BEYOND THE Bubble

Building Global Literacy in Our Students

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The phrase “global literacy,” taken literally, conjures up several possible meanings, for example, basic literacy levels around the world or improving geographical knowledge. However, in this case it is used to convey a broader goal of fluency in skills and competence relating to knowledge and understanding of nations and cultures.

We are all deeply connected and will continue to be because of the many far-reaching changes now occurring: the rise of emerging economies, growing urbanization (especially in Asia), accelerating technological change, challenges in future decades as populations age, and the increased global flow of people, trade, and finance (as explicated in 2015 by the directors of the McKinsey Global Institute, Dobbs, Manyika, and Woetzel)—not to mention the pressing issue of environmental stewardship.

To enable students to thrive as global citizens, a worldwide mindset is the best preparation, as well as an education that aims at appreciating the great diversity of cultures and their life stories and histories. The necessity for this kind of literacy is recognized by prominent educational leaders, albeit using slightly different terms. For example, among the terms used are:

- **global competence**—defined as the ability to (1) investigate the world, (2) recognize perspectives, (3) communicate ideas, and (4) take action; see this report by the Asia Society <http://asiasociety.org/globalcompetence>.
- **intercultural understanding**—defined as the ability to (1) exhibit curiosity and basic knowledge about global cultures, (2) expect complexity and multiple perspectives, (3) see self as part of multiple cultures, (4) value cultural diversity, and (5) be comfortable with...

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**WORLD LITERATURE RESOURCES**

- International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). <www.ibby.org>
- IBBY – UK. <www.ibby.org.uk>
- IBBY – Australia. <https://ibbyaustralia.wordpress.com>
- IBBY – Canada. <www.ibby-canada.org>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). <www.ifla.org>
- IFLA’s The World through Picture Books. <www.ifla.org/node/6718>
- Worlds of Words – US. <http://wowlit.org>
- Outside In World – UK. <www.outsideinworld.org.uk>
- Association for Library Service to Children’s Batchelder Award (for translated children’s literature) – USA. <www.ala.org/aslc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward>
- Children’s Literature & Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association’s Notable Books for a Global Society – USA. <www.crlsig.org/nbgs.php>
- We Need Diverse Books Booktalking Kit – USA. <http://weneeddiversebooks.org/edkit>
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**ANNUAL AWARDS ADMINISTERED BY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARIAN NETWORKS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES**

- Japan: Sakura Medal. <www.sakuramedal.com>
- Korea: Morning Calm Awards. <https://morningcalmmedal.wordpress.com>
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (<www.corestandards.org>) do not directly use any of these terms. However, one of the stated aims of the drafters of the CCSS is to "prepare students for success in college, career, and life in today's global economy." The threat of not being able to compete globally is implicit. Otherwise, the world intrudes on CCSS only via the ability to deal with "real-world problems" and appreciate "diverse cultures" (Millar 2015).

What about AASL's learning standards (<www.ala.org/aasl/standards/learning>)? "Reading is a window to the world" is highlighted as a common belief that recognizes the power of texts to connect people and cultures (AASL 2007, 2). Yet, in the standards themselves, the global angle is addressed only by references to real-world connections, situations, and contexts, as well as broad and diverse perspectives.

Although our standards are just beginning to touch on aspects of global literacy, education literature has long addressed the value of these skills. In May 1933 the article "International-Mindedness through Books" by American English teacher Essie Chamberlain appeared in the English Journal, in which Chamberlain offered up this (unattributed) quote:

> Modern man is in truth a citizen of the world but he does not know it, and therein lies the tragedy of our times.

Another gem from the same article that still resonates today:

> Modern inventions—the telephone, telegraph, radio, automobile, and airplane—make the bond whether we will or not. Since science has linked us together, we must learn to live together harmoniously.

The next month, June 1933, Ruth A. Barnes published an article in the same journal: "Developing International-Mindedness in Junior High School." She opened with a list of public school students' last names, proving how international our American classrooms are by virtue of our immigrant population, which she claims is our starting strength. Her list of suggested activities to achieve internationalism began with "Correspond with children of similar grades in foreign

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**INTERNATIONALLY ORIENTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES THAT THE SCHOOL LIBRARY CAN HOST OR SUPPORT**


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ambiguity; see this report by Susan Corapi from the Longview Foundation and Kathy G. Short from Worlds of Words <http://wowlit.org/Documents/InterculturalUnderstanding.pdf>.

**global citizenship**—defined as the understanding, skills, and values people need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century; see the UN Global Education First Initiative (<www.globaleducationfirst.org/220.htm>) led by Ban Ki-moon.

**international-mindedness**—a concept central to the International Baccalaureate Organization's (IBO) programs, focusing on multilingualism, intercultural understanding, and global engagement; see this report by Michael Singh and Jing Qi <www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/singhqiibreport27julyfinalversion.pdf>.

**cultural intelligence (or CQ)**—defined as the capability to relate to and work effectively with people from different cultures; see the Cultural Intelligence Center’s resources <www.culturalq.com/tmpl/resources/resources.php>.

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**CURRICULUM/RESOURCE RICH SITES**

countries”—a suggestion strongly echoed by digital media literacy folk today, using Google Hangouts and Skype instead of stamps.

For an in-depth discussion of the need for global literacy and how it can be implemented in our schools, I highly recommend *Mastering Global Literacy* (2014), edited by Heidi Hayes Jacobs, one of a series of professional texts on new literacies. It would be a perfect choice for a teachers’ book club. The chapters are written by experts (including the authors of the Asia Society report *Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World* [<http://asiasociety.org/files/book-globalcompetence.pdf>]) who offer many suggestions for ways forward and recommended resources. For a briefer introduction, see Jacobs’s article “Activating Digital–Media–Global Literacies and Learning” (<www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/Activating.aspx>) or read some of the Curriculum 21 “Global Partnerships” blog posts (<www.c21hub.com/globalpartnership>.

The Corapi and Short report on setting up teacher study groups, *Exploring International and Intercultural Understanding through Global Literature* (<http://wowlit.org/Documents/InterculturalUnderstanding.pdf>), is another excellent possibility for teacher professional development, which we as school librarians are well suited to lead—a good chance to share all those diverse, multicultural, and international books we’ve been collecting. (My current favorite is *Blue Gold* (<www.annickpress.com/Blue-Gold>), a YA novel by Elizabeth Stewart (Annick 2014), in which technology links the lives of three girls, one in Canada, one in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and one in China.)

Curation of resources to support research and collaborative lesson planning are other areas where we can expand the worldview of our school community. For example, check out the LibGuides of Primary Source (<https://primarysource.org/for-teachers/guides>), a nonprofit organization that works to advance global education in schools. The organization has produced resource guides for various regions of the world as well as for issues like migration, and their list of global education resources (<http://resources.primarysource.org/globaleducation>) is worth exploring.

Don’t underestimate how the school library’s physical space can also support global literacy. As the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy asserts, the environment is the third teacher (Hall et al. 2010, 47). Highlight literature from around the world, make visual connections to international issues, and host events that support global awareness. Let your school library be a window on the world.

Our international school in Singapore is linked to fourteen other United World College schools around the world, all of which have a mission statement declaring: “Education is a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future” (UWC Int’l 2016). An international mindset is assumed in our community, but that assumption doesn’t automatically guarantee outward expressions of global literacy. We still have to work at it, given our school exists within a privileged Anglo-heritage bubble. The first step is to acknowledge the bubble—and then to get interested in what other bubbles might look like from the inside.
As Jonathan Haidt has argued in his book *The Righteous Mind* (2012), we all have pretty much the same values, we just prioritize them differently. Since then, Haidt has called for more viewpoint diversity in the United States to increase our generosity of spirit and tolerance, both internally and globally (2015).

If you're fascinated by the differences between the priorities of values in Asian versus American educational cultures, read *Beyond the Tiger Mom: East–West Parenting for the Global Age* (2016), written by one of the teachers at my school Maya Thiagarajan. It’s another title that would work well for a book club of teachers and/or parents.

An older book, but still valuable because of the conversations about ways of thinking that it generates, is *The Culture Code: An Ingenious Way to Understand Why People around the World Buy and Live as They Do* (2007) by Clotaire Rapaille. It uses metaphors to generalize about national cultures, and its very arrogance prompts every reader to consider perceived differences, conscious and unconscious, in groups of people and their behavior. This is the kind of thinking that leads to global competence.

Whatever your context, you can always start a conversation—and model connections. You might begin by heeding Joyce Valenza’s call for librarians around the world to connect (<http://blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch/2014/07/02/going-global-a-literacy-a-call-to-action-and-some-resources>) via her Google+ Community Global TL: Librarians without Borders (<https://plus.google.com/communities/118360039129531674592>) and the #globaltl hashtag on Twitter.

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**Works Cited:**


