IJIDI: Book Review

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I t is worth highlighting at the outset that, according to the *2015 IFLA School Library Guidelines*, which this book seeks to illuminate, "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*," and that "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" (p. 7). Consequently, even when this book is addressing the education and training of school librarians in a specific country, it is doing so in the interests of all children.

Quality library services delivered by qualified librarians and information professionals matter, because "since 1992, a growing body of research known as the school library impact studies has consistently shown positive correlations between high-quality library programs and student achievement" (Lance & Kachel, 2018). However, as becomes immediately apparent from *Global Action on School Library Education and Training*, "not all school libraries may currently have a 'qualified' school librarian, while many countries do not yet have a specialised way of educating school librarians, [which] is an aspirational feature that research demonstrates will have an impact on student learning" (p. 10) through core pedagogical activities ranging from literacy and reading promotion to collaborating with classroom teachers on inquiry-led approaches to learning. And in fact, "even in countries where general programmes in library and information studies are well established, specific programmes of education in school librarianship are lacking" (p. 1), largely because the complex relationship between the library and the classroom remains poorly understood even as we increasingly struggle to come to terms with a reality in which it is impossible to teach children everything that they need to know, and so must collaborate to position them where they can find what they need to know when they need to know it. My own personal experience illustrates this point all too well.

I am a professionally qualified school librarian with a teaching background working as the Head of Library and Information Services in an independent school in the UK. In the UK, independent schools charge fees instead of being funded by the government, and, as a consequence, are not required to follow the national curriculum, although they must be registered with the government and are inspected regularly. Despite charging fees, and contrary to widespread belief, independent schools vary widely in terms of their financial security. In terms of library provision, this situation is compounded by the fact that school libraries are not a statutory

requirement, and so the level of library provision, if any, is at the discretion of individual schools, which is also the case for government schools. By many measures, we offer a high-quality library program. However, when I left teaching, I was employed as a school librarian without education or training or experience as a school librarian. While I am grateful, this is not a sound foundation upon which to build a profession. I completed my MA in Information and Library Management, which taught me nothing about school libraries. I joined the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and almost immediately after the National Committee of its School Libraries Special Interest Group (SLG); I also joined the School Library Association (SLA), and recently joined its Board. The fact that school libraries are represented by two associations is telling, and partly accounts for the fact that the very term "professional" is contested and divisive. As a consequence, we have no coherent idea of what a school librarian is and does, or ought to do, and so no way of getting there. However, there are encouraging signs that this may be changing, which is largely due to the Great School Libraries campaign – a joint venture between CILIP SLG and SLA with the aim of ensuring that every child has access to a professionally-staffed school library. This situation is compounded by an educational system that does not require school libraries by law, and therefore has grown to have little need of them in practice. The value of this book to me in my role as Head of Library and Information Services at Oakham School, then, lies in the fact that it points me to the *Guidelines* and workshops as both an inspirational and aspirational end, and a means to that end.

Sponsored by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)'s School Libraries Section and the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), the purpose of this book, according to its blurb, is to "illuminate school librarian and teacher librarian education and training in light of the 2015 *IFLA School Library Guidelines,* 2nd edition, which provide a framework for effective service delivery to ensure that students and teachers have access to quality library services delivered by qualified librarians and information professionals" (back cover).

This gives the text a truly international perspective in two ways. Firstly, IFLA and IASL are international by definition, purpose, and member composition. Secondly, the national approaches to school library education and training contained in the book represent the range of situations that librarians around the world are likely to find themselves in, from countries where schools are legally required to have a school library managed by a professionally qualified school librarian with teaching competencies and supported by a range of ongoing professional development opportunities (Croatia), to countries where schools are not legally required to have a school library and no specific programmes exist to prepare professional school librarians, with professional development opportunities mainly provided by two professional organisations (China, and which is similar to the situation in the U.K.).

The *Guidelines* (2015) are available to download for free from the IFLA School Libraries Section Publications (https://www.ifla.org/publications/52) page, while the associated workshops and materials (see below) may be downloaded for free from the Projects (https://www.ifla.org/school-libraries/projects) page. The workshops and associated materials are worth elaborating on briefly, because they were specifically designed to facilitate implementation of the *Guidelines* and address Introduction and Implementation Support Materials; Mission and Vision of the School Library; Legal and Financial Framework for a School Library; Human Resources for a School Library; Physical and Digital Resources of a School Library; Programmes and Activities of a School Library; and School Library Evaluation and Public Relations.

The value of the workshops and associated materials lies in how broadly useful they are in facilitating implementation of the *Guidelines*, from a national level down to an individual school and even librarian level.

The book is organised in four parts, which reflects its purpose, outlined above:

Part 1: "Guidelines and Standards for School Library Education and Training" addresses the use of international and national guidelines for school library education as frameworks for designing school library education and training. Chapter 1 provides an international perspective, while the remaining two chapters provide a perspective from the U.S. Chapter 1 ("International Guidelines for School Library Education and Training") starts with the background to the *Guidelines* and ends with an overview of the workshops that were developed to facilitate implementation of the *Guidelines* towards "a world of inclusion, equity of opportunity and social justice" (p. 11). In many ways, Chapter 1 is key to the book, because regardless of which country the school librarian operates in, the responsibility and challenge of bringing the *Guidelines* and its meaning to life lies ultimately and always with each and every educator—including librarians—in settings that range from supportive through indifferent to hostile. By drawing attention to the workshops and associated materials, which can be used freely and adapted to meet local needs, this chapter, in turn, highlights the value of the book—the *Guidelines* are inspirational and aspirational in terms of what school library education and training ought to be (see below). Between the book and the workshops with their associated materials we are presented with a range of abstract and practical tools for improving the quality of the library services that we are responsible for. Furthermore, the book and the workshops with their associated materials really do provide us with the means of thinking globally and acting locally; for example, knowing that a school library ought to be staffed by professional staff with the same level of education and preparation as classroom teachers with adequate paraprofessional support, and that this is in fact the case elsewhere in the world, enables professional librarians working without paraprofessional assistance, which is all too common in the U.K., to make a powerful case for change at a local level.

Part 2: "Educating the School Library Professional" addresses approaches taken for initial preparation of school librarians, offered in formal education settings, as well as designed to develop dually qualified professionals holding both teaching and librarianship qualifications, with perspectives from Canada, France, and the U.S.

Part 3: "Changing Pathways in School Library Education and Training" addresses alternate approaches to providing initial preparation for school librarians, emphasising programmes offered by professional associations or government ministries and programmes in transition due to changing external forces or internal understandings, with perspectives from Japan, Botswana, and China.

Part 4: "Continuing Education and Professional Development" addresses programmes offered to in-service school librarians by professional associations, government ministries, school library networks and collaborative ventures, with perspectives from Croatia, the U.S., and Portugal.

The rest of the chapters in the book provide fascinating and informative insight into the bewildering range of approaches to school library education and training, given the general consensus that high-quality library programs positively impact student achievement. This strength also limits the practical usefulness of the book to practicing school librarians and

teacher librarians whose national perspectives are not represented in the chapters that make up the book, in that our contexts are so different that it is very difficult to transfer much on a practical level. Having said that, the book should have immense value to LIS students, academics, researchers, and policy makers with an interest in this subject, especially as there is a gap in the current literature addressing the education and training of school librarians from an international perspective, which is necessarily representative rather than exhaustive, with the closest being *School Librarianship: Past, Present, and Future* (Alman, 2017). Although focusing on the development of school libraries in the U.S., this book includes a chapter titled "School library programs around the world: from training to implementation".

In my capacity on the National Committee of SLG and the Board of SLA, this book's value lies in providing concrete examples of how other countries are approaching the very challenges we are facing. Not that all of these examples are equally accessible: for example, although I draw heavily on the work of individual colleagues in the U.S., the situation in the U.S. appears to be so different that I struggled to identify myself with it; by contrast, the situation in France, which was completely unknown to me and aspects of which I do not yet understand, struck a powerful chord, and elements of their *Master of teaching, education and training* suggest promising ways forward.

I am grateful for the opportunity to review this book and would definitely recommend it, although less so in my capacity as a librarian working in a school.

References

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