
Internationalism as leadership in IASL research: Accomplishments and directions

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The International Association of School Librarianship [IASL] is a leading source in school library research. Many IASL authors work in academic institutions that now identify internationalism as a priority in their research goals. This article examines how IASL-published research accords with a wider academic mandate of internationalism. Moving toward an international focus that recognizes the scholars and contexts of developing countries requires rethinking roles and responsibilities of researchers, and challenging assumptions about emerging nations. Illustrated by the author's work in Ethiopia, recommendations are made for ways that IASL can support school library research that reflects developed and developing countries.

Overview and Background

As an international organization with members from over 50 countries, the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) has published research that has pioneered a shift from local to global knowledge in the field of school librarianship. Many of the authors of these publications work in academic institutions in which “internationalism” has become central to their vision and mission. Although the concept of internationalism is contested and complex, for the purposes of this paper, internationalism is defined as an “outlook, or practice, that tends to transcend the nation towards a wider community, of which nations continue to form the principal units” (Anderson, 2002, para. 2). For example, the University of British Columbia (UBC) explains its goal of internationalism (or its synonymous term “internationalization”) in the following way:

In a world where countries are increasingly interdependent, we share a common responsibility to protect and conserve natural resources, promote global health and well being, and foster international co-operation. The University of British Columbia is already part of a growing network of learning that encompasses the globe; we must strengthen established links and develop new ones through enhanced student mobility and study abroad programs, faculty and staff exchange opportunities, and educational consortia. We shall encourage research projects that link the University of British Columbia faculty and students with their peers around the world, including projects that address global problems in health, safety, economic opportunity, *human rights* [emphasis added], and environmental integrity (UBC, 2005, para. 1).

Likewise, the work of school libraries upholds the human right to education through the mission of “provid[ing] information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society” (International Federation of Library Associations [IFLA] & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006, para. 1). Similarly, IASL identifies itself as an “international forum for those people interested in promoting effective school library media programs as viable instruments in the educational process” (IASL, 2007, para. 1).

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In this context of internationalism, this paper pursues the following questions:

1. Within the current paradigm shift to internationalism in academia, to what extent how is IASL research in line with this paradigm?
2. What landmarks have been achieved?
3. What are the unique considerations of school library research in global contexts?
4. How are IASL-published researchers wearing the privileged status of an international research association? Are IASL's researchers wearing this position, as Anthony Stewart argued his September 2009 UBC lecture entitled *Pilgrims or sea pirates?* Developing a new vocabulary for speaking about diversity, as "something unstable, controversial, possibly unjust, but never taken for granted," or is the privilege regarded as he also stated, as "one wears a comfortable pair of shoes"?
5. What leadership directions should IASL take in encouraging research projects that recognize the issues and research in school librarianship in developing and emerging countries; link established school library researchers with researchers in developing and emerging countries; and ensure access to international school library research to all countries?

In sum, this paper aims to explore actions that IASL can take to support research that addresses global problems in the right to education through access to information and ideas.

In this article, IASL research published between 2002 and 2010 has been reviewed to assess its fit with current scholarship directions in internationalism from a nation- and community-based perspective. For this examination, the nation is the country of the researcher and the wider community is the worldwide membership to which IASL is committed.

The examination and discussion of internationalism in school library research are focused on the growing momentum in academia for increasing research capacity in emerging and developing countries. In contrast to developed countries, these are the countries in which the majority of the world's population lives but are typically the least represented in the corpus of research literature in many disciplines. For this article, the term "emerging countries" refers to both emerging and developing countries, and the term "developed countries" refers to those countries typically regarded as "the West." Recognizing the contentious use of these terms to distinguish levels of economic development (e.g., United Nations (n.d.) and the Wikipedia entry for "Developing country" (2011)), it is important to know that the terms refer to only one aspect of a country's culture.

It is the intent of this research to alert the international school library research community to the need to rectify the imbalance of research productivity between emerging and developed countries in the field; to develop a wide and deep knowledge of cultural contexts for libraries in emerging countries; and to find ways that "school library media programs (can be) viable instruments in the educational process" (IASL, 2007, para. 1) in the many local contexts of the IASL community. Together, these actions enable progress towards a truly worldwide perspective in school library research and clearly foregrounds the "international" component of IASL.

Methodology

Description of the Sample

To gain an overview of the extent and nature of internationalism in IASL publications, all work referenced in IASL Research Abstracts (<http://www.iasl-online.org/research/abstracts/>) was examined. At the time of writing this article, this resource contained abstracts of all papers from 2002–2008 that were published in the journal *School Libraries Worldwide* and in the Research Forum sections of IASL conference proceedings that met these criteria. Although not all of the publications contained in these sources meet the criteria above, all were used in the analyses as they are endorsed as research by IASL. There were 129 articles referenced in *Research Abstracts*, and 24 in the last two years of *School Libraries Worldwide* for a total of 153 articles:

1. Evidence that the article/paper was intended as research
2. Statement of aims/hypotheses/research questions
3. Information about methodology
4. Discussion of results

5. Placed in context of research and other literature
6. Discussion of implications
7. Report of more than two pages

To include research publications up to the present, all articles published in Volume 15 (2008) and Volume 16 (2009) of *School Libraries Worldwide* were also examined. Although other IASL publications concerning international issues, including monographs and professional papers from the annual conference, exist, this review is limited to those publications officially marked as IASL-published research because they are most likely to be considered as the corpus of IASL-endorsed research.

Using these criteria, the sample contained a total of 153 articles, 129 articles from the Research Abstracts, and 24 in the last two volumes of *School Libraries Worldwide*.

Analysis

Quantitative analysis. For each publication, the following characteristics were identified: a) country of the author/principal investigator; b) country in which the research project took place; and c) primary research methods used. Frequencies were compiled for each area of examination.

Personal experience. After the quantitative findings are presented, in the context of a case study, relevant literature was synthesized with the researcher's personal experiences with the issues inherent in understanding and exercising internationalism.

Quantitative Results

This section will describe the characteristics of the research papers examined.

Country of Author or Principal Investigator

As seen in Figure 1, the vast majority of the projects/studies were carried out in the home country of the author(s). One study was conducted by a western researcher and carried out in a developing country (Shaw, 2005). Some articles were not situated in any specific country but presented arguments or practices that were generalized to broad contexts. In a few cases, projects were carried out in the authors' home countries as well as in other countries (e.g. Henri, Hay, & Oberg, 2005; Henri & Lee, 2006). Researchers living and working in developed countries (131 or 86%), primarily Australia, United States and Canada, carried out the majority of projects.



Figure 1. IASL-published research by author country of origin (N=153).

Knowledge productivity in IASL-published research was heavily weighted towards the less populated but most highly resourced countries. In all, the articles were written by researchers/authors in 29 different countries.

Country in Which the Research Project Took Place.

As seen in Figure 2, 12 of the total number of projects was carried out by researchers residing in eight emerging countries and the projects were situated in their home countries.

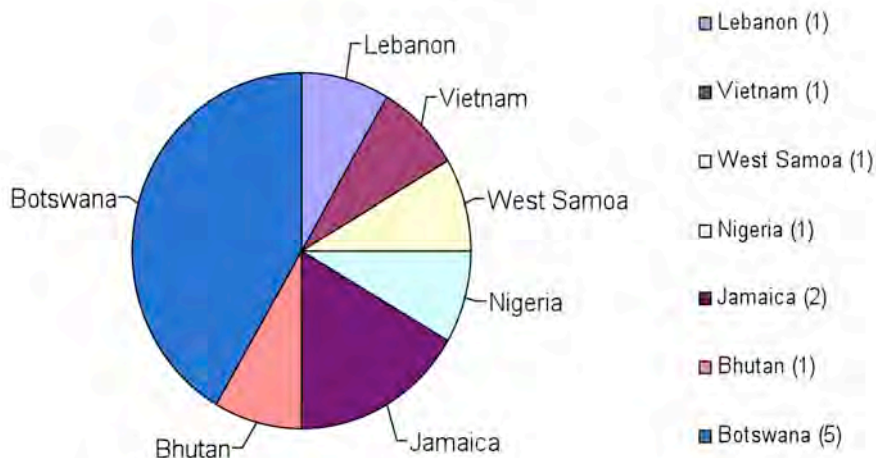


Figure 2. Publications by authors in emerging countries (n=12).

Eight of the total 153 articles (5%) were co-authored by researchers from two different countries. Six of these projects took place in each of their respective countries (Everhart, Dresang, & Kotrla, 2005; Hell, Engstrom, & Lundgren, 2003; Henri & Lee, 2006; Henri, Lee, & Chan, 2006; Henri, et al., 2003; Kong, Lee, F., Li, & Lee, S., 2005), and two took place in the researchers’ home countries as well as in other countries (Farmer, 2007; Henri, Hay, & Oberg, 2002). These can be regarded as international studies in that the gaze extended beyond individual nations to several—from two to seven. All studies of the international co-authored articles were conducted in developed countries.

Research Methods

A broad distinction was made between projects that did not involve collecting new data (63 or 41%) and those that did (90 or 59%). Table 1 summarizes the methods used by existing or new data source. Several studies (24 or 16%) used more than one primary research method, and each time a method was used it was counted. For example, a study that employed both questionnaire and interviews methods (a common combination) was categorized under two different methods. The first group of projects, consisting of those using existing data, included literature reviews, document analyses, use of online course data and internet sites, and research-based descriptions of “best practices.” The second and larger group of projects, those that used new data, included a wide variety of mostly qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, observation) and some quantitative (survey, pre- and post-test) methods. Case study, ethnography, and action research methods were also used. These three methods included specific qualitative methods (e.g., observation, interview, document collection) but were counted only as the larger stated design of case study, ethnography or action research. Although surveys were used in several studies at a district or regional level, only three publications were based on a large-scale, multi-method design, and these publications each reported parts of one study conducted in a developed country.

Table 1. Research methods by data source.

| Existing Data | |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Method | Studies |
| Review of literature | 16 |
| Document analyses | 14 |
| Best practice | 14 |
| Course evaluation | 8 |
| Argument/position | 2 |
| Collection analyses | 9 |
| Image analyses | 2 |
| Instrument evaluation | 2 |
| Website analyses | 2 |
| Total | 69 |
| New Data | |
| Method | Studies |
| Interview | 25 |
| Questionnaire | 24 |
| Survey | 22 |
| Case study | 14 |
| Observation | 11 |
| Ethnography | 3 |
| Action research | 3 |
| Focus groups | 2 |
| Performance measures | 2 |
| Verbal protocol | 1 |
| Total | 107 |

Two of the 152 studies were conducted with marginalized populations within a developed country, specifically with First Nations peoples of Canada. One of these studies (Luther & Lerat, 2009) employed culturally sensitive research methods that involved the local community in the design of the research and utilized traditional listening methods for collecting data. One study considered an alternative model of a school-community library to better meet the needs of a rural tribal community in South Africa (Le Roux & Hendrikz, 2003). Another study (Parr, Nguyen, VET Centre Library, 2002), using ethnographic methods, was unique in its critical examination of the imposition of Western “best practices” in non-Western library systems. This study focused on internationalism in the sense of critically analyzing long-held (Western) assumptions about the work of librarianship in non-Western contexts and presented a platform for an outsider's view of the practice of teacher librarianship.

To complement the quantitative results and to begin to identify some of the challenges and guidelines, I next present an instrumental case study, or example from my own current work.

Considerations in International School Library Research: A Personal Experience

This current work involves research partnerships between my institution and Ethiopian institutions, specifically with two Ethiopian universities and two organizations that support development of community libraries. Canada and Ethiopia may appear to have little common ground upon which to collaboratively investigate meaningful questions. However, the projects address issues in literacy and information literacy education that are common to both countries but play out in different ways because of different historical, political, economic and social contexts. The issues concern the changing notions and practices of literacy brought on by increasingly diverse, multilingual populations, and by the rapid uptake of digital technologies in both countries.

Conducting research about literacy and information literacy in any context entails understanding cultural views about knowledge, learning, and teaching, historical contexts of libraries in those societies, and current policies of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and their uses in education (Asselin, 2009). Such research in contexts of emerging countries is urgently needed and naturally compelling to scholars from established research cultures. Equally pressing is the need for these countries to develop their own praxis-focused endogenous research culture (Maclure, 2006) in contrast to prevailing models which can be fraught with issues concerning research purpose, perspectives, design, and researcher roles (Choudry, 2009; Cranshaw, 1985; Samoff, 1996; Smith, 1999; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). Given the scarcity of research resources in emerging countries and the daily pressures on university faculty, librarians and educators have to do more with little. In such situations is easy for well-resourced, and well-meaning, western scholars to impose their own agendas and traditions. My question is, how can I, as a member of the IASL research community, support development of local research capacity in respectful, collaborative, and productive ways for all participants; and enable conjoining of less heard scholars into the global research community? In the next two sections, I summarize two major lessons I learned from my own work: one concerning building knowledge of local context and the other involving meaningful ways of supporting local research capacity.

Building Knowledge of Local Context

The first lesson that I learned was the importance of establishing trust and respect, and an understanding of the social, political and economic contexts of education and libraries in Ethiopia. I visited the country three times over the past 20 months for these purposes. I visited academic, community, school and public libraries in urban and rural areas. I met with librarians in these settings and talked about their challenges and visions. I met with key people from the Ministry of Education, town councils, universities, and non-government organizations (NGOs) to discuss their missions, situations and goals around literacy, technology and learning. I interviewed young people in various types of libraries and in their communities. I photographed all of these settings and kept a journal of observations. I conducted literature searches about education, libraries, technology initiatives and discussed the articles and policies with locals. Between visits, I used email to maintain communication and develop our projects with key contact people. Below, I summarize what I learned about the Ethiopian context of education, libraries and ICT as critical contexts for collaborative international research.

Education, librarianship and new technologies. Expansion of educational opportunities is a major initiative underway from primary schooling through post secondary. Literacy remains a huge challenge with the youth literacy rate at 42% and a gap between rates of males (62%) and females (38%). Amharic and English are the two official languages and English is supposed to be taught from grade two. In contrast to notions of knowledge in Western countries as inquiry-based and actively constructed by learners, and the role of the teacher as facilitator, more traditional notions of rote learning and didactic teaching prevail in Ethiopia (Poluha, 2004).

The traditional reverence for books as a source of knowledge remains strong. Unlike the west that has enjoyed a long and abundant history of access to books, Ethiopians have been deprived of books until very recently. Community libraries (or “reading rooms”) stocked with donated books and some local publications are sources of pride. My own visits to these reading rooms have reinforced my perception of a severe book shortage in Ethiopia, and the preference for books over computers.

Librarianship education has had a short and troubled history in Ethiopia (Mammo, 2007; Tsigemelak, 2006). In the face of a desperate need for such essentials as food, clean water, and medicine, Ethiopian librarians claim that information had been a relatively low priority for government. Training for reading room attendants is abbreviated to a few days of workshops on basic practices and certification is not recognized outside the reading room context.

Government recognition of the critical importance of access to information in reshaping Ethiopia is now leapfrogging the country into the digital age. However, according to recent data (OpenNet Initiative, 2009), only .04% of the population has access to the Internet, with substantial filtering by the government. The majority of libraries with Internet access are located in the few large urban areas (accounting for only 15% of the population), once again contributing to the

urban/rural divide. Universities have computer labs where students are free to come most of the day, except for lunch hour when they are closed. These labs are well staffed and reasonably resourced, and popular with students and faculty. The few high schools with computers do not have them in the library, but students use computers in labs for required ICT classes only.

ICTs are used in distance education but this is rarely an e-learning situation as assumed by many others. Because most of the country's population is in remote rural areas, distance education is a critical component of the national push for post-secondary education. Librarians in the major universities work with ICT departments on these initiatives but progress has been slow. Advances are greatly hampered by lack of a reliable and sufficiently robust infrastructure, as well as restrictive government regulation of who is allowed to produce content of distance education programs. Embedded in all these efforts to advance into an information and learning society are concerns about the inherent social changes.

Although academic libraries have been prioritized in government ICT initiatives in Ethiopia, they face immense challenges as they shift from long-held practices to contemporary western models (Casey & Savastinuk, 2007; Holmberg, Huvila, Kronqvist-Berg, & Widén-Wulff, 2009). The development of the African Digital Library (<http://africaeducation.org/adl/>), free to anyone living in Africa, and the current push to automate academic libraries indicate the growing momentum towards digitization, open source software, community-based delivery, and efficient management of collections and services. However, changes in Ethiopian libraries will be unique not just technologically, but more importantly, culturally, in terms of beliefs about learning, teaching and knowledge. It is these foundational assumptions that ultimately shape the information literacy practices of users, and the information literacy programs of libraries. Although not immediately relevant to school libraries, these massive changes at the academic level will filter down to school libraries.

It may seem obvious that any international research involving an outsider must be premised with time to build relationships and cultural knowledge; however, it is not always the way it is done. I report my preliminary stages of developing a research partnership with colleagues in Ethiopia to illustrate that a research program about information literacy in leapfrogging contexts must address culture first and foremost.

Towards Supporting an Endogenous Research Culture of Information Literacy

The second lesson, overlapping with the first, was how to not only collaborate but support development of local research capacity. Three key actions that have strengthened my work as a research partner with Ethiopians are: a) taking time to build relationships and cultural knowledge; b) careful considerations of research design and use of culturally sensitive methodologies; and c) building spaces for collaboration and conversations over the duration of the projects.

Relationships. As illustrated above, laying the groundwork for new research relationships and contexts requires increased attention to issues of mutual respect, cultural awareness/sensitivity and the need to listen and to engage in meaningful conversations with potential research partners. Although some might argue that these issues are not part of the research process, this reconnaissance and reflection process is critical to conducting any further inquiries, and should become an explicit part of the research process (Asselin & Doiron, 2009).

Research design and methods. Following from building such a foundation is designing research that is respectful of cultural and research traditions of our collaborators in contexts of "other," and yet finding ways to contribute to building local research capacity. To address the dominant quantitative approaches to library and educational research used in Ethiopia, my projects introduce contemporary qualitative research designs. My projects introduce culturally sensitive research design and methods (Anderson, 2009; Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009; Thomas, 2008). In contrast to a common approach to research in other cultures, at best involving local researchers as consultants, my projects use a symmetrical design so that the same research is being conducted in both Canada and Ethiopia. An example of a culturally sensitive methodology is the use of digital cameras by young people (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2005; "Kids with Cameras," n.d.) to represent their understandings of concepts and practices that are being studied. This method introduces digital research tools respectfully and meaningfully. The images provide the research collaborators with a commonly accessible form of data that can prompt discussion about

underlying assumptions of such core concepts as libraries, learning, and knowledge. These discussions can then direct further types of data collection. At the time of this writing, a pilot study has been completed of this methodology with both Canadian and Ethiopian children.

Ongoing collaboration and conversation. Email is one way to continue the conversations that must be sustained between face-to-face meetings. The use of online spaces such as project management tools such as Basecamp and virtual research sites are options being explored as well. Such virtual environments enable communication, document and data storage and sharing, collaboration, and management across the research team and between groups. For example, research articles from various Ethiopian university conference proceedings that are only available in print from the particular university publisher have been scanned and stored on Basecamp. Basecamp has made this knowledge easily accessible to Canadians in the project providing a balance of literature informing the work. Using contemporary research tools such as these also contributes to the goal of supporting development of local capacity by providing first hand experiences with digital technologies for scholarly purposes.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Directions for IASL Leadership

As researchers, the task is for us to re-conceptualize our roles and practices as members of a global research community. As described above, we face challenges in communication, ethics and respect for the work of our global colleagues. We have much to learn from other cultures and researchers, and our work will only be enriched. In my example of Ethiopia, studying the literacy and information literacy practices within the rapidly changing information environments of those countries experiencing technology leapfrogging requires letting go of familiar assumptions such as limited intellectual capital of “other” researchers, superiority of our own literature, lack of a local scholarly literature, and steadfastness of traditional views of literacy and learning. This applies to all aspects of school librarianship that may be foci of research in emerging countries.

We will need to be open to new views of that which we hold sacred in our own contexts and research, e.g., information access, information literacy, resource-based learning, reading promotion, collaboration, inquiry, even what constitutes a school library. It is through this stance that we can begin to not only distinguish local and global practices, but also open new perspectives on what Street (2003) calls “glocal” principles and practices.

As researchers in an international organization, we must work towards expanding and enriching the school library literature by connecting with colleagues in their own contexts so that we all gain new perspectives. Knowledge dissemination in this view necessitates publishing outside our own privileged circle, and honoring local publishing forms such as monographs while also exploring creative opportunities for online publication such as supporting the newly formed African Journals Online (<http://ajol.info/>) by publishing in one of their journals. Articles from these journals are available for free to scholars from developing countries and for a fee to those from “high income” countries.

IASL-published research has a foundation in current notions of internationalism. Researchers from differing countries have collaborated to conduct and publish research. However, we need to extend that network to colleagues in emerging countries, both countries with IASL membership and those who, for whatever reason, are not represented in IASL. Within the corpus of IASL research published over the last decade, a rich array of research methodology expertise can be tapped. Other research methods such as those that are aligned with local communication and learning traditions should be explored. A new internationalism in IASL research has to start with building connections, learning, listening, observing, respecting, letting go of assumptions, discussing, and finding mutually meaningful inquiries. The process will be slower than what we are used to as cultures navigate between the familiar and the strange—what is important to study, why and how; and the processes of knowledge production and dissemination.

Whether in our own or in others’ contexts, ethical responsibilities for conducting research are increasingly scrutinized. This is more so in international contexts where power relations between the researchers and participants, and between local and foreign researchers, can be misused, intentionally or unintentionally. Most importantly, we need to seriously consider our privileged positions in representing international school library research so that it is not, as

Anthony Stewart stated in his 2009 lecture, “entitled, secure, smug and easily accepted as the way things ought to be” ...and instead, reposition our privilege to “occupy privilege consciously, as an unstable space that brings with it a sense of necessary responsibility to those who might otherwise occupy our positions...it then might become a force for progressive change.”

Although I am by no means arguing against conducting research in our own contexts, I aim to propose a moral argument for extending our intellectual and other resources to those contexts in which much less is known about ways of actualizing IASL’s mission of “promoting effective school library media programs as viable instruments in the educational process” (IASL, 2007, para. 1) through research-based knowledge. Today’s knowledge-based society should not be restricted to those with resources to produce knowledge. And we cannot assume that the knowledge currently produced is transferable to other contexts. In a global knowledge society, all researchers are responsible for enabling knowledge building in all contexts. It is through understanding these myriad particular contexts of the place of libraries in supporting education that meaningful training, collections, and programs can be developed. Although we are already into the second decade of the 21st century, IASL has time to take up the leadership needed to build research capacity throughout the world so that education and information literacy are meaningfully supported by libraries serving schools in all nations, and that we truly become school libraries worldwide.

It is this outsider’s perspective, i.e., that of emerging nations, that is missing in IASL research, as determined by the limited publications examined for this article. Therefore, I respectfully suggest several ways of addressing this challenge that build on existing IASL structures:

1. Create a special issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* that focuses on research in developing and emerging countries.
2. Provide a research grant to support research in developing countries.
3. Translate selected IASL research into languages of various developing countries in partnership with IFLA that already supports translation.
4. Co-publish with IFLA a resource on *World School Libraries Research*.
5. Check worldwide databases to insure IASL research is accessible to those in developing countries.
6. Use Internet resources (such as the IASL social network sites) to sponsor, organize and develop online research discussions across developing countries.
7. Dedicate one of the upcoming IASL Research Forums to research in developing countries.

Through such activities as above, IASL can embrace the “international” of IASL. With the intellectual resources of the IASL research community and the network of international contacts through the Association, I suggest that a concerted move towards this critical direction of international research is what is needed to propel leadership in the field. This movement would be a process unlike research in familiar contexts but is urgently needed if we value the two goals of effective school libraries for all students and expanded arenas for scholarship in school librarianship. There is no one sure road towards this re-envisioned direction for IASL research, but rather many that are responsive to the new twists and turns, and discoveries along the way.

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