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“What Was Left To Do? Cry? No. Create. Create Libraries:”

Transforming Communities Through Leadership and Library Service

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“Only with an impassioned patience, we will conquer that glorious city that will give light, justice, and dignity to all men.” (Rimbaud)

Introduction

I am happy to be part of this publication. First of all, thank you. Thank you very much for the chance of sharing my thoughts on leadership and its relationship to public libraries, and to share these thoughts from my perspective, from my own angle, from the angle of knowledge, the heart, and the practice given by experience – experience grounded in the many places called libraries and from the people that they serve. My thoughts emerge from the theories of many authors but also from the life experience of working and living in Chile and of having worked with different persons from different countries in Latin America.

In the story of public libraries in Chile you will find that the role of the people in this country, a country that is very long and narrow, that runs very north and south, a country made up of many diverse people, is of prime importance. Leadership must be emotionally intelligent and creative, in the context of creating a democracy - one that insists on continuing dialogue in order that libraries are planned with the people that they serve. To accomplish this co-planning, leaders must be able to inhabit the realities of the people, with respect and sensitivity. Our history makes us cognizant of coercion and imposition. Chile, as have many other countries, has had its history of horror – specifically I am referring to a history of dictatorship, disappearance, and censorship, under Augusto Pinochet, during the years of 1973 – 1990 when books and dreams were burned. Yet, a dream cannot truly be changed by an intruder, a life cannot just be simply halted, and a book – the writer’s words, meaning, and voice – cannot be forbidden. After a long time, no - it was not over night, people began to wake up, in order to say no to dictatorship and to put their lives at risk for democracy.

It is not my intent here to review the history of Chile but to point out, even briefly, the significance and impact of the context, the situation, from which public libraries had to be created in our country. People's determination, as part of their leadership capabilities, played a big role in bringing us where we are today and this must be acknowledged.

When our first democratic president, Patricio Aylwin, was elected, we found ourselves at a crossroads. We looked at the destruction, devastation, and the remnants that dictatorship and censorship had left behind. What was left to do? Cry? No. Create. Create libraries!

It is my hope that readers of this article recognize themselves in our struggle and determination. I am happy to share our story as other countries have shared, with us, the stories of their efforts to create accessible public libraries. The Thinking Outside of the Borders program as well as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) and other international organizations, bring us together so that we may re-arrange one another's models of services and adapt them to our own specific needs. Just the simple exchange of strategies from one country to another, generates new ideas, thoughts, and creativity, resulting in a collective effort to apply unique and suitable models worldwide. As we in Chile build "libraries without walls," our profession must continue to exchange without walls and without borders, in order to emphasize the library worker's role and responsibility as both a global and transformative leader, one that works with the people we serve, all along the way.

Public libraries in Chile have very unequal conditions due to economic, social, and geographic reasons. Regardless of these conditions, vigorous examples of leadership have appeared everywhere, many times stemming from an important precariousness of both the environment and the people's training. These leaders, however, have had the intelligence to read their realities, inhabit these realities, and then transform them! How does a leader transform his or her community through library service? By sharing our thoughts on leadership and then describing our own efforts to create public libraries throughout Chile, I hope to answer this question.

Leadership Proficient in the Art of Guiding

Words to Define Leadership

<i>Creation</i>	<i>Inspiration</i>
<i>Planning</i>	<i>Motivation</i>
<i>Attraction</i>	<i>Catalyst</i>
<i>Involvement</i>	<i>Guidance</i>
<i>Pleasure</i>	
<i>Participation</i>	
<i>Enthusiasm</i>	

Guidance involves inspiration, motivation and encouragement to not allow limitations to determine an outcome or one's future. Guidance is not coercion. It inspires determination and catalyzes planning. Leadership refers to the art of guiding men and women toward the future. The leaders are the individuals or the groups that are proficient in the art of "guiding," or taking people somewhere, in this case, into the future, a future determined not only "for" that community but "by" that community.

Librarians, library administrators, and library workers are in charge of public libraries in each region, city, or village of Chile and are thus, the main actors in the transformation of their own communities. Although the public libraries in Chile still experience many limitations such as poverty, social inequity, reduced budgets, and low salaries, they do not allow these limitations to determine the outcome of what public library service is or could be. Public library workers, as leaders, must be capable of noticing emotions and moods related to the hardships and barriers described and experienced by the members in their community. Their role as community leaders, then, is to inspire, motivate, and encourage the community in order to catalyze a conviction to begin the journey on a better road toward

a better future. “A better future” may mean a new outlook, a new world, a new perspective, possibilities, and potential – i.e. options that enable people to live with better alternatives and choices as they create their lives.

How might a library leader attract interest and involvement by the community through inspiration? Emotional intelligence is a critical factor. The community is not a product or an outcome or a profit. Emotionally intelligent leaders can describe and produce emotions as they lead human beings – who are made of language, action and emotion – to their own future. A key feature, then, of an emotionally intelligent leader, is the ability to genuinely connect with the pain and frustration of the community as if they are “feeling” the needs of the library service area by being connected to not only the library structures, the collections, the staff, or the procedures and protocols but especially to the people of the community – their events, their lives, their issues, their joys, their worries and their needs. Library workers, then, must be engaged with the community that they work in. They must participate with the community in understanding library services, library service potential, and library service visions. Once engaged with the community then issues are better understood and potential, possibilities, and envisioning may be generated together. In this way the library leader is not a distant outsider but involved with the community.

When we began to embark upon the creation of a “Participative Management System” in Chile, sociologists, psychologists, and librarians worked together and taught library workers how they could become engaged with the community e.g. learning their history, their interests,

Participative Management – A Closer Look

The aim of Mechanisms of the Participative Management is that the public libraries in agreement with The Directorate of Libraries, Archives, and Museums (DIBAM) – establish a dynamic, permanent, and fluid relationship with their respective communities. Each library constitutes a space for reading and cultural development, where men, women, boys and girls, find a place where their different information and cultural needs are welcome.

their needs, and concerns, and how they could inspire them not only to use libraries but to design libraries and advocate for them. The library workers of Chile learned to plan together with the community by asking them what they wanted. This took enthusiasm and effort, because there are a lot of differences between people in different regions of the country.

Still, the participatory management system was critical toward establishing a genuine trust with and respect for the community.

The creation of a library system and network involved agreements with municipalities, establishments of the first book purchase budgets, implementation of the first qualification courses, integration of jails and hospitals, obligatory open shelves, creation of the “Participative Management System” and the Bibliometro.

Public Libraries in Chile

Bibliometro (Library Net)–A Closer Look

These are lending points in subways for books in 12 Metro stations in Santiago. In the last decade they have loaned 600,000 books to the regular users of the subways. In this way, persons of all ages have been introduced to the pleasure of reading.

During the last two decades, public libraries in Chile have been experiencing a process

of change and transformation, generating more services, developing innovative projects, increasing the access to cultural goods for an ever increasing number of people in our country, providing information, culture, permanent education and recreation.

This development, acknowledged worldwide, is based upon an important number of leaders who are at the forefront of the libraries, overcoming adverse conditions and obtaining achievements, by working together with their communities. This has allowed for the development of a very good number of public library initiatives.

Many of these initiatives began as a vision and in the process of making them realities, it was soon discovered that in each corner of the country there is room for dialogue. “Libraries”, as we saw them, were not only buildings or rooms but places and spaces for dialogue, the dialogue that is required for democracy. Many “libraries without walls” were created to accommodate this philosophy. We found that spaces could be created for gathering,

meeting, and encountering new discoveries, for everybody.

The First Public Library Programs (1993)

Children’s Corners

Child & Youth Literature Selection Committee:

Librografia

Traveling boxes

First *Bibliobus* (mobile library) - serving the rural sector

The Public Libraries Network in Chile–2008:

- 435 Public Libraries
- 378 Libraries with BiblioRedes service
- 16 Prison Libraries
- 9 Hospital Libraries
- 60 Mobile Services
- More than 100 different lending points

Up through the year 2000, other exciting initiatives were created. Some of these ideas were taken to Spain, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay. Some were borrowed from Peru and other countries such as the Book Postmen, Biblio-Boats, Book Carts, Book Messengers, The Yellow Library Bikes–Biblio-Bikes, Community Libraries, SIC–Community Information Services, Diba-Mobiles, Cultural Buses, and the Kiosks in Valparaiso. In the

present day, we now have our New Century Initiatives such as the Open Air Market Lending Point/ “El Casero de Los Libros.” This project involves the creation of book lending points at Open Air Markets. That is, between lettuces, potatoes and tomatoes, near the onions, baskets with books appear, which the neighbors will be able to borrow as members of this new service.

We are proud of each and every initiative however, BiblioRedes was very profound in the sense that we were able to train many people that were poor or that had no computers at home

or that lived or worked in isolated areas of Chile. There is a great diversity in Chile that includes many regional sub-cultures and co-cultures in the urban and rural areas. What was most exciting was that once people were trained they began to create their own content, in their own

BiblioRedes: New Century Initiative

The BiblioRedes Project was developed with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chilean Government. It aimed to provide computers and Internet connections to public libraries as a way to overcome the digital gap in our country. It included three phases:

Phase 1: Training

Phase 2: Creation of Local Content

Phase 3: Creation of Digital Services

voice, on the Web. Villages or islands that were not present or visible on the Web now would have a Web site designed by their own people. This outcome was in line with the philosophy of participatory management and leadership that requires guidance, involvement, creation, and effort.

The Model Public Library:

We are now looking at the creation of a model library with services that embody and deliver on the following defined values: identity, recreation, culture, community, education, knowledge, encounters, information, access and new technologies.

Our main objective is the delivery of information services, the preservation and dissemination of culture, personal development and self-training. We pledged for equity of access to information, extension activities, training and for the welcoming and integration of people through library services especially designed for the community and with the community.

We have since built the Santiago Public Library which is 20,000 square meters and by the time this publication reaches you, three more will be built. We built this library as a model for the creation of many more libraries in each corner of the country: a model of service, of philosophy, of what a library must be- a model of dreams. The services provided were determined by 121 focus groups in the community.

The form and structure of the Santiago Public Library is based on the principle that the human being is the main focus, and therefore, we are interested in having the best books, the best technologies, the best librarians, the best furniture and the prettiest building - but in that order, not backward.

In line with the philosophy that the human being, the person, and the community are the priorities of service, we created the following protocols and operating principles and would like to apply them beyond the Santiago Public Library, to all of our libraries:

Signage

- Prohibitions are not necessary.

Book display

- Books are not arranged by DDC or LC.
- We want to look like a bookstore and thus, have front facing books.
- Any format is accepted.

Access

- Every social group is accepted, except for intolerant ones.
- Every expression is accepted.
- Every ethnic group and nationality are accepted.
- We favor the most deprived groups and the most welcome are the “marginals” - people who live on the margins of our society.

- Being cost-free is fundamental for access.
- There will be a rental fee for any non-library related activity.
- Participation of the community in the decision-making process is a key issue.

Services

- We accept ideas and projects, with the condition that they are innovative.
- When decisions are made, the people whom are served by the library are considered a priority in the decision-making process.
- A story, a poem, or any text is read daily in the library.
- Everything is possible in the library!

Within these operating principles you will see that people are our primary focus. Our libraries must involve them and be accessible to all people. We are on our way to establishing a “culture of literacy” in libraries; however, we understand clearly that there are still potentials and possibilities that do not stop with reading. We see the public library as the mediator between the accumulated culture and its community. In the global world, the library speaks about us and to us. The library is a place of our own. It is the new civic center. It is the new plaza (public square) – so important to Latin American culture. It is the heart.

Leadership

How did we make the journey of transformation this far? With a people-centered leadership style. Here are some of my concluding concepts and ideas on leadership. As you read them, think about the librarians, library workers, sociologists, psychologists, everyday people, villagers, and islanders that worked together to bring public libraries in Chile this far.

A leader:

- is a very good planner, one who has clear objectives.
- is the one who can permanently struggle with success and failure without allowing either to blind him or her.
- is the one who is practical, the one who takes the best of something and reorganizes and re-shapes it.
- is the one who dares and is courageous.
- is the one who is fascinated with what she or he is doing.
- is the one who knows him/herself, who knows his/her own virtues and limitations, the one who fights with his/her own needs and passions.
- is the one who is in touch with others; has great ideas, and makes the best decisions, and communicates them properly.
- is not the one who knows everything, but is the one who knows how to listen to the ones that know best about certain issues and to those that live the experiences, in order to get the best transmission of their knowledge and needs.

- is the one able to break paradigms, to create libraries in a different form or from a different perspective than the one everybody typically thinks of.
- is the one who is able to move a whole community together with his/her team.
- is the one who designs library service with the community as the engine of the library.
- is the one who is creative!

Conclusion

Did I say that transformation was easy? No. There were and are still many challenges but when we make a decision to create with determination and with the community, it becomes possible. When the people of my country decided not to cry, but to create, it became possible. What this meant was that we had to honor history but break with it in order to think outside our mental borders, psychological borders, cultural borders, and even traditional leadership borders in order to accomplish the vision and models of public libraries in Chile today. Below are a few “consejos” to help you think outside the borders, as a library leader, that will guide the community with their needs and dreams in mind:

Consejos - Pieces of Advice

- Look for more than one alternative, look for many alternatives!
- Look at problems as opportunities!
- Take risks!
- Have courage and dare to be different!
- Question rules and presumptions!
- Be persistent. Never give up!
- Be an explorer!
- Invent your own principles!

Finally, I leave you with a favorite inspirational quote. My best wishes go to all readers of this publication in your efforts to transform traumatic censorship into a collective and celebratory voice, to transform limitations into possibilities, and to transform debilitating ghosts into creativity! Create. Create libraries!

- *“Take good care of the earth. It does not belong to us. It belongs to our children. We must give it to them in better condition than when we received it. And with it, we must deliver the words that name everything that exists in the universe. And with the words, the value of life.” African saying*