

## Collaboration in support of library training

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### Abstract:

*International guidelines for school libraries and school librarians exist. However, the role of professional library associations in school librarian education has been largely overlooked. This exploratory study examines the role of professional library associations in Brazil, Honduras, and Costa Rica relative to school librarian pre-service education and in-service professional development. The associations are analyzed in light of communities of practice and the contingency theory of socialization. The findings demonstrate how professional library associations provide culturally relevant professional development that melds professional expertise and socialization. In studying school librarianship internationally, the author had opportunities to observe and talk with beginning and veteran school librarians, library educators, and professional library association leaders in Brazil, Honduras, and Costa Rica. She conducted an ethnographic study, and analyzed relevant documents about librarianship training. Specifically, the author had Fulbrights to work with librarians in Brazil and Honduras. In the former, she interviewed librarians and library educators in four major cities, and worked with their professional associations. In Honduras she worked with the Association of Honduran Librarians and Information Professionals leaders in refining a master's degree in library science proposal and in training country librarians. In Costa Rica she worked with the school library services director, interviewed school librarians, and observed in-service training for school librarians. Research was linked to Communities of Practice and Socialization theories.*

**Keywords:** Brazil – Honduras – Costa Rica – School libraries – School librarians – Library Associations

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The three countries provided an intriguing cross-cultural perspective school librarianship education and professional development, especially in terms of on the roles of professional associations.

## **HONDURAS**

In fall 2011, as a Fulbright Senior Specialist, the author reviewed the National Pedagogical University Francisco Morazan (UPNFM)'s proposal for a master's degree program in library and information science. This is the first time that such an academic program has been considered in Honduras. This initiative has been in the works for at least four years, under the direction of UPNFM Library Director Dr. Nitida Carranza, and has benefited significantly by the consultation provided by Fulbright scholars.

According to UPNFM's program proposal, Honduras has almost eight million people, with the majority under nineteen years old. About eighty percent are functionally literate, with the upcoming generation about ninety percent literate (about one percent of the total population are graduate students in state universities). Nevertheless, only sixty percent of children graduate from grade school, and the reading culture is not very prevalent here. Both public and private schools exist, and several informal educational pathways exist: the Vocational Training Institute, nongovernmental organizations, adult education, and training on the job. About seven percent of Honduras' GDP is invested in education, but eighty percent is allocated for wages, leaving less than twenty percent for infrastructure. Nevertheless, mobile telephony is nearly ubiquitous, which should be a major consideration for library services in the country.

While school libraries exist, mainly in urban settings, they are sometimes just small warehouses of print materials. Sometimes they include computers with Internet access, which infrastructure is a high priority for the Honduran government. Private school libraries are more likely to have current materials in different formats, as well as professional school librarians. The Tegucigalpa Bi-National Center library, for instance, sponsors field trips from local public schools to see their library and get some training.

The pre-primary through secondary school system is governed by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture (specifically the Honduran Institute of Books and Documents) provides short-term training for TLs (who are usually teachers). The United States Information Resource Center provides ad hoc training for librarians, including school librarians, particularly in the use of their resources. In addition, the Regional Center for Book Development in Latin America (CERLALC), a branch of UNESCO

(<http://www.cerlalc.org/>), works with the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Sports of Honduras with the mission to advance the development and integration of the region through readers building societies. The Center works with public and school libraries, supporting libraries in the region through training and research in social and economic value of reading and how libraries can advance their own community.

In addition, the U.S. Embassy in Honduras, which is held in high regard by the librarians in Central America, has supported library education for years. The associated Information Resource Center (IRC) is pilot-testing an online web portal to free resources, which is very attractive to Honduran librarians. They are hungry for databases, but usually have little funding to subscribe to them. This online service (<http://honduras.usembassy.gov/irc.html>) provides a very positive contribution by the US, and is an excellent investment. The Spanish version will be highly appreciated, and the English language learning resource will also help users become bilingual. The embassy also helps bi-national centers, which provide English instruction. The one in Tegucigalpa includes a bi-lingual library that is open to the public. The librarian there is an enthusiastic and effective teacher and librarian, who was supported by the Embassy to get U.S. training in library science. Beyond these efforts by partner agencies, library training is largely done on-the-job (UPNFM 2011).

The main driving force for developing the profession, including school libraries, is the Association of Honduran Librarians and Information Professionals (ABIDH). This national librarians association started six years ago, and provides valuable local training for its members, throughout the year. Their annual national conference draws librarian practitioners and educators from around the country and other Latin American countries. Both entry-level and advanced trainings are offered. ABIDH has worked closely with UPNFM to develop the master's degree program, which is scheduled to be approved this spring (Thompson and Adkins 2012).

It appears that Honduran librarians eagerly use some technologies such as databases and Facebook. However, there seems to be less knowledge about virtual libraries or the use of mobile technology. For instance, some database aggregators offer their products in mobile formats, which would be very attractive there. While bandwidth is a problem here (and needs to be addressed), low bandwidth solutions such as IM-SMS, compressed pod-vidcasts, and web-based tutorials should be explored and leveraged more. The country is close to having the capacity of providing virtual libraries with cyberlibrarian service, which could be very useful and interesting for the Honduran population, which seems to realize the impact of mobile technology. Even those who are not very literate or computer-savvy seem to see the potential of mobile technology, and use it to get information. The Honduran government, in collaboration with librarians, could provide public information such as health and other public services via mobile technology, especially for pre- and functionally literate people who depend on oral communication. In-person librarians can be located throughout the country to help with individual guidance, embedded in schools and other agencies. Both public and school librarians need to help youth gain the habit of reading, learn how to be independent learners, and teach them appropriate and pro-active uses of technology. This foundation can then accelerate and deepen university and informal education.

In short, Honduran libraries have much potential if they will take a broad enough perspective and leverage emerging technologies, as well as gain instructional expertise to pro-actively insert themselves in the middle of lifelong educational opportunities. The master's program

can provide both the foundation and the intellectual infrastructure to jump start this potentially significant contribution to Honduras and Central America.

For the last several years Honduras underwent difficult political and economic times. They appear to have stabilized now, and Honduras has re-entered the Organization of American States. The government has high hopes for telecommunications and supporting infrastructure to advance initiatives such as access to information. Nevertheless, corruption and retaliation among political parties still exists, and the country has experience national disasters and energy constraints (CIA 2013).

The best scenario would build on the continued success of ABIDH; if they can connect different kinds of libraries together, and create a national repository of information resources, they can optimize face-to-face and virtual access to information. However, it will be interesting to see how successfully they can work with different government agencies to financially support these efforts; ideally, the U.S. Embassy would play a key role. However, the U.S. is likely to reduce international offices so this important source of support may disappear at least at the physical level; even though online services and resources may continue to be provided, the loss of personal one-to-one contact so important in Honduran culture would stifle progress (Erickson 2013).

In short, strong in-country leadership is required to support education and libraries, which should be reinforced with resourceful out-of-country organizational partnerships. Only then will school libraries have material and digital resources for school communities, and only then will they have the technological and instructional training to insure physical and intellectual access to the information needed by Hondurans.

## **BRAZIL**

The following information is based on the author's two visits to Brazil, in 2006 under the auspices of the Sala Elizabeth Bishop program, and in 2008 as a Fulbright Senior Specialist.

Brazil's youth population is booming with a seventh of the population between 10 and 19 years old, with 18 percent unemployment (UNICEF 2013). Teens are "into" the Internet, video, and shopping more than reading (Souza 2011). A growing number are involved in drugs, gangs, and risky sexual behaviour, partly due to family instability and violence. Brazil has one of the highest teen fertility rates in the world (75 pregnancies per 1000 teens), and almost a quarter of births in Brazil are accountable to 15 to 19 year olds; by ninth grade, 30% of teens were sexually active (Bruns, Evans and Luque 2011). Many youth are interested in technology and in the Internet specifically, but few have connectivity, particularly in rural areas (Geromel 2012). Poor rural people are coming into the cities, thinking that they will get jobs and money; they find it very difficult to find work without literacy skills (manual jobs are very competitive) (IFAD 2011).

Most people do not have the library "habit." It is not a significant part of their culture, which is aural-based (Economist 2006). Therefore, librarians try very hard to make libraries welcome and relevant. Librarians are increasingly doing outreach work, such as publicizing their resources/services in public areas and offering events/contests to attract youth to come to the library and become regular users. Programs that focus on creative expressions seem to be particularly popular: origami clubs, folklorico, jazz music (Adolphus 2013).

Even though library systems are sometimes centrally administered, youth projects tend to be locally driven and isolated. There is a great need to coordinate program efforts within systems, and to partner across systems and agencies. Several libraries have started Internet access, although rural libraries sometimes lack even electricity. Librarians report that youth sometimes abuse the Internet, e.g., going onto pornography websites. There is a strong need for information literacy, including evaluation of websites and transformation of information (Adolphus 2013; Campello 2009).

School libraries and school librarians reflect Brazil's political and educational realities (Campello 2009). Youth are required to attend only eight years of formal schooling, and 80% attend private schools so public education is uneven at best. Most public schools operate on two-three shifts because of overcrowding and lack of financial support. With their independent funding, private schools usually have better stocked and better staffed libraries. Library practices reflected a wide spectrum of quality in terms of collections, selection, acquisitions, staff, facilities, access, instruction, curriculum, and collaboration: from poor, uncatalogued donations with little access to grade-specific libraries having rich collections, strong educational activities, and well-trained teacher librarians. While some school librarians provide high-quality programs, many do not have proper training. All too often "burned out" or retired teachers are assigned to the school library. Academic library preparation dedicates little coursework targeted especially for school librarianship. Most librarianship programs are undergraduate degree programs, which focus on basic operations.

In the past five years, several initiatives have furthered school libraries. Focusing on education, a national program in schools is focusing on improving reading literacy through resources, information literacy, and staff training. The Federal Council of Librarianship (<http://www.cfb.org.br>) and its regional and state councils are government entities administered by elected librarians to monitor the librarianship profession. These councils launched the School Library Project to create support for school libraries. Representatives met with decision-makers to explore the possibility of mandating school libraries in every school, with the resultant Law 12244 passed in 2010 to that effect – with the goal to be achieved by 2020 (Campello, 2009).

In the area of professional training, The University of Sao Paulo has a model school where pre-service teachers can observe good practices, including a school library program. On a practical level, REBI (Rede Escolar des Bibliotecas Interactivas) is a university-based initiative that has created over 80 school libraries that foster information literacy, reading, and culture. More systematically, the School Library Research Group (<http://gebe.eci.ufmg.br>), based at the School of Information Science at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, is focusing on school library research and education. In addition, the Federal Council of Librarianship holds regular workshops and conferences for school librarians, sometimes partnering with other agencies and professional associations such as IFLA, the International Association for School Librarianship (IASL), the United States International Resource Centers (<http://brazil.usembassy.gov/irc.html>), and the national bilingual centers. The council also links up with the biannual meeting of the Brazilian National Federation of Librarians (FEBAB) to lower costs and bring in more attendees. In addition, these professional library associations disseminate professional publications to their members, and publicly recognize outstanding practitioners.

Brazil is making great strides on several fronts: economically, legislatively, academically, and professionally. Since 2000, Brazil's students have made the most academic gains of all the South American countries, and the government spends 18 percent of its national budget on education (Ness and Lin 2012). Largely through the strong advocacy efforts of high-profile library associations and library leaders, their efforts are coming into fruition. Their older vanguard librarians are also mentoring younger colleagues for leadership. Their two greatest challenges for the future will probably be the continuing disparity between the haves and have-nots (which impacts both physical and intellectual access to information), and the ability to sustain the progress of school librarians and librarians in general. Brazil school librarians have the intellectual capacity to develop federated collections, services, and training, largely facilitate through technology, which they will probably need to do to show that the country's trust and investment in them is well-justified. Ideally, social media can facilitate collaboration and collective intelligence across the nation.

## **COSTA RICA**

One of the author's colleagues had long-standing relationships with technology educators in Costa Rica. When a national school librarians and technology conference was announced, the author was invited to speak at that venue in October, 2012: "Opening doors to education with technology." During that visit, the author was able to investigate the status of Costa Rican school librarians and their development.

Costa Rica enjoys a relative good standard of living compared to its Central American neighbours, largely because of tourism; ecotourism in particular has interested investors and tourists. Two-thirds of jobs are in the service sector, and the country also exports agricultural and technology products (CIA 2013). The high standard of education also attracts foreign businesses.

Education is compulsory for eleven years, although it is not enforced. Almost eighty percent of students continue to secondary school, although educational attendance is significantly higher among urban youth than their rural peers. The national government spends almost a quarter of its budget on education, reflecting its increased commitment to free access to education and to technology education. The Ministry has partnered with entities such as Intel, Quiros Tanzi Foundation, Omar Dengo Foundation, and the One Laptop per Child projects, which include technology donations and teacher training (Intel 2006). It has also developed a telecommunications infrastructure so that almost all schools now have Internet-connected computers. Libraries in general have tended to play a traditional role, so school librarianship has a long row to hoe in its over 500 sites (IFLA, 2009).

The Ministry of Public Education (MEP) is responsible for teacher preparation quality and professional development. Teachers and librarians gain baccalaureate certification, and do student teaching. The two universities that offer a bachelor's degree in education librarianship are the University of Costa Rica and the National University of Costa Rica. In 2008, the MEP established the Institute of Professional Developed, which offers the National Learning Technologies Program and the Digital Technology for Teachers initiative; the latter addressed access and use of technology. Although technology skills are incorporated into K-12 education, only four percent of teachers in Costa Rica do formal technology instruction (UNESCO 2012).

A couple of years ago, a strong leader in educational technology, Anny Gonzalez Gairaud, assumed directorship for school librarians within the Ministry. Although she did not have a library science background, Mrs. Gairaud has sought expertise and has tried to integrate technology into library services through professional development, significant partnerships, and acquisitions. For instance, at the October 2012 conference (<http://www.mep.go.cr/Noticia/index.aspx?cod=1456>), key figures from the Chile school library service, One Laptop Per Child, and significant educators from other Spanish-speaking countries. The conference itself was the result of the Office of Technology Resources integrating its four departments: School Libraries and Resource Centers for Learning Resources Management and Production, Development - Research and Implementation, and Documentation and Electronic Information. The conference also reflected ongoing partner projects such as laptops, classroom sisters, and multilingual initiatives. The underlying message is that school libraries need to become digital-rich resource centers (<http://www.mep.go.cr/RecursosTecnologicos/>).

It appears that technology partnerships constitute the main incentive for school librarianship advances, largely because of the MEP expertise focus. In-service professional development, emphasizing technology resources and services, seems to be favoured over collaboration with pre-service librarianship preparation faculty. That said, librarianship assistance is sought from other Spanish-speaking countries, particularly Chile. In each case, the work depends on educational leadership, personal relationships, and proactive networking.

## COMMON ISSUES

The following table provides some statistical comparisons among the three countries and the United States, all of which impact school libraries.

Sources: <a href="http://www.cia.gov">http://www.cia.gov</a> , <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a>	United States	Brazil	Costa Rica	Honduras
Population (in millions)	1343	205.7	4.7	8.3
Literacy rate	99%	88-91%	70-95%	80-91%
New book titles published per year	328,259	18,712	1315	290
GDP per capita	\$48,100	\$11,600	\$12,600	\$4,300
Internet hosts	498,000,000	23,790,000	147,258	27,074
Electricity consumption (in billion KWH)	3741	455.7	9.5	6.5

In terms of providing school library services, these three countries are representative of many developing countries, which face issues that challenge them more than further developed nations:

- Paucity of local and national publishing. For publishing to flourish, there must be a sizeable population of readers with disposable incomes. Many developing countries have high illiteracy rates and low GNP. Often the government infrastructure for schools and libraries, which would be significant stockers of publications, are

underfunded or lack capacity. Competent writers are more likely to get educated and published abroad.

- Uneven electricity and other public utilities guaranteeing technology infrastructure. In some cases, governments are unstable or have little revenue to support public utilities, which are needed to operate libraries. In other cases, the country's terrain or climate hinders construction and delivery of such service; for instance, jungles impede communication.
- Under-developed or non-existent professional training in library science. Some countries have very low education levels; furthermore, library science might not be highly valued in comparison with other professions such as health and business. In fact, some countries such as Honduras, have no formal library science program at the university level so that would-be librarians have to get training in other countries, which requires substantial personal expense: another economic barrier. Costa Rica has no school library tract in their librarianship academic training, and Brazil has only started such a track in the last few years.
- Lack of a reading culture. All three countries have strong oral and visual traditions rather than a written one. Music and crafts are popular in these countries, but museums are not. In all three countries, creative expression is valued, but archives are not as important; the emphasis is now-oriented rather than long-term.

Nevertheless, several other factors can help these countries leapfrog over some of their existing limitations or constraints:

- Low-cost computers and smart cell phones powered by alternative energy (e.g., solar, manual). The three countries all have active cell phone businesses. Information can be produced and disseminated digitally.
- International satellite Internet connectivity. Countries do not have to construct labour-intensive communication land lines across the land.
- Governmental support – or partnered initiatives -- for educational technology, which can be leveraged for school librarianship programs.
- Globalization efforts in library science professional development. Pre-service librarians can gain access to library science courses virtually from any place that has Internet connectivity.
- Local production of information resources. With free and low-cost social media, students and other members of the public can generate and disseminate digital information, which librarians can collect, organize and provide access to.

In short, government stability and priorities, economic capacity, land features, communication infrastructure, educational situations, literacy practices, and cultural traditions all impact the current school library situation, and are likely predictors of conditions that future school libraries have to address. Technology appears to be an effective way to solicit support of school libraries, which may need to be reconceptualized as information resource centers. In any case, the intellectual capacity and resourcefulness of dedicated school librarians who are responsive to their communities and network effectively can override obstacles.

## HOW TO GAIN FOOTAGE

The research about these Latin American school librarians revealed a refreshed definition of school libraries that is culturally contextualized. No one path exists for developing school librarians, but rather school librarians need to leverage the socio-politico-cultural aspects of their countries, as well as partner with influential entities, to advance the universal values and practices of their profession and its services.

School librarians need to work closely with their communities to assess local needs and interests as well as available resources. School librarians need to take leadership roles in identifying what local resources need to be developed as well, and then collecting, organizing, and making available those locally-produced resources as part of the library's collection. As well as physical access to the collection, school librarians need to provide intellectual access to these resources by working with users directly and also with educators to integrate literacies (reading, technology, information, cultural) into teaching and learning. This role necessitates librarianship preparation programs including educational issues into their curriculum.

Efforts and partnerships of school librarians gain more traction when the government and public at large value school libraries; even so, school librarians will need to advocate more effectively than ever in light of country priorities and the misperception that "everything is free and available on the Internet." It should be noted that digital citizenship has become more important these days, partly because the public has witnessed more cybercrime and online dangers to youth; school librarians have the expertise to instruct students in safe and responsible technology use, so they have the potential to leverage digital use in their favor. The Internet also signals warnings about devaluation of reading; school librarians need to show how a variety of literacies are required – and how the school library can collect these resources and instruct students in their effective use. Indeed, school librarians have to re-educate the public, and themselves, as to the nature of school libraries: the expansion of their resources and access to them, the expansion of their instructional role, and the expansion of the nature of literacies. If, on the other hand, school librarians do not pro-actively take charge and vanguard changing needs, in the worst case scenario, school libraries and school librarians will disappear.

The need for school librarian and library standards – and professional development to support those standards – has become a strong desire among librarians in these developing countries. By leveraging their cultural assets, school librarians can optimize their own value as they provide relevant information that will prepare students to contribute to their own society as well as the Information Society as a whole. It will be interesting to see how school librarians will be able to gauge and take advantage of political and economic situations to address the needs of their school communities, and work collaboratively within and across their countries to deliver the resources and services needed in the future.

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