

School Librarians as Supporters, Professionals, and Collaborators in Learners' Global Connectedness

Global Perspectives Are Important for Learners

When Thomas Friedman announced that *The World Is Flat*, he was using the metaphor of rapid access to business operations to describe global integration. The playing field to compete for global knowledge work was being levelled by technology. This was exciting because:

What the flattening of the world means is that we are now connecting all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network, which— if politics and terrorism do not get in the way— could usher in an amazing era of prosperity and innovation (2005, p. 8).

Friedman defined three eras of globalization that shrank the world. Globalization 1.0 began in 1492, when Columbus opened trade between the “old” world and the “new” world, and extended to around 1800. In this era, the key agent of change was how much force your country had and how creatively and effectively it was deployed. Globalization 2.0 stretches from 1800 to 2000, with interruptions by the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. The driving force for change in this era was multinational companies going global.

Now, we have entered the era of Globalization 3.0 where software, global fiber-optic, and wireless networks empower individuals to collaborate and compete across the world. According to Friedman, “Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to plug and play, and you are going to see every color of the human rainbow take part” (p. 11). However, politics and terrorism have intervened in unexpected ways, and beyond the technological opportunities we encounter the most basic of human needs with the mass migration of refugees globally.

Global Perspectives Are Important for Educators, Including School Librarians

Where does K-12 education fit within the spectrum of Globalization 3.0? Educators, including school librarians, enable global participation by encouraging a global perspective that is open to new ideas, issues, and solutions; culturally sensitive and willing to learn from others; and willing to study the larger world and our society's place within it. A global perspective is important because many of the problems we face locally and nationally are similar or far more serious elsewhere, including environment, pollution, global warming, diseases, and refugee migration.

How do we open the world to our students without having them leave rural/suburban/urban towns and cities? Or, has the world come to these settings in any case? According to Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “almost four million refugees globally do not have access to schools” and this “absence of educational opportunities for refugees fuels ongoing migration, xenophobia, and despair” (2016). Embracing the concept of offering education to refugees has reached the United Nations level and the impact will be felt locally.

Cultural differences and different systems and processes provide insight into ways of doing things that may be new and unknown to us. As societies worldwide are increasingly interconnected, the understanding and use of technology plays a major role in facilitating access through air travel, Internet access, and social media. And, refugee migration connects us to the value of meeting basic human needs. Being willing to learn from others and help others means that we open ourselves to new opportunities and move beyond concepts of “us” and “them.”

Gaining global perspective involves moving beyond a content-bound definition of global education. A global perspective goes beyond the narrow approach of studying things foreign and international to an understanding of the interconnectedness of world systems as well as different values and points of view.

Professional Standards, Professional Organizations, and Global Perspectives

Professional organizations address the value of global perspectives through the standards and guidelines they provide. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) raises the priority of reading as a “window to the world” and acknowledges that “in this increasingly global world of information, students must be taught to seek diverse perspectives, gather and use information ethically, and use social tools responsibly and safely” (2007, p. 2). Additionally, a student’s responsibility when they “draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge” includes considering “diverse and global perspectives in drawing conclusions” (p. 3). As AASL moves to refresh its learner, school librarian, and school library program standards, its authors are thoughtfully weaving global priorities, trends, and challenges into the standards’ framework, ensuring that the AASL community will emphasize the vitality of an interconnected, independent, inclusive, and diverse learning environment.

At an international level, two organizations operate as global advocates for school libraries. The International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) has a vision to “be influential in the establishment and development of school librarianship in every country in the world.” The mission of the organization includes “providing an international forum for people interested in promoting effective school library programs as viable instruments in the educational process.” And, some of the organization’s objectives include fostering “a sense of community among school librarians in all parts of the world; research in the field of school librarianship and the integration of its findings with pertinent knowledge from related fields; and sharing information about programs and materials for children and youth throughout the international community.” (IASL, About IASL)

The IASL GigggleIT collaborative project between educators and students around the world has enabled young writers and artists from many countries to share their knowledge and humor since 2009. Operating under a Creative Commons license, ideas and resources are shared while recognizing the work contributed by the original authors. Teachers and school librarians are encouraged to participate in a project that offers the opportunity for insight into global perspectives from students across the world. The project also works in partnership with the International Children’s Digital Library (ICDL) Foundation, a non-profit corporation whose collection goal is:

To create a collection of more than 10,000 books in at least 100 languages that is freely available to children, teachers, librarians, parents, and scholars throughout the world via the Internet. The materials included in the collection reflect similarities and differences in cultures, societies, interests, lifestyles, and priorities of peoples around the world. The collection's focus is on identifying materials that help children to understand the world around them and the global society in which they live. It is hoped that through a greater understanding of one another that tolerance and acceptance can be achieved. (Foundation Goals)

The Section of School Libraries within the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), formed in 1977, “provides an international forum for exchanging ideas, experiences, research results, and advocacy” (2016). Two documents provide global direction to the establishment and continuing success of school libraries worldwide. The School Library Manifesto (1999), translated into thirty-seven languages and one of only three IFLA manifestos to garner UNESCO ratification, expresses universal principles of school librarianship and has been used successfully to raise the profile of school libraries in their own schools, regions, and countries. The IFLA School Library Guidelines, 2nd edition (2015), were crafted through a two-year collaborative worldwide effort that solicited input and feedback from inclusive representation of the international community. A final review by the IFLA Coordinating Board delivered comments focused on consideration of “members of cultural, linguistic, indigenous, and other unique populations” in specific areas of the guidelines, including Community Engagement (IFLA 2015, p. 28) and Collection Development (p. 33-34). These comments focused attention on a critical area of need for school libraries—the community they serve—and helped raise the quality of those areas of the guidelines that referenced community members.

Collectively, these standards, guidelines, and international efforts focus attention on the global perspectives necessary to honor and respect our community members, locally and abroad.

Bringing Global Perspectives to Your School Library Practice

Our learners need to be equipped with a global perspective that allows them to appreciate and participate in a world that is challenged by similar concerns. School librarians might begin to develop a global perspective by engaging students in the following activities and opportunities:

The Human Library. Provides a framework for discussions by presenting human stories by humans, as real people on loan to readers. A collection of human stories can be built from within the school learning community and beyond, providing the opportunity for students to encounter and exchange ideas with a wide variety of experiences.

Citizen Science. With a mission to “create online citizen science projects to involve the public in academic research” (<https://www.citizensciencealliance.org/philosophy.html>) (<https://www.citizensciencealliance.org/philosophy.html>), this collaboration of scientists, software developers, and educators offers numerous opportunities to engage students in research designed to further science and a public understanding of the scientific process.

Multicultural and international graphic novels and nonfiction. Librarians have long used current, diverse, multimodal collections as foundations for learners to build global connections; an innovative and co-curricular place to start is with graphic nonfiction and graphic fiction with an international focus. Literature in a comic book format often features characters that don't conform to particular cultural stereotypes and themes that address multiculturalism through a focus on satire, colloquial dialogue, and caricature (Ayaka, 2014).

The school librarian is in a prime position and has a professional imperative to offer global perspectives to students. Encouraging cultural sensitivity and creativity, developing problem-solving skills, and deepening a passion for learning require a collaborative effort and school librarians are well positioned to contribute and support global thinking. Thinking globally is important because studying other societies is an excellent means to learn more about ourselves. In a world increasingly linked, economically and socially, we can understand our society better in relation to how our nation fits into the larger world.

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