

# **School Library Concepts Developed by an Inquiry-approach Curriculum Organization: User Experiences and Perceptions About the *Ideal Libraries* Document of the International Baccalaureate**

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## **Abstract**

*Focusing on a recently-published pedagogical statement about the role of school libraries and librarians for specific inquiry-focused curricula, this paper looks at how school librarians used the documentation in individual situations. Experiences and perceptions of individual librarians resulted in analysis of specific uses of the document: informing school leadership teams, contribution to developing school library and librarian roles and documentation, including job descriptions, and aiding preparation for school evaluation by the curriculum organization concerned.*

## **Introduction**

New frameworks about school libraries, based on pedagogical understandings of new literacies, knowledge and learners, is more appropriate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Asselin & Doiron, 2008). Recent action by the International Baccalaureate suggested a similar understanding. A world-wide K-12 curriculum development organization, the International Baccalaureate (IB) historically provided ad hoc information about library use and potential and librarian roles in its burgeoning documentation. The Ideal Libraries project, developed between 2016 - 2018, sought to situate pedagogical understandings about school libraries and librarians (© International Baccalaureate 2018<sup>1</sup>/ International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2018): how libraries/ians are perceived, used and assessed as support and partners in supporting teaching and learning in curricula, widely regarded as being inquiry-focused. This is given a view that ‘librarians and media specialists are vital to IB world schools ... [and] who have reinvented themselves in

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an age where information is in abundance but in which quality information is still scarce'. The IB brought together, digitally, more than 500 librarians to provide data about how libraries/ians supported learning and teaching in a digital environment. It was 'discovered that librarians' had created networks, supported language development and supported an inquiry approach, irrespective of the particular programme offered by the IB in K-12 learning environments, not only pedagogically, but through management of learning spaces. As a result of these deliberations, and through physical discussions between LIS (Library and Information Sector) academics and IB librarian practitioners[2]<sup>2</sup>, thinking evolved that was synthesized in a document, since called *Ideal Libraries: a guide for schools* as 'it became evident that the most effective role for the IB with regard to libraries and librarians was to provide for schools research-driven concepts and frameworks alongside crowdsourced strategies collected directly from librarians'. (Quezzaire, 2018, p.139)

This paper presents findings on how that document has been used and perceived by school librarians, through a small qualitative study.

### ***The Ideal Libraries Document***

The document, *Ideal libraries: a guide for schools*, acknowledged how information is made available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given that, schools may well be 'reconsidering the role of libraries and librarians to make the best of technological and informational resources to enhance learning'.

The aim of the document is to offer factors for discussion and question in school communities about libraries/ians, in the firm context that libraries/ians 'enhance learning across the [school] community'. (©International Baccalaureate 2018 / IBO, 2018, p.1)

In an analysis of the changing roles of libraries and librarians, the crucial importance of the human element was identified: 'a library system is rarely effective without people to design and support it' (©International Baccalaureate 2018 / IBO, 2018, p.3). Indeed, the term libraries/ians (developed by Tilke (2015), a paper referenced in the *Ideal Libraries* document), is used throughout the document, to signify such a symbiotic relationship. This can be seen in core elements or foundations of a library system, according to *Ideal Libraries*, namely people, places, collections and services.

Given that the document was planned as a discussion-orientated tool – not a guideline identifying purely recommended roles – deleterious uses of the school library/ian were identified, the most extreme manifestations of which may include using the library space for the sick or unruly, and where the librarian may be perceived as being an enforcer of required behaviours, or where the librarian is used for duties that are not related to the job for which s/he was hired. All such reasons result in an unclear image or perception of the library space and that can transfer to the librarian, who may 'find themselves undervalued or isolated from the school community' (©International Baccalaureate 2018 / IBO, 2018, p.5).

The document connected with the IB's philosophy; language, international-mindedness, multilingualism, multiliteracies, learner characteristics (known as the IB Learner Profile) and inquiry were all identified as building blocks for IB curricula and learning.

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<sup>2</sup> The present practitioner-researcher declares an interest as he was a member of a working group which met for three days at the International Baccalaureate office in Den Haag, Netherlands as part of this initiative.

The remainder of the document focused on different types of librarian in IB schools, world-wide, delineating models or ideal types, which in the document are referred to as archetypes. They are as follows:

- a. teacher librarian
- b. school or district librarian
- c. media specialist
- d. designer librarian
- e. student life librarian
- f. super librarian

These models were identified from data which identified the variety of librarians who contributed to an online forum as part of the Ideal Libraries project process. Whilst these distinct types were identified, it was noted that in reality librarian roles crossed over types a – e. Type f. featured as it had become a presence in the LIS literature and media, where opinion varies about whether this is beneficial or not. Though the type was identified in the *Ideal Libraries* document, cautionary comments and distinctions were made between high profile and busy librarians and effectiveness. (©International Baccalaureate 2018 / IBO, 2018, pp. 18-19)

### ***Objective and Methodology of the Study***

The objective was, very simply, to seek views from librarians who had used the document, and identify their experiences and perceptions. A one-answer, free-form response was requested from practitioners, who were assured of anonymity.

The survey was publicized through various school library online listservs and forums, and other online networks. Twenty-two responses were made. The extent of responses varied: some were pithy, others several paragraphs in length. The shortest response was 25 words, whilst the longest 570 words. Therefore, the narratives were capable of close analysis, as Given (2007) commented on the size of samples in qualitative studies, considering that contributions from 15-18 respondents were sufficient to yield rich data.

A grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) was adopted to understand contributions from individual librarians. In this approach, data is typically analysed in detail, that is, line by line, and from which codes are identified. Codes that are the same or similar in contributions of several participants combine to emerge as categories. In turn, categories inform and allow a theory for the situation or phenomenon to develop.

### ***Main Findings (Categories)***

To enable categories to be identified, codes resulted from analysis individual responses, and potential categories emerged where the same codes appeared in the contributions of several respondents. In a number of categories, common codes from many respondent contributions provided firm categories. The order of the categories is not by order of number of codes identified, but rather from micro to macro level, that is individual/team to school level.

The IB *Ideal Libraries* document was used by the respondents as follows:

1. Personnel role (librarian) clarification
2. Professional development for new school librarians and librarians new to the specific inquiry-curricula. Use in IB-approved school librarian training events (workshops)
3. Contribute to thinking about school library development and direction
4. Feed into developing documentation about individual school libraries

5. Information-sharing, leading to advocacy, with school senior management teams and others
6. Preparation for the evaluation process for a school to be authorized to offer IB curricula

The following provides details for each category, though not all narratives per category are quoted, only those that provide sufficient, relevant or illuminating further detail or comment.

### ***Personnel Role (Librarian) Clarification***

One responder identified that the IB *Ideal Libraries* document helped the staff of a particular school library ‘to decide that we wanted our librarians to be teacher-librarians’. Another responder found that, whilst the document was used to help a librarian prepare job description revision (from a school librarian to a teacher-librarian), the document identified possibilities rather than recommendations, and a difference between perceptions of roles between the school and librarian still existed. In this case, ‘the document couldn’t really help me to better define my role, as we just reached an impasse’ [with the school]. The same respondent commented that there was little mention of the role of para-professional library staff ‘and the essential difference between a circulation clerk and a librarian. This is an issue in many schools, where the role is misunderstood by the general community’.

There was an understanding by several respondents that the document could be of greater relevance to librarians who were new to IB programmes, to help them identify their role, as key or basic information about the IB curriculum and its philosophies (and which were included in the document) were well-known to librarians, especially if they were also teachers, ‘but for librarians new to the program ... this could be fleshed out much more’. One such new librarian - another respondent – acknowledged that ‘as a newbie librarian setting up a new library for a new school’ the document was helpful.

The inclusion of archetypes in the document drew differing opinions. Some respondents did not mention the archetypes section at all, whilst others commented on this aspect most in their individual responses or had reservations about the inclusion of the various archetypes, though noting that the archetypes were not mutually-exclusive. One respondent saw the reason for delineating various roles, but wanted clarity, so still had questions:

WHICH of our many tasks are the most important to focus on? ... I think the IB could help us to identify the key aspects of the role. Surely in an IB context, teaching needs to be an important part of the role. The guide goes so far as to say that the library is essential for inquiry, but then doesn’t say that a teacher librarian is essential to facilitate this inquiry.

Overall, this respondent concluded the document was ‘a real missed opportunity’.

From another respondent: ‘the different archetypes are still confusing as we are all doing them all (more or less)’. It was not clear from responses that librarians realized that the first five archetypes (teacher librarian, school or district librarian, media specialist, designer librarian, student life librarian) were different from the last-named (i.e. super librarian), though one respondent noted that ‘the description for super librarian says that we need to not try to overdo it (which was a useful reminder for me)’.

### ***Professional Development***

Several responses indicated that the document was first introduced to them during IB workshops, the means and format of training developed by the IB to inform, develop and up-skill educators delivering IB curricula.

One respondent indicated a role with a major school library vendor, noting that the document helped to identify appropriate professional reading, which could be used in vendor-produced lists.

Another contributor's sole comment indicated that s/he saw the document as a help to the librarian 'to carry out day to day services of the library'.

Several workshop leaders<sup>3</sup> provided contributions (suggesting these roles in the anonymous comments) to indicate that most used the document in workshops. One workshop leader noted that the document provided reassurance for 'many librarians who are often puzzled and sometimes overwhelmed by the many things they feel they have to do', and it was clear that workshop participants had a variety of tasks asked of them and others that they asked of themselves, so experienced a variety of pressures. This respondee realized that there wasn't a symbiotic relationship between workshops and the document, but observed that workshops 'do promote deep thinking about the document, and other aspects of the library/librarian system in IB education ... [the document] is not perfect ... [but] makes a useful starter for discussions within schools.'

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<sup>3</sup> Workshop leaders could also be – and often were – practicing librarians in individual schools.

### ***Contribute to thinking about school library development and direction***

One respondent noted that s/he became aware of the *Ideal Libraries* document from an IB workshop, and considered that ‘this document has given me the vision and mission to bring a drastic change in my learning space of our school’.

The document’s use as a check or indicator of good practice was seen as one respondent noted: ‘have read it but not yet specifically applied points. That said, there are many that we are already using’.

Another respondent realized that the document provided ‘interesting [questions] to consider, but ... falls short of being a useful document beyond that, as it doesn’t actually define what an ideal library should be ... without clear guidelines it can be very difficult to challenge prior assumptions and the status quo’. A different respondent largely agreed, noting it was ‘no more helpful than any one of a number of basic texts that support the development and functioning of a school library’, concluding that ‘it does not seem to me to address the singularity of the IB research paradigm’.

One very detailed contribution identified that the document was a catalyst for initiatives and development initiated by the librarian, and that the document aided longer-term planning, such as inquiry. The document enabled this librarian to question practice, and look outside the library to the school community to make connections. It was clear from the narrative that the librarian had asked the management to approve the introduction of flexible scheduling, but otherwise the initiative for change and development came from the librarian.

### ***Feed into developing documentation about individual school libraries***

One response comprehensively identified that the *Ideal Libraries* document was used to ‘inform’ the development of a library mission statement and academic policy, with the aim of ensuring that the library supported the needs of staff and students, and met the requirements of the specific IB curriculum concerned. As noted above, the document was also used to develop teacher-librarian job descriptions. Another response recorded that ‘the library team used the document to include elements of it in the library policy’.

### ***Information-sharing, leading to advocacy, with school senior management teams and others***

A common response was that the document was shared by the respondent (with the assumption that this person was the school librarian) with school leadership teams. Several respondents used it to give a presentation to staff. There was some indication that the document promoted action by senior management. In one school, the document was used by the human resources department to update job descriptions for teacher-librarians. The document was also used to inform senior management views about modern libraries. Although not specifically mentioned by name, this may connect with the idea of school library nostalgia (Hochman, 2016), a concept that had informed the *Ideal Libraries* document. Another respondent noted that ‘the top management still holds traditional views on the role of the library/ian’, and saw the document as a tool to use to change perceptions. Although a term not used in responses, librarians used the document as advocacy for school libraries/ians – as one respondent wrote ‘we have used the IB Ideal Libraries document to give our SMT a better understanding of what a 21-century library looks like in the context of the IB requirements’. Several responses indicated that librarians had not [yet] used the document. One planned to do so, surmising that ‘involving teachers and leaders ... have a tremendous impact on the understanding and appreciation of the role of the librarian’. Another respondent kept the document in reserve, saying ‘fortunately, our admin’s view the libraries as a strong part of the school community, so I haven’t had to pull it out to justify my role or the role of the libraries – yet.’

Another respondent, whose sole comment concerned administrators, noted that, after sharing it, there was no discussion about the role of the library, but concluded that this may be because of a traditional world-view – grade/mark focused rather than the experience of inquiry. This comment was the only one to also specifically mention informing the board of the school.

One respondent used the document ‘to ensure that the PYP teaching community is on one page by conducting a small PD and reading it together’.

A perception that the document provided questions, rather than answers, was evident, and that greater clarity would be helpful. One respondent had hoped to use the document with administration to help develop greater understanding about the role of libraries/ians in an IB environment, but seemed to suggest that greater direction in the document would have been preferred, especially as, with this particular responder, the document was not used.

### ***Preparation for the evaluation process for a school to be authorized to offer IB curricula***

Several contributions indicated that responders used the IB *Ideal Libraries* document to help with the required evaluation process that individual schools experience in order to offer IB curricula. One respondent in particular considered that documentation produced as a result of this process was a ‘positive contribution to the school’s successful IB validation’. Comments from two respondents were wholly focused on this aspect. The extent of work involved was identified by one respondent, from which it is clear that using the *Ideal Libraries* document was just aspect, as in addition to an academic honesty policy, the librarian built up a collection which related to the IB Learner Profile, and liaised with teaching staff, with the aim of working collaboratively.

### ***Limitations***

This small study was not designed to identify factors, such as experience level of librarians, the type of library that was managed, the type of school in which librarians were employed, the geographical location of schools/libraries, how many and which IB programmes librarians worked with, etc. Rather, the study offered the opportunity for librarians to respond freely about a significant milestone in the development and understanding of school libraries/ians in IB schools. This study therefore reflects the perspectives of individual librarians working in an IB environment.

### ***Discussion and Theory***

In outlining above detail in emergent categories, a number of questions arose:

- How can the *Ideal Libraries* document be used and who will read it? Who comprises the typical readership of such a curricular, though specialized, document?
- To what extent can the document be used as an advocacy tool in an environment of evidence-based research?
- To what extent is there a LIS perception that educators, specifically those in leadership teams, do not have knowledge or understanding of current school libraries, but have views based on historic use or non-use of libraries (i.e. school library nostalgias)?
- Is a common (i.e. not ideal) definition of a library/ian in an IB environment possible?
- Is it possible to define or give guidance on what is involved in becoming an *effective* IB school librarian?
- Is it possible to define a librarian’s contribution to the IB’s manifestation of inquiry and research?
- To what extent are identification of archetype librarians helpful?
- Is the document more helpful to librarians new to the IB programmes than more experienced librarians?

- Has use of the document matched expectations and potential?

Perhaps inevitably, in a school environment, any document with the word ‘library’ in the title will be passed onto the school’s librarian. Alternatively, the *Ideal Libraries* document may have been introduced to a librarian at an IB PD event (workshop) for librarians. Therefore, a de facto readership is librarian-based, and so may be a limiting factor. However, it is intended in part, if not in whole, to be read by school leadership teams, as well as others (such as the IB programme coordinator). Nevertheless, it may well be left to the librarian to promote its use in individual schools, and such an approach came through in responses.

Reception of and response to the document may depend on various factors, not least highly dependent on individual school situations, but one common aspect may be the value-system, experiences and perceptions of leadership team members and others about school libraries/ians. For example, one study (Olen, 1995) found that, of a cohort of then recently-trained teachers, a significant factor affecting pedagogical use of school libraries in their own teaching styles, was successful and pleasant experiences of using school libraries as students themselves, rather than any use of libraries whilst in tertiary education or knowledge of school libraries as pedagogical tools in teacher-education courses. Whilst now a decade-old study, the present writer found that Olen’s findings had not changed by the time of his own study (Tilke, 2009). The concept of library nostalgia may also be relevant in such situations (Hochman, 2016), where, in spite of more current information to the contrary, a policy-maker or school leader maintained a strong or vivid memory of using a library whilst young, and where that emotive view still dominated. Allied to this may be the considerable issue in a school LIS environment of difference between advocacy and evidence-based approaches. (Amongst a significant literature, a more recent review of the literature has been made by Hughes, Bozorgian & Allan, 2014, whilst an understanding of evidence-based approaches is well and pithily made by Todd (2015). Nevertheless, the issue is outside the scope of this study, but raised here as a possible factor.)

The remaining questions concern clarification of role or roles for a library/ian in an IB curricula setting, and suggest that a paradigm exists where clarification, direction and perhaps approbation would be welcomed by practitioners. This may specifically relate to the inclusion of archetypes. There may be a difference of perception with regard to the names or descriptors of the archetypes, as opposed to a close reading of the detail for each archetype. Some respondents used the types positively, whilst others had concerns. Yet, the IB *Ideal Libraries* document is not alone in identifying types. In 2016, Sharon Markless identified various models as ‘discourses of professionalism’, building on the work of the French philosopher, Foucault. She specifically instanced discourses of managerialism, technical rationalism, social democracy, and post-modernism. As with the IB archetypes, Markless noted that in reality such discourses overlapped, but the value of understanding them was that

the language we use daily within our institutions is a reflection of the organization’s accepted thinking ... [which] drive[s] institutional policies and shape[s] behavior and responses. Such is the power of language that it creates a narrative that shapes our practice and identity. This is what we mean by discourse. (Markless, 2016, p. 8)

In the present situation, the challenge may be achieving acceptance and, more importantly, understanding of these role distinctions (whether called archetypes, discourses or other terms) by the target audiences, wherever and however identified. From this small piece of research, it is not clear that IB school librarian archetypes have yet reached that level of understanding.

Categories identified above lead to a theory that the IB *Ideal Libraries* document is used largely by librarians, who seek support to identify effective roles and functions, as a tool for development.



Furthermore, the document is valued by individuals and library teams to inform and bench-mark practice. It also provides a means to inform and educate others in individual schools about the contribution of libraries/ians in support of learning and teaching in IB curricula.

### **Conclusion**

Narratives provided by school librarians in this study suggest deep interest and commitment to identifying effective practice, connecting the work of school libraries/ians with inquiry-driven curricula, specifically those developed by the International Baccalaureate, in support of real learning by students in IB schools. To support such self-motivated drive, librarians had views and strategies in their use and planned use of the IB *Ideal Libraries* document. Views of respondents suggested a variety of experience and expertise informed their critique and expectations about the specific curriculum document.

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### ***Biographical Note***

Anthony Tilke has spent over 20 years in the international school sector, in Asia and Europe, and with major IB schools, including Yokohama International School, Japan; a United World College; and the International School of Amsterdam. He is currently Head Librarian at The American School of The Hague, in The Netherlands. He has worked with three IB programmes: PYP, MYP and DP. His doctoral thesis (from Charles Sturt University, Australia) focused on the impact of an international school library on the IB Diploma Programme, and which was accepted without amendment. This inspired the writing of his book about the Diploma Programme and the school library/ian for ABC-CLIO in the USA. He has several roles in support of the International Baccalaureate, including as an accredited IB workshop leader, has contributed ideas and content to IB documentation, taught (and an examiner for) TOK (Theory of Knowledge) in the IBDP. In 1997-98, he was school/youth library adviser with the then UK Library Association, in London.

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