The Role of Librarians as Mediators in Promoting Young People Digital Literacy in Latvia

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New challenges & opportunities

• The fast development of information and communication technologies is rapidly creating a whole set of new challenges and opportunities for young people, their parents and educators. Children make more and longer use of the Internet than ever. They also start at an earlier age, use an ever-growing range of technological platforms, and get on-line in more locations than ever before.

• Internet has become a routine part of children’s lives and “the question is no longer just that of children’s relationship with the internet as a medium, but also with their relationship with the world as mediated by the internet in particular and changing ways” (Livingstone, 2014).
Highly developed internet infrastructure

Children in Latvia today enjoy a highly developed internet infrastructure:

- **Broadband connectivity and speed** of connection ranks Latvia among the top 10 countries in the world (State of the internet. Akamai`s report, 2015).
- Significant progress have also taken place in the development of **wireless and mobile technology**.
- **Internet use** in Latvia among students and pupils is **100%**
EU Kids Online research

• Unfortunately, highly-developed digital infrastructure also bears with it its unavoidable flip side: risks for children. Such risks were highlighted by a study carried out in the framework of the EU Kids Online research project.

• EU Kids Online, a thematic research network, funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme, has examined research findings from 33 member states in the period from 2006 to 2013 into how children and young people use the internet and new online technologies.
EU Kids Online research in Latvia

The research in Latvia was based on the study that was done in two stages:

- Methodology of **quantitative research** corresponds to surveys carried out within the framework of the EU Kids Online project. Children were surveyed by **combining face-to-face interviews with a questionnaire** (children themselves ticked off the answers to sensitive questions).
- The sample – 1,001 respondents. The sample method – stratified **random sampling**
- The results from Latvia were compared with common indicators in Europe.
Independence from parents and caretakers

• As EU Kids Online research project (2013 – 2014) showed: children in Latvia are highly independent from their parents and caretakers in their attitudes towards the Internet.

• Compared with other European countries, parents in Latvia tend to take less interest in what their children do on the Internet. This is attributable to a generally lower level of digital literacy on the part of Latvian parents.

• Much of the existing knowledge and safety skills in Latvia are held by the children themselves, and their peers, rather than by their parents.
The need for mediation

- Children devise their own strategies to learn and solve whatever issues they may come across during their Internet use, which certainly triggers the question whether these self-devised strategies and solutions are always the most appropriate.

- The ability of parents to serve their children as mediators of Internet use is therefore questionable, and hence the potential role of other possible adult mediators takes on added significance.

- In this context, the digital literacy of young people should be supported not only by their parents, but also by other mediators, their educators – including teachers and librarians.
Internet usage by kids in libraries

• Survey data from the EU Kids Online study show that Latvia is at the top of Internet usage by kids in libraries: 46% of young respondents indicated that they connect to the Internet from libraries and other public places, while the EU average stands at only 12%.

• To the question of whether they had ever received advice on Internet usage from librarians, about one-fifth – 21% of children answered that they had – nevertheless a high indicator compared to the European average – 6%
Internet usage by kids in libraries

• The unique situation in Latvia where librarians could play a crucial role as digital literacy mediators can be based on the facts that Latvia has **one of the highest number of public libraries** compared to other European countries and one of the highest number of **free-of-charge internet access points in its public libraries** as well.
Project - The Third Son of the Father

• The public library development project *The Third Son of the Father* falls within this context. This project was implemented with private funding and with the support of the State of Latvia, the municipalities of Latvia and Microsoft.

• The key activities of the project included the supply of computers and software to public libraries, Wi-Fi internet access, training librarians, enabling public communication initiatives, and the like. Several methodological and teaching aids for librarians were developed.
Project - The Third Son of the Father

• To demonstrate the benefits of *The Third Son of the Father* project a large scale longitudinal impact assessment study was implemented. Representative surveys of inhabitants of Latvia were conducted in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013.

• The research indicated that free internet access in the public libraries was used by 28% of the Latvian population in 2007 and 2009, accordingly 30% in 2011 and 32% in 2013. As one of the main reasons for choosing library as a place to use internet was mentioned the ability to get support from the staff of libraries. The help of librarians was required by more than 30% of internet users in libraries (Paberza & Rutkauskiene, 2010).
A librarian-centred approach

- Data from *The Third Son of the Father* surveys and the *EU Kids online* research strongly suggest that librarians can be perceived as digital literacy social agents or mediators for Latvian society and notably for children.

- A librarian-centred approach to the research of the mediation of children’s use of digital technology, or in a theoretical conceptualization of the topic, was not so far applied.
Thank you!