

READING
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THE MULTIPLE FACES OF LITERACY



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Introduction

The theme of the 35th IASL Conference, realized in Lisbon, Portugal, from the 3rd to the 7th July 2006, deals with one of the most important topics for the development of nowadays society: literacy is a complex and multi-dimensional issue and the domain of literacy competences and skills is fundamental to survive and live with quality in a knowledge based society.

In fact, if the new and powerful information and communication technologies are in the origin of unimaginable progress and exciting possibilities for the development of society, their absolute and yet growing domain of the social, economical and cultural aspects of everyday life tends at the same time to provoke higher inequalities and create a new kind of social exclusion; this exclusion, known by the name of “digital divide”, is based not only upon the possession or access to the information technologies, but also – and decisively – in the individual capacities for using and exploring information – this meaning the domain of multifaceted literacy competences for reading, knowing and doing.

There is no doubt today that school libraries can play a decisive role as active partners of the educational system, capable of facing the challenges of our changing world; in reality, they are a fundamental part of the teaching and learning processes and the heart of any educational system based on a learner centred curriculum, one that intends to develop pedagogical processes capable of promoting real literacy and multiple literacy competences among children and young people.

When we started thinking about the theme of this conference, we tried to organize it in the context of four well defined lines that interact between them and can be considered structural to help school libraries face the *literacy challenge*: *school library networks*, which are the basis for the development of quality performance in a networked society and, in consequence, a fundamental issue of the promotion of coherent literacy programs; *literacy and multi-literacies*, where the main question of the conference can be debated at an effective theoretical and programming level; *digital libraries, hybrid environments*, dealing with the concrete problems related to the new and each day more dominant media for the creation, storage, diffusion and retrieval of information; and finally *school libraries, digital divide and social inclusion*, a theme that resumes the main problem that school libraries and the society as a whole are now facing, and affects the real access of children and young people to information and the acquisition of knowledge, in a local, national as well as international level.

The success of the IASL proposal for its 2006 conference was soon detected by the extraordinarily positive response we've received since the very first announcements: when the call for proposals ended, almost 200 proposals had arrived to the organization, sent from 37 countries of five continents. It was clearly difficult for the program committee to choose among so many interesting proposals, enough to organise two conferences without losing quality.

The most appealing sub-theme of the conference was clearly the one that deals with *literacy and multi-literacies* issues, followed by *school library networks*: within a total of 72 presentations, 37 papers are mostly about the first subject and 20 about the second. With fewer contributions, although the specific themes are also touched by other papers, the sub-themes *Digital libraries, hybrid environments* and *School libraries, digital divide and social inclusion*, will be discussed respectively in 8 and 7 presentations.

Also, and regarding now the type of sessions, the conference is constructed on the ground of the theoretical presentations constituted by seven keynotes with invited presenters, 24 research papers, 40 professional papers and 8 workshops, to which we can still add 22 posters.

We'll have 144 presenters from 27 countries of five continents: the Portuguese presence domains, which is natural being Portugal the host country, and the European countries are also well represented, with contributions from Spain, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, Croatia, Germany, The Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and Luxembourg; Australia and Taiwan bring the second stronger delegations, followed by the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Israel and South Africa; and finally, delegates will be able to assist to testimonies, research and professional projects and ideas from Brazil, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Turkey, Botswana and Papua New Guinea.

It is not indifferent the place where such a conference is organised. With somewhat alarming problems of literacy, Portugal has been developing a School Libraries Network since 1996 and, in 10 years, passed from a situation of almost complete inexistence of school libraries to a significant coverage of schools all over the country. The success of the model adopted for the development of such a network justifies the choice of Portugal as host country of the 2006 IASL Conference and leaves the Portuguese professionals with more responsibilities in its future growth.

An unfortunate happening marked the beginning of the organization of this conference and we miss Ann Clyde, who was the very first person to send us a paper proposal – it is in honour of her overwhelming memory that we are and will go on working hard for the success of this conference.

We wish you a good stay in Lisbon, *the white city*: we're sure that its unique light, the beauty of the river and the urban landscape, the fine Portuguese food and wine, the warm climate and the hospitality of the people will leave you with unforgettable memoirs, to join what we expect will be the memory of a high quality conference, built by all of you.

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