

Book Review: Effective School Librarianship: Successful Professional Practices from Librarians around the World

Spotlighting school librarians from across the globe, *Effective School Librarianship: Successful Professional Practices from Librarians around the World*, the two-volume set collected and edited by Patrick Lo, Heather Rogers, and Dickson K.W. Chiu, introduces readers to a wide range of librarians working in rural and urban schools. The various experiences of these diverse librarians are captured through a question and answer format which highlights the challenges and opportunities they encounter. Read collectively, these interviews showcase commonalities among the profiled librarians nationally and internationally, serving as windows into the experiences of other librarians and as mirrors of shared professional values. At the same time, these conversations provide a treasure trove of inspiring narratives sure to spark rich discussions about global issues facing contemporary school librarians.

Relevant to practicing and future librarians serving youth, as well as researchers, teachers, and other educators, these volumes are divided geographically with volume one covering the Americas and Europe, and volume two showcasing Africa, Asia, and Australia. Full-color photos of the interviewees accompanied by additional photos of their library and/or students are provided for entries, assisting readers in creating a more personal connection with the school librarians. At times discouraged but ever hopeful, the librarians in the interviews share compelling narratives that speak to the interconnectedness of global school librarians' daily lives.

In the *North and South America* section (Part I), readers encounter North American librarians from four states in the United States (Arkansas, Connecticut, Virginia, and New York) and two provinces in Canada (Manitoba and British Columbia). South America is represented by one school librarian from the Venezuelan state Zulia. A range of libraries are covered in this section from those in private schools to ones in rural schools and others located in urban public schools. Regardless whether the interviewees are serving youth in elementary or high school or youth in wealthy vs. impoverished areas, all of the school librarians describe the challenges of having enough time and resources to accomplish their job – a common theme throughout this edited collection. The librarians exude an inherent passion to work with their students and mention a wide range of book and technology-related programs to augment student learning, such as book speed dating, makerspace programs, and programs connected to specific types of technology. Of particular interest in this section are the myriad professional paths that led the interviewees to become school librarians. Few of the interviewees arrived at the school library newly minted with a master's degree and most had degrees in other

academic disciplines, another shared trait of interviewees in both volumes. The interview with the Venezuelan librarian provides jarring information about the substantial tax parents are required to pay if they fail to send their children to school. However, the profiled school is a private school serving predominantly wealthy children (mainly those with United States citizenship); since it is the only librarian interview for South America, readers catch only a tiny glimpse into the diverse experiences of librarians throughout the continent.

The *Europe* section (Part II) profiles a librarian from an Irish province (Munster), two librarians in Swedish provinces (Halland, Södermanland and Uppland), one librarian from a Serbian province (Vojvodina), two librarians from a Turkish province (Istanbul), two librarians from a Bosnian and Herzegovinian canton (Sarajevo), a librarian from a Croatian county (Zagreb), a librarian from a province in the Netherlands (Groningen), and two librarians from Icelandic constituencies (Southwest Constituency, Reykjavik Constituency North, and Reykjavik Constituency South). Similar to Part I, the school librarians profiled in this section are from diverse educational backgrounds and exemplify a range of practice levels. However, they all share analogous professional experiences, like the librarians in Part I, such as teacher-librarian relationships and extra duties beyond the library. Interestingly, several librarians in this section describe the lack of upward mobility or job promotions for school librarians versus teachers. While this could lead to job dissatisfaction, they all emphasize the importance of connecting with the youth they serve. As one Bosnian librarian states, "If we learn how to appreciate the daily encounters with our students and apply the lessons we learn to our work, I think we make our lives richer and more meaningful" (p. 185).

One of the most striking interviews from Part II describes the structural racism in Sweden and the multiple barriers that refugee students must overcome to be successful in school specifically and society in general. Included is a heartwarming description of two refugee youth that have been successful navigating the system and the small role that the library in their success. Like Part I, the geographical coverage for this section was uneven with multiple entries for some countries and no entries for others.

Volume 2 of the *Effective School Librarianship* profiles librarians in Africa, Asia, and Australia. The *Africa* section (Part I) introduces readers to a librarian from a province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (North Kivu), two librarians from a province in Zimbabwe (Midlands), and a librarian from a state in Nigeria (Oyo State). Each openly share their frustrations and joys serving youth in a variety of

socioeconomic settings. A particularly heartening interview in Part 1, describes how a Nigerian school librarian was motivated to pursue her career because of a dynamic and driven school librarian from her childhood. The interviewee also credits this librarian for helping her to become the well-spoken writer that she is today. The influence of this librarian can be seen in the numerous literacy programs offered in the interviewee's library as well as her ability to embrace new changes brought about by technology. Resembling the other sections, coverage of school librarian experiences across the continent is not even as there are many countries in Africa that are not mentioned.

Part II of the second volume, highlights librarians across Asia. The interviewees include a librarian from a prefecture in Japan (Fukushima), four librarians in the special administrative region (SAR) of China (Hong Kong), a librarian from a province in the Philippines (Laguna), three librarians from provinces in Thailand (Kanchanaburi, Bangkok, and Chiang Rai), two librarians from the same province in Nepal (Bagmati Pradesh), and a librarian in the southeast region of Vietnam (Đông Nam Bộ). Country coverage in this section included many more interviews than the other sections in Volume 2. Librarians highlighted in the *Asia* section share considerable information about their funding structures, tensions with teachers and/or administrators, and library facilities.

The interviews featuring librarians from Nepal are particularly eye-opening with considerable detail about literacy rates, the people in the country, and the work of the school library association. However, most memorable is a story one of the Nepalese librarians shares about an earthquake rehabilitation camp and a temporary library that was created to serve the needs of distressed children. This particular interviewee has a background in social work which is evident in her descriptions of the emotional support that was carefully folded into the activities of the library and the subsequent strong relationships that were forged with the children and their families.

Australia (Part III) comprises the last section of the interviews and profiles four librarians from various states (New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland). The librarians have vastly different professional backgrounds and but share many of the same professional challenges and opportunities as their counterparts in other parts of the world. Funding concerns, meeting teacher expectations, promoting information literacy in engaging ways, and remaining apprised of changes in technology were consistent themes in the narratives of these librarians.

Perhaps one of the most interesting interviews in this section is the description of the various activities, collections, and programs that the librarian in New South Wales offers to his extremely diverse student populations with represents youth from 64 countries that speak 70 languages. These students come from a wide range of environmental backgrounds from refugees from multiple countries to international students paying tuition to local, native-born students.

It would be easy for a school librarian to be frustrated with trying to meet the needs of all these students. However, the interviewee's positive, upbeat attitude turns a potentially overwhelming situation into a fascinating challenge.

While useful for scaffolding the conversations, the question and answer format of the entries is tedious at times and, in some instances, includes lengthy questions comprising more than half the page. Some of the interviews are redundant and include various colloquial phrases that may not universally translate, leaving one to ponder if a succinct, summarized narrative would have been more powerful for introducing each school librarian. Although this detracts nominally from the cohesiveness of the volumes and is indicative of a need for tighter editing, the combined richness of the stories outweighs this oversight. As previously mentioned, coverage of geographical regions is not consistent with some regions having deeper coverage than others.

Despite these flaws, readers are still provided with a rare opportunity to encounter the daily experiences of numerous international school librarians in a published work. This is not only helpful to school librarians but also to teachers. As one interviewee from Australia notes, "for many teachers, entering the school library is like entering a foreign country, in that it is not their teaching space" (p. 208). Certainly, this collection of interviews provides a large window of experiences that teachers can explore to better understand their colleagues in the school library.

The two-volume set is bookended nicely with a preface and conclusion that situates the work of school librarians on a global context and emphasizes the importance of international school librarian standards to guide daily practice and ensure quality services. The conclusion teases out many of the commonalities in the interviews and reinforces the important role of the school library within the education community. It also addresses some of the inconsistencies with geographical coverage, explaining the voluntary nature of the project and lack of accessible translators to non-English speaking librarians.

In our current, challenging times during the global pandemic, now more than ever we need opportunities to connect with each other; this purposeful collection of interviews provides a viable avenue for these connections while also offering a valuable snapshot of international school librarianship. Many school librarians will never have the chance to attend an international school librarian meeting or conference; but with Lo, Rogers, and Chiu's volumes, they can still meet an unequivocally, diverse group of passionate and engaged librarians facilitating the educational and informational needs of young citizens around the globe.

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