

A School Library Guideline for Disadvantaged School Children in Brazil

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Abstract:

It is known that families and schools that work together can improve the children's learning process. Student's success is also related to social conditions and the quality of the school. While information ability is widely recognized as a key factor in contemporary education, the school library is not yet entirely associated with the development of informational competencies in Brazil. Though information literacy (IL) may be a successful device to master effectively the current variety of information needs in education, what to do with children whose educational failure is connected to parental attitudes towards drug use, environment of violence, delinquency and antisocial values? Has school library any relevant role in social situations of ethnic discrimination? In pursuance these issues, an experimental IL program aligned with social and emotional learning (SEL) was settled based on an interdisciplinary approach of school library guideline and social skills from international references (IFLA, UNESCO, CASEL) and national laws. Developed as an academic extension activity, the program was conducted in a school in São Paulo State (Brazil) during the second half of 2013. The population included 3 teachers and 100 students (6-11 year-olds) that regularly attended the program 1 hour once a week. The results show that interdisciplinary approaches may offer good insights on how to design standard school library guidelines for social disadvantaged children.

Keywords: School library guideline, Information literacy, Social and emotional learning, Disadvantaged children, Brazil.

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Introduction

While information skill is widely recognized as a key factor in contemporary education, regrettably school libraries are not yet entirely associated with informational abilities in Brazil. In 1930 Brazilian *New School* leader Anísio Teixeira had already described school libraries as a necessary resource for improving education but the nation never had a national

guideline for school libraries. The current situation is worst in public schools where are enrolled about 80% of the students of primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, public schools in Brazil involve low institutional quality, violence, high school dropout, and lack of school libraries (UNICEF, 2012).

However, a law established a period of 10 years for the universalization of school libraries. Hence, there have been an increasing number of studies regarding school libraries but few related to standards, particularly to interdisciplinary approach of information literacy (IL) aligned with social and emotional learning (SEL) for social disadvantaged children. The purpose of this study is to discuss the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary approach of IL and SEL program based on Brazilian Laws for Education and guidelines of IFLA and UNESCO.

International Guidelines for School Libraries and the Brazilian Outlook

We live in a world of information where big data increases the challenge for librarians to help learners to move from mere access to effective usage of digital information. IFLA and UNESCO have been providing international references and support for the standardization of school library activities related to different necessities of information. “Right to education”, “equal opportunity”, and the “reduction of dropout rates” of education are among the core components of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989, Article 28).

From IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (1999) to the draft for the new guideline for school library (2015), these institutions have played a vital role for the international standardization of library services. The school library values and procedures suggested have emphasized the essential skills required for a knowledge-based society. “Equity of opportunity” and “right to learn” are the fundamental values of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and core principles of IFLA’s second edition of guideline for school library:

1. the endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
2. the belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being;
3. the conviction that delivery of high quality library and information services helps guarantee that access; and
4. the commitment to enable all Members of the Federation to engage in, and benefit from, its activities without regard to citizenship, disability, ethnic origin, gender, geographical location, language, political philosophy, race or religion. (IFLA/UNESCO, 2015:12)

Brazil has 204 million people living in a developing country of 8.515.767 Km². School libraries might have a special responsibility for improving educational outcomes due to strong historical inequalities that persist notwithstanding over 26 million people have recently left poverty. Created by the Federal Government in 2003, the Bolsa Família Program (a national cash transfer), the commodity boom and the growth of the minimum wage helped to promote the largest reduction in poverty and inequality in the recent country’s history. The program has reached almost 25% of the population but the education remains as a national task for a sustainable growth in an economy still based on commodities. During the last decade, the

average income of the bottom 40% of the population raised about 61% compared to 3.5% growth of the whole population but strong inequality persists (World Bank, 2015).

Until recently, despite all efforts, we have neither a national curriculum for basic school nor a national policy for school libraries. This situation started to change with a national law that established a decade for the universalization of school library in all public schools (2010-2020). But the law did not stipulate any framework for public school libraries. On the one hand, we have not yet the sufficient number of school librarians. On the other hand, most Academic Librarianship Curriculum has little or none interest in school library training (Campello et al, 2007). Therefore, Brazilian school library staff is often retired teachers with no school library instruction.

Although there is not genuinely a national standard framework for public school library, Brazilian Law of the Directives and Foundations for Education (LDB) and the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) offer educational principles for school library activities. They express the context of globalization in a fast changing society and the consciousness of the central role of information in digital age. The PCN are founded on the two articles of LDB (Brasil, 1997):

- Art. 22 formação comum indispensável para o exercício da cidadania [essential common training for citizenship]
- Art. 32 desenvolvimento da capacidade de aprender [learn how to learn]

The PCN determine that the major skill to be achieved by the students after nine school years is “saber utilizar diferentes fontes de informação e recursos tecnológicos para adquirir e construir conhecimentos” [to know how to use different information and technological resources to acquire and build knowledge] (Brasil, PCN, 1997: 69). Diversity, cooperation, time organization, and student`s autonomy are core values for LDB and PCN (Siqueira, 2011). Shortly after the approval of the law for school libraries, the National Congress of Librarianship and Documentation in partnership with the Association of Librarians of Alagoas defined five principles stating the importance of school library and IL for a knowledge-based society in its Maceió Manifesto on IL in 2011. The Brazilian educational principles are aligned with IFLA/UNESCO guidelines and resemble ALA recommendations:

To any thoughtful person, it must be clear that teaching facts is a poor substitute for teaching people how to learn, i.e., giving them the skills to be able to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information for any given need. (ALA, 1989)

Economy & education

According to the International Monetary Fund, Brazil is the seventh richest economy in the world with a GDP of U\$ 3.259 trillion (up 27.2% from 2008), (IMF April 2015). But in terms of per capita income based on population size, Brazil is in 77th position with U\$ 15,941 (up 19.2 since 2008). However, the current per capita income per month of Brazilians was U\$ 351 in 2014. But 1/4 of the population receives financial aid of U\$ 10 to U\$ 100 through the Bolsa Família Program (IBGE, 2015). In education, although Brazil has significantly increased student`s enrolment rates in the last ten years – virtually all students aged 7-14-years-olds – only 0.5% are top in reading, 0.3% in science, and 1.1% in math. The country was respectively 55th, 58th, and 59th out of a total 65 countries in reading, science, and math (OECD PISA, 2012).

Accordingly Brazil is one of the richest countries in the world where public education is one of the greatest obstacles particularly for Afro-descendants due to the historical inequality roots from slavery (1530-1888). Although major inequalities are especially located between North/Northeast and South/Southeast regions, there are strong differences in educational opportunities even in South and Southeast, the richest regions.

So school libraries have an enormous potentiality in helping teachers and students by providing methods and tools to use information according to the requirements of our age. The Internet access facility does not change the fact that there is a general lack of instruction on how to use web tools and information to raise one's personal math and reading achievements. Nevertheless, School Library Guidelines in Brazil should consider our history of inequalities and the contemporary challenges of the public institutions where the basic ingredients include children disconnecting from school, regular incidents of violence, drugs, bullying classmates and other abuses from peers, teen pregnancy and domestic violence.

The consequence is that we have 98% of the students in school (4-17 year-olds), but nearly 92% of the 25% poorest are out of school, and they are typically Afro-descendants. In addition, 25% of the students that complete primary school in Brazil have low proficiency in reading and math. Another 25% can't understand the plot of a tale.

São Paulo is the richest state of the country, with more than 4 million students in 5.000 public schools. However, the last national education ranking point out that its students were placed in 10th place out of 27 Brazilian federal units. We have neither in Brazil nor in São Paulo State information about the precise number of public school libraries, but it is estimated that they exist in no more than 30% of the public schools. The major problem is that a large number of students see no meaning, not in school library nor in school.

Considering this situation, the question was how a school library could effectively improve this state of school failure? The answer was a program based on SEL and the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines, which highlights media and information literacy (MIL) competences, technology integration, appreciation of literature and culture, respect for ethnic and cultural identities of members of the school community and a critical approach of continuous evaluation of the program. In short, the program was chiefly inspired by the recommended function of school library:

The goal of all school libraries is to develop information literate students who are responsible and ethical participants in society. Information literate students are competent self-directed learners, who are aware of their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas (IFLA/UNESCO, 2015: 6)

Integrated approach of IL and SEL

Historically, school library guidelines have been focused in improving reading achievement and informational skills. In the data age, traditional approaches include how to locate, to use, and to design information in several formats. The 2015 edition of IFLA/UNESCO guidelines highlight “inquiry-based learning and information literacy development” (Chapter 1), and the integration of MIL in curriculum (Chapter 5). However, current environment in Brazilian public schools encourage an interdisciplinary method due to its complex situation.

Considering that over the last years child-development science has made noteworthy improvement in understanding children's trajectories toward social and emotional learning, SEL has been primarily designed to reduce violence and to promote a safe environment for learning. It was especially used to enhance children's social achievements by showing them how to overcome bad inner feelings related to social disadvantages, school bullying and family disorders. SEL may be comprehended as a framework centered on the development of inter-related sets of cognitive, affective and behavioral aptitudes based on the following approaches (Durlak et al., 2011):

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

The IL approach was based on UNESCO MIL – curriculum for teachers (2011), which emphasizes content, strategies, goals, assessment, and differentiated instruction of:

- IL for elementary school – integrating what, why, how to teach, and how to learn
- How to design a personalized IL program for differentiated lessons and students
- How to identify relevance in web environment
- How to use search engines effectively
- Learning how to support one another
- Copyright, copyleft, open source, Facebook, Google, CMS
- Educational tools, games and comics
- Digital citizenship and ethics in the 21st century
- How to organize time and information with web Apps

Considering that educational failure in Brazil is strongly connected with slavery and inequality that built the entire society, and that we have not had a library school tradition among teachers and students, we started with questions such as:

- How to respond positively to social disadvantages and family disorders?
- Consequences of my actions on society and myself?
- Is there any way to solve problems creatively?
- How technology can make my life easier?

The efforts to answer these questions usually had an especial impact on students. This is not a kind of stuff they experience in ordinary classes. Even the teachers showed some kind of perplexity that an emotion approach could be connected with IL, technology and social values. When the students were comfortable enough, they suggested the task they wanted to do. Some tasks were developed in cooperation with other students and the activities were generally developed with PC or smartphone, for example, how to make a good and secure search in Google. As students generally have classes based on topics that they perceive as having no connection with their existence, we used to work with a large broad of topics suggested by them. Firstly, we were more interested in developing competencies than in the

topic itself, and that was one of the most astonishing discoveries for them – the connection between different things by some elements' patterns.

As problem-solving and critical thinking are the most critical issues of learning process, we tried to help them to understand that information and a technical approach are crucial to any activity nowadays. For example, the use of marijuana and alcohol by children was a topic of strong interest, as was sex and pregnancy. These topics offered the possibility to learn about different levels of risk, protective factors, the consequences of drug use, poor school achievement, antisocial behaviors, and the possibilities education provides. We used information to show them the pattern of parental attitudes of violence, and the consequence of poor family management, family conflict and other community disorganizations. As they become more aware of the connections between their family history and history of the country, most of them started to be more interested in history and information, and how they could acquire more confident information with the same smartphone used only for fun.

In general, children with or without social emotional problems received well the activities and the content structured through the approach of IL and SEL. The teachers' commitment to the program made it possible to encompass a large spectrum of educational activities. It is possible to point out that a partnership between teachers and school library would have a great potential to make big transformations – for students and teachers. The teachers had no training in how to attach curriculum contents to an information process as suggested by IFLA/UNESCO guidelines. None of the teachers knew how to organize lessons including new technologies. They also feel alone in this challenge situation of trying to teach the importance of information skills without proper training. The three teachers have been teaching for the last two decades but have never had any information training. The strategy below outlines our pedagogical approach (Anderson, 2007):

- break class into teams in order to ensure they are receiving the appropriate instruction.
- personalized learning tools and goal setting throughout the program assessment.
- collaborative environment, learn in different ways, individual basis.

Our main achievement was the inclusion of the IL and SEL approach in the School Development Plan. The school has no librarian, but they started negotiations with the Prefecture in order to receive trainees from the Librarianship academic course. The school was founded around 1940 and never had a librarian. It receives students for a second period of classes because the students have no place to go in the evening or a structured family life. Students' family income ranges from U\$ 263 to U\$ 526 per month – equivalent to one or two national salaries. Parents' jobs include servant at houses for women and construction work for men, or they are jobless or in prison. The parents all have only primary education but their children may have a better destiny. As Nelson Mandela would say, "It always seems impossible until it's done".

Conclusion

The failure of the public schools in Brazil certainly will define the human capital and the lack of educational potential in the future. In the present, we are facing the growth of the violence. There were 30.000 deaths of young people from 15 to 29 years old only in 2012, of which 77% were blacks. Three characteristics are present among all of the victims – illiteracy,

school dropout and unemployment. As the 21st century schools are increasingly becoming a place of political disputes, the school library may provide informational tools to encourage public school to become a real democratic institution where everyone has the right to learn to learn. Scaffolding children toward a self-sufficient understanding of how to overcome social disadvantaged conditions through IL and SEL should be integrated into any Brazilian School Library Guideline.

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