



IFLA
2005
OSLO

World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council

"Libraries - A voyage of discovery"

August 14th - 18th 2005, Oslo, Norway

Conference Programme:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/Programme.htm>

2nd Version: June 16, 2005

Code Number:

116-E

Meeting:

87 SI - Libraries for Children and Young Adults

50th Anniversary of the Children's Section: History of the Section and plans for the future

Ivanka Stričević

Chair of IFLA Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section

Medvescak Public Library

Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract

IFLA Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. It was founded in 1955 in order to promote and support the development of library services for children and young adults. The Section's numerous activities over the last fifty years include the organization of seminars and implementation of conference programs, organization of pre- and post conferences, issuing publications and guidelines, overseeing projects and networking. Strategic goals of the Section in the future are based on the right of each child to have access to information. Its activities are related to the promotion and encouragement of all types of literacies for all children and young adults, especially of the skills required by the new technological age, and to the development of partnership for the enrichment and exchange of resources.

Sharing and networking may be considered crucial to the work of the Section as it strives to be an international forum for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, ideas and projects. It also aims to be a forum for discussion, cooperation and development and to open channels for information on services for children and young adults all over the world.

Fifty years is a substantial existence! It is half a century and may be someone's entire life. And the fifty years of IFLA Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section have been more than eventful.

In 1955 The *Committee for Library Work with Children* (CHIFLA) was established at IFLA's Congress in Brussels by the IFLA Public Library Section. The Dutch children's librarian Johanne Wolf took the initiative, and together with Aase Bredsdorff from Denmark and Eileen Colwell from the UK, the Section was established. Hannie Wolf thought it was necessary to have a special children's section since in public libraries, too, children needed special care.

She was the chair of that Sub Section for 5 years. Some years later the Committee was called *Sub-Section on Library Work with Children* as it was a subsection of the Section of Public Libraries. In 1977 it was renamed *Children's Libraries Section*.

I am not going to talk about the history of children's librarianship globally, which we know started in the late 19th century, as it is difficult to summarize it in twenty minutes or so. However, I would like to emphasize some important events in this area at the time when the Section was established. The 1950s were a time when children drew attention largely due to new insights into developmental psychology. In the late 1950s the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child was passed and this was the first time that a special international document had treated the child as a person with rights and proclaimed that mankind owes children the best it has. The best interest of the child is the Declaration's guiding principle.

The 1950s were also a post-war period when children's libraries were opened in many countries of the world and some library programs designed for children were set up. In 1957 UNESCO published the manual *Les services de lecture publique pour enfants* by Lionel McColvin¹. As the main objective, he emphasised allowing children easy access to books, from the time they develop an interest in books until the time their needs can be met by library services for adults. Readers' clubs and clubs for creative writing, storytelling, drawing and painting were highly recommended. Children's librarians were expected to be interested in working with children, to know and love children and children's books, to be practical, young at heart, realistic, patient and open to all children's questions.

The issue of access has been in the focus of attention of children's librarianship since 1950s – if children do not show interest in books, it should be aroused, and if the child cannot get to a book, the book should get to him/her. Children's libraries, books and children's librarians leave their premises and visit hospitals, parks, rural and distant areas, and, nowadays – the virtual world.

After the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* from 1989, which puts the child into the position of an active agent and emphasizes the rights of all, children's libraries started focusing on the right to information for all children and to the provision of this right for special user groups – children with special needs, multicultural communities, young people. The *Convention* offers support to library policy and practice. As Marian Koren stressed in her paper presented at the Berlin IFLA Conference 2003 "Children's libraries should have as its goal to advocate children's right to information."²

¹ McColvin, L. *Les services de lecture publique pour enfants*. Paris, UNESCO, 1957

² Koren, M. Children's rights and library best practices. URL: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/007e-Koren.pdf>

What has the Section accomplished in the last fifty years?

Members of the Section's Standing Committee have organized seminars and participated in regular IFLA conference programs, pre- and post conferences, issued publications and guidelines and worked on projects.

Interesting facts on the Section's operation in the last 50 years may be found in the anniversary leaflet. The purpose of this leaflet is to provide information, but at the same time invite all those who have some information about the Section's activities in the given period to share it in order to update the leaflet before making it available to everybody through IFLANET. It is always a problem to name specific activities and particularly deserving individuals, as there is always the danger of omitting some of them. However, I will, nevertheless, emphasize some activities which have marked the work of the Section's members and have had an impact on children's librarianship in the past years.

In 1968 the Children's Section, which at that time still operated under the name *Committee for Library Work with Children*, organized a seminar on the education of children's librarians which was led by Aase Bredsdorff. As a result of the seminar three volumes of the publication *Library Services to Children (Training)* were published in 1970.

In 1973 UNESCO and IFLA jointly launched the *Books for All* project, the purpose of which was to provide children and young people in developing countries reading materials. The idea for this project came from the Section, which was also the advisory body to the Project. In the 25 years of its duration BFA was able to support libraries for children and young people in 54 developing countries. A total of US\$ 500,000 was collected and correspondingly disbursed.³

In 1976 a Round Table of *Librarians Representing Documentation Centres Serving Research on Children's Literature* was established under the Children's Libraries Section. The conference papers of the Round Table are included in the bibliography. The bibliography also includes the Section's conference papers, publications etc. from 1961-1981 and is now available at IFLA HQ.

In 1981 the IFLA/UNESCO pre-session seminar on children's services in developing countries was held in Leipzig (Germany). The proceedings *Library work for children and young adults in the developing countries* edited by Geneviève Patte and Sigrún Hannesdóttir followed in 1984.⁴

In Moscow in 1991 the publication *Young People and Reading: International Perspectives* resulted from a joint workshop of the Children's Section and the Reading Research Round Table.

In order to help librarians share resources and skills, the Children's Section presented at the Barcelona conference 1993 and in Havana 1994 a database containing abstracts of

³ URL: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s10/index.htm>

⁴ Library work for children and young adults in the developing countries : proceedings of the IFLA/UNESCO pre-session seminar in Leipzig, GDR, 10-15 August, 1981 / edited by = Les enfants, les jeunes et les bibliothèques dans les pays en développement : actes du séminaire IFLA/UNESCO de Leipzig, RDA, 10-15 août, 1981 / édité par Geneviève Patte, Sigrún Klara Hannesdóttir. K.G. Saur München ; New York : K.G. Saur, 1984. (IFLA Publication no. 28)

research being conducted on library services for young people, edited by Adele Fasick. The abstracts, arranged in twelve categories, are accessible on IFLANET.⁵ Coverage is international, although most of the studies come from North America. This project was discontinued after 1995.

In 1996 the *Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults*, edited by Ilona Glashoff and Vivi Fahnoe, were published and presented at the 1997 Copenhagen IFLA Conference. Young adults as library users and the public library that needs to provide the transition from services for children to services for adults were topics discussed as early as in the 1950s. In many public libraries, for example in the US and Great Britain, there were programs for teenagers, but it was emphasized that they depended largely on the enthusiasm of individual libraries and librarians and thus may not serve as an indicator of consistent care for young people worldwide. In the 1990s, the time when *Guidelines* were published, many special departments for young adults were set up, particularly in Germany, which motivated then Section chairperson, Ilona Glasoff, who was German, to be the editor of the *Guidelines for Young Adults*. Those *Guidelines* as well as their revised version from 2001 are available in many languages as a brochure and on IFLANET.⁶

In 1999, publication of *Children's Literature Abstracts* was ceased. This quarterly international guide to books and periodical articles about children's literature 1995-1999, edited by Gillian Adams, has been absorbed into the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database, based in Bethesda, Maryland, US.

I am coming back to the year 1991. That year was crucial to the work of the Section as it was the year of the publication *Guidelines for Children's Services*, edited by Adele Fasick as IFLA Professional Report, No. 25. Although library departments and services for children were the subject of other IFLA guidelines as well, these specific guidelines for library services for children also conveyed the importance of this area of librarianship, apart from the professional standards the document recommended. In these guidelines the editor emphasises that in the last decade of the 20th century "the greatest challenge for children's librarians would be helping children prepare for the changing nature of information".⁷

The question children's librarians are facing today is whether the same challenge is true for the 21st century as well? The 21st century has only just started. Can we anticipate how the services for children and young adults will develop? This raises the question of how the Section can respond to these challenges.

In December of 2003, after four years of work, the Section published new *Guidelines for Children's Libraries Services*.⁸ Within just one year the *Guidelines* were translated into 9 languages, and these versions can be found on IFLANET. The *Guidelines* emphasize the underlying principles of the establishment and development of children's librarianship today as well as the fact that "Library services for children have never been as important for children and their families all over the world as they are today" and "A quality children's library equips children with lifelong learning and literacy skills, enabling them

⁵ URL: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s10/index.htm>

⁶ URL: <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s10/index.htm>

⁷ Fasick, Adele M. *Guidelines for Children's Services*. The Hague: IFLA Headquarters, 1991 (IFLA Professional Reports: 25)

⁸ *Guidelines for Children's Library Services*. IFLA, 2003

to participate and contribute to the community". The child and his/her developmental and participatory rights are the focus of attention.

If we accept the saying that «we shouldn't view past from a present perspective, but rather view and reflect on the present from a future perspective», what is our perception of current children's librarianship if we take into consideration the needs of the future? Will libraries become extinct by the end of this century, when their role in ensuring access to information may be taken on by new technologies? Librarians believe that what will remain within the domain of libraries will definitely be creating a pleasant meeting place ("public paradise"), a place of exchange of knowledge and ideas, and doing educational work in the area of technology as well as all other literacies. It is this role that is essential to children's libraries, which need to develop services for bringing together entire families and various experts who are involved in the production, perception and reception of library materials for children and young adults.

Libraries and librarians wonder whether today's priority should be access for all or serving the special needs of specific user groups; new media and ICT or literacy in general? These are the questions being carefully considered by the Library for Children and Young Adults Section in the context of IFLA Professional priorities⁹, especially those that are essential to the development of children's librarianship such as the following:

- Supporting the Role of Libraries in Society
- Promoting Literacy, Reading, and Lifelong Learning
- Promoting Unrestricted Access to Information
- Promoting Resource Sharing
- Preserving Our Intellectual Heritage
- Developing Library Professionals
- Promoting Standards, Guidelines, and Best Practices.

In accordance with these priorities the Section has included two key areas of activity: the right to literacy and partnership.

The right to literacy implies working on the promotion, encouragement and provision of all types of literacy for all children and for special user groups. Partnership is becoming the condition of survival in today's networked society and involves setting up partnership with other IFLA sections and all related associations and institutions on both the local and global levels.

These are the projects and activities currently carried out by the Section:

- Continuous exchange of information on the Section's activities and library services for children and young adults around the world (through the SCL Newsletter, IFLANET and in direct communication with children's librarians).
- Preparation and realization of the Section's programs at IFLA conferences independently or in joint programs with other IFLA sections in accordance with overall WLIC themes.
- Preparation and presentation of pre/post conference programs of the Section
- Development, updates, translation and distribution of Guidelines for Children's Libraries Services and Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults

⁹ URL: <http://www.ifla.org/III/misc/pp1.pdf>

- Partnership with associations and institutions on an international level – partnerships have been established with some, and co-operation for possible partnership has been established with some others: International Children's Digital Library (ICDL), International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), also International Reading Association (IRA) and UNICEF. The search for new possible partners continues.
- Nomination of the best children's literature authors and illustrators and outstanding reading projects for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award
- Statement on Children and Internet in co-operation with the IFLA Reading Section
- The "Best practice on the web" project – presentation of good practice in libraries for children and young adults worldwide, which illustrates the principles emphasized in the Guidelines for Children's Libraries Services and represents the application of guidelines in children's libraries throughout the world. Examples of good practice that are collected by the Section's Standing Committee will be available on IFLANET.

Sharing and networking may be considered crucial to the work of the Section as it strives to be an international forum for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, ideas and projects. It also aims to be a forum for discussion, cooperation and development and to open channels for information sharing throughout the world.

We believe the mentioned activities will be a good starting point for the work of the Section into the future and for the development of library services for children and young adults in the 21st century.

I would like to congratulate all former members of the Section and hardworking librarians, who have put so much effort into making library services for children and young adults recognized in the past years, on the 50th anniversary of the Section. Also, I would like to thank them for laying the groundwork for the promotion of the library profession into the future.