Facilitating convergence: information literacy and joint use libraries in Spain

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1. **ABSTRACT**

The joint use library is introduced as a model for school and public library convergence from the perspective of Spanish experience. A description is provided of the associated information literacy programme implemented in the virtual learning environment developed by *Baratz*, a world class automatic processing and information and documentation flow management company that has been furnishing solutions for over 25 years. The underlying hypothesis is the existence of the alliance between libraries and schools that has always been an element of libraries' working philosophy as a way to optimise resources and improve user services. From the outset, the contemporary public library established one-directional cooperation with educational institutions, assuming greater educational responsibilities, creating environments and offering guided tours for children and lending books to schools. At the same time, in communities with no public library, schools were the only institutions able to provide library services. This mutual need gave rise to the first joint-use libraries in the mid-nineteenth century. At present, after many years in which it was regarded as a lesser form of library service delivery, the joint use library has begun to consolidate its position world-wide with numerous examples of good practice in the provision of library services and incipient experience in countries such as Spain. The communication aims to illustrate a possible method for integrating the two types of libraries through an information literacy programme, based on Spanish experience.

1. **FORCES THAT DRIVE COOPERATIVE CONVERGENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

Inter-library cooperation has always been an element of libraries' working philosophy, as a way to optimise resources and improve user services. From the outset, the contemporary public library established one-directional cooperation with educational institutions, undertaking greater educational responsibilities, creating environments and offering guided tours for children and lending books to schools.

As a rule, the collaboration between school and public libraries in Spanish-speaking countries is nearly always beneficial for the former, which are afforded more favourable conditions, both in terms of resources and the technical training afforded their staff through the public library.

One of the most notorious effects of the deficit in the Spanish library system with respect to the world of education is how public libraries have attempted to make up for the shortcomings of school libraries through initiatives that in most cases are not truly collaborative, and much less cooperative, projects. Rather, they form part of library outreach services. This "original sin" rested on the conceit that public libraries were instituted to underpin the education system. In the educational model propounded by the information society, school libraries have begun to move away from the traditional public library framework to become so-called Teaching and Learning Resource Centres (Spanish initials, CREA). These centres are modelled on the new approach to university libraries, now regarded as Learning and Research Resource Centres (Spanish initials, CRAI). This framework justifies the priority emphasis on *skills* in the new educational model for digital and virtual educational surrounds, the new knowledge environment where school and public library educational services converge. As a result of these drivers of change, the public library must restructure its educational function, seeking new scenarios such as social responsibility, learning, inter-library cooperation and information literacy.

The conviction that users' skills have been outpaced by the know-how needed for the expert use of IT tools has preceded the development of information literacy activities in libraries. Consequently, information literacy courses, an emerging and innovative element in the new educational model, are being delivered in two types of libraries, educational (primarily formal education) and public (primarily non-formal education). From this vantage point, the educational convergence of public and school libraries has not only not been weakened, but has obviously been reinforced by the stimulus afforded by new factors and a more symbiotic and therefore healthier cooperation model: the joint use library.

From the outset, as a result of its more functional than academic nature, its non-association with any educational model and the prominence of a pragmatic and professional approach to library science, the joint use library concept has developed along three geographic and social lines: North American, Australian and European[1]. Two areas of influence can be identified, in turn, in the European joint use library model: the United Kingdom, analysed with some precision by Sarah McNicol, and the Nordic countries. In Norway and Sweden especially the development of the joint use library is ongoing and constitutes one of the most efficient ways to provide the new facilities required to meet the needs of twenty-first century citizens. In these countries, as in Australia, one of the highlights of joint use library activities is the implementation of information literacy programmes.

Examples of this type of libraries can also be found in other European countries such as Estonia, Portugal, Germany and Spain, but there the initiatives, instead of following a formal theoretical model, are organised as isolated endeavours or simply capitalise on the municipal ownership of school libraries.

2. THE JOINT USE LIBRARY EXPERIENCE IN SPAIN

The first reference to a link between schools and public libraries can be found in a Royal Decree dated 23 September 1847 on measures to advance primary schooling. The regulation included the creation of teachers' "corporations" which, according to Article 54, were supposed to secure the establishment of libraries to be run by the teachers themselves and to be open to the public at night or on holidays.

Further attempts arose in the twentieth century during the Republic, but were never implemented for lack of time. On 7 August 1931, a Decree specified that primary schools were to have a fixed and mobile public library, run by the schoolmaster[2]. That same year, with Marcelino Domingo in the Ministry of Public Schooling, María Moliner was appointed to head what were called "educational missions". Libraries located in rural schoolrooms were founded in that period, particularly in the least advantaged areas, where the schoolmaster not only used the stacks for teaching, but lent them to the rest of the town after hours. In four years, over 5 000 libraries were established in classrooms in towns and villages under the schoolmaster's supervision. Initially, then, municipal public libraries were associated with school teachers and schools, until 1939 when the María Moliner Plan was published, alluding to the need for libraries specifically for schools, complementary to but separate from public libraries:

"in towns with a population of over 1 000, i.e., the ones that must have a municipal public library, the school libraries located in each school shall be for the exclusive use of these institutions. In towns with a population of under 1 000, a single library for the rural community and school can be instituted, managed by the schoolmaster. But these arrangements must be made in a way such that the two types of library can be separated if warranted by a change in schoolmaster or any other circumstance"[3].

Ever since the earliest joint use libraries were established under the María Moliner National Library Plan decreed in 1939, two features have characterised the implementation of the model in Spain. The first is the difficulty stemming from the historic deficit shouldered by the country's school libraries and the non-consolidation of library use in academic culture. The second is the existence of real but non-formalised joint use library experience.

It has not helped that on the scant occasions when these libraries were instituted, they proved to be unsatisfactory, partially because the initial project was poorly defined and partially because in practice school libraries preyed upon their public counterparts[4]. Attempts made in the nineteen nineties failed for want of continuity or institutional support in Galicia (A Coruña), the Canary Islands and Madrid, among others, while joint use libraries in other places managed to survive, despite the difficulties. The school libraries in the region of Valencia are one example. Created under the REDLIB-1 Programme that fuelled the creation of public and school libraries, they were installed in school premises in towns with a population of under 2 000, where the possibility of maintaining a public facility of this nature to an acceptable standard of quality was next to nil. The initiative, which was a success at first, soon spread to a total of 28 schools forming part of the Valencia Library Network. But after they were in place for a number of years, around ten libraries discontinued service and

thereafter the number gradually waned. A variety of reasons can be given, in particular the weak demography of the communities chosen, with the closure of the schools themselves. In other cases, a new public library or the relocation of the existing facility to a place distant from the school brought the joint use library project to an end. Such was the fate of the last two in the province of Castellón, at Aras de los Olmos and Beniardá. At this writing only five school and public libraries are still operating in the region, all in towns with a population of under 750.

In the last 10 years, this downward trend has been checked and new projects for joint use libraries have arisen. The satisfactory results have encouraged other towns to emulate this cooperative experience. A total of 36 public and school libraries is known to be in operation across the country: La Granja de la Costera, Sanet y Negrals, Gátova, Bolulla and Sella (Valencian Region); Collado Villalba (9) and Morata de Tajuña (Madrid); Villarrobledo, Talavera de la Reina (2), Burujón, Cuenca and Quer (Castile-La Mancha); A Coruña (Galicia), San Sebastián (Basque Country), Torrox (Andalusia), Los Realejos (2) (Canary Islands), Castelldefels (3) (Catalonia) and Lorca (6) (Murcia). The number in brackets denotes the existence of more than one joint use library in the town.

The vast majority of these facilities are school libraries open to the public at large or public libraries regarded as school libraries, in which joint use is slight and public and school libraries are mere "lodgers" that occupy the same premises but operate independently. Each library keeps its own hours and during class time is open to students only.

One of the main weaknesses that impedes more widespread use and development of joint use libraries is the near absence of specific regional legislative provisions that would support the creation of this type of libraries in Spain's 17 autonomous communities. In fact, the possibility is envisaged in only three: Galicia, Cantabria and the Balearic Isles.

- Region of Galicia Act 14/1989 of 11 October on libraries: "The Regional Government may conclude agreements with towns and cities to provide all communities with a population of over 2 000 with a public library, which may be the public school library or pertain to any other public entity".

- Region of Cantabria Act 3/2001 of 25 September on libraries: "towns and cities with a population of over 1 500 must have a public library offering at least the services laid down by law, which may be provided through school libraries under the respective agreements".

- Region of Balearic Isles Act 19/2006 on the library system: "school libraries may share library premises and services with other public libraries under the respective agreements".

The region of Castile-La Mancha has recently taken a giant step forward in the future development of joint use libraries in Spain, passing Act 3/2011 of 24 February on

reading and libraries. This piece of legislation defines joint use libraries as an integral part of the network in the following terms: "a public institution offering library collections and services both of a general and an academic nature, sharing infrastructure and resources".

Another element lacking is the formulation by competent institutions or professional associations of regulatory documents, standards, guidelines and recommendations that may be useful for joint use library design. A further key issue, critical to success but likewise outstanding resolution, is the definition of the professional profile of the person in charge of managing joint use libraries. This reflects on the long-standing dispute between librarians and teachers and the traditional distance between the library and educational communities.

Further weaknesses can be identified, such as the lack of consensus[5] about the term used to refer to this form of cooperation in Spanish (mixed, multi-purpose, dual use, neighbourhood or integrated libraries, to name a few); the non-existence, by and large, of agreements governing this combined library model and ensuring its existence beyond the terms of individual municipal authorities or school principals; not to mention other more operational issues, such as the lack, in the vast majority of cases, of separate entrances, one for pupils directly from their classrooms and the other from the building exterior for the rest of the community.

In addition to this, the institution is threatened by other factors: the mistrust with which joint use has been viewed to date by all concerned; the sole (and mistaken)aim to cut costs, particularly in times of recession; and the wide chasm between the library and education communities. Some critics, taking a very alarmist view, predict the utter disappearance of school libraries as a result of the institution of joint use facilities.

These weaknesses notwithstanding, certain strengths can also be identified, such as examples that can serve as a guide for the development of this form of cooperation between different types of libraries. One such example is the joint use library programme in place at Collado Villalba (a town in the province of Madrid), which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2010 with the launch of its ninth facility, making Collado the Spanish town with the largest number of such libraries.

Another prominent joint use library project is underway in the region of Castile-La Mancha, which was launched in 2007 to combine school and public efforts and resources in a single project. It is based on a three-way agreement among the Regional Departments of Culture and Education of Castile-La Mancha and the five towns presently participating, whose libraries are included in the Castile-La Mancha Library Network's Collective Catalogue. The justification for joint use libraries rests on their more efficient and intense use of the existing resources (collections, premises and facilities), the unitary provision of shared services (lending, user training) and the planning of activities suitable for different user groups: children, youths and adults[6]. The project defines a series of minimum standards that should characterise a joint use public library, with respect to facilities, staff, collection and services; draft guidelines for joint use libraries have also been formulated.

A third example is to be found in the joint use libraries in the Municipal Library Network of Lorca, in the Spanish province of Murcia, the recent site of the worst earthquake in Spain in the last 50 years. Unlike the joint use libraries of the preceding example, the Lorquian libraries form part not of a regional but of a municipal project. The local Council of Culture and Festivities provides the specialised personnel and furnishings, purchases the general collection and performs the technical processing involved. Lorca's joint use libraries constitute a model for many reasons: facility planning; integration in and an open attitude toward the community (with the installation of large neon signs reading "public library" on schools' most visible façades); the benefits for users in terms of a higher quality and more widely varied collection; the diversification of services or longer hours; the projections for the future and the division of the municipal district, for reasons of orography, into 39 sub-districts, each with a population of under 3 800.

3. INFORMATION LITERACY: A STIMULUS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOINT USE LIBRARIES IN SPAIN

One of the key features making the joint use library the ideal model for inter-library cooperation is the fact that it is a convergence platform for (school, university, public) libraries pursuing educational purposes, enabling them to cooperatively administer and manage information resources and services, contents and staff. This places them in a position of privilege to combat social exclusion and the effects of the digital divide through literacy cooperation programmes geared to virtual learning, in keeping with the development of reading-writing skills in digital and Web 2.0 environments.

Information literacy and its application in training programmes implemented by libraries or educational institutions in conjunction with libraries should be seen as a vehicle for delivering information skills. Such skills include web content management through "reading" based on the expert use of tools for information retrieval and the extraction of digital content, and "writing" through a command of metadata, blogs or wikis; cooperative editing for ethical and solidary knowledge transfer via digital educational objects, with all their potential and complexity; assessment and self-assessment of intellectual progress through the selection and evaluation of content for analysis in knowledge generation on the grounds of applicable skill criteria and indicators.

Literacy and information programmes can be seen, then, as an opportunity for reinterpretation and an important qualitative leap in the cooperative joint use library model, visibly enlarging the scenario for optimising premises and resources. The model serves as a platform for the convergence of educational tools that are particularly useful in the context of the semantic web as an inevitable training facility for the population at large. The need to close the digital divide makes well-structured cooperation for information literacy training a highly desirable objective in digital educational library-cum-resource centres under the joint use library model.

The above overview of the development of joint use libraries in Spain confirms that having information literacy programmes as mainstays in their design constitutes an

opportunity for these facilities. This idea led the authors of the present study to propose a Carlos III University of Madrid research project to *Baratz*, a document management software company. The aim was not to develop a mere information literacy tutorial, but to create an e-learning course on information literacy skills for dissemination and possible use in the training delivered by public and educational libraries, and especially by the model on which they converge: joint use libraries[7].

Information literacy is actually presently in place in libraries, but librarians have neither the time or, often, the necessary aptitudes to undertake this task. The aim, then, was to establish a virtual educational programme monitored by librarians and geared to delivery and use, not only in libraries, but in of all manner of entities needing to include this type of programmes in their training plans or in institutions whose professionals need to constantly update their skills.

The project was proposed as one of the conclusions to the 6th DHI (Spanish initials for Information Skills Development) Congress organised by the *Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez' Library Service* in 2008, a prestigious event and source of one of the standards for information literacy in Spanish (2002). The justification is based on one of the objectives of basic research projects, which view information literacy as the necessary background for acquiring digital reading and writing skills with which to generate knowledge, and directly associated with lifelong and cooperative learning in the knowledge society.

That justification defined the working hypothesis, based on the enunciation of a curricular design for information literacy programmes characterised by full and self-specific objectives, methods and contents. It is clearly differentiated from on-line user training, given the distinctly different scopes of application of these two environments: digital educational libraries, tending to converge with joint use libraries for information literacy, as opposed to libraries focusing on on-line user training.

The project was undertaken in October 2009 with an agenda that included a digital edition for web platforms. The objectives in terms of skills are similar to the aims set out in the *Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy's (ANZIL)* Information Literacy Standards published in 2004. The two reasons for preferring the ANZIL standards were: their Australian philosophy and design, given the maturity of joint use libraries in that country, and Alan Bundy's involvement, given this librarian and scientist's role in the formulation of standards and the development of joint use libraries. In March 2010, Professor Bundy accepted an invitation from Professor Marzal to participate in a visiting scholar programme addressing the theoretical principles of the project with *Baratz*.

The course was ultimately structured around seven modules, designed as fully independent course units for the following two reasons.

- The course addresses skills that should be provided by an information literacy programme, from information retrieval and digital reading-writing to gathering knowledge and know-how available on the web.

- The course is scalable, i.e., can be compartmented into a logical, progressive sequence deliverable in whole or in part, depending on the educational schedule.

With the exception of evaluative Modules 0 and 6, designed around a questionnaire (0) and skills indicators (6), all the modules comprise the same six elements:

- a user's guide with a brief discussion of the underlying theory to provide the trainee with clear definitions of the notions needed to complete the module and an understanding of the items to be converted into skills further to the module objectives ; this is the "academic" part of the unit;
- illustrative examples, called "web practice", in which the trainee should recognise all the items discussed in the preceding element; here the trainee not only understands, but assimilates the notions addressed in the module;
- tools, area in which the course offers software that trainees must find, download and become acquainted with to enable them to "create" the items understood and assimilated in the two preceding parts;
- support materials to provide the trainees, once they have the tools, with precise instructions, complete with examples, on what is involved in creating and authoring the items understood and assimilated, and implementing these instructions to test their skills;
- educational use, i.e., a proposal for a series of practical exercises to be solved by trainees; this is where knowledge is applied to become know-how;
- a self-assessment in the form of a series of suggestions to enable trainees, through their answers, to judge the progress made.

Structurally speaking, the course has five core training modules in which skills are acquired gradually, in keeping with the design of the ANZIIL standards and the principles published by C.S. Bruce in 2003. Programme design concurs with on-line training contents in Module 1 only. Thereafter, it adheres to the notion of information literacy set out at the end of point 2, charting a course that culminates in information literacy 2.0. The programme contents, based on all the above, are described in the paragraphs that follow.

Module 1 (ANZIIL Standards 1 and 2) describes the strategies for retrieving information, along with expert handling, selection and assessment of information sources. The module follows the four steps of the very useful Gavilán model: define, seek, analyse and synthesise.

Module 2 (ANZIIL Standard 3) teaches the expert use of the tools (visual and associative thesauruses, topic maps and ontologies) designed for effective content

organisation and knowledge-effective editing and characteristic of digital content management, from a user perspective.

Module 3 (ANZIIL Standard 4) is designed to gain effective "digital reading" skills through the satisfactory editing, use and management of self-charted concept maps, the basis of the pupil's own electronic discourse.

Module 4 (ANZIIL Standard 5) is specifically geared to knowledge, i.e., deft use, but especially to the efficient "educational" use of social networking and Web 2.0 tools as fundamental elements for digital reading comprehension in the context of education in the knowledge society.

Module 5 (ANZIIL Standard 5) addresses digital writing (the other element of information literacy), the expert use of "writing" on the Internet, and ethical content editing in objects of learning and digital educational objects specific to each pupil.

The determination not to make the programme into a tutorial but to adapt it to the design of an object of learning, led the IT team at *Baratz* to insist on the interactive, visual and virtual aspects of editing.

The skill-oriented nature of information literacy explains the attention paid to assessment in course design, from two perspectives:

- trainee skill accreditation to grade their progress and success in information skills
- certification of course quality and the effectiveness of information literacy programmes as part of the entity's activities, with information skills indicators to show how these courses and programmes contribute to the academic success of entity trainees, which in turn is an indicator of the quality of the institution itself.

This dual dimension is reflected in the following.

The programme begins with Module 0, which pupils see as a questionnaire on their command of one or several educational resources on the web to "measure" their information literacy. Module 6 is a model containing edited and structured indicators for use by the teaching-library staff, whose purpose is not to evaluate pupils but to provide an objective and ideal tool with which to report to academic and administrative decision-makers. These reports substantiate pupils' progress on the one hand and the quality of the information literacy programme on the other.

- Initial module 0 consists of diagnostic questionnaires, a battery of questions that attempt to assess trainees' information skills and determine which module or modules they should take.
- Each course module contains follow-up or self-assessment questionnaires designed to measure the skills acquired. These are not "surveys", i.e., subjective questions on perception, or replies to academic-practical exercises.

Rather, they are questions deriving from the indicators and consequently readily processed and objective.

- The indicators in Module 6 gather data for processing by categories of progress and course impact for entity planning. They can be used to issue periodic reports on progress monitoring in the "educational community" for effective and efficient decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS

An effective library system able to underpin knowledge society development indisputably calls for cooperation among libraries with obvious educational functions and objectives, the principles underlying public and school libraries. This cooperation requires sound convergence. In public and school libraries, information literacy provides common ground for such partnering, for it involves no clash between the purposes of the two entities or the training and information needs of their communities of users, which do not always concur. Any cooperative environment calls for a precise regulatory framework. This can be found in the joint use library model, which is implemented in Spain not only for reasons of economies of scale and resource optimisation, but also because citizens' education must be delivered through both formal and non-formal models. The legal and regulatory provisions enacted by Spanish legislative bodies have tended to design a joint use library model that calls for genuine and symbiotic cooperation between public and school libraries. That effort, as in so many other cases, has led to a "legal" model which has found no real life application for a variety of reasons, very likely economic, but also due to the failure to view the new library institution as a resource centre. This structural dysfunction may be corrected through the implementation of information literacy programmes, which teach users how to make the most of libraries as actual digital education institutions and which further the consumption of information, such as content of proven quality, for the attainment of knowledge and know-how.

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