

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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Abstract

Introduction. According to the Croatian concept of school librarianship, the school librarian is the key factor in the operation and development of the library, as well as in the contribution the library makes towards overall educational success in the primary and secondary schools. This document introduces the professional profile of the school librarians, including the process of their education, as well as their role in the upbringing and education. In these settings, the key role is played by the well-founded legal and other regulations through which the Republic of Croatia (the Ministry for Science, Education and Sport) established the school librarianship and the librarians as the distinct, essential and acknowledged profession in the system of upbringing and education. The purpose of the document is to present the role and activities of the school librarians in the Republic of Croatia, with the emphasis on the changing needs of the users and the changes inside the educational system. Thus raising the expectations of the librarians' role.

Method. Within the scope of the principal topic (Library and Information Practice) the document is primarily based on the indicators that are result of experience and day-to-day practice. When contemplating the probable future roles of librarians in education, the author uses the research results about the changing needs of the users, and takes into account the actual changes, e.g. in the technology as well as in the educational system.

Results. According to the research conducted and the findings from the practice there is a visible trend of strengthening the (sub)role of information practitioners towards the one of a tutor, expanded by the wide-ranging managerial duties. The document can serve to baseline and develop the position not only of the librarianship profession, but also the "persona" of school librarians inside educational systems world-wide. The following indicators will be usable: (1) the organization of librarians' education, (2) the model of continuing education of school librarians, (3) the level of professionalism and status in the vocation (4), day-to-day activities, and (5) the vision of principal future direction of school librarians.

Introduction

The Republic of Croatia is a Central-European country with a track record of institutionalised secular education that started in 1607 through the founding of a Classical Grammar School in Zagreb¹. Towards the end of 18. century the state has reformed the educational system and made it universal. In the Fifties in 20th century, the compulsory eight-year primary education has been established², as well as

¹ The foundations of classical education in Europe, and therefore in Croatia, from which all classical grammar schools evolved, were laid by the Jesuits' schooling system in the 16. century, the "Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Jesu", which is better known as "Ratio studiorum".

² The eight-year education is compulsory but free for all children.

(typically) four-year secondary education and three-year trade schools. Currently, in the Republic of Croatia the compulsory but free system of secondary education is being established for all children.

In the setting established as above, a comprehensive educational system – including the academic level – has evolved; with the attention being paid to all components that ensure a high level of classical education. By taking care about education being of highest possible quality the state has developed the school libraries.

Although the school libraries date back much earlier, their real development was enabled by the Educational Act of 1874. Between then and the period of stagnation in the Second World War, the libraries employed the most distinguished educationalists, not infrequently with a doctorate. The traditional school libraries have been re-defined in the Eighties, when the funding became multi-medial and the activities have been oriented towards upbringing and education. By that time the Librarianship studies have been established; in order to perform the duties of the school librarian the already highly-skilled educationalists had to acquire the Librarianship qualifications³. Thus resulting in a phase where the school librarians were the most educated practitioners in the educational system, both by the length and the breadth of training. Thus just from the history of Croatian school librarianship visible are:

- The orientation towards the continued improvement of the concepts and activities.
- The educational level stipulated for school librarians.
- The aspiration towards making the school librarians' occupation a true profession.

1. The school librarian profession in the Republic of Croatia

At the beginning of the Eighties, established were the laws, standards, by-laws and statutes that carefully treat the issues of the school librarianship. Through those regulations the Croatian school librarianship has been acknowledged as a distinct profession with the system of upbringing and education. The next step was an appointment – in the Ministry of Science, education and sport - of a civil servant responsible for school libraries, followed by the appointment of an Advisor for school libraries in the Agency for Upbringing and Education. Since then the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport has started a formal participation in and the care for the issues of school librarianship that essential for the development of that profession. The key determinants are as follows:

- the directive that each school must have a library
- the compliance with the Law regarding the required professional qualifications
- the alignment of the working hours of school librarians with their role and responsibilities in the system of upbringing and education
- targeted funding of the libraries
- equipping the libraries with the contemporary technologies
- establishing the annual professional conference focused on the theory and practice of school librarianship
- establishing the local network for continuing education that enables every school librarian to participate in, at least, for professional events⁴ every year
- opportunities for career progression to the post of practitioner-mentor, via practitioner-advisor and, most recently, practitioner-senior advisor⁵
- support for the establishment of a professional association of school librarians⁶
- support for opening the Librarianship studies⁷ at a several universities in the Republic of Croatia.

³ In practice that meant that school librarians had to have two degrees.

⁴ These are available to all librarians in Croatia, they are organised at a local level and compulsory

⁵ According to the new Upbringing and Education law for primary and secondary schools, confirmed by the Croatian parliament on 15. July 2008. The Article 116. proclaims that teachers, practitioners and head-teachers may advance in their profession into at least three levels, acquire the relevant qualifications and be rewarded for exceptional achievements in upbringing and educational activities.

⁶ The Croatian Association of School Librarians (HUŠK).

The school librarianship as a profession has also been well rounded by numerous specialist essays. The bulk of that literature is specifically based on the Croatian model of school libraries. The practice of school librarianship has evolved on the foundations of well structured laws and regulations which enabled a constructive, modern and creative development of library activities. Thus resulting in an enviable level of this profession in Croatia.

2. The status of a school librarian

To Haycock (1997) the most precious innovation in his 38 participation in education was the introduction of school librarians. However, it is well-known that the perception of the value, importance and the role of school librarian are very different in the school and even in the librarian profession itself.

At the conference on school libraries 2003 (White House Conference on School Libraries) Gary Hartzell spoke about the status of school librarians as based on the established perception.

The similarities in the world – of a significant difference between the poor perceptions and the actual realities - are exemplified by the fact that the White House itself lent its authority to the campaign led by the school librarians world-wide.

Is the current state of affairs unavoidable and how to ensure that school librarians have the status they rightly deserve? There is a solution, but at times it would appear that the problem is being addressed from a wrong angle. It is clear that a well-deserved status can be achieved by fulfilling the following three essential conditions:

1. the required qualifications of school librarians
2. the well ordered educational system in general
3. the development and profiling the profession towards being competitive, within its context, and perceived to be essential for the educational system.

The Republic of Croatia is one of the countries that recognizes the role of school librarians in education. At times, the school librarians and their role were a real innovation in the educational system. As persons that were not moulded in common daily tutorial tasks, the school librarians were able to enrich their role of teacher or partner with all available pedagogical approaches; they could afford individual approach to the work with pupils and to the care for the pupils' cultural needs. Thus being able to influence the quality of the school curriculum. The librarians with this profile were given the freedom for creation and innovation, so they were in a position to become, as far as the curriculum is concerned, the key staff in schools. They could have been those responsible for introduction of significant changes into the teaching process, for correlation between the subjects or for the intermedial approaches to the educational contents. This big and responsible role has been given to the school librarians by the Ministry of science, education and sport and by other institutions that are tied to upbringing and education.

In addition to the above, it is widely estimated that the further important tasks include equipping for active and successful resolution of issues surrounding the own professional skills, and then all other issues ranging from health and family to the social environment and global problems surrounding the changes to the Croatian schools. Starting from this initial position and through continuous education, Croatian school librarians have developed an enviable range of activities, very specifically focused on upbringing and education. In this was in the Republic of Croatia, the school librarian is, at the same time, a teacher – but first among the equals in the school.

These directions are also built into the Strategy for the Development of the Republic of Croatia “Croatia in 21.st century” (Institute for social research, and the Center for research and development of education, 2000), especially in the first part of the project deliverables that discusses upbringing and education based on the concept of life-long learning. (It formalizes the three main forms of education: formal upbringing and education, informal education of adults, and self-learning i.e. the concept of “learning society”). These two complementary concepts recommend – as the basis of managing a modern educational policy and the reform of educational system – UNESCO, OECD, ILO and other interna-

⁷ The following courses lead to librarianship degrees: Librarianship, Information science, and Informatology. Also, being approved is Culturology with a Librarianship sub-stream the programme for which pays a particular attention to the contents that help gradual preparation of school librarians.

tional organizations that strategize education and identify the growing need for individual and self-managed education, supported by the technology.

3. The school librarian as a teacher

It is a widely held view that the teaching profession is one of the most difficult. Why? Some of the contemporary findings have the following answer to this complex question: a successful teacher is the one who can win over/motivate almost all pupils to do quality studies in the school. To win over/motivate pupils means that they should study in accordance with their own capabilities and abilities. For the pupils to study hard, the conditions have to be met, and the teachers must contribute to establishing a conducive environment. The pupils should be approached in such a way that they distinguish between what is being given to them now, as opposed to its importance in the future.

Owning that what is usually known as the “teacher persona” includes the subject competencies (preparations for the lessons and the required differentiations), social competencies and a high level of self-confidence. These are termed personal competencies by Meyer (2002). Thus the ability to act professionally does not depend only on the theoretical and subject skills of teachers and/or pupils but, instead, the “professionalization” of learning is a part of development of a comprehensive “teacher persona”.

The didactical competencies of a school librarian include the profession education and life-long education and experience; whereas the high-level qualifications for librarianship and broad range of skills for electronic media add to the professionalism. Innovation, as one of the key positive characteristics includes:

- openness to change
- positive criticism of librarianship
- research attitude
- acceptance and application of ideas and innovations
- personal contributions to the above
- willingness to exchange experiences with the fellow colleagues.

○ **3.1 Developing Tutoring in School Libraries**

The largest proportion of time worked by the school librarians relates to the engagement with the pupils (more than 60%). In this area there are well-thought-through methods of tuition, depending on the types and characteristics of pupils – the main users of school libraries. It is always useful to repeat that the pupils are the main users of school libraries, but at the age when they still need to be led, monitored and tutored. The most frequent question nowadays is how to think the programmes through, and how to continuously improve one’s knowledge and efforts on tutoring the pupils. The starting point was the new environment for learning based on the Programme for teaching pupils the self-learning in the library, based on the following six steps:

<p>1. ORGANISING THE LIBRARY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (location/space, contents, opening hours, the plan and the programme of work, using information sources and knowledge, book borrowing, contents protection) 	<p>2. THE ROLES OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - upbringing and education - information and documentation - cultural and public
<p>3. ORGANISING THE BOOK- AND NON-BOOK CONTENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to the age (1st to 8th form – the „fund of pupils”) - in line with the Universal and decimal classification – UDK (the „fund of teachers”) 	<p>4. THE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - books - periodicals - AV contents - electronic sources of information - catalogues - bibliographies - referential collections
<p>5. TEACHING THE USERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - texts (written) - notes - reports - seminar essays - the “reading log” - diploma thesis - presentation - valuation 	<p>6. SEARCHING THE DATABASE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - refreshing the knowledge related to the basics of “information literacy” (the segment required in the librarianship) - structuring the queries - the searching skills required - the skills required to monitor the continuous changes to the field of searching

A school library tutoring programme structured in this way emphasised the upbringing role of the school, the cooperation between the school and the local community, and it introduced the pupils to the world of life-long learning whilst reducing the pressure by maximally reducing the volumes of encyclopaedic contents (focused on memorising and retelling).

The programme of „information literacy” has enabled the development of new starting points for shaping the user education programmes in the libraries, this topic being very contemporary in Croatian primary school libraries. For the first time the Programme of education has been introduced at the national level, into the Teaching plan and programme for the primary schools. Therefore the new role of teacher/school librarian is primarily concerned with developing pupils’ motivation, creation of the environment conducive to „emotional” creativity, state-of-the-art knowledge verification & valuation methods, and with an effective management of the educational process.

The components of the Program for library education – Reading stimulation and Information literacy – came about from the need of the users of the educational system, and are based both on the positive experiences so far and on the successful individual programmes of work delivered by the Croatian school librarians in the primary and secondary schools. Teamwork encompassing school librarians and subject matter teachers enables them to correlate similar teaching contents, to conduct teaching in smaller group sizes, and to conduct learning at the very sources of information. All the above are the preconditions for successful learning in all subjects and for acquiring permanent, useful, connecting and applicable knowledge.

The Croatian National educational standard in the Teaching plan and programme for the primary schools⁸ wishes to promote high educational standards and achievements. Therefore it demands that more attention is paid to identification of the above-average and talented pupils, and to the creation of conditions that enable a further development of their talents in one or more areas. This is why the teachers and librarians have a new role nowadays – the one about identification and monitoring of talented pupils and about stimulation of the talent development, through creation of educational programmes that are aligned with the aptitudes, interests, motivation and capabilities of talented pupils.

On the other hand, in the conduct of educational programmes with pupils with learning difficulties the participants are teachers, practitioners (defectologist, psychologist, pedagogue, school librarian) and the parents. The cooperation between the defectologists and school librarians is becoming increasingly important, because teaching in this population segments demands an individual approach for each pupil. In this way their professional roles are becoming more connected, in a new and effective manner; this manifests itself in observations of pupils, identification of solutions and then establishing tuition that enables step-by-step progress.

The tasks of school librarians in stimulating reading and information literacy are:

- stimulating reading habits and enabling users for elaboration of information sources. Thus helping develop the culture of self-managed intellectual efforts
- in addition to the direct educational work with pupils and guiding them in the usage of diverse knowledge sources, participating in multimedial school centres through acquiring the subject matter literature, other knowledge sources and appropriate educational techniques
- following the scientific and professional literature, creation of annotations and thematic bibliographies, and motivating pupils and teachers to use the above mentioned literature.

With the pointed changes to the primary school education, the school librarians bring about the qualitative changes in the educational work of the libraries. They are expected to have a professional approach to communications and work, also the ability to understand the user needs, as well as skills and knowledge for useful and superior information usage.

In the contemporary forms of planning, the school librarian has a multitude of opportunities to tailor the learning and align it with pupils' knowledge levels and development abilities, to exploit the differences in cognitive status and biological age. Thus giving them the necessary information according to aptitudes and abilities of each individual, through a multitude of media.

The schools in the "information age" in 21. century are rather different to the "industrial age" of 20. century. The information age calls for new models for teaching teams that encompass diverse subject matters and abilities for creation of environments conducive to learning. For example, the school librarians and subject matter teachers together look for specialist practitioners required for particular areas in the school and beyond (musician, visual artist, dance teacher, technologist etc), in order to ensure a rich research experience for the pupils working in pairs or small groups in the school library.

○ **3.2 A step beyond**

The scenarios of teaching and learning develop in space and time of the school library through new teaching programmes, whereby teachers/librarians and pupils continuously develop new combinations of goals, contents and work methods. Therefore the goals, contents and methods represent the fundamental categories of didactical actions. This is why didactics continuously questions and answers: who, what, when, who with, where, how, what with, why and to which objective one is to learn/teach. The goal is always the same: the expected result of learning and teaching, intermediated between the topic and the pupils' work process by the teaching medium.

Following these new "rules", school librarians are making a shift from being teachers/librarians to being library media specialist. It is evident that their tasks are increasingly numerous, and the library contents – still the primary building blocks – increasingly complex. Thus reducing the time available for the content - the staffing numbers never change. The "rule" remains: one school – one librarian! The

⁸ The new Programme for education in the primary schools was published by the Ministry for science, education and sport in 2006. For the first time in the history of Croatian school librarianship, the Programme refers to the school libraries

goal of educational and librarianship profession is to have an accomplished school librarian who is skilled at acquisition and skilful in leading information searches, as well as an information specialist within the library and educational context.

As the questions about school librarian persona and their role, today and in the future, are increasingly frequent, a survey⁹ has been conducted to investigate the pupils' attitude towards the role of school librarian in education. Pupils – the users of school libraries – borrow the books, learn how to learn, acquire “information literacy” skills, participate in school projects, the programmes of reading literacy, different types of learning and, more recently, learn about steps in research.

The above activities of school libraries, led by the school librarian, have initially emerged and were then expanded to meet the ever-changing needs of users, primarily the pupils. The indicators that were collect point to modest but continuous changes to the role of school librarians. The fact is that school librarians nowadays can meet all demands of learning and teaching in ever-changing conditions. In this context the role of school librarian is has also become ever-changing. He/she is no longer primarily a teacher but, increasingly, an information practitioner with teaching competencies. The school system has seen the emergence of new tasks such as self-assessments and valuation of work, that are essential to the existence of the staff and their activities. The result is emergence of a new category in the school librarianship. The school librarian has in this way entered a new type of activity, and through acquiring new skills entered the world of marketing. The new is the strategic perspective in which mutual trust plays a significant role. Building the trust is an essential assumption for a successful and permanent communication between all participants in the educational process.

We live in the age when every day, even every hour volumes of information reach us from a variety of sources, sometimes bridging large distances in a matter of seconds. It is reasonable to question if the role of teachers has become irrelevant. The answer is clear: nowadays, more than ever, teachers have the responsibility of mentoring and leading, thus helping their pupils find the “best” way to knowledge from the ever-growing volumes of information that they encounter daily. School librarians – as teachers satisfied with the results of their efforts – are becoming important factors in the process of upbringing and education which, according to the legislation, has the duty to enable a continuous development of pupils in spiritual, physical, moral, intellectual and social aspects but in accord with pupils' aptitudes and abilities, through acquiring knowledge, concepts, attitudes and customs necessary for life as well as for on-going education.

The re-shaping of upbringing and education and the new role of participants in that process has also resulted in new determinants for pupils, learning, knowledge and teachers. The pupil is no longer a passive recipient but, instead, as an active researcher and information user he or she has to be constantly motivated for research activities. Learning in these new conditions is based on the constructivist paradigm, i.e. on actively facing the environment, the starting point of that process being the experience which can then face (acquisition of) further knowledge. The primary goal is enabling the pupils to understand relationships in problem situations and to solve those situations swiftly and effectively. In this way the newly acquired knowledge is made meaningful and relevant in day-to-day life situations. Teacher/school librarian becomes a participant and partner in learning; he or she motivates for work but presenting issues, asking questions and helping out in any crisis moments of this managed research-based learning.

By exchanging experiences of successful practices in education, for example by skilling teachers and practitioners (in this case school librarians), by developing skills for learning foreign languages, by adopting information and communication technologies, with the necessary monitoring of results in line with the agreed indicators and measures, Europe sees the development of an interconnected educational and research domain in which the Republic of Croatia is profiling her position in the key knowledge areas.

Conclusion

Nowadays school librarians in Croatia are highly educated persons in the field of information sciences. Their advanced training is obligatory, guaranteed by the Ministry of Science and Education through up-

⁹ Lovrinčević, J., Kovacević, D. (2006).

to-date contents in their profession as well as in education in general. The law of elementary and secondary education has clearly defined their adequate and very important place and role at school emphasizing their duty of serving as instructors and partners to the teachers in the process of education. Their share in the advancement and achievements of the pupils is absolutely recognized as an important factor in following the modern educational trends. In that way the problem of the status of school librarians in Croatia has been satisfactorily solved — a permanent problem in that profession not yet solved in the majority of states in the world.

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