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ABSTRACT

The *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto* envisions the school library as integral to the educational process. This, however, is not the experience of many, if not most, school librarians around the world, even in countries where school libraries are required by law. The *IFLA School Library Guidelines*, which translate the principles of the *Manifesto* into practical terms, shed some light on why. This article reflects on the author's ongoing efforts to realise this vision of a school library integral to the educational process, most recently at Blanchelande College in Guernsey, by means of the *Guidelines*. These efforts are characterised by a long obedience in the same direction, punctuated along the way by days of small beginnings.

INTRODUCTION

In the year since Elizabeth Hutchinson and I shared the privilege of contributing an article on FOSIL to *ACCESS* (Volume 35, Number 2, June 2021), I have taken up my new role as Head of Inquiry-Based Learning at Blanchelande College, which includes responsibility for the Junior (Primary) Library and Senior (Secondary) Library, and which between them serve almost 500 students aged 2½ – 18.

Lee's invitation to write an article about my move to Blanchelande came at a propitious time, as I was turning my attention to the IFLA School Libraries Section 2022 Midyear Meeting that I was convening at Blanchelande from 21-22 April 2022, and specifically my [presentation on implementing the IFLA School Library Guidelines \(2015\) at Blanchelande College](#), central to which is inquiry. Given the focus of the Midyear Meeting on two key IFLA publications – the revised 2022 *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto* (1999), which revitalises the *Guidelines*, and the latest book in the *Global Action for School Libraries* series, *Models of Inquiry* (2022), which reaffirms the centrality of inquiry to the school library's pedagogical programme – all of the presentations may be viewed as different perspectives on implementing the *Guidelines* (see [here](#) for recordings and accompanying PPT presentations).

What follows, then, is a reflection on my journey to and at Blanchelande, which is an ongoing inquiry, really, into school librarianship and the place and role of inquiry within school librarianship. It is Lee's hope, and by extension mine, that this reflection may be of some encouragement to you.

SMALL BEGINNINGS AND A LONG OBEDIENCE IN THE SAME DIRECTION

Matthew Syed (2015) points out that insight is the endpoint of a long term, iterative process, rather than the starting point, so even what seems most familiar to us is laden with insight-generating potential when (re)thought through. If I return, therefore, to anything in the previous article, it is to bring deeper insight to bear on what I have already written rather than merely repeating myself.

On reflection, two truths have both guided and sustained me at every stage on my journey. The first is that we are not to despise the day of small beginnings *if* the plumb line is in the builder's hand (Zechariah 4:10), because we do not know what our efforts will eventually produce. The second, to borrow Nietzsche's language if not his intent, is that a long obedience in the same direction accrues enduring value in the long run (1998, p. 77).

These truths, in turn, each give rise to a concern. The first concern is with a plumb line that will help us to build true, and so build strong, and it should come as no surprise at this point that our plumb line is the *Guidelines*, which I will return to. The second concern is with what will sustain a long obedience in the same direction. For this, too, I turn to the *Guidelines*, but this time by way of Octavia Butler's warning in the *Parable of the Talents* (1998, p. 239):

When vision fails/ Direction is lost.
When direction is lost/ Purpose may be forgotten.
When purpose is forgotten/ Emotion rules alone.
When emotion rules alone,/ Destruction... destruction.

WHY THE CAUTION?

When it comes to school libraries, emotion runs high, and doubly so, at least in certain circles, when discussing the place and role of inquiry within the school library's pedagogical programme. So, lest emotion run amok, and following Butler's logic, we look for vision.

A SUSTAINING VISION

The *Guidelines*, which translate the principles of the *Manifesto* into practical terms, envision a library that is central to the educational process. Now, the school library is integral to an educational process, just not the one that is likely to be prevailing in most educational settings. The reasons for this are many and varied, and beyond the scope of this article, but some consideration is required here.

Harold Howe, US Commissioner of Education during the Johnson administration and senior lecturer emeritus at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, incisively observed that "what a school thinks of its library is a measure of how it feels about education" (1967, p. 28). Howe's observation demands a response. Given the generally poor condition that school librarians find ourselves in, it is understandable why our response might be to demand that the school thinks more highly of its library, and to redouble our efforts to focus attention on the library. This, however, misses Howe's profound point, which is that what a school thinks of its library is a *consequence* of what it feels about education. Therefore, to change what the school thinks of its library, we, *if* necessary, must change how it feels about education. This, in turn, requires a preoccupation with being integral to the educational process, or, *where* necessary, agitating for an educational process that the library is integral to, which, as we have argued, is an inquiry learning process.

The first edition of the *IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines* (2002), in discussing the library's pedagogical programme and the instructional activities of the professional librarian, sheds some light on this, making the point that "teachers' educational philosophy constitutes the ideological basis for their choice of teaching methods" (p. 18). The *Guidelines* (2002) do not elaborate on this much, unfortunately, but contrast teachers whose pedagogical approach is based on a more traditional view of the centrality of the role of the teacher, the textbook and the classroom in the educational process (p. 18), with those whose pedagogical approach is based on a more progressive view of the educational process

(p. 19). This "more progressive" view of education stretches surprisingly far back, and is succinctly described by Helen Sheehan in 1969 as:

ongoing efforts to center education in the learning process, rather than in the teaching process, to encourage initiative and independence on the part of the student, and to bring the student to grips with original thought as expressed in books and other media (p. 98).

Unsurprisingly, teachers who tend toward the latter pedagogical approach are more likely to be open to collaboration with the school librarian and to view the library as defined by the *Guidelines* (2015), as a "physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey and to their personal, social, and cultural growth" (p. 16). And while it is tempting, as an embattled librarian, and entirely understandable, to look to collaborate only with the latter group of teachers, the *Guidelines* (2002) stress the need to develop effective strategies to foster collaboration with both (pp.18-19). And this, in turn, reveals the depth of Howe's observation, because the latter will likely be easily persuaded to think differently about the library because of how they already feel about education, whereas the former will likely need to be less easily persuaded to feel differently about education, but which will then predispose them to think differently about the library.

A TRANSCENDENT AND HONOURABLE PURPOSE

Neil Postman, in discussing his ambiguously and provocatively titled book, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (1996), writes that "without a transcendent and honorable purpose, schooling must reach its finish, and the sooner we are done with it, the better" – with such a purpose, though, "schooling becomes the central institution through which the young may find reasons for continuing to educate themselves" (pp. x-xi). I will return to this.

The *Guidelines* (2015) assign a twofold purpose to the school library – educational and moral – which is implicit in its definition (see above). Our educational purpose may be broadly understood in terms of the student's information-to-knowledge journey, and our moral purpose may be broadly understood in terms of the student's personal, social, and cultural growth. While the educational purpose of the school library and its moral purpose are equally important, the educational purpose must be our primary concern, because this forms the frontline of the battle for the continued existence of school libraries, and if we fail to hold the frontline we fall. Also, the educational purpose is fundamental to the moral purpose – if we fail students in their information-to-knowledge journey, then their personal, social and cultural growth is stunted, perhaps permanently.

The *Guidelines* are clear that the library – facilities, collections, staff, and technology – are only means to our educational and moral end. Moreover, the *Guidelines* are equally clear that without a pedagogical programme – a planned comprehensive offering of teaching and learning activities – the library will not reach its end. The core instructional activities that make up the library's pedagogical programme are:

- Literacy & reading promotion
- Media & information literacy, which can be included in inquiry-based learning
- Inquiry-based learning, which necessarily includes media & information literacy
- Technology integration
- Professional development for teachers.

This is a tall order. However, what I am coming to understand more deeply is that because inquiry is a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, it encompasses *and* integrates all five core instructional activities.

Ruth Ann Davies, in her towering *The School Library Media Programme: Instructional Force for Excellence* (1979), reminds us:

The school library media program becomes an instructional source and force for excellence only when it functions as an integral support component of the total teaching-learning enterprise. The library media program and the educational program are interdependent and inseparable. ... Therefore, perspective in viewing the function and role of the school library media program begins logically by building a historical understanding of education itself (p.13).

Given the FOSIL Group's working definition of inquiry as a stance of wonder and puzzlement that gives rise to a dynamic process of coming to know and understand the world

and ourselves in it as the basis for responsible participation in society, which is centred on the inquirer, it would be hard to argue that this is not also the fundamental purpose of education, regardless of how it might be approached. Inquiry, then, as encompassing and integrating the core instructional activities of the library's pedagogical programme, aligns the library with the fundamental purpose of school, which is more important than we may realise. Debra E. Kachel and Keith Curry Lance – in a recently published interview with Ray Pun (2021) – put forward that:

the [ongoing] losses of school librarians [in the United States] are not solely based on school finances—a common reason for eliminating [them] ... [but that] a major contributor to those losses has been a 'disconnect' between school librarianship and the larger education community.

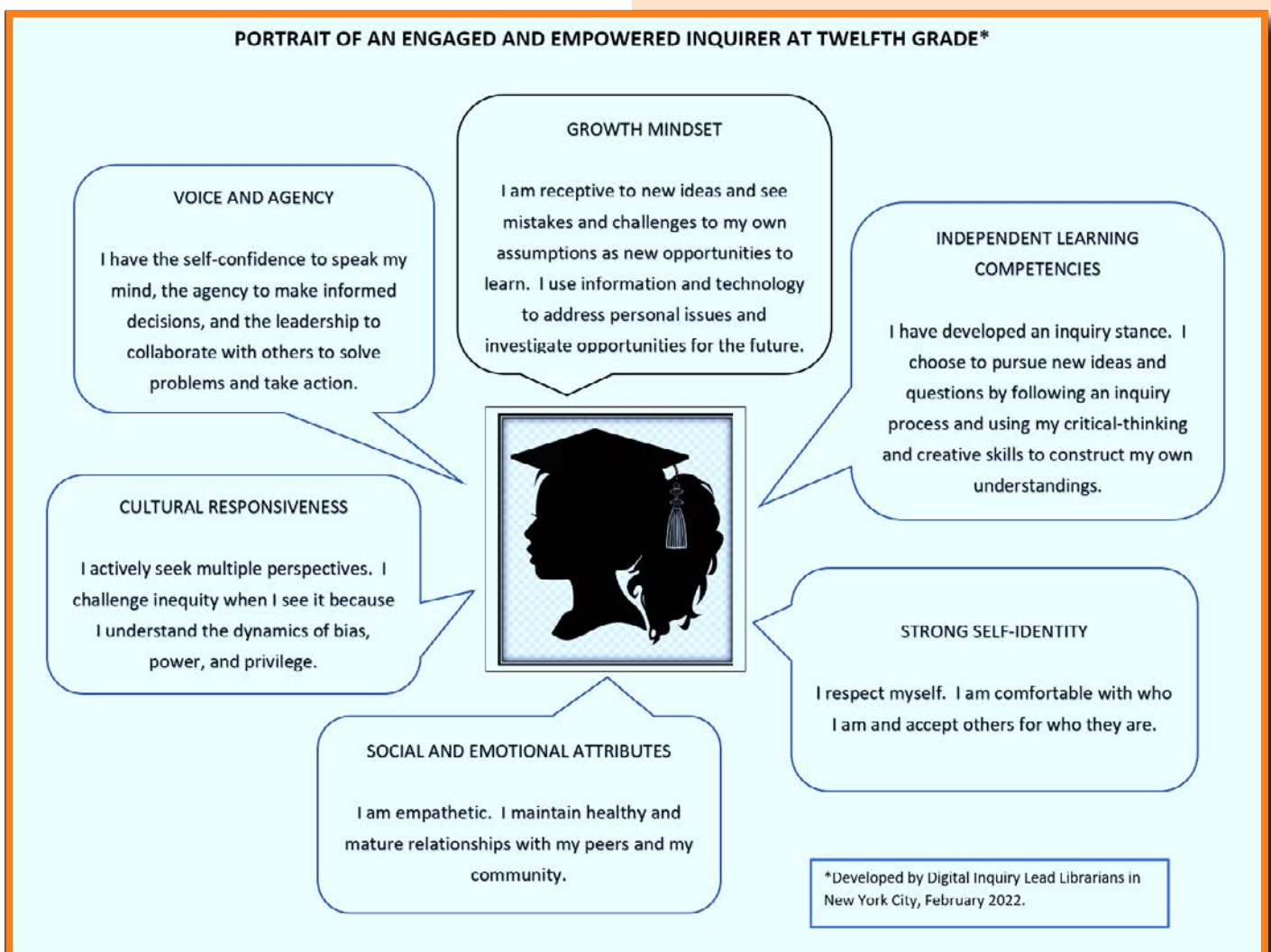


Figure 1. Portrait of an Engaged and Empowered Inquirer at Twelfth Grade (2022, slide 25).

We can make a compelling case, then, that inquiry – and by extension the school library pedagogical programme, and by extension the school library/ librarian – provides schooling with a transcendent and honourable purpose, and so provides compelling reasons for our children to continue educating themselves. Moreover, undergirded by a framework of developmentally appropriate metacognitive, cognitive, emotional and social skills within a sound instructional model of the inquiry process, inquiry *also* empowers our children to actually continue to educate themselves. This is powerfully captured in the *Portrait of an Engaged and Empowered Inquirer at Twelfth Grade* (2022, slide 25), which is the result of ongoing collaboration between Barbara Stripling and Digital Inquiry Lead Librarians in New York City (see Figure 1 above) – our children deserve at least this from their many formative years of schooling, and we, dare we say it, are integral to the educational process that brings this about.

A NEW DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS

Marshall McLuhan (1996) warned that “as we begin, so shall we go” (pp. 46-47). So, in my application for the position of Librarian in the newly-built Senior library, and the first professionally qualified Librarian in the Blanchelande’s history, I made a case for what more than 50 years of international research into the effectiveness of school libraries demonstrates a school library can achieve through its pedagogical programme, as understood above, provided that the necessary conditions for the implementation the pedagogical programme are met. These conditions, taken from the *Guidelines* (2015, pp. 16-17), are:

- A qualified school librarian with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching that enables the professional expertise required for the complex roles of inquiry-based instruction, reading & literacy development, school library management, collaboration with teaching staff, & engagement with the educational community.
- Staffing in sufficient numbers according to the size of the school & its unique needs – I am very grateful in this regard to colleagues from the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) for your revised *Table 6: Recommended minimum information services centre staffing* (2020), which are the most detailed, and therefore most helpful, guidelines that I have found.
- Targeted high-quality diverse collections (print, multimedia, digital) that support the school’s formal & informal curriculum, including individual projects & personal development.
- An explicit policy & plan for ongoing growth and development.

The reason why I applied, and why my application was enthusiastically received, is because the College had begun exciting work on framing the educational process in terms of the Hero’s Journey, which I had discovered in Blanchelande’s [Prospectus](#), and I was increasingly understanding inquiry in terms of a heroic information-to-knowledge journey – this serendipitous meeting of the ways is reflected in Principal Rob O’Brien’s [opening address](#) for the Midyear Meeting. Moreover, the College’s Design Director, Hugh Rose, was translating this deep conceptualisation of the educational process at Blanchelande into an equally deep iconographic vocabulary that reached beyond the Prospectus, and this vocabulary was perfectly suited to articulating the FOSIL-based inquiry process. We explored this in greater detail through Hugh’s [presentation on the conceptual design of heroic inquiry](#) for the Midyear Meeting, although Figure 2 below reflects some of the early fruit our collaboration, which is centred on the newly-developed Library subject icon.

More broadly, since starting as Head of Inquiry-Based Learning, which, following my application and interview, became a teaching staff appointment at head of department level, rapid progress has been made:

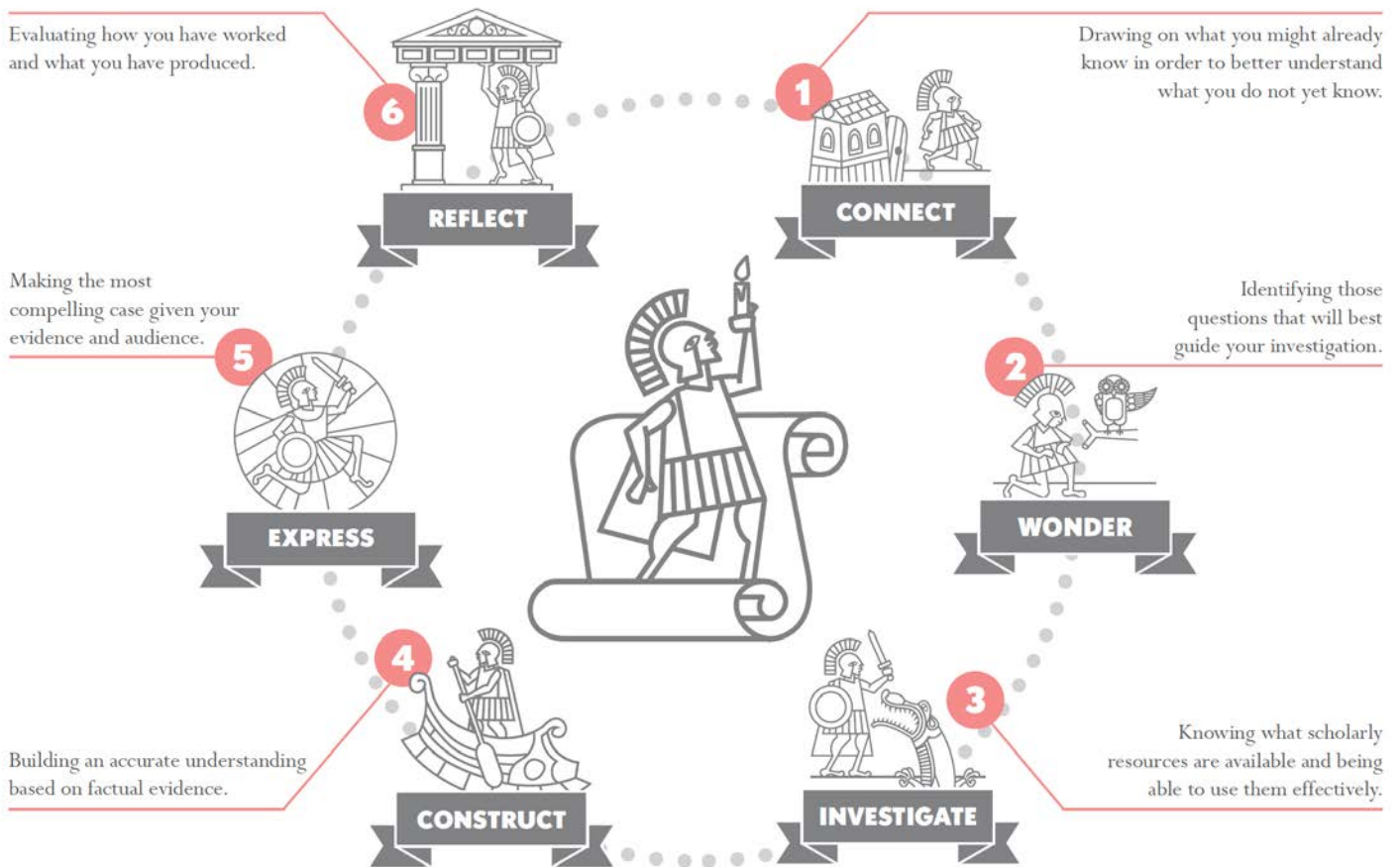


Figure 2: Heroic Inquiry at Blanchelande College

- Staffing in the Senior Library has increased from 1 FTE professionally qualified librarian (me) to 1.5 FTE professionally qualified librarians with a view to bringing this in line with ASLA-ALIA guidelines. The extra 0.5 FTE hours includes responsibility for coordinating the Extended Project Qualification, which is an optional extracurricular inquiry that contributes towards university entry – see Jenny Toerien’s [presentation on extracurricular inquiry](#) for the Midyear Meeting. There is also an intention to bring staffing of the Junior Library in line with ASLA-ALIA guidelines.
- An operational budget for developing and maintaining an appropriately sized print and digital collection for both the Senior Library and Junior Library has been secured. Furthermore, planning is now underway for the redevelopment of the Junior Library to bring provision for the emerging pedagogical programme in the line with that of the Senior Library. We are also collaborating with the Director of Studies on embedding inquiry in subject area teaching in transition years for this coming academic year. As we follow the

English National Curriculum, this represents a pedagogical paradigm shift – see Joe Sanders and Jenny’s [presentation on curricular inquiry](#) for the Midyear Meeting for insight into what this paradigm shift represents. Also, our long-time collaboration with Kevin Heppell from Mondrian Wall has entered a new and exciting phase – see Kevin’s [presentation on mapping inquiry in a dynamic curriculum](#) for the Midyear Meeting.

- A strategic and operational development plan, based on the *Guidelines* and serving as the basis for the budget, was presented to the Education Sub-Committee of Governors, was well received and highly commended.

A long obedience in the same direction, punctuated along the way by days of small beginnings, has led, in the long run, to this day of small beginnings, which, as always, is full of promise – the promise always of a school library that is integral to the educational process.

May you prosper along your way.

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