning environments, which are essential to supporting these constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. The greatest challenge school libraries now face is to discover ways to promote the varied literacy or multi-literacy skills, and help both schools and the educational system fulfil their missions and challenge ongoing literacy problems.

As Ross Todd says, "the hallmark of a school library in the 21st century is not its collections, its system, its technology, its staffing, its buildings, but its actions and evidences that show that it makes a real difference to student learning, that it contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of meaning making and constructing knowledge"[12].

As we argued before, Portuguese school libraries are undergoing a change process, with a progressive recognition by political power. But across schools, the major challenge is to develop partnerships with teachers, through collaborative work practices. New ways to face learning and teaching are necessary. Teaching is now an active process, held by resource based learning and inquiry based learning, and not anymore a lonely activity in the classroom. The process of knowledge construction places the school library in a central position.

Teacher librarians must know and understand the goals and contents of different areas curricula, and promote strategies to plan their work with students and teachers. They must show that the school library and its resources are essential for a constructivism approach to learning and to the teaching process. The main goal of school is now to prepare our students to be competent, critical and ethical users of information, lifelong learners and successful citizens.

The transition to active learning, transforming the school library in an extension of the classroom, is possibly the biggest challenge the school library faces. Also, teachers are aware that students must learn to learn and that the mission of schools has changed: it is no longer centred on academic knowledge, which does not suffice in today's society. However, finding

---

[12] Todd, R. (2001) *Transitions for preferred futures of school libraries: knowledge space, not information space place connections, not collections actions, not position evidences, not advocacy.* Keynote addressed for the International Association of School Librarianship, Auckland, New Zealand. <http://www.iasl-slo.org/virtualpaper2001.html> (accessed 30/05/2009)

ways to cross classroom walls and engage with new dimensions of knowledge remains as a major issue for teachers.

For this very critical aspect, the role of teacher librarian can make the difference. Placing literacies development in the centre of the School Project (School Mission Goals) is the first step. The commitment of key stakeholders such as the School Board and school staff seems determinant to accomplish our work strategies and develop collaborative partnerships with teachers to support curriculum activities, network and establish connections, create opportunities for cooperative learning and cultivate a rich learning environment.

Promoting changes in the teaching and learning process and placing the school library at the core of the educational process as an enhancer of curricular goals therefore depends on having teachers devising strategies, co-operatively exploring materials and resources, tailoring the learning experience to the students' needs and evaluating the impact of activities on students' achievement.

3. An approach to the perception of the different levels of articulation between school library and the curriculum: some findings

To confront the realizations and shortcomings with internationally identified concepts, standards and critical success factors of school libraries, in Portugal, a self-evaluation model and an external evaluation of the School Library Network Programme were launched.

The first one is in a pilot implementation phase, but the outcomes of the external evaluation were published in the end of June, with positive results concerning leadership, and the implementation and development of school libraries in such short period of time - 13 years.

Also, regardless of differences in school levels and time of integration in SLN, we have attempted at collecting regional coordinators' perceptions on the articulation of school libraries with the curriculum. We have done so by administering a questionnaire able to generate general insight, rather than detailed analysis. Regional coordinators are key informants with relevant grounded knowledge because of their proximity with and close monitoring to the field. They were asked questions addressing six specific domains:

1. Impact of the school library in the school;
2. Level of articulation between school library and the curriculum;
3. Levels of articulation:
   a. Resources
   b. Reading
   c. User training
   d. Information literacy;
4. Planning and development of curriculum activities in partnership with the school library;
5. Curriculum areas of articulation;
6. Perception of Pedagogical Boards' role within the school.

Despite the different levels of development across school libraries, a great majority of regional coordinators answered that school libraries have already achieved medium level impact both on school and on curriculum articulation. The extent of this articulation is variable, with a major incidence on resources and reading literacy, followed by user training and, lastly, activities concerning information literacy.

The vast majority of answers focuses on school libraries' plans and curriculum-related activities in the subjects of Portuguese Language, History, Project Area, Arts and, occasionally, ICT and Sciences.

In what the Perception of Pedagogical Boards' role within the school is concerned, informants were less optimistic and approximately 50% have reported poor relevance perception levels.

Data collected also suggests that school libraries in Portugal are growing in number and quality, despite case-specific differences. What remains central is a wider acknowledgement of the school library as an important resource for educational activities and, as often reported, the growing collaborative ventures joining teacher librarians and teaching staff.

Also, training has contributed to an increased perception of the school library's impact in school performance. A growing number of teachers and school board members undergo specialized training in different aspects of the school library functioning. Since 2007, SLN has invested a great deal in providing training and guidelines to answer school libraries professional development needs: a training plan was implemented, comprising approximately 600 modules; and an e-trainers course comprising 30 modules was delivered to multiply the number of specialists and foster cross-fertilization.

4. Future development

SLN has now been running for 13 years. As we all know, it is not easy to place the school library at the core of the educational process and make the school understand its role in student's success. However, findings presented here, drawing from perceptions, reveal that critical awareness to that role is increasing. School libraries are a privileged structure in the school, not only to access information - available locally or remotely – but also to enable students with critical thinking and the skills needed to transform information into knowledge. Moreover, the school library supports curricular development and plays an important role in training readers and promoting reading habits, which is a basic tool for formal learning and lifelong learning.

It is necessary to further increase evaluation practices based on daily inquiry and evidence collection, as the self-evaluation model already encourages. It is also necessary to link advocacy to action, demonstrating the impact of the school library on student achievement to School's Executive and Pedagogical Boards. It is, in addition, of utmost importance to integrate the school library's mission and strategic development plan in the school's own vision and planning process, engaging different curricular departments to generate good practice and wide recognition of benefits.

The recent formal acknowledgment by the Ministry of Education of the teacher librarian as a key element will help the school library improve its work and spell out its mission across school. At institutional level, it represents a huge step forward, but also an increase in responsibility for schools, school libraries and teacher librarians themselves.

In line with this school library strengthening agenda, it is expected that future policies continually reinforce school libraries' role in school and across pedagogical and curricular domains.

Biographical Notes

Rosa Martins is School Library Adviser at the School Libraries Network Office, Ministry of Education since 2000. Her research interests are school libraries evaluation and the role of the school library in the learning process.

Ana Martins is School Library Adviser at the School Libraries Network Office, Ministry of Education since 2001. Her research interests are reading literacy and the role of the school library in the learning process.

References

Acordo de cooperação (Agreement Cooperation) <http://www.rbe.min-edu.pt/np4/19.html> (accessed 20/05/2009)

Buzzeo, T. (2002). *Collaborating to meet standards. Teacher/ Librarian to meet standards partnerships for 7-12*. Worthington, OH: Linworth.

Costa, Firmino (2009) (coord.) *Estudo de avaliação do Programa Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares* [Evaluation Study of the School Libraries Network]. Lisboa: CIES/ISCTE

DESPACHO CONJUNTO N.º 43 /ME/MC/95 *in* Isabel Veiga et al. (1996) *Lançar a Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares*. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação.

Farmer, L. (2003) *Student success and library media programs: A system approach to research and best practice.*Englewood , CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Harada, V., Yoshima, J. (1997) Improving information search process instruction thought collaborative action research. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 3, 41-55.

Law n.º 700/2009 <http://dre.pt/pdf2sdip/2009/01/006000000/0087300878.pdf> (accessed 15/05/2009)

Lance, K (2002). Impact of school library media programs on academic achievement. *Teacher Librarian,* 29, 29-35.

Lance, K. Curry, L., David, V. (2003). *Powering Achievement: School Library Media Programs Make a Difference*. 2nd ed. Hi Willow Research and Publishing.

Loertscher, D. (2000). *Taxonomies of the school library media program.* Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Lonsdale, Michele (2003). *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: a Review of the Research*. Report for the Australian School Library Association. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

Portuguese School Libraries Self Evaluation Model (2008) <http://www.rbe.minedu.pt/np4/?newsId=427&fileName=ModeloRBE2009.pdf> (accessed 10/05/2009)

Williams, D A, Wavell, C. (2001) *Impact of the School Library Resource Centre on Learning*. Final report of a research project funded by Re:source: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Aberdeen: The Robert Gordon University.

Todd, Ross. (2001) *Transitions for preferred futures of school libraries: knowledge space, not information space place connections, not collections actions, not position evidences, not advocacy.* Keynote addressed for the International Association of School Librarianship, Auckland, New Zeland. <http://www.iasl-slo.org/virtualpaper2001.html> (accessed 30/05/2009)

Todd, Ross (2008) The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians. *The School Library Journal.* <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6545434.html> (accessed 28/05/2009)

Todd, Ross (2002) *School librarian as teachers: learning outcomes and evidence-based practice.* 68th IFLA Council and General Conference, August 18-24. <http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:ZIuzS3ZA4eYJ:www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/084-119e.pdf+part+of+making+actionable+all+the+information+todd+2002&hl=pt-PT&ct=clnk&cd=1&client=safari> (accessed 30/05/2009).

Zmuda, A,, Harada, V. (2008). *Librarian as learning specialists: meeting the learning imperative for the 21st century.* Westport, London: Libraries Unlimited.

Statement of Originality

This statement certifies that the paper above is based upon original research undertaken by the author and that the paper was conceived and written by the author(s) alone and has not been published elsewhere. All information and ideas from others is referenced.