
Developing International School Library Guidelines to Make a Difference: A Case Study

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Abstract:

The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines were first introduced in 2002 to support the foundational principles expressed in the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999 and interpret those principles in practical terms. A revision to the 2002 edition of the Guidelines was deemed necessary to reflect current research, practice and conditions of 21st century school librarianship. The two year process of revision involved a wide network of international contributors, guided by a Joint Committee from the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) School Library Section and the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL). The process of developing the Guidelines for approval from the IFLA Governing Board is detailed along with a discussion of challenges, and lessons learned during this undertaking.

Keywords: *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto, IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines, standards, International Association of School Librarianship.*

Background

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users since it was established in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1927. In 1977 the School Libraries Section (SLS) was formed as one of the 44 sections within IFLA, with a Standing Committee of up to 20 members, nominated by IFLA association members who identify school librarianship as an important library service group. The SLS receives input from up to five Corresponding Members, appointed by the Standing Committee, who represent countries in geographical areas which might not otherwise be represented or who provide expertise in a specific subject field. Since Standing Committee members can only serve for two terms of four years and Corresponding Members are appointed for an initial two-year term, renewable for one further term of two years, on the decision of the Section Chair, the system of evolving membership ensures that there are ongoing opportunities for membership and participation among the countries of the world.

As stated on the IFLA SLS website, “The Section of School Libraries concerns itself with the improvement and development of school libraries and resource centres worldwide, especially advocacy for their qualified and adequate staffing. It provides an international forum for exchanging ideas, experiences, research results and advocacy.” This allegiance to the school library field reflects the understanding and belief in the role of school libraries in “teaching and learning for all” (IFLA 1999, 1).

Since 1947 IFLA has published jointly endorsed statements related to the principles of library service with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Two primary publications produced by the SLS provide fundamental principles of school library service: the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999* and the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines 2002*.

The genesis for the revision of the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines 2002* was a review of the document and discussion among the Standing Committee members of the School Library Section, Chaired by Randi Lundvall (Norway), at the IFLA WLIC 2013 in Helsinki, Finland. Both the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999* and the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines 2002* were reviewed and the consensus was that the Manifesto, translated into 37 languages and one of only three IFLA manifestos to garner UNESCO ratification, was still relevant in its current edition; the *School Library Manifesto* expressed universal principles of school librarianship and was used successfully to raise the profile of school libraries in their own schools, regions and countries. The *School Library Guidelines 2002*, on the other hand, that intended to “inform decision makers at national and local levels around the world, and to give support and guidance to the library community” (IFLA 2002, 2), were certainly written to help schools to implement the principles expressed in the manifesto but they didn’t reflect current research, practice and conditions of 21st century school librarianship.

The IFLA School Libraries Section pursued the revision of the Guidelines with inclusive representation from our international community. At the time the Guidelines were under review and revision the following countries were represented within the Standing Committee and the Corresponding Members: Canada, France, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States. Joining the SLS to pursue revision of the 2002 edition of the international guidelines was the membership of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), a major IFLA association member.

The resulting process of systematic review and energetic debate by the international school library community included scheduled meetings and workshops at the annual World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) held in August in different parts of the world, midyear meetings of the SLS held in the spring in different parts of the world, and rigorous and dedicated committee meetings via email, telephone and Skype conferences delivered through the coordinated efforts of the School Library Section Chair and the Secretary.

Revision Process

The revision of the *School Library Guidelines 2002* became part of the Action Plan of the School Libraries section for 2013-2014 which was updated in April 2013 at the Standing Committee midyear meeting in Oslo, Norway. Joining these efforts was the IASL membership, represented by members on the Joint Committee of IFLA/IASL, Chaired by Dianne Oberg (Canada). A timeline for the revision of the Guidelines was established and

amended as necessary (see Table 1). The revision work commenced with a workshop at IFLA WLIC 2013, Singapore.

Table 1 Timeline of Development of the *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015*

August 2013	Workshop IFLA WLIC, Singapore
September 2013	Summaries from workshop completed by facilitators and sent to Joint Committee
October 2013	Joint Committee feedback to IFLA School Libraries Section Chair
December 2013	First draft of guidelines completed by Joint Committee
February 2014	Joint Committee feedback sent to IFLA School Libraries Section Chair
April 2014	Midyear School Libraries Section meeting in London, UK; second draft completed
May 2014	Feedback from Joint Committee on second draft
June 2014	Editing and formatting of third draft completed by Section Chair and Secretary
July 2014	Review of third draft by IFLA School Libraries Section Standing Committee members
July 2014	Review of third draft by IASL Executive Board
August 2014	Workshop and endorsement of fourth draft at IFLA WLIC, Lyon, France
August 2014	New IFLA Standards process and guidelines introduced
September 2014	Workshop and endorsement of fifth draft at IASL Moscow, Russia
January 2015	Call for entries for the Bibliography
January 2015	Distribution and integration of feedback for the Recommendations section
January 2015	Submission to IFLA Professional Committee for approval
February 2015	Guidelines approved in principle, subject to comments from the Indigenous Matters SIG
April 2015	Incorporation of SIG feedback at Midyear School Libraries Section meeting in Austin, TX
June 2015	Final version approved by IFLA Professional Committee
July 2015	Final version accepted and posted to IFLA School Libraries Section website

The two hour workshop in Singapore was structured to examine each chapter of the 2002 Guidelines and garner feedback on the accuracy and scope of coverage of each chapter. Since the workshop was held during a WLIC, any interested IFLA members could attend and participate. Approximately thirty interested participants from school and public libraries, representing a wide variety of countries, assembled to provide feedback on the 2002 edition of the Guidelines and offer suggestions for the revision. With a round table assigned to each chapter, participants were asked to choose where to make their contribution. All chapters were actively reviewed, discussed, and debated; chapter feedback was presented to the full group for further discussion and thematic coverage for the emerging chapters was decided. The summaries and feedback from the workshop were sent to the Joint Committee members for further comment and assembled into a first draft revision by the School Library Section Chair, newly elected Barbara Schultz-Jones (USA) and Secretary, Dianne Oberg (Canada).

The first draft was distributed to the IFLA/IASL Joint Committee members and additional feedback was collected and integrated into a draft document for review at the April 2014 midyear Standing Committee meeting in London, UK. The midyear meeting focused entirely on reviewing and revising the draft to produce a second draft for wider distribution. At this point, the IASL listserv was used to distribute the second draft for international feedback. The response to the wider scope of the guidelines and revised chapter organization was very positive and additional comments and suggestions were received, debated and integrated into a third draft.

The third draft of the guidelines was distributed and presented at the second major international workshop in August 2014 at IFLA WLIC in Lyon, France. The format for review was the same as the first workshop, but the interest and availability of contributors had grown to 100 in number, with significant representation (30 participants) from our French colleagues. Participants were asked to choose and join a round table assigned to a

specific chapter. In some cases, more than one table was needed to accommodate interest in a specific chapter and in many cases translators were utilized to conduct the discussions. The two hour workshop was facilitated by members of the IFLA School Library Section Standing Committee, many of whom are multilingual, and all feedback and suggestions were documented. Each table examined a chapter, recorded comments, and presented their response to the full group for discussion and further debate. Endorsement for the additions to the third draft was received and a fourth draft was later prepared by the Standing Committee Chair and Secretary for future discussion.

At the annual IASL conference of September 2014 in Moscow, Russia the fourth draft was presented in a one hour workshop. Each chapter was presented to the full group of fifty participants and all additions, deletions, and comments were considered and addressed. Endorsement for the fifth draft was received from the participants.

The fifth draft was prepared by the Standing Committee Chair and Secretary and distributed again for final international comment through international listservs and to the participants of the workshops in Lyon and Moscow, with minor edits requested as a result. With the draft version complete, the final tasks were assembling a bibliography of citations of essential school library documents (2000 and later) that would be useful to our international audience, and extracting a set of recommendations from the guidelines that could be used as highlights of the guidelines' major themes. Once again, the international listservs were used to enlist citations and distribute the set of recommendations for comment. Our international audience consistently provided meaningful and timely responses that enabled the construction of a final draft document for submission to the IFLA Professional Committee in mid-January, 2015.

Feedback from the IFLA Professional Committee was received in February, 2015. The Guidelines were approved in principle, subject to comments from the Indigenous Matters SIG. These comments were provided in time for the April, 2015 Midyear Meeting in Austin, Texas, USA. The comments focused on consideration of "members of cultural, linguistic, indigenous and other unique populations" in specific areas of the guidelines, including Community Engagement (IFLA, 2015, p.28) and Collection Development (p.33-34). These comments focused attention on a critical area of need for school libraries – the community they serve, and helped raise the quality of those areas of the guidelines that referenced community members.

The process of official endorsement was completed in June 2015, in time for the IFLA/IASL Joint Committee to introduce the new *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015* at the IASL 2015 annual conference in June at Maastricht, Netherlands and at the IFLA WLIC 2015 in Cape Town, South Africa.

IFLA School Library Guidelines Content

While the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999* expressed universal principles of school librarianship, the *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2002* were limited in scope as an expression of these principles through international research, practice and conditions of 21st century school librarianship. The Guidelines underwent a significant revision "to inform decision makers at national and local levels around the world, to give support and guidance to the library community, and to help school leaders implement the principles expressed in the manifesto" (IFLA 2015, 12).

To address the current and future condition of school librarianship worldwide the 2015 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. (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 standards 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) (13)

The revised Guidelines emphasise the features of a school library based on an empirical foundation and rationale of more than 60 years of international research.

Definition of a school library - The revised Guidelines include the definition of a school library as a “school’s physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to students’ information-to-knowledge journey, and to their personal, social and cultural growth” (IFLA 2015, 16). The definition of a school library now 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” (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 may 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.

Definition and 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” (28). Instructional models for inquiry-based learning are included and the importance of reading and information literacy is emphasized.

Evaluation and Evidence-based Practice - Evaluation of school library programs and services helps ensure that they support the goals of the school. Approaches to school library evaluation include the ongoing approach of evidence-based practice to focus on improvement of practice.

Recommendations - The inclusion of a set of recommendations provides a focused set of primary themes from the guidelines. These could be used for advocacy purposes and to focus efforts to evolve the development of a school library. They can be used as a handout to quickly highlight the important elements of the Guidelines.

Examples - An important addition to the 2015 Guidelines is the inclusion of various examples of school library practice from around the world, used to illustrate salient points within the document. The inclusion of examples was inspired by the first edition of the *IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Guidelines* and the international response to our request for examples was gratifying.

In addition to expanded coverage within the chapters, the new guidelines include a glossary of terms, a bibliography of works consulted during the preparation of the guidelines and contributed during an international call for citations of essential school library documents (2000 and later), and a set of appendices (see Table 2) designed to support various areas of the Guidelines and provide additional detail.

Table 2 *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015* Appendices

Appendix A	<i>IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto</i>
Appendix B	School library budget plan
Appendix C	Instructional models for inquiry-based learning
Appendix D	Sample school library evaluation checklist
Appendix E	School library evaluation checklist for principals

In total, the revised *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015* constitute a significant representation of school libraries around the world, the evolving nature of school libraries, and the vision to “think globally and act locally in our efforts to provide the best possible school library services in the support of “teaching and learning for all.” (IFLA 2015, 13)

Context

The Guidelines are meant to apply to school libraries of many different kinds and the importance of local context is addressed frequently throughout the document. All school libraries, regardless of context or placement in developed or developing countries exist on a continuum of practice. They exist “as learning environments that provide space (physical and digital), access to resources, access to activities and services to encourage and support student, teacher and community learning” (IFLA 2015, 16).

The guidelines have no force of law, only the force of persuasion or inspiration, and they need to be implemented through legislation and through professional practice. It is possible that the international guidelines will inspire the development of national or regional standards and/or legislation where there are none at present. Regardless of the context, ultimately school libraries embody the basic concept expressed in the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 1999* of “teaching and learning for all” (1).

Challenges Encountered

The process of constructing an international document and reaching international consensus was not without challenges. There are many different perspectives on school libraries around the world and different terminology used to describe these perspectives and practices. The process to develop international guidelines created an atmosphere that celebrated the variety that exists among school libraries and blended multiple approaches to the establishment and use of guidelines across the world.

The target audience for the guidelines was actively debated. It was challenging to create a set of guidelines 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), 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.

In August of 2014, during the IFLA WLIC in Lyon, France, the new IFLA Standards process, guidelines and website were launched. The *IFLA Standards Procedures Manual* provides guidance for the development of standards and guidelines by IFLA professional units and outlines the required steps needed to produce an IFLA document that acquires official IFLA approval. These steps include writing the document, seeking input on the contents, correctly formatting the document and including various components, and the required forms for submission to the Professional Committee of IFLA and beyond for final endorsement. The revision of the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines* was underway before the new process was introduced so the documentation for an initial plan of action was not available when our process was initiated. We were, however, able to incorporate the required components, including the set of Recommendations that were not part of our original document. Beyond the omission of the initial plan of action, our Guidelines met all requirements and were duly submitted on January 16, 2015 for the first review.

Lessons Learned

The process of review by international participants which reflect best practice and local context is time consuming and potentially controversial. Maintaining a respectful line of communication and an orderly process was a shared responsibility that was fulfilled by dedicated professionals.

The *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015* will need to be updated in the future. The first edition was published in 2002 and the current revision was published in 2015. Our educational environment continues to evolve and school libraries will evolve alongside the challenge to educate current and future generations. Future updating will likely occur within a shorter interval than thirteen years, because of the leadership of people within IFLA and IASL; we have a well-established pattern of collaboration and shared interest in the need to keep our guidelines relevant to our rapidly changing learning environments:

These school library guidelines envision a world of inclusion, equity of opportunity and social justice. They will be implemented in the context of the 21st century, characterised by change, mobility, and interconnection across different levels and sectors (13).

The process for obtaining UNESCO endorsement of the Guidelines is not a natural extension of the process for approval by the IFLA Governing Board. Acquiring UNESCO endorsement is important, but not essential. Publishing and disseminating the Guidelines was the primary objective and the next step of seeking UNESCO endorsement will continue while the Guidelines are actively shared and promoted.

Next Steps

With the formal *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2nd edition* published, the focus of the School Library Section turns to dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines:

- Dissemination and implementation initiatives began immediately after WLIC 2015, with leadership from the 2015-2017 School Libraries SC and the Joint Committee of IASL/IFLA School Libraries.
- Announcements related to the Guidelines were sent out on IFLA-L and School-L and on IASL's Twitter and Facebook feeds.
- The process for obtaining UNESCO endorsement of the Guidelines is being researched.
- Translation into IFLA's official languages: the Guidelines (approximately 70 pages of text) were forwarded to IFLA Translation Centres, with a request to fast track the translation of the Guidelines' Executive Summary and Recommendations (approximately 5 pages of text).
- Translation into other languages: Many volunteers have begun the process of translating the guidelines into other languages. Norway took the lead with two Norwegian members of the School Libraries SC, and a special advisor on school services at the Oslo public library volunteering to translate the Guidelines into Norwegian.
- The Joint Committee of IASL/IFLA will conduct a 3-hour workshop on the dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines for IASL 2016 in Tokyo (Japan) and for IFLA 2017 in Poland.
- The Joint Committee of IASL/IFLA is developing webinars on the dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines for 2016-2017.

The successful completion of the process is a testament to the commitment of dedicated school librarians and school library educators worldwide. Contributing time and energy to the process reflects the interest and belief that school libraries, however they are configured and wherever they are situated, are instrumental in supporting and advancing student learning. Now, the responsibility and challenge to bring the *IFLA School Library Guidelines 2015* and its meaning to life lies with each and every educator.

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