Policy Challenges for Administrators and Teacher Librarians in International Schools: Albania: A Case Study

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Policy development stands at the heart of running a successful library and having a positive impact on student literacy and overall achievement. This paper reports on the policy challenges that face librarians, teachers and school administrators in international schools, and provides the results of a case study from the Quality International School in Tirana, Albania. More over it provides a synthesis of the literature review on policy standards in international schools and the United States, and their impact on third world culture student achievement and success. Most of the achievements of students in international schools have more recently been studied under the scope of "third culture." This paper, examines student access to policy and overall achievement within the context of "third culture" as a phenomenon. The paper also focuses on the importance of media selection, censorship, copyright and technology, as evidenced from interviews of school librarians, teachers and administrators at the Tirana International School. One of the central challenges in international schools remains the lack of centralized guidelines that support the institution's library mission and vision. In order for libraries to thrive in an international school setting, communication at the onset of policy development between staff, teachers, librarian(s) and administrators is key.

Policy challenges, Albania, International Schools

Introduction

In many countries around the world, state requirements for school library media centers at the primary or secondary level of student development vary. In other countries the availability of school libraries is absent altogether. As such international schools that do provide access to libraries are the only exposure for many native students who attend them. For third culture kids the school library offers a space where both learning and student achievement are promoted. In order to meet user demands and promote the mission and vision of the international school, the development of coherent library policy which addresses user demands is both critical and essential to the success and development of the school as a whole.

Literature Review

The development and continuous updating of any school library policy document is essential to the success of the library in meeting its institutional goals as they pertain to staff, faculty and students. The library policy document should align with the overall mission and

vision of the school, in terms of service, selection of items, censorship, copyright and technology. Even more so, the policy document should reflect the culture and needs of the institution. Nowhere is this more apparent than in an international library school setting.

Before examining the literature review more closely, it is important to understand key terms that are crucial to any study on policy in international schools. What are international schools? What are third culture students? While international schools vary in scope and size, they do have commonalities: they are mostly private, and according to Blandford and Shaw:

> "In terms of phase, size, and sex, international schools defy definition: They may include kindergarten, primary, middle and upper, higher or secondary pupils or incorporate all of these in a combined school; they may range in number from twenty to 4500; they could be co-educational or singe sex. The governance and management of such schools might be determined by the school the owner, the board, the senior management team or head of school or managing agency." (2001b:2)

Other distinguishing traits of international schools are their composition of staff and students. The majority of international schools have students whose parents work between transnational borders. The schools also educate children whose parents serve in diplomatic missions, and host country children who immerse themselves in English language studies. According to Hayden:

> "An International school is specifically established to cater from students from a wide variety of cultures who are likely to be internationally mobile as their parents move from country to country, often in the employ of UN organizations or private international companies. The staff also represent a mixture of nationalities, usually with no particular nationality predominating. Such schools normally teach an international programme of study or one or more national programmes (but not generally of the country in which they are to be found) or a combination or both." (2006,p.12)

Even though the concept of international schools is neither ambiguous nor hard to define, concepts 'third culture' and 'third culture kids,' have only recently begun to be studied in context to literacy and school libraries. Third culture kids and 'global nomads' are used throughout the literature to refer to children who grow up between cultures. The term itself was initially coined by sociologists Ruth Hill Unseem and her husband John Unseem from Michigan State University who researched the expatriate families in India. They describe third culture kids as:

> "Although they have grown up in foreign countries, they are not integral parts of those countries. When they come to their country of citizenship, some for the first time, they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectation of others-especially those of their own age."(Unseem, 1976)

As such, 'Third Culture Kids' are children who spend the majority of their life outside their parents' culture. They often interact in multiple languages and do not feel a sense of national identity between the place their parents call 'home' and the host country they inhabit. One of the better definitions for 'Third Culture Kids," comes out of the work of Pollock and Van Reken who built upon the work of Unseem, and define them as children who have spent the majority of their developmental years outside of the parents culture, and who build relationships with all the cultures surrounding them, and yet, they don't have ownership in any. (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999)

American Literature on School Policy. The literature on library school policy as it pertains to collection development, media selection, censorship, copyright and technology in the United States is abundant. According to the National Center for Educational statistics (NCES), ninety- two percent of the public schools and sixty three percent of all private schools in the United States have library media centers in them. In terms of numbers of students having access to a library or media center in the United States these statistics translate to 45 million students who attend public schools and four million students who attend private schools have access to a school library. In terms of staff serving these students more than fifty two percent of the staff or media specialists who work in a school library, public or private, in the United States have a Masters Degree in Library Science. (Tabs, 2004 and Lowrie, 1991) More than sheer numbers, these statistics also reflect that school libraries in the United States are established institutions who have both material and human resources directed at the conception of policy, management and delivery of services to users in libraries.

Donna P. Miller (2008) writes that every library needs a written policy which covers the following areas: collection development, collection maintenance, and challenged material. According to Miller, when library policy is absent, library staff needs to create one. Frank Hoffman and Richard J. Wood, (2007) have put together a manual that really aims at filling the void in library literature as it relates to collection development policies. They aim to provide a roadmap for any school librarian involved in policy writing. In their book, *Library Collection Policies*, both authors cover every aspect of policy development: how to write mission, goals and objectives statements, identifying who bears responsibility for collection development, how to evaluate sources, how to write statements on format or type of materials, what the policy documents should state for the treatments of specific resource groups, special collections, resource sharing, selection aids, acquisitions, gifts, budgeting and funding, intellectual freedom, copyright, collection maintenance, and collection evaluation. The authors also make available in their book documents from the American Library Association as they pertain to collection development in order provide a synthesis of available material for writing policy documents in this area.

Leslie Farmer's work (1999),a high school library director from California, examines the importance library policy in relation to technology. According to her, libraries or school media centers need to create and make available documents that keep up with technological changes. "Particularly on the district level, if technology does affect policy…,then you may want to research the issue and offer a more current policy for your school board's consideration." (1999,p.31) Moreover by having an updated technology policy demonstrates not only that the library is up to date with current technological changes, but that careful consideration has been appropriated to the technologies the library decides to implement. Whereas, Doug Johnson (2003) examines the impact of failed technology policy in school libraries. According to Johnson, a library director from Minnesota, library policy often requires team work between administrators teachers and school librarians because, "Technicians, don't make school policy." He suggests that often time a technician is mainly concerned with the technical aspects of technology infrastructure within an institution and often they are "insensitive to the concerns of parents, teacher librarians and students." (1999,p.38)

Nancy Kranich (2007),a former ALA president, has done extensive work in the role of library and information commons in society. In relation to school libraries and privacy policy, Kranich examines how librarians should engage with their users in the age of social networking. According to Kranich "adults still have a role in raising awareness [of issues of privacy]given that eight out of ten teens and parents agree that kids need to be more careful

about the information they provide online.(2007,p.36) But even more than raising awareness, librarians need to create a library presence in social networking sites, and showcase the value of social networking and other electronic resources.(2007,p.36) While privacy is a key component of library policy, understanding copyright and plagiarism are also issues that should be reflected in the policy document as well. According to Nancy Everheart (2003) school librarians can join efforts with faculty staff to promote literacy and understanding of plagiarism in schools. They can do this by developing and implementing plagiarism policies in their schools.(2003,p.44)

   School Library Policy Abroad. In international schools, the ideal for school libraries much like in American school libraries is to have library staff, who play a central role in the development of student information and critical literacy skills. According to Ross J. Todd, many international school communities often fail to understand, endorse and embrace the role of the librarian within their community.(Markuson,2006) Paolo Odasso (2007), reflecting on the relationship between libraries and education systems notes:

> "A school library that proposes as its main purpose to operate as an efficient means of access to information, no matter how valid and pertinent the information is, would risk doing something that is necessary but not adequate. Focusing only on the providing access to information is certainly not adequate for a school that is asked to move the *barycentre* from *having information and knowledge* to *being competent and capable*." (2007,p.22)

   A pivotal work by Carolyn Markuson, (2006) much like Frank Hoffman and Richard J. Wood's, (2007) work in the United States, aims at providing a comprehensive document to aid international school librarians in creating , promoting and writing school library policy for their institutions. According to Markuson:

> "Whatever level of service a school is able and prepared to provide, it is extremely useful to have a *Library Management Manual*, a kind of 'bible' always available for ready reference in respect of any matter having to do with any aspect of the library programme. Particularly in international schools, where mobility amongst all sections of the community is endemic, this sort of document can save an enormous amount of time, money, energy and frayed nerves." (2006,p.33)

   For Richard Turner (2006), who has focused his research on school libraries in England and Wales, the school library policy is especially important for institutions that do not have statutory requirements to have a library, because it provides the foundation of a "professionally managed library resource center." (2006,p.59) Following the recommendations of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) for school libraries, a policy document for international schools should include the following:

> -Aims and objectives of the school library
> -The management structure and systems of the school library
> -User and non-user involvement in the library's management
> -Resource management guidelines
> -How the library contributes to information skill development across the curriculum
> -How the library promotes reading across the school
> -How the library caters for individual learning needs to ensure equal access for all
> -A commitment to external relations-especially with the school's library service
> -How the school library is promoted
> -How the school library is monitored and evaluated
> -How and when the library school policy is to be revised (p.63)

Another document which aims at establishing standards for international schools is the *School Library Manifesto* (2000) by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, (IFLA). The manifesto covers targets six areas: the mission of the school library, funding legislation and networks, goals of the school library, staff, operation management and implementing the manifesto. In relation to policy, the manifesto states that "the policy on school library services must be formulated to define goals, priorities and services in relation to the school curriculum.(p.26) Additionally the manifesto stresses the importance of having service accessible to all, and encourages cooperation between management, staff, faculty and parents.

Even though the theoretical and philosophical structure is in place for international libraries to develop library policy which takes into account library procedures, media selection, censorship, copyright and technology, the practical experience is unique to the context and culture where the international school is housed. Beth Gourly (2008) examines library services and programs in the international school library in Tianjin, China. The goal of the library in Tianjin, is to "serve the entire community-students, staff and parents." To meet this goal the library has implemented a circular literacy program known as 'Inquiry Circle' which aims at tuning in to user needs, finding out their needs, sorting out, going further, making conclusions and lastly taking action.(2008,p.20-21) There is no mention however of how the library should respond to issues of media selection, censorship, copyright and technology.

Where as the United Nations International School in New York City which houses over 1400 students from 110 different countries, has a policy document in place that recognizes plagiarism and provides a template of how school library media specialists or SMLS can aid the general school policy on this issue. Since students are from various nationalities, many of them view plagiarism differently. " Asian students have a more communitarian approach to studying. Copying a good example or taking an idea from a good student or a teacher is seen as a good approach for learning." (Dutilloy, 2003, p.44) Accordingly, SMLS explain the meaning of the plagiarism policy to the students. They help detect plagiarism by utilizing software programs such as Turnitin.com and Glatt, but also refer to traditional print reference works. (p.44)

Tirana International School Case Study

Tirana International School is part of Quality Schools International, and has accreditation through the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Pennsylvania, USA. The school in Tirana, Albania was founded in 1991, and currently has 128 students enrolled ranging between 3 and 17 years of age. There are over fifteen teachers who teach and promote a personal approach to instruction. The instruction is conducted in English and both the faculty and student body is comprised of different nationalities.

The library at Tirana International School, houses over 6,000 items which include monographs, videos, compact discs and DVDs. There is one librarian who is in charge of the entire library. Additionally the librarian administers all of the curriculum materials and textbooks which are loaned to students and faculty on a semester basis.

In June 2008, fourteen students from the University of North Texas and two instructors aided in the transfer of records for the Tirana International school into Follett's Destiny System. The students also entered all of the textbook data in the catalog, cleaned existing records, weeded and relabeled the entire collection, re-shelved items, created a policy document which contained recommendations for library procedures, and technology use. Students also trained the school librarian in the use of the new Destiny system. Data on

policy was collected formally by surveys administered to faculty, administrators, and librarian as well as informally through observation and individual interviews with administrators, members of the faculty, staff and the school librarian.

Library Procedures. Administrators at the Tirana International School recognize the need to have a streamlined policy document which clearly states to their community of students, staff and faculty, library procedures regarding hours of operation, and check out procedures i.e. how long books will be checked out by the user depending on their status: faculty, staff, or student. The teachers and school administrations had developed an initial policy document without any input from the librarian. The librarian at the school, does not attend faculty meetings, and is not involved in setting policy for the library, even though she is expected by administrators and faculty to manage the library and its resources.

Media Selection. There is no policy in place that specifically targets media selection. Items are purchased yearly by teachers and administrators through a Quality International vendor and are shipped from Idaho, US. The response from the teachers interviewed and surveyed was varied. Those teachers involved primarily with students in the elementary grades utilize the librarian in media selection of items for their classroom, but their counterparts teaching secondary grades felt less inclined to work with the librarian in media selection. There was a lack of trust between the librarian and teachers mainly stemming from lack of communication.

Censorship. There is no policy in place which deals with censorship directly. However as instances of it arise in the school community, the administrators make the decision whether the item should be removed from the shelf or not. Administrators noted that sometimes they are driven by cultural contexts to make decisions on the circulation of items that could be offensive in the host country where the schools operate. Neither teachers,or librarian felt that censorship was an issue at the school. Everyone, administrators, teachers and librarian, was in agreement that there needs to be a policy document which clearly states how the librarian should handle issues of censorship.

Copyright. There is no policy in place which specifically targets copyright. Both administrators and teachers recognize that copyright is an issue in the host culture at large but not in the school. Since there is limited access to technology on the part of the students, there are more instances of plagiarism than copyright infringement. Teachers and administrators would like to see more involvement from the librarian in promotion of literacy both for copyright and plagiarism but that process was hindered in the past due to unavailability of a trained librarian.

Technology. Even though there are over forty computers in the computer lab, and every teacher has access to a computer in their room, there are only two computers in the library and only one of them is available for library users to browse items electronically. None of the computers in the school are networked and the library catalog is not available online. There is little communication between the librarian and computer instructor to work together to promote literacy programs which benefit the students. The role of the librarian in the school is absent in relation to having input on technology policy and development of literacy programs that evaluate online tools and resources.

Recommendations

In order for the school library to have a coherent library policy, all parties, administrators, teachers, staff and librarian should be involved at various levels in crafting a policy document that reflects the institutional culture and specifically outlines the responsibilities of the librarian. Lack of communication between school administrators, teachers and librarian at the onset of policy creation is one of the central factors that impacts negatively the librarian's role within the organization. It is imperative that both the librarian and administrators work together, utilizing a combination of IFLA, CILIP and ALA templates to create a policy document which aims at not only supporting the vision and mission of the institution but that lays out specific policies as it pertains to areas of media selection, censorship, copyright and technology in the school. The policy document should be easily accessible online and in print, by the community of users, including the parents of students. Finally the efforts of the librarian to attend training seminars and participate in peer regional conferences should be supported by the library administration.

Conclusion

International school libraries have their own unique structure and considerations on meeting user needs based on national and cultural differences of their staff and users. Policy development is key in addressing user demands and promoting the role of the library to administrators, teachers, staff and students. However communication barriers must be overcome in order to establish a successful library. As such the librarian should actively advocate the implementation of policy in the library by bringing together administrators, staff and teachers in the conceptualization process. The policy document should reflect not only the organizational culture, but address issues regarding every aspect of library administration, including media, censorship, copyright and technology.

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