An IB educator’s story about the role of librarians in multilingual learning communities

Background information

The library in an IB World School is potentially a central link for promoting and facilitating effective teaching and learning across the curriculum. It can provide access to relevant and stimulating material necessary for a variety of needs and purposes such as for inquiry, as well as to information that supports learning, and to fictional literature encompassing many genres. In addition to printed and illustrated texts, the modern school library offers access to quality digital resources. But a school library is more than just a provider of resources; it is also a place for learning through inquiry, for modelling and stimulating collaborative practices and creating meaningful knowledge with teachers, students and families as part of the learning community. A librarian plays an important role in establishing a school-wide ethos of learning. As integral members of a school’s IB learning community, librarians needs to be fully aware of the philosophy that underpins IB teaching and learning so they can support inquiry, action and reflection in the library and beyond.

Cultural context

Around the world, schools use a number of different terms for facilities, resources and personnel that are libraries and librarians. Sometimes, terms can be especially confusing in a multilingual community with members from diverse cultural backgrounds. The terms “library” and “librarian” can often be translated more easily and meaningfully into other languages than some other terms. They are used in IB documents such as the *Programme standards and practices* (2010).

On a practical level, library spaces must evolve to accommodate technology. Perceptions of libraries can also change to accommodate shifting beliefs about effective learning. For example, libraries are not necessarily really quiet places anymore; they are places where people interact with each other and technology and that can be wonderfully noisy!

Last but not least, the school library facility offers an IB World School a major opportunity for a visible statement about the importance of mother tongues and other languages in the community, which is a major contribution to affirming identity in multilingual contexts.
Inquiry/challenge
How can libraries and librarians help to create vibrant communities of lifelong learners in IB World Schools? What is the role of librarians in developing robust multilingualism in IB programmes?

Action/solution
Librarians can promote and facilitate effective teaching and learning across the curriculum as they:

- **meet students’ needs**
  For example, librarians must make sure they can select and maintain the necessary relevant resources for current Diploma Programme (DP) extended and theory of knowledge (TOK) essays, Middle Years Programme (MYP) personal projects, or a Primary Years Programme (PYP) transdisciplinary theme, unit of inquiry and exhibition.

- **meet the needs of teachers with professional development collections, both in print and through enabling access to online specialist information about pedagogy and language issues**
  Librarians should include, in such a collection, relevant texts from IB documents as many of them have very useful bibliographies for further reading. It can be helpful to have a selection in a centralized library collection for the benefit of all staff.

- **inform parents as well as teachers and students of new publications and opportunities to participate in library events**
  In fact, adult use of the library is something that librarians are keen to promote as such use provides an excellent role model and is a vibrant example of lifelong learning.

- **support the development of multilingualism through access languages or languages of instruction for all students, especially as this may be a challenging aspect to resources across the programmes and will vary as to where in the world the school is**
  It is helpful to collaborate with the IB coordinator as well as language and literacy staff on this. Keep in mind the mantra from the document *Language and learning in IB programmes* (2011: 17) “all teachers are teachers of language” includes librarians.

- **provide balanced collections in two languages in schools that operate a bilingual policy for teaching and learning; this may include dual-language texts**
  In such cases, an understanding of bilingualism and the relevant pedagogy can be promoted through various texts being provided in specialized library collections for educators as well as parents.

Reflection/next steps
Anthony Tilke thinks collaboration between librarians and other staff is the key to the described practices and actions ultimately being effective. Using information critically, supporting inquiry and developing new knowledge are issues that librarians are familiar with as they deal with these factors on a daily basis. When there is collaborative planning with teachers, these skills can feed into developing critical literacy in students very well. Then the library becomes part of the teachers’ pedagogical toolkit, as the IB *Guidelines for developing a school language policy* (2008) suggest.

To help nurture such a situation, the role of the library and librarian needs to be written into documentation and formalized practice, for example, in school handbooks, as well as inclusion protocols and participation in ongoing collaborative practices.

One example where librarians are a necessary and valuable resource is in developing the school language policy required for IB programmes. As the managers of major facilities and resources devoted to text, information and literacy, librarians need to be informed about the role of language in teaching and learning.

Librarians also can help the community to understand the range of student language profiles represented in the school and through good practice can promote and document the school’s commitment to multilingualism and intercultural understanding.

Librarians should be involved in the school’s language policy process too. Their perspective about the role of language in the school as well as language profiles is valid. On a practical level, the policy should be visible in the school library through practices and behaviours, as well as a physical document and electronically on the school library website. The library policy should both reflect and be reflected in the school’s language policy.
The school’s resources and support structures ensure the implementation of the IB programme(s). This practitioner focus reflects the following standard from the IB Programme standards and practices (2010):

B2: Resources and support
6. The library/multimedia/resources play a central role in the implementation of the programme(s).

Practitioner focus: an interview with an IB school librarian

In this interview the librarian Anthony Tilke, Head of Library at the International School of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, answers questions about the importance of the library in the development of students’ mother tongues and literacy.

How can the library promote mother tongues?

Well, obviously with vibrant and relevant collections in the school community’s languages. This should include the host country language and might also include heritage and sign languages. These materials should be catalogued in a similar way to other materials and, if possible, in the original language. A proportion of the library budget should be devoted to developing resources that reflect the multilingual nature of the community but liaising with embassies or other national agencies can be productive too, as well as parents, who can bring titles for the collection from visits to their home country. Of course, liaising with mother tongue coordinators and language teachers so that the materials are incorporated into the curriculum is important.

As well as supporting mother tongue development, the materials are also important resources for the nurturing of intercultural awareness and international-mindedness. The school library collection should feature a rich collection of material that explains and furthers understanding of international-mindedness and intercultural awareness. This should be written into a collection development policy for the library. The library catalogue together with a librarian’s professional knowledge can be used to provide resources to support this central tenet of IB philosophy and programmes.

Where a school library focuses a great deal of its collection development on the English language, in order to better reflect international-mindedness I would suggest that World Englishes are represented through publications and information emanating from and representing English as used in a variety of countries, including many African and Caribbean countries, Australasia, Canada, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Literacy is critical for students if they are to be able to access the curriculum and be successful. How can a library help to strengthen literacy across the curriculum?

Librarians will have views and thoughts about literacy, which will inform their daily work and activities. It is important that their views are incorporated into a literacy vision for the school. Equally, it is vital that they are cognizant of school
and IB thinking and practice about literacy and language development. But I think it is now generally well known that research has shown that engagement with reading a wide variety of texts for different purposes is an effective way to develop literacy. Librarians see their collections as providing a range of texts and information to support learners of very different abilities, thus contributing to extending the language development of individual students. Librarians are also passionate about the concept of reading for pleasure as a lifelong activity and generally devote time and energy to means of promoting imaginative literature in their schools. They see this as an important contribution to motivation for reading and thus to literacy development.

A particular interest of school librarians is information literacy, which is an aspect of the inquiry process. It is important that there is a focus on this literacy as well as others such as critical literacy as part of multiliteracy development and that this is reflected in the wider literacy vision.

About the interviewee: Anthony Tilke became Head of Library at the International School of Amsterdam, The Netherlands in 2010. He previously worked as librarian in international schools in Asia for 12 years and first worked with IB programmes in 1996. Prior to that he was a national advisor for school libraries with The Library Association, UK and a school librarian. His PhD thesis (with Charles Stuart University, Australia) was on the impact of an international school library on the IB Diploma Programme, and his latest book is concerned with that topic (ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, CA, 2011). He is also a workshop leader for IB continuum and DP library workshops.

Note: A practitioner focus is an account from the perspective of one practitioner that is in keeping with IB Programme standards and practices (2010). However, it does not represent the only perspective and may or may not always be transferable to other situations.