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# Going Global

International Professional Organizations  
for School Librarians

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If you are reading this article in the most recent issue of *Knowledge Quest*—congratulations! You are most likely a member of our professional organization, the American Association of School Librarians. It is also highly probable that you are a solo librarian. While solo school librarians can be isolated both within their own school buildings and, sometimes, geographically, they maintain valuable links to others in the profession by following social media, reading journals, and attending conferences of their professional associations, both state and national.

But have you ever considered an international association for school librarians? Despite the opportunities that international associations offer, many school librarians are hesitant to become involved—particularly when it comes to attending conferences. There are legitimate concerns over language, funding, safety, and cultural differences. However, these concerns can be addressed and overcome. First, international conferences are conducted in English. Funding can be an issue, but scholarships are available through the organizations—particularly for first-time attendees and those early in their career. Viewing international conference attendance as an investment in one's professional development helps, and travel bargains can be had if one is savvy. Often attendees seek out roommates to ease expenses. Conference organizers are

concerned about everyone's safety and are usually straightforward about any issues in the surrounding areas, but usually there aren't any. Organized group outings are typically arranged. Cultural differences do exist, but it is simple to acclimate yourself to a country's customs by reading guidebooks and information on the Web ahead of time. And cultural differences are a distinct *advantage* of attending an international conference in the first place and should be celebrated.

### International Associations

Three international associations have rewarding opportunities for school librarians to become involved.

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#### *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)*

IFLA calls itself the "global voice of the library and information profession" (IFLA 2017) and has over 1,500 members from 150 countries. Within IFLA is a School Libraries Section, which "concerns itself with the improvement and development of school libraries and resource centers worldwide, especially advocacy for their qualified and adequate staffing. It

provides an international forum for exchanging ideas, experiences, research results and advocacy" (IFLA 2018). This section maintains a mailing list and blog and publishes a newsletter. The section has produced the *IFLA/ UNESCO School Library Manifesto*, *School Library Guidelines*, and a School Library Advocacy Kit. Members are active participants in the IFLA World Library and Information Conference. Recent conferences have been held in Wroclaw, Poland (2017); Columbus, Ohio (2016); Cape Town, South Africa (2015); and Lyon, France (2014). IFLA 2018 will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

#### *International Association of School Librarianship (IASL)*

IASL is a smaller organization than IFLA, but the advantage is that all of its members are in the school library field. The IASL Regional Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from Africa, Asia, North America, Latin America/ Caribbean, East Asia, Europe, North Africa/Middle East, Oceania, and international schools (IASL n.d.-b.). Currently IASL has almost five hundred members, who are predominantly school librarians and school library researchers.

Unique offerings of IASL include an online professional development library with hundreds of resources; sample advocacy letters and news articles; a gallery of library images; GigglyIT, a forum whereby students from around the world can share their writing through their school library; resources for International School Library Month celebrations; and country profiles related to school libraries (IASL n.d.-a). *School Libraries Worldwide* is the official journal of IASL, and it is the only peer-reviewed international journal focusing on

school librarianship. A newsletter is published three times a year. Recent conferences have been held in Long Beach, California (2017); Tokyo, Japan (2016); Maastricht, Netherlands (2015); Moscow, Russia (2014); and Bali, Indonesia (2013). The May 2018 conference is scheduled for Istanbul, Turkey.

### *International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)*

ISTE provides “educators and leaders with clear guidelines for the skills, knowledge and approaches they need to succeed in the digital age” (Krueger 2015). Although the membership numbers are not provided on the organization’s

website, it does state that sixteen thousand educators are expected to attend the upcoming ISTE conference and that members hail from seventy-five countries. Twenty-six professional learning networks, which include the Librarians Network with about nineteen hundred participants, allow members to focus on their areas of interest. “The purpose of the Librarians Network is to promote librarians as leaders and champions of educational technology and digital literacy. The key mission is to provide a professional learning community where librarians can leverage technology knowledge and expertise to improve school library programs, increase access

to information, and foster strong teaching and learning environments in a connected world” (ISTE 2017).

ISTE standards are highly valued by not only their members but also by educators in general. The ISTE standards for students, teachers, administrators, coaches, and computer science educators are pedagogically sound—focusing on student learning experiences that enable them to live productively in a global and digital society. ISTE’s other publications include the *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*; the *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*; and *ENTRSEKT*, a practitioner journal. White papers, webinars, and online

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courses are also available. Although an international association, ISTE's conferences are held in the United States: San Antonio, Texas (2017); Denver, Colorado (2016); Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2015); and Atlanta, Georgia (2014). The June 2018 conference will be in Chicago, Illinois.

### International Conferences

What is a typical international conference like? As an example, I will describe the events of the 2015 IASL conference held in Maastricht, Netherlands. At the start, registrants had the opportunity to attend a half- or full-day practitioner workshop or visit area school libraries before or after the conference. The opening ceremony typically celebrates the country where the conference is held—in this case we heard from an orchestra, singers, keynote speakers, and local dignitaries—including the Queen of the Netherlands—about the importance of school libraries. A flag ceremony was assembled; representatives marched to the stage with their country's flag and left it on display. Throughout the next four days, participants moved between an interesting array of presentations, research papers, posters, and a small number of

vendor exhibits. Ample time was provided for morning and afternoon coffee breaks, as well as lunch, during which stimulating conversations took place and local foods were provided. There was also a time reserved for regional meetings when members from the same geographic area got together to discuss issues. All of these activities took place in a self-contained venue, the Maastricht Exhibition and Conference Center. Having our conference badges recognized as valid bus passes made getting to the venue very simple and also allowed free transportation throughout the city all week.

IASL members also showcase their own countries at conferences and raise funds for school librarians and school libraries throughout the world. Attendees are asked to bring an item that is unique to their country (and easily packable) for both a silent auction and a grand auction, and a book for the children's book exhibit. After the conference the books are donated to a school. Members also bring in smaller book-related items to share and purchase.

Several social events add to the fun and are another way to experience local culture. At the 2015 IASL

conference a reception was held at the Dominican Bookstore, which is considered one of Europe's most beautiful bookstores, as it is in a former cathedral. The grand finale each year is a conference dinner, the live auction, music, and dancing.

### Growing Beyond the Associations

The networking that begins in international associations often expands naturally into other venues. These communities of practice are less formal, social networks, which can organize face-to-face get-togethers, such as meeting for dinner or, more commonly today, communicating via social media. They create social capital through multiple channels such as information flows (learning about jobs, exchanging ideas), reciprocity (mutual aid, exchanges), and collective action (fundraising, political acts). These relationships can be rich, ongoing sources of inspiration and ideas. Here are some examples. You may go to a presentation and begin following the speaker's blog or friend the speaker on Facebook. You see that really interesting Facebook posts are coming from another group that the speaker is following, so you join that group, too. Or a colleague

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from another country may post about an earthquake there and seek help to rebuild a school library by pointing friends to a GoFundMe site. The feeling of worldwide comradery is reinforced and spreads.

One might also get known for certain expertise and be asked to present at a venue in another country. For example, during a Lithuanian library conference U.S. colleagues learned that Lithuania mandates a school library and a school librarian in every school but lacked a formal organization of school librarians. Since the opposite situation exists in the United States these colleagues were able to reciprocate and exchange ideas from both scenarios (Woolls 2012). Opportunities to connect internationally are offered through the Fulbright Program, Goethe-Institut, and the U.S. Department of State (Farmer 2010). Through the Goethe-Institut, I was able to establish ties with school librarians in Germany who visited Florida for several weeks to visit outstanding school libraries and present at our state school library FAME Conference (Florida Association for Media in Education). The two Germans, a U.S. doctoral student, and I coauthored an article about the experience (Everhart and Johnston 2010), which generated a research study (Johnston 2013) and led to a return visit to Germany to present at their national conference. These experiences formed a foundation for my research fellowship awarded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to study school librarian education for four months in Berlin. DAAD provides an array of opportunities for both researchers and building-level educators (DAAD 2017).

Lucy Santos Green and Melissa Johnston have eloquently elaborated on loftier advantages that, ultimately, improve services that support learners around the world:

As school-based librarians around the world struggle with strikingly similar challenges, it is important to examine the work of these individuals through a global lens. This worldwide perspective allows us to engage in partnerships that will enable school-based librarians and school library educators to investigate institutional factors that shape our profession, providing opportunities to learn from, share expertise with, and support one another, thus strengthening the practice of school librarianship throughout the world. (2015, 15)



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