



Filling the blanks: articulations between public and school libraries to guarantee quality education in Argentina

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118 — Friends or Foes - public and school libraries a force for change for creating smart communities — School Libraries and Resource Centers with Public Libraries

Abstract:

Argentina's National Teacher's Library (BNM) under the Ministry of Education, coordinates and supports with different resources, a network of public-access pedagogical libraries all over the country. Each jurisdiction develops cooperative work with public and school libraries from the area reinforcing a strong social and educational profile. We want to share with IFLA two cases in which, from different backgrounds and needs, the articulation between this two types of libraries working together can promote social inclusion through encouraging reading, information and knowledge access and, consequently, higher educational quality.

The lack of public libraries in most communities (except for 2000 public libraries spread throughout the vast country) forces scholar, public, educational and many community libraries -formed by the efforts of neighbours- to generate different types of united work.

REBIES: Provincial Network of Public and School libraries of San Luis

First, let's talk about the Rosenda Quiroga Library (RQL), located in San Luis province, serves the community by offering information and resources to future teachers. Despite being the library of the Instituto de Formación Docente (Teacher Training College), its access is open to the community. Its growth and new role has implied challenges, often difficult, within the College it primarily serves. Since 2001, RQL committed with its community by organizing the first Provincial Literary Contest and the Children's Art Competition, inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and sponsored by the Argentinean UNICEF branch.

Due to the lack of a provincial library-network, in 2003 it was decided with others Teacher Training College Libraries to create REBIES (Provincial Network of Public and School libraries) coordinated by RQL. It aims to knowledge democratization as well as the training of school librarians It articulates and optimizes the efforts of public and school libraries for reaching their shared patrons.

In 2004, RQL compiled official information about the state-of-the-art concerning school libraries in the province. There was no such data and, in general, school libraries existence itself was not a matter of official interest.

RQL developed various surveys that helped build an scenario. It was rather discouraging: isolated libraries, silent and hidden even within the same institution they serve, lack of recognition to the library and the librarian role, who served in administrative work, who participated in different scholar acts, who replaced absent teachers -all in addition to their "official" librarian work- books in never-opened cardboard boxes (sometimes complete collections!) all in a messy non-professional environment.

Given this sad situation, RQL called professional librarians to work in libraries in order to reverse the situation. Instead, they found teachers with labour change, beneficiaries of social plans and teachers in passive tasks (those who are waiting for the end of the process to get their retirement or those who, because of some sickness, requested a "more quiet" place).

Therefore, the outlook showed a lack of human resources - with no specific training-, as well as a technological, financial and building problems.

A transformation process began in San Luis. The educational system strengths were the starting point. The Aguapey integrated library software (created by the BNM and distributed freely), Wifi availability in all schools and governmental buildings and the possibility of free phone calls between educational institutions.

In this context, the Pedagogical RQL, as co-coordinator of the Public and School Libraries Network, made a commitment. A series of free training, approved by ministerial resolution in 2005, provided new skills and/or updates addressed to every person who performed functions in school libraries. The First Provincial Conferences for Librarians were one of the steps that contributed to the network construction. This activity allowed RQL to know the exact needs in terms of training topics. Thus, there were courses related to technical procedures for the organization and operation of the school library, information management through the use of knowledge technologies use, implementation of software Aguapey, reading encouragement from the library, etc. School libraries started to appear in the news and the network incorporated more members. The great response made possible, in 2006, the creation of the REBIES network, through Ministerial resolution¹.

Despite the lack of funding, different actions are developed in order to meet objectives, primarily, they tend to promote the importance of school libraries and the role of the librarian as information manager.

Including:

- An annual opening activity: after the start of the school year, a meeting is held with all the network's librarians. There, they receive a tentative schedule of actions, proposals are received and different topics are discussed searching for cooperative solutions. Reading encouraging and other workshops are determined at specific schools, conducted by librarians and teachers who do not belong to that particular institution. Given this, the situation becomes a novelty to the students.
- Video teleconferencing: in coordination with the BNM, this training approach allows librarians to participate in courses on different topics. The video output from the City of Buenos Aires reaches the whole country and is a great opportunity to meet state of the art advances.
- Virtual training: Its a signed agreement between San Luis and the BNM, in which the province gives the structure to provide virtual training in the use of the software Aguapey. Since there is wifi throughout the whole territory, many librarians can develop this skills without moving from their residences. This year, the third experience of this type will be held.
- Presential training given the importance and the presence that REBIES and RQL have in the community, ongoing training and workshops are required. In

¹ Ministerial ResolutionNo. 157 - MP states its objectives: to integrate all school libraries in San Luis, to promote libraries where there are none, to strenghten links between the network's institutions, to develop actions that contribute to the difussion of the book and the library and to provide training to its members. Any educational institution, public or private, can be a member. However, all of them have to compromise and participate in ongoing and totally committed actions that benefit the whole network.

response to this demand, a project called *Traveling boxes* was implemented. These little boxes include library materials according to its recipients educational level. The small collections are left in any school that asks for them and can be loaned for two or three months. The institution is requested to incorporate to the box material created by its students (story books, poems, drawings, letters). This enriched box is sent to another school that receives it and have to do the same. When the boxes arrive, the Pedagogical Library organize a workshop based on different issues that students are working (environmental care, the importance of good nutrition, reading encouragement, etc.). This activity can include, occasionally, puppet shows.

- School workshops: provided by the RQL in different educational contexts and destined to every level.
- Provincial conferences: RQL has organized a six-day activity that gathered San Luis and neighbor provinces librarians. Prominent figures from the Argentinean librarian world as well as network members present their experiences. In 2011, at its tenth anniversary, RQL organized the First National Conference for Librarians, “Library: uses and resources”, which involved 450 librarians.
- Regional conferences: in order to gain a further approach to school libraries reality inside the province, a regional conference is held. It gathers school librarians, teachers and administrators in rural schools, in order to train them in the librarianship field, highlighting the importance and value of the school library.
- Librarian meetings : held in school libraries during the academic year, it aims to train librarians in the aspects they have requested.
- Librarian of the Year Award: an encouragement award that RQL delivered since 2008. It recognizes the work of a librarian member of the network that highlighted its institution and community by his work, adding value to the rest of the members.

Library openings

- Book exchange day: the vast majority of books that come to school libraries is by donation. Therefore, the material is not always suited to students. Given this problem, RQL proposed members of the network to exchange books in public spaces. During the day, each participating member offers workshops for students, teachers, librarians, seniors from all kind of institutions. Different cultural events are held as well. This activity have a great impact on the community and has become an original way for encourage reading.

- Coordination with other community organizations: REBIES promotes agreements with different organizations to benefit the network's members as well as the contributing organization. Examples include: Volunteer Firefighters of Potrero de los Funes, Rataract Juana Koslay and the National Institute Against Discrimination (INADI, San Luis delegation).

Furthermore, the public “Biblioteca Pública de San Gregorio de Arenales” from Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla La Mancha (Spain), thanks to IT, has organized since 2010 with RQL intercultural workshops with members of their communities.

This actions are the beginning of a long journey. However, today it is possible to say that, in San Luis, there are librarians with targets and school and public libraries walking together to enhance their strengths in order to be up to the challenges posed by the socio-educational context.

Bibliotecas en Red – Del Viso Ciudad Educativa

The second and last experience that we will like to share with you today refers to a network of public and school libraries, tied together as part of the “Del Viso Ciudad Educativa” (DVCE) Project. Located at 40 kilometers from Buenos Aires city, in Greater Buenos Aires, this NGO tries to transform situations of social and educational exclusion. Over 80 institutions, including nursery, primary and secondary schools, community libraries, vocational training centres, agencies of the National, Provincial and Municipal government, families, social organizations, unions and universities, among many others, contribute to this program in order to improve local education.

At Del Viso, the social fracture between rich and poor is statistically the largest throughout Argentina. Children, adolescents and families rights with whom the DVCE works are systematically violated by this gap (unsatisfied basic needs, substandard housing, insecure jobs, living in areas with difficult access, dirt roads, floodplains, lack of public transport, sewer and gas mains). Although, since 2003, there have been countless advances in social inclusion and the improve of education quality all over the country, there is still a long way to go.

In this situation, the problem of school failure is incredible high. Population where the DVCE develops its actions have over 75% of youth who do not complete high school. And, even those who do, have many difficulties, especially in reading comprehension and text production.

DVCE aims to build a learning community in which everyone can participate, focusing on children's capacities and potentials rather than on their limitations and lack of resources.

It involves their institutions worries about the infringement of the access to reading and writing, the loneliness of teachers and the downgrade information which have a bearing on education.

Given that, among the many challenges that has arisen, one of the main is to encourage reading.

Throughout these years, the BNM and the Center for Research and Dissemination of Children's and Youth Literature (CEDILIJ) have been allies in this construction. In order to make citizens aware of their rights, to transform them into critics and main characters of their own history, it is absolutely necessary to ensure access to literacy culture and education, which guarantees not just reading as a technique. To exercise this right is an entrance to the whole world of knowledge, to violate it, its a synonym for exclusion.

Concerned by this structural problem, in 2007 the DVCE created the "Libraries Network DVCE" project, that revealed that **KIDS ACTUALLY LOVE TO READ**.

Many actions helped to reach this conclusion, between 2007 and 2012, the following took place:

- Creation of the network between schools and community libraries.
- Creation of four public libraries in the poorest Del Viso neighborhoods.
- Training of over 60 community reading promoters (children, youth and families from the same neighborhoods).
- Training (technical and support) for over 200 teachers and schools librarians.
- Reading community festivals.
- Implementation of the *Wanderer backpacks* in more than 30 institutions of the district as part of the Educational Resources Unit.
- Giving equipment to schools and libraries with books as well as other supplies (computers, routers, pedagogical kits, etc.).

Since 2007, a space for training and exchange of experiences between community reading promoters is being held. Each meeting, the “host” library shows its resources and how they work. The Educational Resources Unit allows: circulation of pedagogical and didactical materials between institutions, systematization of processes and practice regarding education, production of knowledge and its socialization by the community.

Many obstacles arose during the experience. Librarians and teachers, not trained as mediators but as mere library administrators, ready to provide books to students who ask for them, but what about those who didn’t visit the library? No reading was made in many cases. Second, working on reading for pleasure was practically nonexistent. Students asked books by obligation, to complete their homework, as an imposition. No place to discover the joy of reading. In order to see teachers and librarians as mediators, the encounter with creativity from popular educators was the main key. Not only by sharing from reflection and training, but also viewing students from a different angle at the community libraries. There they could experience a pleasant reading space, free, made by the same children and youth to be an enjoyment and meeting space.

Community libraries that cares for children, youth and adults in the neighborhood, trained for that purpose. At first, the resistance was vast, reading used to be a bad school memory for adults, there was also a great share of shame and fear.

After a whole year of work, such barriers started to fall, communities appropriated their libraries and began to use and enjoy them. Those barriers now are only found in very little young and adults, but never on children.

Broadening readings and the cultural universe (with films, museums, shared reading, lending books, etc.) was a challenge that implied working with both community educators and teaches. Therefore, at the DVCE, the joy of reading summons adults in order to expand culture, promoting the construction of tools that lead them to trust their chances of transmission and to recognize their essential place as culture subjects.

Short biographical statement regarding the presenter/s

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