

The issue of media literacy in Portuguese school libraries: data inspire action

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Abstract:

Launched in 1996, the School Libraries Network Program aims to install and develop libraries, making available to users the necessary resources for reading, accessing, using and producing information in print, electronic and digital media. It bases its work on three structural documents - the 2014-2020 Strategic Policy, the Learning with the School Library Framework, and the School Library Evaluation Model.

The Framework, a key instrument in supporting the curriculum, has proven to be a motivating tool for the development of collaborative work on a cross curricular approach to learning and 21st century literacies training (reading, information and media).

Based on the Framework Implementation Report, which has been carried out annually since 2012, it has been possible to access data regarding the participating schools, the curricular areas involved in the process and the distribution of activities by the literacy areas (reading, media and information). This systematic gathering of information led to the identification of a critical issue, because it corresponds to the persistence of a trend: there is an uneven distribution of activities by the three areas of literacy and media literacy is clearly the one that is less addressed.

In order to solve the above-mentioned problem, the intervention strategies designed by the School Libraries Network have involved raising awareness of teacher librarians and training them for a more consistent and confident approach to media literacy. These strategies were planned and developed in four axes:

- 1. Teacher training;*
- 2. Creation of web tools to support the work of teachers;*
- 3. Creation of activities for students;*
- 4. Establishing partnerships.*

In conclusion, through a diachronic data analysis, the SLN has managed to design actions that aim to increase the quantity and quality of media literacy activities in Portuguese schools.

Keywords: Data; School Library Framework; media literacy; curriculum.

Launched in 1996 by the Ministries of Education and Culture, the School Libraries Network Programme, aims to install and develop libraries, making available to users the necessary resources for reading, accessing, using and producing information in print, electronic and digital media.

The Programme manages and articulates the work of 2507 school libraries in public schools at all levels of education.

There are 1365 teacher librarians who ensure the functioning and management of libraries, the activities of articulation with the curriculum, the training of readers and the development of 21st-century literacies in each school cluster.

On the top of this organization, there is a coordinating office, under the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Education, and, in the intermediate level, a set of advisors who, covering the entire national territory, support and supervise the work carried out by school libraries in the field.

The School Libraries Network Programme bases its work on three structuring documents - the 2014-2020 Strategic Policy, the School Library Evaluation Model, and the Learning with the School Library Framework (hereafter referred to as Framework).

In the schools where it has been applied, the Framework - a key instrument in supporting the curriculum and the training of different literacies (reading, media and information) - has proven to be a motivating tool for the promotion of collaborative work and transversal learning and for the development of skills and knowledge.

In order to collect information on different aspects of the school libraries functioning, which allows for the planning of future actions to improve the services provided, the School Libraries Network (SLN) launches the annual Database Survey.

This survey is carried out in two distinct phases: at the beginning of the school year, it aims to update data on material and human resources; at the end of the year, libraries are questioned about the activities carried out, namely the implementation of the *Learning with the School Library Framework*.

Chart 1 shows the growth curve of the adoption of this collaborative work tool in our schools, from its launch to the last school year.

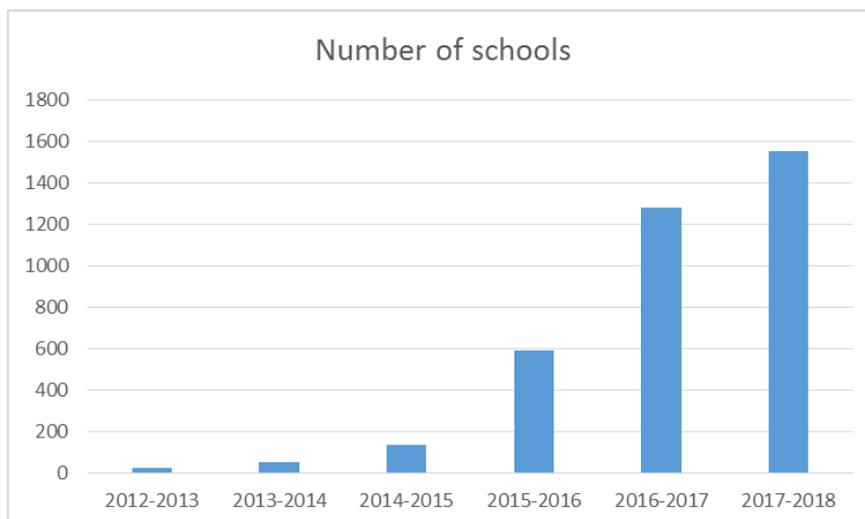


Chart 1

In the first three years, a pilot experiment was carried out to apply the framework, first with twenty-five schools, then with fifty and finally with one hundred and thirty-five. The aim of this experiment was to assess the document's potential in terms of the libraries' work with the curriculum teachers, and to determine the aspects that needed to be changed or improved in the document.

In 2015, the application of the Framework entered a free regime. Even so, the SLN Office applied a questionnaire to libraries in order to maintain some monitoring. From 2016, this questionnaire was reduced to the essentials and included, as a section, in the general SLN Database Survey.

Through this systematic data collection, it was observed that the use of the Framework Learning with the School Library has expanded significantly and in 2017-2018, it was already implemented in 1552 schools of all levels of education.

Based on the Implementation Report of the Framework Learning with the School Library, held annually since 2012, it has been possible to have access not only to the figures relating to the participating schools, but also to those involved in the process and to the distribution of activities among the literacy areas, the levels at which the document was most used and the subjects and areas with which there was more collaboration.

One of the aspects to which attention is given each year is the distribution of activities by area of literacy.

From the analysis of the reports of those years (three of the pilot experience - chart 2 - and three of the free and more generalised application - chart 3), resulting from the collection of data from the participating schools, the distribution of activities by literacy area was as follows:

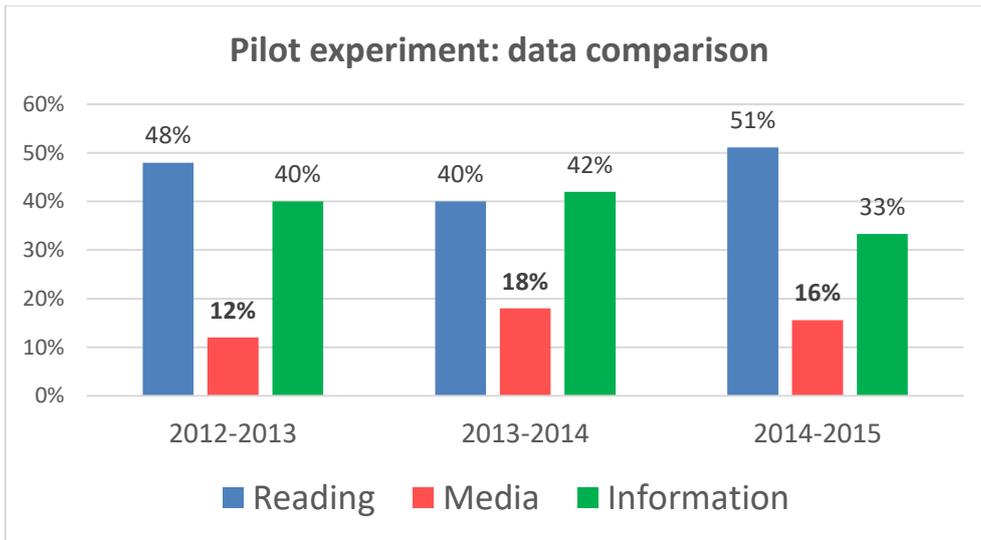


Chart 2

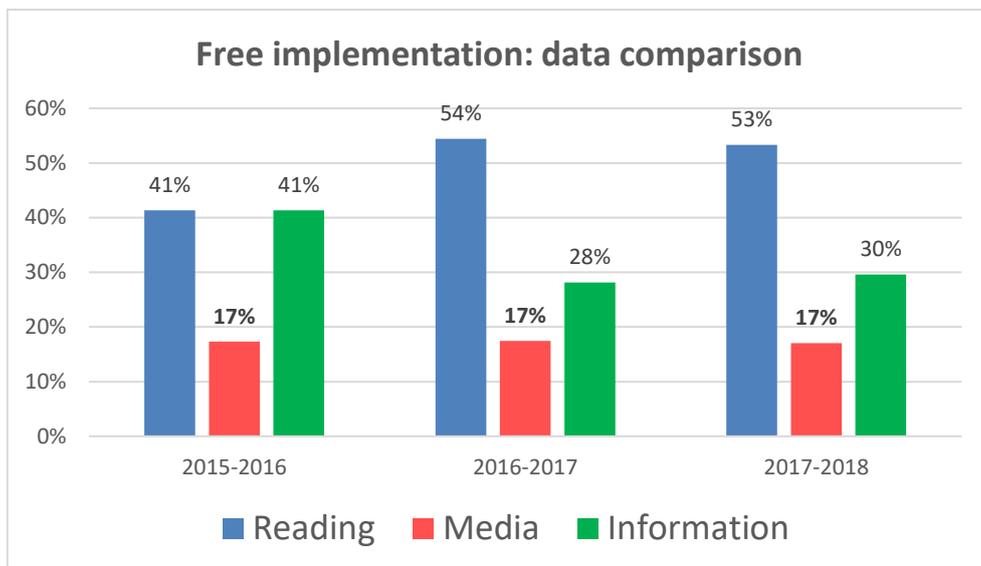


Chart 3

These data brought to light a situation that we considered critical, because it corresponds to the persistence of a trend: there is an uneven distribution of activities by the three areas of literacy, and media literacy is clearly the one that is less addressed. This tendency stabilized in a very inexpressive value in the last three years of free implementation of the Framework.

The analysis of these national data inspired the in-depth reflection of the School Libraries Network. In addition to the internal debate within the SLN Office, regular support from school library advisors enabled the identification of needs and aspects for improvement. The conclusions of the reflection on these findings were disseminated to educational communities, partners and other entities and served as a basis for decision-making on the further development and sustainability of the increasingly widespread use of this Framework, namely in the area of media literacy.

The Framework is an instrument which is perfectly aligned with the IFLA School Library Guidelines (2015) when they state that “School librarians agree with the importance of having a systematic framework for teaching media and information skills, and they contribute to the enhancement of students’ skills through collaborative work with teachers.” (p.41). Considering the above-mentioned analysis, it has been considered a priority to adopt specific measures to overcome this weak point identified in the work of Portuguese school libraries.

So, in the last few years, the intervention strategies designed by the School Libraries Network in order to solve the problem have involved raising the awareness of teacher librarians about the importance of media literacy in students’ education and training them for a more consistent and confident approach to media literacy. These strategies were planned and developed in four axes:

1. Teacher training: Provision of more than fifty training actions in articulation with existing teacher training centres at local level, targeting not only teacher librarians, but also teachers of different disciplines, promoting collaborative work among them, curricular articulation and the development of skills, attitudes and values advocated in the *Students’ Profile at the End of Compulsory Education* (the guiding document for the Portuguese K-12 education, published in 2017);

2. Creation of resources and recommendation of web tools to support the work of teachers:

Saber usar os media [Be Media Savvy] – This website is intended to support an approach to media literacy in the three dimensions considered in the Framework: *know*; *think about*; *produce*. Suggestions of activities, structured according to the same methodology, are presented to allow an easy approach. All of them refer to standards defined in the framework. Some possible connections with the curriculum are also proposed. There are suggestions for all the five levels of K-12 education- <https://media-rbe.webnode.pt/>

Aprender digital [Digital learning] – This website presents a selection of digital tools that may enhance the development of reading, media and information literacy and was created to facilitate the work of teacher librarians in the choice of those tools. - <https://aprender-digital8.webnode.pt>

MILD Manual de Instruções de Literacia Digital [MILD Digital Literacy Handbook] – This website was created to develop the skills of young people aged 14-18 in the fields of digital reading, media and citizenship. It presents a set of resources and activities organized in eight areas which can be used both in formal and informal learning contexts, in the school library, in the classroom or independently by young people - <https://mild.rbe.mec.pt>

3. Creation of activities for students:

Media@ção [Medi@ction] **Contest** (taking place annually):

This is a joint initiative of the School Libraries Network and several other governmental and non-governmental entities: General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (SGPCM) in partnership with the National Commission of UNESCO (CNU), the General Department for Education (DGE), the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), the PT Foundation (FPT) and the National Reading Plan 2027 (PNL2027).

The purpose of the competition is to contribute to fostering the critical, responsible and creative use of media, as well as the exercise of freedom of expression in educational communities, particularly in students. The theme of the 2019 edition was *Media, democracy and tolerance*. The theme is common to both categories - 1st/2nd cycle and 3rd cycle/secondary - and can be

approached from multiple perspectives: How to prevent hate speech? How to promote tolerance in the media? How to use the media for citizenship?

4. Establishing partnerships

7 Dias com os Media [7 Days with the Media] (held annually):

The Informal Group on Media Literacy in which the SLN takes part, holds the *7 Dias com os Media* initiative, inviting schools and especially school libraries to join this week. All the activities and projects included in it are aimed at training students for a more competent and critical use of social networks.

It is expected that this combination of actions will lead to increased motivation and growing capacity, through an easier access to suggestions and resources, allowing teacher librarians to feel more confident in addressing the multiple facets of media literacy in their schools, in collaboration with curriculum teachers.

Thus, we will also be contributing to improve the results in all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by “Promoting universal literacy, including media and information literacy, and digital literacy skills;” (in Toolkit: Libraries and implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda, p. 14).

The systematic collection of annual data will enable us to assess the effectiveness of these measures, and it is already planned to include in the SLN Database Survey issues relating to the use, by school libraries, of the resources suggested on the different support sites that the SLN provides.

The School Libraries Network is well aware that, supported by data, we think better and plan more effective improvement actions.

Acknowledgments

To Isabel Mendinhos, inspiring friend.

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