School Library Self-Evaluation
A way to improve learning through collaboration

Isabel Mendinhos
Teacher librarian
Escola Galopim de Carvalho
Queluz- PORTUGAL

This paper describes the work that is being done in a school library of a Portuguese school, in the outskirts of Lisbon, concerning Information Literacy and its development through the collaboration with classroom teachers.
The experience we have been carrying out in the last four years is based on the perception that the school library, by itself, cannot significantly influence students' outcomes and make them lifelong learners. Classroom teachers must be engaged to fulfil this mission.
We will refer to the several ways we have experimented to achieve the best possible results in this area of school library work and to how self-evaluation has enlightened our way.

Information literacy, collaboration, school library self-evaluation

Introduction

Preparing students for the future is the theme of this conference. We have to educate them to be lifelong learners, critical thinkers, world citizens. In a world dominated by information, where knowledge is the main value, students must be able to deal with information and transform it into new knowledge. School can no longer be a place for "photocopy learning"[1]. It must be a place where students actively learn, by solving problems, by asking significant questions and finding adequate answers to them, by explaining to others what they have learned, using all possible means at their disposal in the real and digital context we live in.

In the Alexandria Proclamation (2005), information literacy has been considered "a basic human right in a digital world", promoting "social inclusion in all nations". It is one of the main issues of school library work and one of the main issues of school itself. A lot of research has been done on how to develop students' information literacy and we all know how collaboration between school library and classroom teachers is important to achieve such a goal. But it is not always an easy job.

In Portugal, the School Libraries Network is very aware of the importance of this issue, but many school libraries are still giving their first steps. There is a great need to accelerate. A major contribute to that acceleration is being given by the school library self-

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[1] This is how James Henri defined traditional learning, in his conference "School Libraries: All About Learning", presented in the seminar "Bibliotecas Escolares: Como construir o Sucesso?" (School Libraries: How to build success?), organized by Universidade Aberta and Universidade Portucalense, in Porto, Portugal, in March 6 and 7, 2009.

- evaluation model that is being put into practice, on an experimental basis, these last two years.

The Portuguese School Library Self-evaluation Model

The model considers four different areas: support for curriculum development; reading and literacy; projects, partnerships and community open activities; school library management.

In the second experimental year, all the school libraries that are applying the model were asked to focus on the first area, since it corresponds to the priority that the School Libraries Network (SLN) had established for 2008-2009.

The first area is divided in two:

- Articulation between the school library and the pedagogical structures and teachers

- Information literacy promotion

In each sub-division, we have several indicators and parameters to evaluate. We have to gather evidence to support our evaluation and the whole school must be involved in the process. This evidence gathering will allow us to identify our strengths and weaknesses, to determine our performance level and to plan improvement actions. The model provides many examples of possible improvement actions.

Even before its generalization, the model is already promoting change. School librarians are taking it into consideration when they plan their work and soon they will all be conscious of the distance that separates each library from the desirable situation.

This is, I think, a solid way to go forward.

An experience of Information Literacy development through the collaboration with classroom teachers

The school where this experience is taking place is a public school (grade 5 to grade 9) in the outskirts of Lisbon. It is the head of a group of schools (two kindergartens and two primary schools) and when we plan the library work and intervention we must consider this reality.

The school was totally rebuilt and the library was installed in 2001. It belongs to the SLN since 2002.

During the first two years we were very busy in training, in collection development, in organizing access to information and in organizing support to users. We soon began to work with student assistants who volunteer to work in the library and are trained in routine jobs and to give support to their fellow students.

The work of those two years gave us the clear perception that the school library, by itself, cannot significantly influence students' outcomes and make them lifelong learners. In

fact, students are very easily attracted to the library, they like working there and spending there their spare time, too. They respond enthusiastically to the activities we propose. However, if we want to form independent and competent readers, if we want to develop students' information literacy skills, we must work on a systematic basis and, therefore, it is essential to get classroom teachers to collaborate with the school library.

Building collaboration

The organization of Portuguese schools is not a very efficient one. Teachers are part of pedagogical structures that often meet. It would seem that this would lead to a practice of collaboration. Formally, it may look like collaboration, but it is not so. Isolation is still a very strong feature of teacher work.

We, then, began to think on how the school library can break this isolation and lead teachers to experience collaboration.

As we were aware of our students' weaknesses concerning information literacy skills, we decided to adopt a research model. We studied several models (Big6, PLUS, EXIT, Kuhlthau's ISP) and decided to build our own, based on the ones we had studied and adapted to our population. Then, we presented our work to Project Area Teachers[2], we asked their opinion about it and made the suggested changes. The same teachers were asked to put it into practice and we planned collaborative lessons with some of them. This was an important first step. But more than a half of Project Area Teachers were still not using the model. Why would this happen? The model was available in print, in CD-ROM and in the Internet. It was not a question of access. It was rather a question of training. Teachers are not all information literate.

So, we decided to invest on teacher training. Two years ago we planned and carried out six training sessions for all Project Area Teachers. The themes of those sessions were: A constructivist approach to learning; Information literacy - Research models/our model; Searching for information in the school library catalogue and in the Internet; Evaluating web pages /Ethical behaviour when dealing with information; "Explain in your own words what you have learned"; Monitoring the process to evaluate the product.

At the same time, we planned, in collaboration with the teachers lessons on web pages evaluation and on ethical and safe behaviour in the Internet.

Information Literacy Promotion

Besides the above mentioned research model, we participated in the group that wrote the new School Mission Statement and promoted the discussion on the importance of Information Literacy among the members of that group and in the pedagogical departments. Finally we assigned an important place for Information Literacy development in the School mission Statement.

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[2] This area of the Portuguese curriculum is dedicated to project work. Students are supposed to use what they learn in the several disciplines to develop projects they establish together with their teachers. So it is particularly adequate to inquiry-based projects.

We then debated and drew, together with classroom teachers (one of each level) an Information Literacy curriculum to be put into practice from grade 3 to grade 9.

We also produced a small film with our volunteers, to demonstrate, in a more attractive way to students, how to use the research model.

School library self-evaluation: first implementation

In 2008 we were one of the school libraries that tested the new school library self‑-evaluation model. Because of the work described above, it seemed very adequate to choose the first area (Support for curriculum development) for deeper analysis.

Evidence collection was done through document analysis (records, plans, reports, presentations ...), through questionnaires applied to teachers and students and through observation instruments regarding students behaviours when dealing with information in the library and also the products of their work.

The samples were formed by 20% of the teachers and 10% of the students. In this first year we focused on Project Area teachers because they were the ones with whom we had worked harder and also because these teachers are also responsible for other subjects and thus we managed to cover all the subjects. In what concerned students, we had two or three per class, randomly chosen. For observation we chose two weeks and observed all the classes that came to the library. We did that with the collaboration of classroom teachers.

After treating the data and listing the evidence from document analysis according to each indicator, we reached these final quantitative results:

Curriculum articulation with pedagogical structures and teachers – Level 2 (Satisfactory)

Information Literacy development – Level 3 (Good)

Afterwards we defined the following improvement actions:

- More frequent participation in the reunions of the different curricular areas, finding ways of responding to teachers' needs and proposing strategies for collaborative work;

- Planning of collaborative lessons (or sets of lessons), with other disciplines besides Project Area, integrating curriculum contents and Information Literacy contents;

- Consolidation of the collaboration with Project Area teachers, engaging the largest possible number of teachers;

- Enhancement of collaborative production of pedagogical materials accessible online through the school's collaborative platform;

- Further development of student's library and information skills, organizing training sessions for all the classes, with gradual level of difficulty;

- Further development of students education in the ethical use of information;

- Further teacher training in the areas of IT and IL;

- Production of more IL development supporting materials, whenever possible in collaboration with classroom teachers, in the context of planning collaborative lessons;

- Training of the school library team on the efficient use of web2.0 tools.

By the end of July, we will have the results of this second year of the school library self-evaluation, but we are conscious that we didn't succeed in all the improvement actions we planned.

Anyhow, more and more teachers come to the library to discuss strategies, to ask for advice. Many of them see the library and the library team as a professional resource, not only because they have guided access and selection of information, but also because they can get training there, both in formal and informal ways. This last year we have done a large number of teacher training sessions, concerning the use of information technology and in the area of information literacy. These sessions were very popular among teachers and I believe we have walked a large step ahead, since the number of teachers who collaborate with the school library and the frequency of that collaboration are clearly increasing. Nevertheless the existence of what Kuhltau calls "instructional teams" (2007: 49) is still sporadic.

Students are very receptive to all the activities that involve the library, either when they work in the library (individually, in groups or with the whole class) or when I (or another teacher of the library team) go the classrooms. They are progressively getting more skilful when dealing with information and in the ways they communicate new knowledge. This is evident to our perception and they feel the same way, according to their answers to the questionnaires. The results of the observations confirm their feelings. Teachers' answers show they are also aware of this improvement.

Conclusion

We were already conscious of the way we had to follow, but the self-evaluation model has made it clearer. We are getting used to systematic evidence collecting. This is changing the way we look at ourselves and the way others look at us. The process of self--evaluation is helping the whole school, through the involvement of its different actors, to perceive the importance of the school library in students' learning outcomes and in their capacity to live as critical responsible citizens in the 21st century.

School librarians' responsibility is growing. Portuguese school are now technologically equipped and school librarians are members of the Technological Plan for Education team in each school. Moreover, from this year on, groups of schools are going to have from one to three teacher librarian positions in full time. We have beautiful and equipped libraries and great work has been done since the creation, in 1996, of the School Libraries Network. Now we are meeting new challenges: adapting those libraries to the

digital world of the 21st century; making students competent and responsible users and producers of information and knowledge.

Making libraries indispensable to learning, making them available and accessible everywhere, sharing skills with classroom teachers, doing curriculum mapping with them to identify all possible ways of collaborating, making our students competent readers and information literate, making the best possible use of web 2.0 (and, in the near future, of web 3.0) tools... are the great issues of our work.

There is a long and hard way ahead of us and we must demonstrate that the measures taken (schools' technological equipment, school libraries and teacher librarians) are worthwhile, by actively contributing to give new meanings to learning and teaching.

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Biographical Note

Isabel Mendinhos is school librarian in Galopim de Carvalho School, Queluz, Portugal, since 2001. She also works in the Portuguese School Libraries Network as a local co-ordinator. Her research interests are Information Literacy and collaboration between school libraries and classroom teachers.

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 alone and has not been published elsewhere. All information and ideas from others is referenced.