

## **Building a Learning Community: Challenges in Implementing School Library Guidelines**

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**Abstract:** The implementation of a policy, guideline or practice can be an arduous process, fraught with difficulties around unfamiliar concepts or activities. Implementation difficulties are examined, using examples from Alberta's 1990 *Focus on Research: A Guide to Developing Students' Research Skills* guide to inquiry learning and the international 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). The lessons learned from the implementation of these two documents may provide useful questions for the implementation of Canada's 2014 *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Commons in Canada*. All three documents were the culmination of multi-year processes involving a wide network of contributors. In each case, the development process was guided by a school library association and by panels of experts, both researchers and practitioners. The challenges of implementing a new policy, guideline or practice are discussed, focusing on some concepts important to contemporary school library practice.

### **Introduction**

Accounts of the process of developing the 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines* have been written and presented previously (see, for example, Oberg, 2015; Schultz-Jones, 2015; Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2015). In the Appendix to this article, readers will find two excerpts from the *Guidelines*: the Executive Summary and the Recommendations of the 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines*. The full text of the *Guidelines* is available on the IFLA website at <http://www.ifla.org/publications/node/9512?og=52>. Translations into 14 languages are in progress: Chinese, Croatian, French, Hungarian, Dutch, German, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese (Pt), Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Telugu (India), and Vietnamese.

### **Value of School Library Guidelines**

What is the purpose or value of guidelines documents? Gwyneth Evans (2007) explained the purpose and value of international guidelines in this way:

*We live in an interconnected world and what happens in one place does affect us all. We have standards and values in our profession, and we want to develop statements that reflect those standards. We do not want to duplicate high level documents when there is so much to do in implementing them and addressing the changes we face. By sharing our knowledge and experience, we are reinforcing our common humanity while understanding our diversity.*

As noted in an earlier publication (Oberg, 2015), those involved in creating the *IFLA School Library Guidelines* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) faced the challenges faced by all who develop guidelines documents plus the additional challenges of creating documents that would be meaningful to educators in many different roles (e.g., librarians, teachers, principals, superintendents, ministers of education, ministers of culture, and so on), and working in very diverse economic and sociocultural environments. All guidelines represent a compromise between what we aspire to achieve and what we can reasonably expect to achieve.

People can and do make use of guidelines in many ways: to inform the development of national and local policies and guidelines; to support strategic and operational plans, especially in schools and in regional educational authorities; and to act as resources in the initial and continuing training of teachers and librarians. However, those who implement guidelines need to bear in mind the local context, the current situation, and the potential for future changes in the situation and in the documents.

People who consult guidelines documents to guide school library practice, to advocate for future improvements in school libraries, or to develop school libraries need to be sure that those particular standards and guidelines are applicable to their situation, that is, if they make sense, if they “resonate.” People who consult guidelines documents need to ask themselves: Who created these documents? Where were they created? When were they created? Who were they created for?

The process of developing and adopting a new policy, guideline or practice can be challenging but the implementation of that new policy, guideline or practice can be even more arduous.

## **Implementation Challenges for *Focus on Research***

In 1990, the Alberta Ministry of Education published *Focus on Research*, a guidelines document for teachers and school librarians who were teaching students to do library-based research (now usually referred to as inquiry projects). The document’s research process model drew from research, particularly that of Carol Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process (ISP). The ISP approach identified the thinking, doing and feeling aspects of student’s experience of the research or inquiry process and incorporated into the teaching practice to support student learning, a concept new to many teachers and school librarians, that of metacognition. When implementing *Focus on Research*, teachers and school librarians were expected to engage student in the metacognitive practices of “thinking about their thinking” and “thinking about their feelings.” The *Focus on Research* document provided a number of activities for developing students’ metacognitive abilities.

However, the implementation of the *Focus on Research* model was found to be more difficult than expected, especially in those areas that were new to teachers and school librarians: engaging students in planning and assessing their research projects and supporting students in exploring their personal experience of the research process (that is, exploring both their thinking and feeling). For example, in a study involving two teachers working with a grade five class using the research process model, Susan Holland (1993) found that the success of the research project was hampered by the teachers’ limited understanding of the metacognitive aspect. This aspect was given specific and in-depth attention in the revision of *Focus on Research*, which was published by Alberta Learning about a decade later, *Focus on Inquiry: A Teacher’s Guide to Implementing Inquiry-based Learning* (2004).

## Implementation Challenges for the *IFLA School Library Guidelines*

The new *IFLA School Library Guidelines* are intended to be:

*both inspirational and aspirational. The many contributors to this document were inspired by the mission and values of the school library, and they recognized that school library personnel and educational decision-makers, even in countries with well-resourced and well-supported school libraries, must struggle to be relevant to the learning needs of the whole school community and to respond thoughtfully to the changing information environment within which they work. (p. 12)*

The evolving nature of the context for school libraries provides a challenging environment for creating and implementing guidelines that can be used to guide practice and also to advocate for future improvements in the local situation. And, while meeting the proposed guidelines is important:

*What is more important is the way that the members of the school community think about school libraries: working in service of the moral purpose of school libraries (i.e., making a difference in the lives of young people) and of the educational purpose of school libraries (i.e., improving teaching and learning for all). (p. 13)*

### **What is “New” in the New International School Library Guidelines?**

As with Alberta’s *Focus on Research*, it is likely that the new aspects of the revised *IFLA School Library Guidelines* are going to be the most challenging to implement. However, what is “new” will depend heavily on the local situation. The revised *Guidelines* emphasize the elements of a school library that, based on an empirical foundation of more than 60 years of international research, are most critical to ensuring that a school library contributes in positive ways to “teaching and learning for all.” These elements include: the definition of a school library; the teaching and learning role of a school librarian; the education of a school librarian; leadership and collaboration; and evaluation and evidence-based practice. Each one of these elements is “new” in some part of the international school library community.

#### Definition of a school library

The definition of a school library includes significant distinguishing features: “a qualified school librarian with formal education,” “targeted high-quality diverse collections (print, multimedia and digital) that support the school’s formal and informal curriculum.” and “an explicit policy and plan for ongoing growth and development” (IFLA, 2015, p. 17). By including the school librarian as an integral part of the definition, the role of the school librarian as an educator is emphasized. Not all school libraries currently have a “qualified” school librarian, and many countries do not yet have a specialized way of educating school librarians, but this is an aspirational feature that research demonstrates will have an impact on student learning.

### Teaching and learning role of a school librarian

The school librarian's role in teaching and learning is central to the school library program. The role is recognized by several terms (school librarian, school library media specialist, teacher-librarian, *professeurs documentalistes*) but the role itself includes: “instruction, management, leadership and collaboration, and community engagement” (IFLA, 2015, p. 28). The instructional role of a school librarian emphasizes reading and information literacy as well as inquiry-based learning. This instructional role encompasses work with teachers, principals, and community members as well as with students.

### Education of a school librarian

The instructional role of a school librarian requires that he or she have at least the same level of education as a classroom teacher, and the leadership and collaboration role requires that a school librarian have the same level of education as other leaders in the school. The recommendations related to this requirement were controversial, but are supported by research. Exemplary school librarians display the traits of exemplary teachers: successful teaching experience is necessary for school librarians to understand and solve instructional problems. They plan with teachers, use innovative teaching strategies, and develop collections which support the curriculum. School librarians need classroom teaching experience in addition to preparation in curriculum development and implementation.

### Leadership and collaboration

Also controversial was the leadership aspect of the role of a school librarian. Although a school librarian commonly acts as a resource person for teachers and is expected to co-plan and co-teach with colleagues, the idea of a school librarian taking on leadership activities within the school found less acceptance. However, the research is clear that a school librarian needs to provide in-service training for colleagues. This is because many of the activities that contribute to successful learning and teaching have not been emphasized in teacher education in the past and because schools are bombarded with changes in curricula, pedagogies, resources and technologies. Supportive professional development is often best provided at the school or district level where teachers and school librarians learn together: such in-service programs require leadership skills.

### Evaluation and evidence-based practice

Evaluation of school library programs and services helps ensure that they support the goals of the school. Evaluation is usually about accountability, but it also can also be about transformation—about influencing people’s thinking about the school library and developing support for the school library. One of the newer approaches to school library evaluation is evidence-based practice. Using this approach, a school librarian uses three kinds of data to improve practice: findings from formal research (evidence FOR practice); locally produced data (evidence IN practice, such as schedules of instructional activities); and user-reported and user-generated data (evidence OF practice, measuring the impact of what school librarians do). Evidence-based practice is a holistic and integrated approach to using data for decision-making that demands new kinds of competencies from the school library professional.

## Implementation Challenges for *Leading Learning*

Like the IFLA *Guidelines*, *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* is meant to apply to school libraries of many different kinds, and the importance of local context is addressed frequently throughout the document.

### **What is “New” in *Leading Learning*?**

What is experienced as “new” in *Leading Learning*, that is, the elements most likely to present implementation challenges, will vary across the country. Within each of the five *Leading Learning* standards are six-seven themes. Below are my guesses as to which theme in each standard will likely present a challenge in the school districts I know best. Which themes will present challenges in your local school community?

Standard	Theme
Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate and Empower a Community of Learners	<i>Student and Community Partnerships</i>
Advancing the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals	<i>Principal Collaborative Role</i>
Cultivating Effective Instructional Design to Co-plan, Teach and Assess Learning	<i>Evidence-based Practice</i>
Fostering Literacies to Empower Life-long Learners	<i>Cultural Literacy</i>
Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning	<i>Designing for a Participatory School Culture</i>

All school libraries, regardless of context or location, exist on a continuum of practice. *Leading Learning* has no force of law, only the force of persuasion or inspiration, until the standards of practice outlined in the document are implemented through legislation and through professional practice. Until then, the responsibility and challenge to bring *Leading Learning* to life lies with each and every school library practitioner, researcher, and educator.

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## APPENDIX

### IFLA School Library Guidelines: Executive Summary and Recommendations

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**School Library Manifesto:** School libraries around the world share a common purpose, expressed in the 1999 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto: the school library in teaching and learning for all*. School library personnel uphold the values of the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959), the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* (2007), and of the Core Values of IFLA. School libraries are envisioned in the *Manifesto* as a force for the enhancement and improvement of teaching and learning throughout the school community—for educators as well as for students.

**School library guidelines:** All guidelines represent a compromise between what we aspire to achieve and what we can reasonably expect to achieve. The contributors to this document were inspired by the mission and values embodied in school libraries, and they recognized that school library personnel and educational decision-makers, even in countries with well-resourced and well-supported school libraries, must struggle to be relevant to the learning needs of the whole school community and to respond thoughtfully to the changing information environment within which they work.

**The goal of school libraries:** The goal of all school libraries is to develop information literate students who are responsible and ethical participants in society. Information literate students are competent self-directed learners, who are aware of their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas. They display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know how to locate relevant and reliable information. They are able to manage technology tools to access information and to communicate what they have learned. They are able to operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers or no answers. They hold high standards for their work and create quality products. Information literate students are flexible, able to adapt to change and able to function both individually and in groups.

**Frameworks for school libraries:** School libraries exist within a framework of local, regional and national authority to provide equity of opportunity for learning and for developing the abilities needed to participate in the knowledge society. In order to maintain and continuously respond to an evolving educational and cultural environment, school libraries need to be supported by legislation and sustained funding.

School libraries also exist within an ethical framework that considers the rights and responsibilities of students and other members of the learning community. Everyone who works in school libraries, including volunteers, have a responsibility to observe high ethical standards in their dealings with each other and with all members of the school community. They endeavor to put the rights of library users before their own comfort and convenience and avoid being biased by their personal attitudes and beliefs in providing library service. They deal with all children, youth

and adults on an equal basis regardless of their abilities and background, maintaining their right to privacy and their right to know.

**Staffing school libraries:** Because the role of school libraries is to facilitate teaching and learning, the services and activities of school libraries need to be under the direction of professional staff with the same level of education and preparation as classroom teachers. Where school librarians are expected to take a leadership role in the school, they need to have the same level of education and preparation as other leaders in the school such as school administrators and learning specialists. The operational aspects of school libraries are best handled by trained clerical and technical support staff, in order to ensure that school librarians have the time needed for the professional roles of instruction, management, collaboration and leadership.

Staffing patterns for school libraries vary depending on the local context, influenced by legislation, economic development, and educational infrastructure. However, more than fifty years of international research indicates that school librarians require formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching in order to develop the professional expertise required for the complex roles of instruction, reading and literacy development, school library management, collaboration with teaching staff, and engagement with the educational community.

**School library collections:** School librarians work with administrators and teachers in order to develop policies to guide the creation and maintenance of the library's collection of educational materials. The collection management policy must be based upon the curriculum and the particular needs and interests of the school community and reflects the diversity of society outside the school. The policy makes it clear that collection building is a collaborative endeavor and that teachers, as subject experts with valuable knowledge of the needs of their students, have an important role to play in helping to build library collections. Also vital is ensuring that school libraries acquire resources that have been created both locally and internationally and that reflect the national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, indigenous and other unique identities of members of the school community.

**Instructional programs of school libraries:** School librarians should focus on the core pedagogical activities of:

- literacy and reading promotion;
- media and information literacy (e.g., information literacy, information skills, information competences, information fluency, media literacy, transliteracy);
- inquiry-based learning (e.g., problem-based learning, critical thinking);
- technology integration;
- professional development for teachers;
- appreciation of literature and culture.

School librarians recognize the importance of having a systematic framework for the teaching of media and information skills, and they contribute to the enhancement of students' skills through collaborative work with teachers.

**School library evaluation:** Evaluation is a critical aspect of an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement. Evaluation helps to align the library's programs and services with the goals of the school. Evaluation demonstrates to students and teachers, to library staff and to the wider educational community the benefits derived



from school library programs and services. Evaluation gives the evidence needed to improve those programs and services and helps both library staff and library users understand and value those programs and services. Successful evaluation leads to renewal of programs and services as well as development of new programs and services.

**Maintaining support for the school library:** Evaluation also is essential to guide initiatives related to public relations and advocacy. Because the role of school libraries in teaching and learning is not always well understood, supportive relationships need to be built with the school library's stakeholder groups and supporters in order to ensure that library funding and other kinds of support are maintained.

**About this document:** This is the second edition of school library guidelines published by the IFLA Section of School Libraries. These guidelines have been developed to assist school library professionals and educational decision-makers in their efforts to ensure that all students and teachers have access to effective school library programs and services, delivered by qualified school library personnel. The drafting of these guidelines involved discussion, debate and consultation with many people from many countries at workshops during IFLA conferences and mid-year meetings and through ongoing writing and review in person and online. The editors are indebted to the contributions of members of the Standing Committee of the IFLA Section of School Libraries and the Executive Board of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), as well as the other members of the international school library community who shared their expertise and their passion for the project.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed for use by school library professionals and educational decision-makers in their efforts to ensure that all students and teachers have access to effective school library services and programs, delivered by qualified school library personnel. The recommendations are presented in alignment with the text of the guidelines; the supporting sections of the text are noted at the end of each recommendation.

Those wishing to use the recommendations as one aspect of planning, developing, promoting, or evaluating a school library may want to utilize a scale to assess the status of each recommendation in relation to a particular school library or school library system: e.g., "Yes, Somewhat, No" (see Appendix D: Sample Evaluation Checklist), or "Exploring, Emerging, Evolving, Established, Leading into the Future" (see *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, 2014, p. 9).

**Recommendation 1.** The mission and purposes of the school library should be stated clearly, in terms that are consistent with the principles of the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto* and the values expressed in the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, and in the Core Values of IFLA. [Introduction, 1.7]

**Recommendation 2.** The mission and purposes of the school library should be defined in terms that are consistent with the expectations of national, regional and local educational authorities and the outcomes of the school's curricula.

[Introduction, 1.1-1.8]

**Recommendation 3.** A plan should be in place for the development of the three features necessary for the success of a school library: a qualified school librarian; a collection that supports the curriculum of the school; and an explicit plan for ongoing growth and development of the school library. [1.1–1.8]

**Recommendation 4.** Monitoring and evaluation of school library services and programs and of the work of the school library staff should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that the school library is meeting the changing needs of the school community. [1.9, 6.1–6.4]

**Recommendation 5.** School library legislation should be in place, at an appropriate governmental level or levels, to ensure that legal responsibilities are clearly defined for the establishment, support and continuous improvement of school libraries accessible to all students. [2.1-2.2, 2.4-2.7]

**Recommendation 6.** School library legislation should be in place, at an appropriate governmental level or levels, to ensure that ethical responsibilities of all members of the school community are clearly defined, including such rights as equity of access, freedom of information and privacy, copyright and intellectual property, and children's right to know. [2.3, 3.6-3.8]

**Recommendation 7.** School library services and programs should be under the direction of a professional school librarian with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching. [3.1-3.4]

**Recommendation 8.** The roles of a professional school librarian should be clearly defined to include instruction (literacy and reading promotion, inquiry-centered and resource-based), library management, school wide leadership and collaboration, community engagement, and promotion of library services. [3.5, 3.5.4]

**Recommendation 9.** All school library staff--professional, paraprofessional and volunteer—should clearly understand their roles and their responsibilities to work in accordance with library policies including those related to equity of access, right to privacy, and right to know for all library users. [3.1, 3.2, 3.6, 3.7]

**Recommendation 10.** All school library staff should endeavour to develop collections of physical and digital resources consistent with the school's curriculum and with the national, ethnic and cultural identities of members of the school community; they also should endeavour to increase access to resources through practices such as cataloguing, curation, and resource-sharing. [4.2.3, 4.3, 4.3.1-4.3.4]

**Recommendation 11.** The facilities, equipment, collections and services of the school library should support the teaching and learning needs of the students and

the teachers; these facilities, equipment, collections and services should evolve as teaching and learning needs change. [4.1-4.3]

**Recommendation 12.** The connections among school libraries and with public libraries and academic libraries should be developed in order to strengthen access to resources and services and to foster their shared responsibilities for the lifelong learning of all community members. [4.2, 5.4]

**Recommendation 13.** The core instructional activities of a school librarian should be focused on: literacy and reading promotion; media and information literacy instruction; inquiry-based teaching; technology integration; and professional development of teachers. [5.2-5.7]

**Recommendation 14.** The services and programs provided through the school library should be developed collaboratively, by a professional school librarian working in concert with the principal, with curriculum leaders, with teaching colleagues, with members of other library groups and with members of cultural, linguistic, indigenous and other unique populations to contribute to the achievement of the academic, cultural, and social goals of the school. [3.5, 3.5.4, 5.1-5.8]

**Recommendation 15.** Evidence-based practice should guide the services and programs of a school library and provide the data needed for improvement of professional practice and for ensuring that the services and programs of a school library make a positive contribution to teaching and learning in the school. [5.1, 5.2]

**Recommendation 16.** The use and support of the services and programs of a school library should be enhanced by planned and systematic communication with school library users (current and potential) and with the library's stakeholders and decision-makers. [6.4, 6.5]