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Advocacy: building skills and competencies in Brazil

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Abstract:

Libraries associations in Latin America and the Caribbean are distinct from other regions of the world, especially if compared to North America and Europe. This is due to several reasons both for the area of Librarianship and Information Science because it is not a cultural trait to work in the associative movement, nor for the lack of public policies for the area of culture and education that lead to discourage people to work for a specific cause. In Brazil, the vast majority of professionals work in Governmental agencies that also have an organizational culture and makes librarians almost not perceive themselves as an area but as part of the public service. This labour market also impacts on the curricula of training schools that do not discuss or stimulate discussions about advocacy and leadership. The members of the associations and therefore of their boards need to deal with other issues that are far from daily routine of libraries, regardless of type: academic, public, specialized, school, parliamentary and national libraries. Being in the associative movement means developing or enhancing a range of skills that will enable you to develop outstanding leadership in the country's librarian community. Based on the experience acquired by Brazilian Federation of Libraries

Association and Institutions (FEBAB) in the construction of the “Santiago Declaration” launched in 2018, it reaffirmed the need for professionals to be prepared to be in the places that will actually decide the life of the libraries. Based on Core Competencies for 21st Century CARL Librarians of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (2010), ALA's Core Competencies of Librarianship (2008) and The Library and Information Sector: Core Knowledge, Skills and Attributes published by Australian Library and Information Association (2014) will define a set of competencies that we consider appropriate to Brazilian context.

Keywords: Advocacy skills, Leadership, Brazilian Federation of Libraries.

Introduction

The term “advocacy” in Brazil has used by the third sector, and it is defined as “lobby of the good”. Because of the practice of politicians in Brazil, the term lobby has a negative connotation. Lobbies in Brazil are characterized by practices of interest that do not benefit society as a whole but rather a specific group. Thus, the term advocacy would be this “advocacy of the good” once the public reached, and the expected results would have an achievement that would indeed contribute to the construction of a more just society. For the area of Librarianship and Information Science, the term that is also being used in its English form began to be disseminated by Brazilian Federation of Library Association and Institutions (FEBAB) in 2012 from the translation of the Library Advocate's Handbook (ALA, 2008a; ALA, 2008b), initially produced by the American Library Association (ALA). On occasion, FEBAB, in partnership with the American Consulate in Brazil and NGO SP Leituras – Organização Social de Cultura do Estado de São Paulo (SP Readings - Social Organization of Culture of the State of São Paulo), promoted a course with Marci Meriola, Director of the ALA Advocacy Office, attended by professionals from the State of São Paulo.

From that date, FEBAB promoted lectures in librarianship schools and also with professionals disseminating the importance of the librarian to recognize as the most critical “link” of the chain of good to promote libraries and their services.

Brazil has 78,157 libraries, one of which is national, 2407 are academic, 6102 are public, 280 are community-based, and 69,367 are school libraries (IFLA, 2018b). Although in the first moment the number seems expressive, we are a territory with continental dimensions, and we have a significant deficit of libraries to attend the population. It is also important to mention that there is a substantial deficit of school libraries which have mobilized the Conselho Federal de Biblioteconomia (Federal Library Board) to raise the awareness of the legislative power to enact Law no. 12.244 / 2010 of the Universalization of School Libraries, determining that all educational institutions in the country, public and private, should have libraries with the presence of librarians. The main question of the data is that we do not have the information of what are considered libraries, what is the infrastructure they have, the quality of the collection and teams. There are many spaces with shelves and books that are called libraries, which further aggravates the situation.

That way in 2013 it was launched by FEBAB the campaign - Biblioteca Eu Amo Eu Quero (Library I Love I want!) seeking to make society aware of the role of libraries and, on the other hand, also calling librarians to action. Posters, folders, t-shirts, aprons, and bags were produced with the logo (figure 1), and the campaign was attended by authors and personalities who gave their image.



Figure 1 - Campaign - Biblioteca Eu Amo Eu Quero logo

Despite the great repercussion, the campaign couldn't reach the society as a whole, since for its effectiveness it would be necessary to be in the vehicles of mass communication, like the television, radio, and newspapers, and this was not possible because of the media costs.

It is important to emphasize that the areas of Culture and Education where the libraries are inserted are not characterized as strategic for all governments, municipal, state or federal level, and this reverts in few investments. Without adequate investments, libraries cannot fulfill their role and can do not recognize its importance for society.

In November 2016 FEBAB participated in the IFLA International Advocacy Program (IAP) which is a capacity-building program launched in 2016, designed to promote and support the role libraries can play in the planning and implementation of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015).

Two strategic actions were carried out by FEBAB from this training. As the year 2017 was the year of elections for president and governors were produced booklets entitled "Bibliotecas Vivas" ("Alive Libraries")¹ to show the importance of libraries and analyze the proposals of candidates for the area (figure 2). The second action that happened in parallel was the beginning of a series of meetings in various regions of the country to mobilize librarians around 2030 Agenda. These moments were called Esquentas CBBB (Preview CBBB) because the central theme of the 27th edition of the Congress of Library and Documentation (CBBB 2017) was "How libraries can contribute to the implementation of 2030 Agenda". One of the results was the elaboration of a booklet of experiences and began a new phase of the advocacy campaign now with the slogan "libraries for a better world" (figure 3).

¹ Alive Library is an expression that is used for define that libraries are more than a collection of books and need to be connected and integrated with their communities.



Figure 2 – Booklet cover "Bibliotecas Vivas" ("Alive Libraries")



Figure 3 – Booklet cover "libraries for a better world"

Also, in 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Another decisive action was the articulation of FEBAB with CEPAL Brazil during the months of October 2017 to March 2018, culminating in the construction of the Santiago Declaration (<https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/81792>), which was proposed at a parallel event of the II Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on sustainable development, which took place from April 18 to 20 at the headquarters of the UN regional body in Santiago, Chile. The first version was presented at the side event “The importance of access to information to achieve sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean” organised by the Hernán Santa Cruz Library (ECLAC) and IFLA (<https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2018/en/programme/importance-access-information-achieve-sustainable-development-latin-america-and-caribbean>).

The construction of these contents, the articulation with the 17 associations affiliated to the FEBAB, the interactions with the most different governmental, non-governmental and third sector entities led us to reflect on the importance of developing specific skills related to advocacy in professionals and students of Librarianship and Information Science.

In the current Brazilian context, these skills are even more important than the abilities considered specific to the librarian, such as organizing, curating content, disseminating, preserving, etc.

Libraries are under severe threat, and so it is necessary that the librarians who are in the labor market and those who choose this profession can mobilize society in defense of libraries. There is no place for professionals who are not proactive, who expect their users to come to offer a service. Libraries need to be together with their communities, and especially to support vulnerable people.

Mapping the set of skills and abilities to develop advocacy

The Canadian Association for Research Libraries (CARL) defines seven dimensions to explain the skills of the professional librarian in the 21st century (CARL, 2010), emphasizing that depending on the position the professional occupies, there will be variations in each of the topics, requiring greater or less understanding ensuring the quality of work. The dimensions are: 1) Foundational Knowledge; 2) Interpersonal Skills, 3) Leadership and Management, 4) Collections Development, 5) Information Literacy, 6) Research and Contributions to the Profession and 7) Information Technology Skills.

In dimension 2 — Interpersonal skills is quoted “communication and advocacy — effectively conveying the importance of libraries to their parent institutions, to their target audiences / constituencies, and advancing the values of the library profession (e.g. in powering users to be self-sufficient, freedom of expression, upholding the right to access information and knowledge in all expressions, preserving the corpus of human knowledge for future generations, etc.)”. In this case, the ability of advocacy is linked to the ability to communicate (CARL, 2010).

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) highlights that the library and information sector is characterized by a diverse workforce that is successful in (ALIA, 2005):

- promoting and defending the core values of the library and information profession;
- understanding and responding to cultural, social, information and learning needs of clients/stakeholders and customers;

- managing the storage, organization, access, retrieval, dissemination, and preservation of information and enabling free access and use of information
- developing, delivering and evaluating information facilities, services, sources, and products responding to client needs;
- envisioning and planning future directions for the sector;
- advancing library and information science in its adaptability, flexibility and autonomous application to information service;
- engaging with clients, community, and other industries.

ALIA defines eight dimensions to group the set of competencies. They are: 1) Knowledge of the broad context of the information environment, 2) Information seeking, 3) Information architecture, 4) Information organization and access, 5) Information services, sources, and products, 6) Information Management, 7) Generation of knowledge and 8) Employability skills and attributes (ALIA, 2005).

Advocacy skills, although this term is not employed, are described within the dimension 1: ***Knowledge of the broad context of the information environment*** showing that professionals should be able to discuss future directions and negotiate alliances for library and information sector development aligned with corporate, social and cultural goals and values and also in the dimension 8: ***Employability skills and attributes*** defined as the ability to build partnerships and alliances (ALIA, 2005).

In addition to the profiles developed by the associations mentioned above, we believe that it would be important to analyze advocacy manuals explicitly prepared for libraries and their professionals. We identified the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Global Libraries Advocacy Guide (BMGF, 2011), an advocacy plan that is not a document that specifically addresses professional profiles but when we look at the recommendations and examples, we can infer what skills are needed to carry out advocacy. The differential of this guide is to have been developed precisely for countries with realities closer to Brazil, which has economic, political, and social inequalities.

The Guide highlights some topics:

- what is advocacy and why is it important;
- advocacy is crucial to sustainability;
- using perception and impact evidence for library advocacy;
- advocacy: what's in the word;
- advocacy players and roles;
- history and lessons learned;
- the advocacy process.

Within some topics we can find detailing for practice of advocacy. For example, ***Using perception and impact evidence for library advocacy:***

Stage 1 - Preplanning and Learning

1.1 Identify qualified staff and consultant support for the planning process

It is suggested that the leader be a professional who has a degree in communications, advocacy, public relations or marketing and promotions. And as attributes that have a strong ability to communicate verbally and write, skills to work, and coordinate priorities pressured, be adaptable, enjoy working with people.

- 1.2 Preliminarily assess the library landscape and identify challenges that limit program sustainability that can be addressed through advocacy.
- 1.3 Develop a proposed solution to your challenge.
- 1.4 Consider the risks.
- 1.5 Identify your preliminary advocacy goals.
- 1.6 Identify a preliminary list of key stakeholders.

Stage 2: Advocacy

- 2.1 Identify your preliminary advocacy targets.
- 2.2 Research your challenge and proposed solution.
- 2.3 Coordinate your impact assessment process with your advocacy goals
- 2.4 Refine your advocacy plan.
- 2.5 Begin to build relationships with targets, partners, and stakeholders.

Stage 3: Advocacy Implementation

- 3.1 Research your targets opinion on the issues you want to affect.
- 3.2 Building coalitions.
- 3.3 Develop messages and slogans.
- 3.4 Tailor your messages to your audience.
- 3.5 Identify strategies to convince targets: inform or educate, mobilize and persuade.
- 3.6 Implement strategy.
- 3.7 Monitoring progress along the way.

Stage 4: Evaluate advocacy successes and failures

- 4.1 Evaluate your efforts.
- 4.2 Adapt effort based on lessons learned.

Besides the material of the Global libraries (BMGF, 2011) we also use as reference the Library Advocate's Handbook (ALA, 2008a) produced by the American Library Association. The manual contains the following topics:

- who are library advocates?
- building a library advocacy network;
- the action plan;
- speaking out;
- dealing with the media;
- dealing with legislators;
- ways to communicate;
- library advocate's checklist;
- resources — who are library advocates?

The ALA Handbook emphasizes the importance of spoken and written communication. It also highlights that an effective Library Advocate: is informed and articulate, is available at a moment's notice, is not afraid to speak out, is well-connected, knows the message and key audiences, talks in sound bites, stays in control, tells stories.

The ability to tell stories has also been much emphasized by IFLA, who created a storytelling manual (IFLA, 2018a) that helps libraries and librarians in their advocacy efforts for libraries engaged in SDGs. As explained in the manual “storytelling is all about engagement, using the power of words to create empathy, loyalty, and aspiration. By telling stories, based on solid

evidence, we can win over hearts and minds, and encourage people — particularly decision-makers — to give us their support”.

At the Satellite Meeting of the MLAS (Management of Library Associations Section) held at the National Library of Malaysia in August 2018, the main topics for the Library Advocacy were discussed, from the perspective of professional associations (Sawaya et al., 2009). They are:

- value and visibility of libraries in society;
- librarians as a professional;
- library funding;
- laws and regulations that impact access;
- library laws;
- freedoms and principles;
- roles in social development (SDGs);
- convincing the library community on the need to advocate.

The manuals and materials produced to sensitize and guide the professionals to bring common points. They emphasize communication, the need to know the laws and principles of the country, and how to obtain financial resources to ensure the sustainability of libraries.

Considering that advocacy is a continuous and permanent process, it is not a destination but a journey it needs to be incorporated as part of daily work routine.

The image of the Brazilian librarian is stigmatized. People tend to imagine that librarians spend all day reading their favorite books or consider them to be obsolete because of the existence of Google and the internet.

There is an exaggeration in these statements, but we know that some librarians prioritize books and not people and have a restricted view of the profession. They do not engage in political relations because they believe that they are “technical” and that it will be up to others to decide. For the elaboration of these competencies, we have based on that the professional librarian is an agent mobilizing of changes, works mainly to build a more just and equal society as advocated by 2030 Agenda.

Statement of intent

Access to information is the right of everyone to build a democratic, progressive, and diverse society. Libraries are responsible for connecting people to the world of knowledge so that they can use it in all aspects of life.

In this sense, we define the sets of skills and competencies that are complementary and are at the same level of importance.

Knowledge of the environment

We want to say that it needs to know the environment where the library is inserted. What is the hierarchy of power, to understand the political origins, parties, alliances, stories of decision-makers, regulations, laws, and other aspects who have influence under libraries’ life. To know what is happening at the moment in the country — be a newsreader — from the political column of the main communication vehicles. It is important to note that in Brazil, there are 35 registered political parties, so identifying alliances and relations between parties

is not a trivial task. It needs study and investment of time. Going out to discuss with politicians without knowing their trajectories can be fatal.

Information technology

Libraries generally do not have additional funds for the production of printed materials or the payment of information on paid media such as television and radio. The resources freely available should undoubtedly be used to achieve the target audience. And in Brazilian reality we find very small teams, often the librarian will have to start the work alone because he is the only one in the library. It is essential to know the resources and tools available with prominence for social media and understanding the principles of web page design.

Sustainability

Understanding how the library budget is built. Who decides what information is taken into account for the construction of the budget. Getting to know the funds, funding agencies, fundraising possibilities to provide the necessary conditions for libraries to play their role in society.

Project development

Ability to draw up plans, but also master the language of projects to raise funds with governmental and non-governmental organizations, companies, institutions, among others.

Entrepreneurship

An entrepreneur with negotiating skills and maintaining political connections, who are persistent in defending their ideas, leading to their conception of problems and proposals at different levels.

Advocacy Ecosystem

Work in an engaged way. It is necessary to be part of this ecosystem, being:

- at the local level: the library, associations of friends, supporters;
- at the regional level: the associations of classes existing in the country;
- at the national level: the FEBAB;
- at the international level: IFLA.

Being in the ecosystem strengthens local advocacy. Libraries are equipment that exists all over the world, so there are people qualified to work on them and defend everyone's right to access. It is important to remember that advocacy is more than a "like" on Facebook!

Government and governance

The government is the actor of the process, and governance is the process of making to decide, control, and administer public policy away. The word government also describes the group of individuals who have the authority and responsibility to govern, specifically through executive, legislative, and judicial power. There are management styles that can include more or fewer spaces for civil society participation. This analysis is extremely important for identifying existing participation spaces and/or mobilizing for their creation. It is imperative to be present in spaces related to libraries.

Creativity

Well, in this question the Brazilians are stars! Bringing solutions that may already be adopted in daily life for work is what will be needed to support advocacy programs. There is a popular saying "who has no dog, hunts like a cat". To realize everything that is around and take advantage to overcome difficulties.

Communication

Excellent communication is key to the success of any venture. Advocacy is based on good communication because it presupposes engagement, mobilization, and changes in attitudes. It is necessary to have complete mastery of the Portuguese language and also to analyze regionalisms of the language so that national campaigns can have the same message. It is as important to master writing as it is to know how to speak. Knowing how to speak publicly is an art to be conquered. Some techniques can be learned, such as oratory, etiquette, and others that will make communication effective.

Resilience & Perseverance

Being resilient is a crucial feature for people who want to grow and thrive. But for this, you need to get out of your comfort zone. Because advocacy is a process, one needs to be optimistic and learn from mistakes, reorganize, and move forward. Predictably, many plans and projects may fail, but what will be the attitude toward it? We must see mistakes as opportunities: learn, start again, and do better! Also, it can withstand the pressures. Being persistent is not giving up something that did not work right at first, but means evaluating, reflecting, and re-working to succeed in the future.

Love and passion

Do you love and are passionate about your profession? So the advocacy plan will be more likely to be successful.

Final considerations

The rise of more conservative governments, such as President Trump in the US and President Bolsonaro in Brazil, the voting of Brexit in England, the migrations of millions of refugees, among others are impacting the libraries' life. Latin America and the Caribbean remain the unequal region on the planet, according to CEPAL data that monitors the progress of the SDGs. The skills and abilities we highlight in this work emphasize the need to intensify continuing education programs, to bring dialogues closer to training schools, to strengthen the national associative movement and to remain aligned with the work of IFLA.

Brazilian librarians are facing a great challenge, showing the importance of libraries as strategic allies to reduce inequality, to combat misinformation, and to improve people's lives. It is a fact that we never had easy times for Brazilian libraries, but now we are facing an even more significant challenge. Our answer is to fight! There is no other way but to be with people, especially the most vulnerable and for that matter, and we understand that our action must be collective, and we are all responsible for the change we want.

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