

# Children + Young Adults + Information Literacy = Cooperation between public and school libraries

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## Abstract:

*The importance of developing and maintaining a regular and systematic collaboration between public libraries and school libraries is established. This relationship is crucial in Spain because of the precarious situation of school libraries. School libraries dedicate major efforts to reading promotion programs, therefore public libraries can collaborate with school libraries in order to promote information literacy programs. An example of this kind of collaboration is the program developed by the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez, "Biblioteca-Escuela" [Library-School]. Through this program, the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez works regularly with schools from the city and province of Salamanca to encourage and promote the projects that support teacher's work and information literacy.*

"[...] We cannot do too much in bringing libraries and schools to the closest harmony and cooperation, but they should be co-workers, each keeping its proper field, and giving the cooperation and respect due its associate, and not drifting into the traditional relation of the lion and the lamb that lie down together, with the lamb inside the lion"

Melvin Dewey, 1896

## Cooperation Between Public and School Libraries: An Overview

The importance of establishing regular and successful relationships between public and school libraries has been highlighted by the literature and professional associations. IFLA's *School Library Manifesto* mentions the importance of "liaising with the public library". In more defined terms, the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines* establishes several points that an agreement between public and school libraries should meet; different examples of areas for cooperation are also cited. The author would like to highlight two examples that connect to the purposes of this paper:

- Cooperation in the development of learning tools and user education
- Joint marketing of library services to children and young persons

The *IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development* remind us of the educational role of the public library, as well as the collaborative work that this institution should carry out along with the school library: "Where adequate library facilities exist to support formal education the public library should complement them rather than duplicating library provision available elsewhere." Later on, the same publication highlights the importance of the relationship between public libraries and schools: "One of the most important institutional relationships for a public library is that with the local schools and the education system in the service area."

In addition, two studies at the national level show the interest and importance this topic has had over the years. Bundy compiles several reports that cite the lack of school libraries in

Australia and that state the importance of developing school libraries in that country. The first of those reports is dated in 1934. Another of the reports, one developed by Lionel McColvin in 1947, indicates already the need for cooperation between school and public libraries (Bundy, 2002). In 2000, Fitzgibbons, as part of a national study in the U.S.A, collects and analyzes some of the efforts made by administrators and researchers to justify, plan, and start serious cooperation programs between schools and public libraries in the USA. She makes a list of recommendations at different levels: cooperative work among ALA divisions; connections and partnerships with federal and local governments; inclusion of this concept at the educational level for librarians and educators; and the evaluation and dissemination of results of existing collaborative efforts (Fitzgibbons, 2000). The same author insisted in 1989 that cooperation may be the only solution for adequately providing for the library needs of children and young adults. What is important is that the best library services be provided for children and young adults – library services that will meet their total needs including education, personal information, recreation, personal interests, and career needs (Fitzgibbons, 1989). In Spain, the topic of cooperation is linked to the development of school libraries in that public libraries cannot cooperate with an institution that does not exist. Despite this lack, Salaberriá dedicated an entire publication to state the need for establishing serious and regular cooperation between public and school libraries. He asserted that the poor situation of Spanish school libraries is not an excuse for not trying to establish action plans (Salaberriá, 1997). As will be discussed in the following section, the lack of school libraries has caused an “invasion” of public libraries by children and young adults as public libraries are taking the place of the school library in many cases (Ventura, 1996).

While this is not a new topic the author thinks that is not attracting the attention it deserves. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the need for cooperation is gaining importance as a result of the introduction of information literacy. This concept is affecting not only the library world but other areas of society, especially education. Lifelong learning is a transverse objective and libraries are not the only agents responsible for making lifelong learning happen. The relationship between the school, and more specifically the school library, and the public library emerges as a combined force that is able to achieve success in the goal of educating citizens for the Information Society. As Bundy states, “[...] there has thus been sparse attention in the literature to school-public library interaction in the last decade. In one sense this is surprising, given the whole of education contribution of both, the potential of information literacy as a cross-profession connector, and the increasing focus on the lifelong learner” (Bundy, 2002, p.13)

The article in 1990 by Mathews, Flum and Whitney anticipated and emphasized the important role that both public and school libraries were going to play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: “For children and young adults in school, the school library, which carries out its important role in structured learning as its first priority, also meets the personal, recreational, and information learning needs of many children. The public library provides the transition from babyhood into formal learning, the resources and services for personal information and recreation, and the transition from structured learning into self-determined lifelong learning. When both types of libraries are well supported, they can team up to provide a seamless information and enjoyment resource.” (Mathews, Flum, & Whitney, 1990, p.199). The authors compiled a list of needs that youths have and that public and school libraries could meet; from the list there are four needs we think have increased in importance since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- Preparation to use present-day technology and to adapt to a changing technological world
- Equal access to the marketplace of ideas and information
- The ability to think critically in order to solve problems
- The desire and ability to become lifelong learners

We have decided to highlight these four because they are related to the concept information literacy. When we think about cooperation nowadays, these four needs are essential. The importance of information literacy, the emerging educational role that public libraries are taking, the changes that this concept implies at an educational level, and the need for starting information literacy programs as soon as possible make this the prime time for the development of this collaboration that the author has been describing.

The complementarity and essential distinctiveness between public and school libraries are two issues to keep in mind when discussing the topic of collaboration. Several authors have stated this duality (Callison, 1997; Bundy, 2002; Salaberría, 1997; Ventura, 1996; Wolls, 2001). Bundy lists three goals in common (Bundy, 2002):

- Ensuring that students develop as information-enabled learners
- Providing access to a wide range of analog and digital resources
- Motivating students to use libraries and their professional staff for informational and recreational purposes

Czopek highlights three shared goals (Czopek, 1995):

- Ensuring that students are information users
- Providing access to a wide range of current resources
- Motivating children and young adults to use library materials for information and recreational needs

Differences between the two institutions are also mentioned. Callison distinguished among the differences related to the users both institutions serve, the development of the collection, their main services, and the primary role of the librarian (Callison, 1997). Evidently, public libraries serve a broader audience but children and young adults are included in that audience. Based on these common goals, authors like Fitzgibbons, Ventura, Omella and Fine have recommended areas of cooperation and have compiled examples of initiatives, projects, and activities developed between public and school libraries. In most articles, the difficulties of establishing and especially keeping these initiatives are mentioned. The major difficulties are related to the lack of time and staff, budgetary constraints, and maintaining an up-to-date collection. Fitzgibbons and Bundy emphasize another difficulty, what Bundy describes as “insularity” of the professional; the lack of knowledge that individual professionals have about each other both professionally and personally.

As mentioned before, the lack of school libraries in Spain makes it harder to create solid and permanent cooperation initiatives. The lack of school libraries, however, does not excuse public libraries from establishing their own internal initiatives to meet the common goals of both types of libraries.

Fitzgibbons declares that children and young adult librarians are essential for initiating and maintaining these projects. In Spain, public libraries have started to develop children's departments in the last 15 years, but the existence of young adult departments is still very rare. In some exceptional cases, the libraries hire a specialist that will "nurture" the relationship between the public library and the school system; this is the cases of the city library system of A Coruña (Salaberría, 1999). Some interesting initiatives have come from private institutions like the Biblioteca-Escuela program from the Fundación Bertelsmann; and others are from state and province governments, like the Generalitat de Catalunya and Diputación de Barcelona and their School Library-Public Library Laboratory (Omella, 2005).

### The Situation of School Libraries in Spain and the Importance of Public Libraries and Collaboration in Information Literacy

When he speaks about information literacy at the public library, Peñalver says that "these abilities should be transmitted through primary and secondary education<sup>1</sup>; the fact that both are compulsory assures that every citizen have the possibility to get this education. The school library, and the specialized professional, should be the agent for this education. However, the reality of the school library in Spain has been proved precarious that too often the public library take on a substitution role on the task of giving a basic education to the users" (Peñalver, 2000, p.243). A study of the current situation of school libraries in Spain was conducted in 2005 by the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez ("Las bibliotecas escolares", 2005). The study analyzed the roles of the existing school libraries and the subsequent report includes a series of proposal and recommendations to boost school libraries in Spain, at last.

#### *The Triangle: Public and School Libraries and Information Literacy In Spain*

For the purpose of this presentation, the author is going to point out some data from the aforementioned study that is useful to emphasize the work to be done related to information literacy and public and school library cooperation. The data is presented under three headings: information literacy, public and school library connection and a summary.

*Information Literacy.* We cannot say that information literacy programs are offered at school libraries because the survey asked for visit programs or bibliographic instruction activities, not specifically information literacy programs. However, the author is assuming these two activities serve as their primary form of an information literacy program. At the secondary education level, 45% of the libraries declare that they offer bibliographic instruction programs but very often the use of new technology is not included in the programs. The students declare that the support from the professional in charge of the library is deficient, especially in main aspects like reading recommendation and help with homework. The same students declare to have more difficulties using the library; more than 50% say that they do not know how the collection is organized and more than 70% do not know how to use the catalog.

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<sup>1</sup> Primary education goes from 6 to 12 years old. Secondary education goes from 12 to 16. These two levels are compulsory. Bachillerato goes from 16 to 18 years old.

The training on the use of information sources does not come from teachers but from other agents. Forty-eight percent of students at the secondary level declare that their teachers do not teach them how to use the basic information sources. The family and self learning are the primary ways that students learn to use the resources. At this level the influence of friends increases in importance.

*Public and School Library Connection.* The cooperation between public and school libraries has increased to 28% since 1997 but this relationship is still more frequent among school libraries at primary education institutions than secondary education institutions. The use of the school library decreases as the students' age increases, 70% of the students from the last two levels of primary education (10-12 years old) report that they use the school library and 50% declare that they go once a week. At the start of the secondary education level, 50% declare that they do not go to the library; not even once a month. However, 61% of students from ten to seventeen years old go to the public library to look for books, do their homework, and use the lending services. There are two facts that probably help explain this decrease and the migration from the school to the public library: in primary education the library is open during non class time more often than it is at the secondary education; and 75% of the secondary education teachers never go to the library.

*Summary.* When discussing the types of improvements that need to be made, the cooperation between both institutions is not seen as a priority: higher budgets, renewing and growing collections, and attracting new and retaining frequent users of the school library are seen as the three priorities. However, as demonstrated by the data aforementioned, students do go to the public library and it is not surprising that they abandon the school library: there is lack of support from the teachers, lack of interest from the professional in charge, lagging collections, and a lack of new technologies. We might also question the delivery and quality of bibliographic instruction programs that the school library is developing, particularly if students declare their ignorance about library organization and the use of the catalog. If the school library is not achieving its goals now how will future university students and citizens learn to manage themselves in the Information Society? This situation affects both university and public libraries. The latter have become substitutes for school libraries and see their spaces invaded by students (Ventura, 1996). At the university level, the expectation will be that students will have a minimum knowledge of libraries and information literacy; a knowledge that should have been transmitted by the school and the school library. Compulsory education is the key to transmit a minimum knowledge to citizens. Learning will be continued by university and public libraries, at formal and nonformal education.

The solution that has been presented to end the disconnection between classroom and school library has been the inclusion of reading and the use of the school library among the main objectives of all school department curriculums. Many authors at international and national levels have defended this approach. For example, Félix Benito explains that libraries can favor a new role for the teacher, as researcher; a professional that does not have to submit to the textbook. This new kind of teacher promotes cooperative learning and supports the use of alternative information sources (Benito, 1999). Bundy sees information literacy as the catalyst for educational change, not ICT or e-learning, because "it is fundamentally about learning how to learn and developing people able to explore those complex issues by generating those webs of

questions”. (Bundy 2004). The new curriculum changes will increase library use for both teachers and students. Public libraries can collaborate with school libraries to reinforce this new direction and to promote specific techniques that support a needed methodological change.

Mañá and Baró present the public and school library as “partners” in the task of training students in information literacy. Each of them brings something to this relationship:

- The school library:
  - The knowledge about the students
  - The motivation for the use of the library
  - Didactic resources for the training
- The public library:
  - More and varied information and recreational resources
  - Better technical organization of the collection
  - Better technical knowledge from the librarians

The same authors describe as essential the following points in order to create an information literacy program:

- Have a well organized central library, independent of the classroom collections
- Have a varied collection, including different formats and topics
- Have enough working space
- Have a librarian ready and capable of teaching to the students
- Have a training plan specified in the curriculum project, and a specific action plan

While the current situation of school libraries in Spain is not ideal, the importance of creating cooperative projects is key in transcending the challenges that a lack of school library partners may present. As is the case now, school libraries and public libraries in Spain have an obligation to youth to develop innovative programs to teach students how to navigate in the Information Society. The program that is going to be presented next is an example of successful collaboration between the school and the public library to create a program to train critical readers and learners.

### An Example of Cooperation: The Program “Biblioteca-Escuela” [*Library-School Program*]

The overall mission of “Biblioteca-Escuela” is to create a bridge between the school and the public library in order to collaborate and support reading promotion and educational change. This cooperation is essential in order to reach children and young adults who are not library users and to work with teachers to build common projects that support the goals of reading promotion and information literacy. The program is presented through a brochure that is sent to every school in Salamanca and other cities in the province.

The program has six lines of action:

- For teachers: through the Research Center, the teachers can access several services, for example bibliographic searches, “Al pie de la letra” (a free publication that highlights recommended books, webpages, activities for class...), resources guide for reading promotion...

- Special lending services: two lending services that offer a selection of books about different topics, poetry, humour, mystery, classic..., for ages from three years old to twelve years old.
- Servicio de Orientación Lectora (Reading Orientation Service): a visit for children from eight years old to thirteen years old that presents them the Reading Orientation Service webpage. This webpage offers them the best books for each age, short articles about literary topics, and several interactive activities like reading clubs, multimedia games...
- Library visits: four different visits for ages from kindergarten to seventeen years old are developed during the week.
- Information literacy: the program “Publicar en la web es...” “Dossier y cantar” is a program that targets young adults and its main objective is show them the array of information sources that the library can offer them as well as the steps to find, analyze, and organize information to create a new piece of information.

For the purpose of this article the author is going to focus on the last two programs: the library visits for children from nine years old to twelve and young adults, and the information literacy program.

The library visits are planned as an enjoyable as well as a learning experience for the visitors. The visit for younger users is called “Para lectores fisgones” [For nosey readers] and the other for young adults is called “Supervivencia en la biblioteca” [Surviving at the library]. Both visits are organized in a similar way:

- Presentation of the library
- Short video that presents libraries and ours in particular
- Ice-breaking activity
- Group activities that introduce the library, its sections, the catalog
- Wrap-up that provides a moment for visitors to share the results of the activities

During the ice-breaking activity the librarian presents the basic organization of the library, introduces the visitors to the different parts of the catalog record (information they will need for the next activity), and stresses the fact that these libraries are just for them; for children and young adults. The group activities are the most important component of the visits. Children and young adults are divided in groups and given different tasks related to:

- The library sections
- The library collection
- Basic reference questions to use the non-fiction and reference materials
- Basic introduction to the UCD
- The on-line catalog and the type of searches available
- The Reading Orientation Service webpage

While the students are involved in the activities, the librarian tries to find a moment to present the library to the teacher, especially if he/she is a first time visitor. When the students finish their tasks, they meet to share the results and show the other students what they have learned about the library through the activity. At this moment, the librarian is usually attentive to their comments to see what parts of the library or the collection have caught their attention the

most. This is very valuable information for the library in order to stay in touch with the students' needs, expectations and preconceived ideas about the library in a non-intrusive way.

The program "Publicar en la web es..." "Dossier y cantar" was created in 1997 and it was developed at the young adult library for students from fourteen to seventeen years old. The goals of this project-based program are to introduce students into the world of knowledge, to train students how to use library resources, and to teach students about information seeking techniques. What is learned is then used to develop a web page. The relationship between teenagers and technology is already well established at this age level so the point is not to introduce students to something they already know, but to use technology they are "enamored with" to teach them how to find, analyze and organize information. Students choose the theme or topic for their website; the librarian may intervene only if the library's resources cannot support the topic. Some of the topics the students have worked on in the past include World War II, flamenco, tattooing, ecology, and alternative leisure activities in Salamanca.

### *Publicar en la Web es...Dossier y Cantar: Program Structure*

This program runs for one full term/semester and is delivered to a maximum of thirty students in thirteen, ninety-minute sessions. The students are divided into small groups of five or six people. The materials created by the librarians are very helpful to support the search and organization of the information, especially during the first sessions. These working materials help the students to organize their work and the information they find, so they will not end the sixth session with pages and pages of annotations and a chaotic amount of information. There are three distinct stages of the program; the motivation phase, the development phase, and the evaluation phase. The development phase is the most important.

*Motivation Phase.* In this phase, the strengths of the program are promoted by librarians who talk with teachers who are visiting the library or who are frequent users. The librarians highlight the importance of the work done in this program, its usefulness at an educational level and the important role that teachers play on its success. Emphasis on the use of technology has been positive both to enroll teachers and to attract students' attention during the sessions.

*Development Phase.* The contents and the organization of the different sessions evolve in a way that keeps the attention and interest of the students. The first five sessions focus on the use of information sources and research in order to compile the information they will need to create the webpage. From that session on, students analyze the information and begin to create the structure of the web page, with introductions to the web development software as these stages progress. The following is a simplified version of the organization of the different sessions.

SESSION	CONTENTS	ACTIVITIES
1 <sup>st</sup>	Bibliographic work at the library Topic and point of view selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library presentation</li> <li>General approach to the work</li> </ul>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Basic reference materials I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information search in dictionaries and yearbooks</li> </ul>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Basic reference materials II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information search in</li> </ul>



		encyclopedias
4 <sup>th</sup>	On-line catalog and classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document search in the library catalog and identification of the library's classification scheme</li> </ul>
5 <sup>th</sup>	Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webpage search and analysis</li> </ul>
6 <sup>th</sup>	Final structure of the work I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitive conceptual map of the project</li> <li>• Introduction to the web developing software</li> </ul>
7 <sup>th</sup>	Final structure of the work II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select, extract and organize the information</li> <li>• Introduction to the web developing software</li> </ul>
8 <sup>th</sup>	Final structure of the work III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract the information to include it at the webpage</li> <li>• Introduction to the web developing software</li> </ul>
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	Webpage design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the structure and information at the webpage</li> </ul>

*Evaluation Phase.* This phase attempts to evaluate what the students have learned from two points of view. The first evaluation happens at the thirteen session where the students present their webpages to the other groups. During the presentations students share impressions about the work, difficulties they encountered, and components they would develop or change. The second evaluation is through a meeting between the librarian in charge of the program and the teacher. They can share their opinions and discuss the positive and negative points of the experience in order to review them and use that review to make improvements to program.

### *Publicar en la Web es...Dossier y Cantar: Final Analysis*

Clearly, the strength of this program is based on the interest of the young adults for new technologies and the motivation they find in the process of creating a new piece of information. Teachers express excitement about the group work aspect because it supports cooperative learning and action research. Project or problem-based learning helps illustrate the usefulness of library resources and librarian expertise to help students complete assignments. The role of the teacher is to connect the library experience with the daily work they assign to students, to stimulate and motivate their students, and to reinforce the relevance and importance of the topics covered by the librarian. Though the librarian usually expects that teachers will want to participate in the program; that is, that they will be present at the sessions, this is not always true. Over the years, the librarian has worked with teachers that do not collaborate or participate in the sessions.

The program has gone through changes in the content and main structure. The important change will come with a widespread development of school libraries. A step further will be to

change the structure of the program in a way that it would be carried out at the public and school library, complementing resources, infrastructure and knowledge between both settings and professionals.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cooperation is essential in order that public and school libraries will be able to better serve the users they have in common; youth. Successful cooperative efforts between public and school libraries not only engage critical thinking now but set in motion a way of thinking that will extend into the future. As with any partnership there has to be two components present that each bring something unique to the project. Information literacy initiatives and projects in Spain illustrate that although it might be a challenge to find a partner, innovative programs are still being developed and proving successful. As Adams states in his article on the topic of misinformation, we, as a Society, need citizens that “[r]ead more widely, see more clearly, think more clearly, challenge authorities on every occasion, more importantly challenge themselves” (as cited on Bundy, 2004).

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