

The internationalisation of school librarianship

By Diljit Singh

The school library is a school's physical and virtual learning centre where inquiry, creativity and learning are nurtured. This helps students in their personal, social, cultural and intellectual growth. The school library is critical to the educational process, as it provides the foundations that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society ('UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto', 1999).

The importance of school libraries is widely recognised. The School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) itself stressed, in its submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools, that

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'school libraries are vital for the successful implementation and delivery of current national and state curriculum frameworks which articulate interdisciplinary or cross-curricula skills and an ICT-rich learning environment' (School Library Association of Victoria, 2010).

School libraries are constantly evolving and changing. With changes in pedagogy, technology and management approaches, school libraries have transformed. School libraries have moved from rooms with collections of books, audio-visual materials and computers, to dynamic multimedia centres where reading, inquiry, collaboration and a range of services are available with the aim of curriculum integration and holistic student development.

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While changes in collections and services are obvious, it is perhaps not so apparent that school libraries have become, or are becoming, more internationalised. School libraries are increasing their collections of materials about other countries or originating from other countries, and accessing

information from other countries, possibly in another language. Schools are having more children of international origin in their student population, having exchange programs with other countries, and having teachers and students travelling abroad. It is also not unusual for school libraries to have staff that are citizens of the country but were born in another country and retain their original culture. These are all signs of internationalisation. As the world becomes more interconnected through technology, travel and demographic changes, internationalisation is inevitable.

Internationalisation differs from globalisation, a term which we hear often. Globalisation refers to social and economic processes where a local culture dominates, whereas internationalisation refers to the increasing linkages and interconnectedness between nations or cultures, irrespective of their geographical locations. While globalisation refers to integration into one whole world entity, internationalisation recognises the distinctness of individual cultures.

It is not just libraries that are experiencing internationalisation. Foreign-built cars are common in Australia, international students are a common sight in many Australian education institutions, and a number of Australian universities have set up branch campuses overseas. Australian products are

marketed overseas, as are foreign products common in Australian supermarkets. These are just some of the signs of internationalisation.

School libraries play an important role in preparing students for an even greater internationalised society. One avenue that provides an opportunity for school libraries and teacher-librarians to experience this

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increasing internationalised world is the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL).

IASL is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation intended to promote the development of school librarianship worldwide. Established in 1971, it currently has more than 600 members in 75 countries. The membership comprises teacher-librarians, principals, library educators, publishers, consultants, retired persons and others interested in the development of school librarianship internationally. IASL represents an international network of school information professionals dedicated to literacies, learning and libraries. Through its activities, IASL provides an international forum for people interested in promoting effective school library programs as viable instruments in the educational process.

IASL carries out a variety of activities, including:

- An annual conference that brings together people interested in school librarianship from all over the world for professional development, networking and international understanding. Each year, the conference is held in a different part of the world. Australia has played host to the IASL international conference three times – Melbourne (1978), Adelaide (1993) and Brisbane (2010). Forthcoming conferences will be held in Kingston, Jamaica (2011), Doha, Qatar (2012) and Bali, Indonesia (2013).
- Awards that assist in bringing leaders in education and libraries from developing countries to the annual conference. IASL also provides funds to make it possible for teacher-librarians in developing countries. In addition, the association also provides funds for books for school libraries in developing countries in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, South America, and the Caribbean.
- An online forum for members throughout the world, to facilitate communication, cooperation and collaboration. .
- Publications, including a triennial Newsletter, a research and professional journal *School Libraries Worldwide* (the only international journal devoted to school librarianship, now in its 16th year of publication), books and conference proceedings.
- Committees and Special Interest Groups that bring together people who are interested in particular aspects, such as publications, research, and education for school librarianship.

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Many other activities are being planned. Through its activities, IASL connects people in person, print and online. IASL inspires professional leadership, excellence in school library development, research and development, and collaboration across

international borders.

Members of SLAV are invited to join IASL and participate in its activities. Further information can be obtained from <http://www.iasl-online.org/>

References

School Library Association of Victoria (2010) 'School Library Association of Victoria Submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians in Australian Schools'. Available at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/schoollibraries/subs/sub114.pdf>

'UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto' (1999) Available at http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/school_manifesto.html

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