



ARTICLES

International Librarianship and its Impact on the Profession

by Anne M. Galler

Abstract

This article addresses international librarianship from both the point of view of education for international librarianship and librarianship at the international level. It also addresses research in the field of librarianship, and describes a selection of international associations mostly from personal experience.

The author adapted this article from a paper given at the Special Libraries Association Conference, held in Boston in June 1996.

"Librarians, by the nature of their affiliation with public, academic and cultural institutions, like museum curators and information center directors, must have an international outlook."¹

This article addresses the topic of international librarianship from two points of view: education for international librarianship and librarianship at the international level. One is the sensitization of librarians during their education for librarianship to the needs of the international library community and the other is the participation of professional librarians in the activities of library associations at the international level. The latter is the consequence of the former - the more library education addresses the needs of the international community, the more librarians will eventually participate in library activities at the international level.

Topics covered are:

1. Education for Librarianship (Curriculum)
2. Languages
3. Research
4. International Associations

Each topic will be addressed, first at the general level, then from a personal perspective regarding experience with some of these international associations.

1. Education for librarianship (Curriculum).

"Library education by and large remains provincial in its outlook and preparation."² - a strong statement but unfortunately true. The curriculum in most library schools prepares the students for the local community; reference, cataloguing and classification, children's and young adults literature where it is still taught, are all inward-looking. Maybe this is as should be, as the most important role of the librarian/information specialist is to serve the national community. However, especially today with the internationalization of information, it is the duty of library educators to enter the international arena, if they have not already.

Guidelines

One of the problems when one wishes to become "international" (for lack of a better term) is the absence of basic international standards or guidelines. The IFLA Section on Library Schools and Other Training Aspects - later renamed Section on Education and Training (1986) proposed *Standards for Library Schools*. These were published in the IFLA Journal (1976). As far as could be ascertained, these were never disseminated to the library schools nor endorsed by them.

¹Amman, Mohammed M. *Innovation for Information: International Contributions to Librarianship*.

²*idem*, p. 112

The next project undertaken by the same Section was to develop *Guidelines to Equivalence and Reciprocity of Professional Qualification* (Fang, Fischer, Nauta). This was not an easy task and the Section members realized that in order to determine professional qualifications worldwide, they first had to survey library and information studies schools throughout the world. As a result, the *International Guide to Library and Information Science Education* was published in 1985. An updated version of this survey was published by IFLA in 1995, entitled *World Guide to Library Archive and Information Science Education*. Editors are Josephine Riss Fang, Robert D. Stueart and Kulthida Tuamsuk.

It is worth noting that Archival education was added to the second edition of this work, and also that, after completing the first and second edition of this publication, the authors neglected to go back to their original plan, namely the establishment of equivalencies. This publication was very useful for obtaining addresses of library and information studies schools for an international study conducted in 1995.

Trying to establish international standards or guidelines is not an easy task. For example, in North America and the U.K., education for librarianship is mostly at the graduate level; in the third world and many East European countries, education remains at the undergraduate level.

This does not mean that one is superior to the other, or more desirable than the other. It is more likely that each type of education responds to the respective countries' needs. However, international guidelines are a goal to work towards. Lately, library curricula have concentrated on technology as opposed to cultural development of the potential graduate, which in my opinion is deplorable. Courses in the various literatures, such as children, young adults, have either been discontinued, or are being offered infrequently, thus concentrating solely on technology to the detriment of literature. Although technology is an excellent and important tool, hopefully there will eventually be a return to more intellectual pursuits at the library education level.

An entire issue of the *IFLA Journal* (v. 17 (1991) under the editorship of Miriam Tees is devoted to Education and Training. The articles in this issue also discuss other topics, such as distance education for the library profession, library technicians, continuing education for librarians and harmonization of education and training for information professionals. Particularly useful is the article, "IFLA's Contribution to Education for Library and Information Science," by Josephine Riss Fang and Paul Nauta.

2. Foreign Language Requirement

In the late fifties, there was a language requirement in library schools (as they were then called.) In addition to English, potential students were required to prove fluency in at least two additional languages, i.e. German and French, or German and Spanish were the recommended ones. This was a very good idea, which for unknown reasons is no longer enforced.

While it is true that most of the business at the international level, for example, in an association such as IFLA, is conducted in English, I found that Canadians are much appreciated on international committees. Canada is a bilingual country, and it is believed, although not necessarily so, that most Canadian delegates speak at least two languages, if not more. The fact that I was able to conduct meetings in French and English was a great asset at the international level. While delegates from Germany and the Scandinavian countries all speak English fluently, members, especially from Latin America do not: to them French is easier to follow than English.

Internationalism, as a topic, should permeate all courses in library and information studies schools. Most courses, such as bibliographic instruction, reference, cataloguing and classification on this continent are taught from American or English textbooks, with very little reference to foreign publications. Even in Montreal, which is a bilingual city, the language of instruction at Concordia University is English, and French reference sources are mentioned only rarely or superficially. There was a great deal of debate before agreement was reached on including the French *Vedettes Matières* in the Library Studies Programme. (A Subject Headings List in French), published by the Université de Montréal and which is very similar to the Library of Congress Subject Headings list. This was successful mainly because of complaints received because of complaints received from our students about lack of accessibility to French textbooks and generally little or no reference to French publications.

Reference sources from all over the world should be introduced into the curriculum. Government documents should not only be studied at the local, provincial or state (federal) level, but also at the international level. It is surprising how many librarians are not familiar with how United Nations, UNESCO, and other international, NGO documents are organized, how they can be accessed, where they are available (deposited), etc. Moreover, students should be introduced to international associations, and the type of work they do.

Access to foreign periodicals and foreign publications would be facilitated if the library and information studies schools would insist on the knowledge of at least one language other than English.

3. Research

Another extremely important aspect of librarianship is research. It should be encouraged much more in library schools at all levels and in every course. One of the reasons why the profession is not held in high esteem, besides librarians being too modest to talk about their achievements, is the fact that there is still not a considerable body of research that can be pointed to in order to back up many statements. Research is, to a certain extent, slowly coming into its own in the library world, with more Ph.D. programs being implemented, but it has to be emphasized at every level of study, as well as in the field.

The excuse practising librarians have always given in the past is that they are too busy to do research. Strangely enough, a lot of the work that is being done in libraries is research, (such as the compilation of annotated bibliographies, to give only one example) but it is not recognized as such because it so often remains unpublished.

Students should be encouraged at every step of the way of their course of study to research. They should be taught research methodology right at the beginning of the course of study, and should pursue it in every one of their courses. Even with limited amounts at one's disposal (and IFLA is a good example of that, because of the limited amounts for research projects) a lot can be done just to launch an idea.

I have always encouraged research in librarianship, thus it was most gratifying when I joined IFLA to be able to apply for grants for research at the international level. My very first research project, with the help of a small IFLA grant, became a manual for school librarianship, co-authored with a local practising librarian. This manual, entitled *Managing School Libraries*³ was originally intended for the third world, as it describes methods to run a library on a virtually non-existent or very minimal budget. It became a useful reference tool in Canada as well as in some European countries. It was also translated into French and Spanish (see bibliography for titles).

The project that I am currently involved with has direct impact on this paper. In the fall of 1995 I distributed an international survey of library curricula to library schools around the world, as listed in the publication I mentioned above. Approximately 430 questionnaires were mailed. The purpose of the survey was to establish to what degree these library schools have been serving the disadvantaged in their curricula.

While this paper concerns international librarianship and not service to disadvantaged, this research is also international, funded by IFLA and a lot of information about curricula was received. Many of the respondents (the response rate was 20% or 86 replies received) included either a description of the curriculum, or a brochure, a pamphlet, etc. so that quite a bit of information about the various curricula was gathered.

As part of the ongoing series on library education that is being published in this journal, it is interesting to note these various approaches to library education and the different names used by library schools. Most frequently used of course, is:

Dept. of Library and Information Science or
Information Studies
Information Management and Library Studies.
School of Library, Archival and Information Studies
School of Information and Media
Faculty of Information and Documentation
College of Journalism, Library and Information Science
School of Library and Documentation
School of Information and Media

4. International Associations

The importance of international associations in the field of librarianship cannot be over-emphasized. What constitutes an international association? Although SLA has members from Canada, (8%), Europe and even some members from Mexico and Japan, according to the definition given by SSHRC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, it does not meet its standards for international representation, as the composition of the Board of SLA is almost exclusively from Canada and the U.S. Recently, a member from the European Chapter has been added to the SLA Board, to make the representation more international. In the mid-eighties, SLA was not deemed international while IFLA was.

SSHRC, as a grant-giving body, used to have a category for international representations. The recipient of this type of grant had to be a member of board or committee of the international body to which representation was requested, and the grant would cover the flight to the destination and a per diem. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, this category of grant was discontinued a couple of years ago.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

IFLA is a worldwide independent, non-governmental organization. It was founded in 1927 and its Headquarters are located in The Hague, The Netherlands. The majority of its members are library associations, libraries and library schools. There are also a few individual members. IFLA endeavours to promote international understanding, cooperation, discussion, research and development in all fields of library activity and to be the international voice of librarianship.

IFLA is a very interesting organization which does excellent work on the international scene. It works at many levels: at the grass roots, in third world countries, as well as at the highest administrative and technological level. Involvement in IFLA, like many other associations, is expensive, time consuming and very, very, rewarding both at the professional and the personal level.

IFLA is expensive because the meetings are held all over the world (for example this year (1996) in Beijing - last year (1995) in Istanbul) In addition to the fares, the registration is usually around US\$400.00 and the attendees are lodged in expensive hotels.

The annual conference lasts a week, and in addition to keynote addresses and public meetings, those who are members of committees and coordinating boards have to attend for at least eight days. The only way to get the maximum out of IFLA is to participate actively in a committee or round table (of which there are thirty-three). During the annual conference the committees and boards meet several times to take advantage of the presence of a maximum number of members who otherwise would have no opportunity to meet face to face.

³Galler, Anne M. and Coulter, Joan A. *Managing School Libraries*. The Hague, IFLA, 1989.

IFLA committees have a maximum of twenty members who are expected to do all the work: prepare the annual program, edit a newsletter, prepare grant applications, submit annual reports and attend the annual meetings. This is only the beginning of the work.

For four years I chaired the Section for School Libraries, and then for four years (the maximum term of office in each case) I chaired the Section for Disadvantaged Persons, which covers the Services to the Deaf, the Hospital Patient, the Prison inmate, the mentally and physically handicapped. During my term as Chair, guidelines for school library service were updated and published and translated into several languages.

While Chair of the Disadvantaged Section, International Guidelines for Prison Service and for Services to the Deaf were published. Currently, members of the section are working on Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Publications and Standards for Hospital Libraries. The Guidelines are usually published in English first, and then translated into the other IFLA languages: French, Spanish, Russian, and Dutch.

These Guidelines represent the work of members of the Committee, in consultation with national and international experts in each field. The work is hard and time-consuming but extremely rewarding. Meeting with librarians from all over the world is stimulating and exciting. While I am no longer Chair of a section, I am still very involved in the work of both - besides working on the above-mentioned international survey for the disadvantaged section, I am also writing the history of the Section for School Libraries and edit the Newsletter for the Section for the Disadvantaged.

Today, with the advent of FAX and e-mail, working at the international level has become much, much easier; I started in pre-Fax and pre-e-mail times, in 1982 and in those days it was much harder to cooperate on any of these projects. Many East European and African countries have also made the jump into the electronic age and have e-mail - while the mail still goes at a snail's pace.

Of course, with the advent of the Internet, working on the international level is constantly becoming easier. IFLA has a web page and information regarding the annual conference, and various activities of IFLA, are constantly being updated making access much easier than anything you could do in print format. The next issue of the Newsletter for the IFLA Section of Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons will also be mounted as a web page. We are presently conducting a survey among the members of the Section to see how many will be able to access the Newsletter in this fashion. Until everybody can, we will, of course, also publish it in print format.

IFLA, apart from publishing various guidelines and standards, is also active in advancing librarianship in the third world. The ALP (Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World) project is doing precisely that. There is always a group of librarians who cannot afford to attend the annual meetings who are brought there with UNESCO grants, or funding from other non-governmental organizations. The exchange between librarians coming from the various cultures that belong to IFLA can enhance ones outlook on librarianship enormously. Over the years IFLA has explored various avenues of cooperation between the developing and developed countries, such as twinning.

Twinning.

As an idea twinning has merit. However, the recipient from the developing country often feels that this is a one way street, and the contributions only come from the haves to the have-nots. Even when it was established that the exchange between two countries is profitable to both, as librarians coming from the disadvantaged areas can teach economical ways of budgeting and channelling meager resources to the so-called haves, there is often unease between the two parties. At the IFLA Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1984, we were told that the librarians do not even have money for letter-paper, stamps or envelopes, so how can we expect them to participate in an exchange program?

As another type of twinning, IFLA has encouraged its members to sponsor an institution or association from a third world country for IFLA membership. Unfortunately, IFLA membership is very costly to start with, and with ever-shrinking budgets even members from relatively affluent countries are cutting back on their own membership, and have no money to sponsor others. Although various schemes were put forward from various sections, to propose reduced rates for members coming from third world countries, or smaller libraries as opposed to the larger institutions, IFLA has adamantly refused to heed these suggestions. There are not too many countries that can currently afford to pay the membership of both their own and that of a "twin."

There are several other associations worthy of mention. These include:

IASL (International Association of School Librarianship)

The mission of IASL is to provide an international forum for those people interested in promoting effective school library media programs as viable instruments in the educational process. IASL provides guidance and advice for the development of school library programs and the school library profession. IASL works in cooperation with other professional associations and agencies.

This international association was founded because some members of the IFLA Section for School Libraries were not happy with the way IFLA works - they found it too bureaucratic and thus too slow. They also felt that the section did not really respond to the needs of school librarians but was oriented more towards the personnel of library schools and teacher-librarian training institutions. While international in scope, the membership of IASL is dominated by North America, although it is careful to have representatives from all over the world on its board. The current president is from Iceland, the vice-president from Canada, and the Directors are from nine different countries. However, the Newsletter Editor, the Executive Director and the Executive Secretary are all from the U.S.

Membership in IASL is much lower than IFLA, and it also offers a two-tier membership, where members from third world countries pay less. Conferences are also held on university campuses and members are boarded in dorms, unless they want to be in hotels, which makes attendance easier for some, although delegates coming from third world countries or Eastern European countries still need sponsorship or subsidies to attend.

IASL is focused on school librarianship. In addition to its Newsletter, it also has a Web page and a ListServ. In 1995 it started a periodical entitled *School Libraries Worldwide*.

IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People)

IBBY is a non-profit organization that was founded in Zurich, Switzerland in 1953. It is an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together. Its mission is to promote international understanding through children's books. Books will give young people a wider knowledge of other countries, values and traditions and therefore help develop good will among nations and ultimately serve the cause of peace.

IBBY is composed of national sections, of which there are more than fifty. I have been on the board of IBBY Canada for four years, serving as the representative from Quebec. IBBY is organized differently in each country. In Canada it has been dominated by Ontario. Until very recently, not much has been done to create a liaison with the French community in Quebec. This year, for the first time, two names were put forward for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, which is often referred to as the Little Nobel Prize and it is awarded annually to an author and an illustrator of children's books - a category which the Nobel Prize does not recognize. Recipients are selected by a distinguished international jury of children's literature specialists. IBBY holds a congress every other year.

International Youth Library

This library was founded after the war, in order to introduce German children to the world of international children's books. It is located in a suburb of Munich, in a 13th century castle (Schloss Blutenburg) which has been refurbished as a proper library. It also has a small two bed-room apartment, to lodge visiting scholars who are the recipients of an IYL scholarship, mostly to do research at the library. (I was the lucky recipient of such a grant, in 1983, during a sabbatical year, and spent two months at the castle).

My fellowship at the IYL consisted of assessing the Canadian collection, and find what was lacking. At the time I was encouraged by the Children's Services Librarian of the National Library of Canada, to do this work. Unfortunately, there was no money to provide the IYL with more books from Canada. While there I was able to consult children's books coming from a wide variety of countries, and to interview the persons responsible for the various languages. The staff at the IYL is international, and in the past publishers from all over the world sent books to be included in the collection. Money was also provided by the different countries for maintaining the books. As time passes, however, there are fewer and fewer contributions and the library is turning more into a German children's library. This is another consequence of shrinking budgets both at the publishing and the national level.

Association of International Libraries

The aim of this association is to promote co-operation among international libraries. Its working language is English and French, and its membership consists of libraries of international organizations, in particular those of intergovernmental organizations, such as the UN (United Nations), the ILO (International Labor Organization), WHO, (The World Health Organization) etc. It was founded in 1988.

This association is also affiliated with IFLA.

There are many other international associations in the field of library and information science. The above is, of course, not intended as an exhaustive, not even a selective list of these, but a selected list, mostly based on personal experience.

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