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School librarians to facilitate an educational change process

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Abstract :

The educational change is not possible if we do not have access to this particular tool we call a library. In this scenario, the first aim would be to create real libraries, considered as resource centres for learning. Librarians are among the most well-positioned teachers to make change effective. The knowledge and skills required from school librarians to enable educational changes design a professional role for school librarians as mediators between information and users, who belong to the whole learning community. School librarians who are adapted to this profile will give a more important value to the role of the library in the educational process, and they will contribute efficiently to change educational models.

1. Introduction

In the countries where active methodologies are traditionally used in the field of education, it is not difficult to define the role of school librarians, so as their competencies, their abilities and their particular knowledge. Beyond the analysis of documents designed to rule the profession, that of good practices could enable us to establish an exhaustive statement of the conditions required to be good professionals, on the level of behaviours, and on the level of competencies acquired during training time and during professional practice as well. Within this environment, school libraries are naturally seen as lively places, as real resource centres for learning. Their aims are specific ones, and they are provided with staff more or less

important in number, and more or less trained, but always with a professional profile which has always been determined in relation with the particular needs of the learning community.

Nevertheless, in other countries, and even if their educational policies recommend educational methods based on active participation of students, changing methodologies has become a slow process, and in that way, we can observe that globally, the predominant method is that of transmitting knowledge, with the help of textbooks, which are supposed to include all knowledge available. In this environment, students are only supposed to be " receptors " and are required at the best to listen, to read, and to accomplish suitable exercises. In a certain number of cases, teachers propose students to do some work on a determined subject, for which it is necessary to implement information researches, while students have no further habit than using, and even copying, elementary information derived from textbooks. In these countries, school libraries play a minor role, or even no role at all, principally in direction of helping instruction, and all the more, of promoting reading skills and habits among students[1]. This type of school library, when we find it, is quite never supported by official aid, nor by policies impelling the transformation into an efficient resource centre for learning. There is no link with the curriculum, even if sometimes, the school library is mentioned in the centre projects. When there is a school librarian - generally a volunteer, without any legitimity - the later has no professional training, in best cases, he has followed a few Library Science training courses, and he can hardly count upon the collaboration of the other teachers, when he has not to face uncomprehending behaviours.

2. Educational change, without school libraries and librarians ?

Our reflection is centred on this change scenario, with the contrast we can find between pedagogical theories, and everyday practices. In reality, the educational change is not possible if we do not have access to this particular tool we call a library, even if many countries tried to do so, with a predictable failure. We must consider that, in this scenario, the first aim would be to create real libraries, considered as resource centres for learning, and provided, for that reason, not only with traditionally print documents, but with documents on other supports too, and with systems allowing free access to on-line information.

It would be necessary too to work on the training of the persons acting as librarians, so as to empower them with specific knowledge and competencies, in the field of information use. They must be trained to practice decision making, research strategies, comparisons between documents, critical thinking, with the aim of helping students with these processes, and of integrating them to lesson plans. This training profile would imply a double specialisation in the fields of Pedagogy and Library Science, which is compulsory at this time when school libraries need some prestige. For this reason, it would be necessary to establish clearly, within a normative frame, what are the competencies and missions of this new school librarian, what training is required, and what definitions must be given to their working time. We must not forget otherwise that any educational change is based on the implication of people who must develop it, and for this reason, it would be all the more necessary to provide subject teachers

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[1]As an example of this situation, we can mention the case of school libraries in Spain, a situation well known by the authors of this paper. Their work can be found in another paper proposed by Monica Baro, " La biblioteca escolar en España en los annos 90 : un enfermo con buena salud ". In Università degli studi di Padova, *Master Europeo per la formaziones del bibliotecario scolastico*. Padova, 2001.
http://www.formazione.unipd.it/fbs2001/materiali/023.pdf

specific training about the pedagogical methods based on active learning, on the valorisation of school libraries, and of their educational role. It is only starting from these changes in the training of school librarians and subject teachers, that they could work together efficiently. As Cherrell Shelley- Robinson says :

> To be able to function efficiently, as active partners in the teaching-learning process, school librarians must normally know the development of the curriculum, the educational design, and the educational theories and methods. In the same way, the training programme of teachers should include items on information skills, the role of the school library, and of the information resources available on the subject they teach. We cannot, as a matter of facts, expect teachers to train information literate students, while they do not have the necessary information skills themselves. So, the actors of the implementation of a change towards integrated learning, the institutional authorities should assume the responsibility to adapt training courses to workplace expectancies. Then, teachers could approach matters such as resource-based learning, the developing of information skills, and the planning of co-operative learning sessions.[2]

3. Can librarians help to accelerate this type of change process ?

It would be enough to have a look at the reference documents of the main librarians associations to establish that libraries must contribute to promote the educational change by providing educational materials and pedagogical methods[3]. At the beginning of the 21st century, the educational change has still for an aim to bring students to participate actively to their own learning, and to increase their autonomy in front of their learning requirements, while they are acquiring the information skills that will enable their personal development.

As a consequence, to match the previous question, it seems an evidence that we believe that librarians are among the most well-positioned teachers to make change effective, because of their strategic place, at the centre of the educational process, and because of the importance of the school library[4].
This professional can establish links between the educational staff, students and the community to :

- Develop co-operative contacts between the administration, the teachers, and the other staff of the resource centre

- Offer an environment suitable to learning

- Support smooth communication for the development of the curriculum, the educational strategies and the information technologies

- Participate to the administration, and collaborating with the consultative and managing teams.

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[2]Cherrell Shelley-Robinson**.** Prioridades y Estrategias para el Siglo XXI: la Necesidad de Educación en Información*.* Dans *1er Seminario Internacional de Bibliotecarios Escolares*. Santiago : Programa Mece Media, Ministerio de Educación, 1999. <http://www.geocities.com/crachilecl/ponenciaa.htm
[3]IFLA/UNESCO. *The School Library manifesto: the school library in teaching and learning for all*. IFLA, 2000 < http://www.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/guide02.pdf>
[4]It has been extracted from the first point of the first report on the professional competencies of the teacher librarian elaborated in 1997 by the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association. See in : Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association. *Students' Information Literacy Needs In The 21st Century : Competencies For Teacher-Librarians*. [Ottawa] : 1997, <http://www.cla.ca/divisions/csla/pub_2.htm#1.1>

4. What are the characteristics required from librarians to implement this function ?

As far as this question is concerned, we should consider two aspects for a response : on the one hand, knowledge and abilities to be developed by school librarians during their initial or continuing training, such as through their professional practice, and on the other hand, what behaviours are necessary to provoke changes.

The education of school librarians varies considerably from one country to another, depending on traditions[5] but nevertheless, the official documents usually indicate that the good school librarian should be a polyvalent professional, in the specific field of Library Science, and in that of pedagogy as well.

> " School librarians should be professionally trained and qualified, with additional training in educational theory and learning methodology. "[6]

4.1 Basic knowledge for school librarians

The main problem is to be found on the level of the initial training provided to school librarians. If we consider the model in which education and practice are designed for teachers, we should insist on the fact that specific knowledge should be integrated to the professional training of these future teacher librarians, and more globally, to the training of every teacher, whatever his specialisation is to be. As a matter of facts, the position of the school librarian in the resource centre as the sole specialist of information research processes, or as the sole defendant of the educational role of the library, does not guarantee good results. On the contrary, when the initial training is centred on Library Science items, the professional thus trained has too little awareness of pedagogical methods and of educational design in general. In both cases, additional training is necessary to remedy these lacks of knowledge.

Anyway, and as it is underlined in the *Guidelines*, training should provide the school librarian the following knowledge :

- Knowledge and comprehension of cultural diversity

- Knowledge of learning methodology and educational theory

- Knowledge of information skills and of the way to use information

- Knowledge of materials which constitute the collections of the library, and of access possibilities

- Knowledge of literature, means and culture for the youth

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[5] Dorothy Williams, Caroline Wavell y Louisa Coles. *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and learning : Critical literature review of the impact of school library services on achievement and learning to inform the work of the DFES Task Group set up to implement actions contained in the Government's response to " Empowering the Learning Community "*. Aberdeen : The Robert Gordon University, 2001.

[6] IFLA/UNESCO. The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines. IFLA 2002
<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/guide02.pdf>

- Knowledge and skills in the field of management and marketing

- Knowledge and skills in the field of information technologies.

4.2 Skills required from school librarians to enable educational changes

The knowledge and skills defined previously design a professional role for school librarians as mediators between information and users, who belong to the whole learning community. In a changing environment, this inter-mediation is still a necessity, with students, and with teachers too, because in most cases, the latter have been delivered directive training courses, and because they did not have the opportunity to develop skills or to implement activities linked to information research processes. School librarians should then find the way to transmit these skills and processes to all professionals working in the resource centre, and who must help users to develop these same skills.

The Guidelines specify that librarians must have the following abilities too :

- Ability to communicate openly with children and adults

- Ability to comprehend users' needs

- Ability to cooperate with individuals and groups inside and outside the school community

In that sense, the abilities for co-operation are necessary, for the co-ordination of activities with all the members of the school team, with the aim of preparing and implementing projects in view of integrating education to the use of information in the curriculum, and even in view of becoming the leader of this process.

> A curricular leader and a full participant on the instructional team, the library media specialist constantly updates personal skills and knowledge in order to work effectively with teachers, administrators, and other staff - both to expand their general understanding of information issues and to provide them with specific opportunities to develop sophisticated skills in information literacy, including the use of information technology.[7]

To these general abilities, we should add some other specific ones, which are essential to help the educational changes.

A first type of abilities would aim at the renovation of pedagogical methods :

- Impelling and facilitating activities centred on projects, with preparing and providing the specific materials for learning

- Providing teachers concrete experiences in link with the use of information, and prompting them into new educational methods

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[7]American Association of School Librarians et Association for Educational Communications and Technology. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Chicago : American Library Association, 1998

- Implementing the conversion of school libraries into resource centres for learning

- Developing learning conditions for the integration of information skills in the curriculum.

Another type of abilities would be in relation with the reinforcement of the role of the library as an effective training agent :

- Elaborating programmes for different levels, to facilitate the development of information skills, in link with the different subjects requirements

- Identifying the specific needs of students and elaborating adapted and diversified training courses

- Assessing the formative practice of the library and the librarian, in relation with students' learning, and with the implementation of new methods by teachers

- Using technologies as a tool to facilitate learning

- Integrating to the resource centre, programmes promoting the use of information, on the local, regional and national levels.

4.3 Behaviours

Nevertheless, we seem to give the impression that educational changes are impelled rather more through behaviours than through knowledge and skills that have been exposed previously. In this environment, the school librarian must be the one to promote, induce, impulse, empower, inform, demonstrate, and set up the experimentation, educate and facilitate with the aim of innovation for the whole instructional team. In that sense, the school librarian should be able to :

- Create links between the different teachers to prepare activities in the school library, to acquire and elaborate materials

- Maintain a proactive behaviour : anticipating the needs of the whole educational team, by proposing new uses of information in view of more active learning

- Consider oneself as an active agent in the educational process, by integrating the administrating teams in charge of the curriculum

- Deliver the standards of the Library associations, in which can be found the necessity of educating students to the use of information in view of lifelong learning, and with the mention that acquiring information skills is part of the responsibility of school

- Share knowledge with the other members of the instructional team, especially in the field of the use of information and the expertise of technologies

- Adopt a flexible and positive attitude when confronting changes, without misjudging innovations.

5. Conclusion

School librarians who are adapted to this profile will give a more important value to the role of the library in the educational process, and they will contribute efficiently to change educational models, so as to enable the process to feed-back itself. Such an education, based on the individuals' capacities to handle their own learning development, cannot be implemented without a resource centre to facilitate the process, and without a professional to manage resources, to make them materially and intellectually available to all, and to assume the capital role of leadership in the educational change.

In that way, the school librarian has a double role in the promotion of change. On the one hand, he is a specialist of the processing, the organising, the gathering and the delivering information, and he knows the information resources and references needed by students : this enables him to create the best opportunities for students to access to these resources, and to facilitate their efficient use within the instructional team. On the other hand, he is a teacher, and he teaches students, and teachers as well, to use efficiently these resources, with the introduction of new educational methods.

> These qualifications ensure that the teacher librarian is both an educator and an information manager with integrated understandings form both of the areas. As a result, a knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning styles is combined with a knowledge of resources and information access systems. This enables teacher librarians to undertake an active role in curriculum design, support an implementation.[8]

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[8]The Australian School Library Association. *Policy Statement-Teacher Librarian Qualifications*, 1994.
 <http://www.asla.org.au/policy/p_tlq.htm#TopOfPage>