Developing an International Children’s Library Collection: Issues and laudable suggestions

Anamika Dasgupta, Florida State University
Developing an International Children's Library Collection: Issues and Laudable Suggestions

This paper explores the issues in developing international children's library collections and suggests some strategies to diversify international children's collections.

Author: Anamika Dasgupta
Date Posted: 10/11/07

This paper explores the issues in developing international children's library collections. Although promoting global awareness among children is no longer easily debatable, many libraries, big and small, rich and poor, are lagging behind when it comes to implementing the concept of having a collection of international children's literature. In addition, this paper suggests some strategies to diversify international children's collections by incorporating resources in variety of formats such as print, digital, and artifacts. Further, it lists some important resources for librarians to look at as they work towards developing their international children's library collections.

Introduction

"It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations-something that will help them make sense of their own lives and encourage them to reach out toward people whose lives are quite different from their own."
-Katherine Paterson

Incorporating international children's literature is a fairly new movement. The movement was initiated in 1949 by Jella Lepman who served in the U.S. Army of Occupation during the World War II. The movement started immediately after the closing of the World War II. As part of the movement, Jella Lepman established the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich, Germany, the country where she was born. "She saw this as an opportunity to find new hope and values after the years of Nazi terror and the horrors of war and to awaken a new understanding for other people and nations" (International Youth Library, 2005, ¶ 2). She believed that children's literature would increase international understanding and would promote world peace (Latrobe, 2001, p. 98). As Johnston and Beckett (2003) say, children's literature that emerges from the human desire to tell stories from different cultures enables children to comprehend cultural identities, and most importantly, how the existence of those cultures have shaped and ordered, and continue to shape and order the world into which they have been born (p. 123). Offering a collection of children's literature to both children and adults, and promoting international understanding through children's literature remain the guiding principles of the International Youth Library (International Youth Library, 2005, ¶ 2).

Families, friends, social, historical and political prejudices may thwart a child's exposure to international cultures. Therefore, children's libraries as educational institutions should actively pursue developing children's sensitivities to international cultures by offering rich international literary collections and programs.

Lack of Diversity and Availability of International Children's Literature: Issues in Developing Children's Library Collection

Children's libraries often lack diversity in their collection of international children's literature. International literature for children is comprised of: (Lo & Cantrell, 2002, p. 22).

1. Literature that was originally written in a language other than English and/or subsequently translated.
2. Literature that was originally written in English, but in a country other than the United States.
3. Literature that was written for children of another culture by a long-term member of that culture.

There are many reasons why a children's library might lack a rich collection of international literature. First, a restricted vision could lead to faulty and inadequate service to the children in a community. A library's vision can not be devoid of the
essence of the integration of international narratives in children's lives. If devoid, it certainly stifles the growth of international literature within that library collection. Second, a library might choose to reduce its international children's literature collection based on its tracking records, which could show that the community in which the library is located does not often borrow international books. Finally, librarians rely extensively on book reviews in selecting and expanding their book collection. Unfortunately, book reviews are not written for much of the available international children's literature. It is incumbent on the librarian to search through many different book review databases. It is also important to join professional organizations, and read news and updates on international book fairs, awards, and publishers to have access to new global literature that may not be available through book review databases.

While issues such as unsuccessful display of international literary materials and inadequate training programs may repress the growth of an international collection in a children's library, this paper focuses only on the issues of lack of diversity and the availability of international resources in a children's library collection. It suggests resources that can be added to a children's library collection in order to develop an international aspect to an existing collection for children.

Suggestions for Developing an International Children's Library Collection

The reason for developing an international children's library collection is to stimulate children's cultural sensitivity towards people of other nations. It is difficult to promote such awareness among children of all ages with different interests, attitudes, and cognitive behaviors by offering few international literary resources. A children's library should have international resources available in a variety of formats. However, developing international children's library collections can be very challenging. The following are some of the resources libraries may add to their collections to support international literacy for children.

International children's literature in print format

Picture books integrate two of the oldest forms of story telling instruments – words and images (Hope, 2004, p. 1). The two instruments can be equally valuable to children in comprehending the realities, values, fantasies, mysteries, and adventures that stories deliver. Picture books "depend for meaning-making not only on the artistic use of words but also on the artistic use of pictures" (Johnston & Beckett, 2003, p. 123). As such, in the case of international picture books, their illustrations offer children a cultural, ethnic, and demographic perspective of the place the story is from. Freeman and Lehman (2003), in the book, Global Perspective in Children's Literature say, "picture books, with their combination of the verbal and visual, speak "two languages" by their very nature" (p. 43). Thus, where text may be lacking in representing the familiar as well as unfamiliar aspects of different populations, cultures, and geographic characteristics of nations, illustrations can convey those representations through images. For instance, Niki Daily's illustrations in the book, Jamela's Dress , exhibit the bright colors and traditional prints of South African outfits. The illustrations in the book Hush! by Minfong Ho depict the construction of Japanese traditional houses mounted on top of wooden planks. International picture books reduce culture shock among children of uni-racial and uni-cultural communities around the world.

Novels are a type of print format that give young readers an opportunity to get to the heart of other cultures and help in building a "sense of nearness" through text reading (Clark, 2004, p. 12). Like picture books, novels present folk tales, biographies, fiction, and non-fiction stories that "offer a window into its people and their beliefs across time and geographic locations" (Perez-Sable, 2005, p. 86). Research has shown that after reading an international novel, students go beyond looking up facts to exploring novels written about the country, and people (Clark, 2004, p. 13). Educators are working towards integrating international literature to enhance the school curriculum (Clark, White & Bluemel, 2004). Thus, libraries can also be actively engaged in this movement by enhancing their collection of international novels. An awareness that a particular book is representative of another nation can help motivate children to further explore the heritage and people of that nation.

Graphic novels are books with continuous plot using sequential artwork along with dialogues in bubbles and narrative captions (Bilton, 2004, p. 30). Though graphic novels do not yet have the global diversity in terms of their origin, they are becoming extremely popular among children. They generate a whole new energy among young readers (Crawford, 2004, p. 26). Currently, only a few nations such as Japan , the United States , France , and England have been creating and publishing graphic novels. However, as Gorman (2003) says, a large number of published graphic novels address history, politics, literature, and social issues such as the Holocaust, Judaism, women's history, inventors, and wars that introduce valuable thematic booktalk (p. 20). Research shows that young readers are more inclined to read graphic novels regardless of the languages in which they are written (Cho, Choi & Krashen, 2005). Therefore, graphic novels invite reluctant readers to learn languages, as well as boost their reading skills.
**Comic strips** are collections of newspaper comic strips that are bound together in a book (Bilton, 2004, p. 30). Children's interest in comic strips has been evident time and time again. Bilton (2004) finds that, "children can't get enough of these" (p. 30). Research has shown that children are more drawn to comic book drawings consisting of so-called simple figures and other comic strip symbols such as speech bubbles, and line drawings (Pierson & Glaeser, 2005, p. 279). Comic books are easy to read and are often complimentary to a young reader's attention span (Burt, 2005, p.168). Comic strips mostly depict the historical, geographical, political, social, and traditional status of a nation and its people and are found in newspapers and magazines of many nations as well as in comic books (Gorman, 2003, p. 20). Cho, Choi and Krashen (2005) found that comic books help in foreign and native language development (p. 32). They also provide insight into foreign history and culture, and stimulate interest in knowing about cultures from different nations (Cho, Choi & Krashen, 2005, p. 32).

**Maps** are important resources for children's international literacy. They help children develop their spatial concepts and relationships (Rieke, 1983, p. 38). Maps are very popular among children because they convey a "sense of place" as they read books that offer no knowledge of place. According to Rieke (1983), maps can "subtly reinforce a child's perspective of the world and contribute to their appreciation for other people, cultures, and times" (p. 38). Maps come in all shapes, sizes, and designs. Libraries should have pictorial maps for small children, because they identify more with the familiar than with the abstract (Rieke, 1983, p. 38). Libraries should have both relief maps (e.g. physical landscapes) as well as thematic or subject maps (e.g. cultural features).

**Foreign language books** offer children stories and facts in languages other than the English language and/or provide lessons to learn languages other than English (Rogers, 2003, p. 44). They give young readers an opportunity to realize and admire the beauty and power of foreign languages. Finding similarities and dissimilarities in the words, syntax, and semantics of foreign languages is fascinating to children (Freeman & Lehman, 2001, p. 99). International literatures that emphasize oral and written languages help develop children's appreciation for the richness of languages around the world and inspire them to develop their own language abilities (Freeman & Lehman, 2001, p. 101).

**Historical literacy books** include both non-fiction and historical fiction that provide events relating to human lives, places, and/or institutions from the past (LaFaye, 2001, p. 56). They offer children a sense of time, space, and evolution of mankind culturally, politically, socially, and economically. As Chris Crowe, the author of the award winning historical nonfiction book, *Mississippi Trial, 1955* says, "Textbooks can, at best, provide a superficial overview of an historical period, person or event, but good historical fiction and non fiction brings those periods, people and events to life with the sort of richness that's impossible in a text book" (Lesesne, 2004, p. 60). Therefore, libraries should improve their collection of historical literacy books and make them available to children in order to supplement and/or complement history textbooks (Lesesne, 2004, p. 60).

**Posters** provide children's libraries with an effective way to introduce international literary materials such as books, VHS, DVD, and CDs to the young readers. Although posters manage to captivate children with fewer words and images, they effectively convey messages in an artistic, comprehensible, and educational fashion. Creating posters of new and old international materials is one of the successful ways to encourage children to become interested in international literary works. Illustrations and words in posters offer a quick peek into the lifestyles, beliefs, cultures, and traditions of others. For instance, the poster named after the book, *Egyptian Diary* by Richard Platt illustrates the ancient Egyptian culture, occupations, people, and costumes.

**International children's literature in non-print format**

**Children's blogs and forums** are internet-based journals and discussion boards that encourage global interconnectivity among children of similar/dissimilar interests through the reading and writing of individual perspectives on various topics. A study conducted at the Hatherly Elementary School in Michigan found that students of third-grade wrote a science fiction story by gathering fragments of thoughts shared on a blog by students of many primary schools on various topics (Youse, Kenniburg & McCormack, 2005, p. 21). Students who participated in the study had diverse languages and cultural backgrounds where sixty-two percent spoke one of twenty-eight languages other than English at home and fifty-four percent did not speak English at home (Youse, Kenniburg & McCormack, 2005, p.21). Thus, it is evident that blogging brings together children of different languages and cultural backgrounds, and encourages interaction among them.

Libraries can create and maintain their own blogs where patrons of that library and of other libraries can collaborate among each other. Libraries such as the La Grange Park Library and Roselle Public Library in Illinois, U.S.A. have active blogs where children can share thoughts on the books they read (Fichter, D., 2005, ¶ 12; Zdenek, K. 2003, ¶ 2). Such a tool has the propensity to spur discussions on similar books read by children all over the world. Libraries can encourage children to start blogging by distributing pamphlets with a list of weblogs, and organizing training sessions on how to use blogs and practice safe blogging. Libraries should educate parents and children with safe blogging tips such as "never offer personal
information (last name, contact information, home address, phone numbers, school's name, e-mail address, last names of friends or relatives, instant messaging names, age, or date of birth), never post provocative pictures, and never use blogs to attack someone" (Microsoft Corporation, 2005, ¶ 12-17).

**E-books** are digital versions of the traditional print book designed to be read on a personal computer or e-book reader (Church, 2005, p. 9). E-book production is a fast growing industry that is helping to bridge the gap between children of technologically advanced nations. They are available for free and for purchase for download or printing off the websites. E-book companies provide a single licensing facility to libraries and schools that accommodate unlimited use of e-books by multiple patrons and students.

E-book providers are continuously working towards diversifying their children's e-book collections by incorporating international books in English and many other languages, such as Chinese, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, and Spanish. E-book providers, such as the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL), are encouraging children's knowledge and understanding of global culture by giving children an option to search for books by specifying the continent, and the language. Besides picture books and novels, e-books offer a diverse collection of encyclopedias, almanacs, specialized reference sources, and teaching lesson plans.

**CDs, DVDs, VHS tape** are popular in all libraries, though the size and variety of the collections may vary significantly from library to library. It is important to point out the fact that most library collections lack foreign films, music, and documentaries in these formats. Libraries should not only increase their collections of films that have been dubbed from a foreign language to English, but they should also add international films with English subtitles. International films offer children a taste in and the pleasure of knowing foreign lands, people, religions, languages, cultures, and music. They motivate them to explore places beyond their own vicinities. International films and music can also help reinforce a sense of self-identity within children by representing various historical and cultural backgrounds to which they may have familiarities.

**International artifacts**

**Memorial collections, musical instruments, and collectibles** are some of the most effective mediums of literacy in awakening international awareness among children, but they are also some of the toughest collections to develop and maintain. Otten (1998) addresses such collections as "primary sources" and says that they "develop [in children], the intellectual curiosity that leads to further research and increased awareness of the world around them" (¶ 5). It is difficult to develop and maintain a collection of international artifacts because of the lack of materials, availability of information on available artifacts, funds to meet labor and material costs, and the inadequacy in the number of library workers who can dedicate their time and efforts to find information on available materials, and provide maintenance of the collection. These types of collections are similar to museum exhibits, but are smaller and less expensive and therefore suitable for a Special Collections section within a library. Libraries may work with a museum in finding out information on facts, myths, fantasies, stories, and display techniques related to a collection if they have enough funding to bear the cost in collaborating with museums.

**Conclusion**

Expanding the number of international resources for children in various formats is the first step in fostering international awareness among children. The important part of the movement in developing international awareness among children is to incorporate international literary materials in their lives by offering international literature in different formats, particularly in libraries. With the rapid development of technology, new formats of international literature will evolve. As new formats evolve, they can be added to a library's existing international children's collection. Offering international literary materials in different formats can support children's cognitive styles and can offer them a realm of new adventures, perspectives, and emotions that cannot be experienced otherwise.

**Appendix**

**Resources**

The following are recommended resources where information about various international literary materials can be found to be added to the children's library collection.

**International and Regional (outside of the United States) Children's Book Awards**
• **International Book Awards**

  Hans Christian Andersen Award  

  Mildred L. Batchelder Award  
  [http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/.../batchelderaward.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/.../batchelderaward.htm)

  UNESCO Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance  

• **Canada**

  Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award  
  [http://www.cla.ca/awards/afhg.htm](http://www.cla.ca/awards/afhg.htm)

  CLA Book of the Year for Children  
  [http://www.cla.ca/awards/boyc.htm](http://www.cla.ca/awards/boyc.htm)

  Elizabeth Mrázik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award  
  [http://www.ibby-canada.org/cleaver.html](http://www.ibby-canada.org/cleaver.html)

  Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction  

  Governor-General's Literary Awards  

  Information Book Award  
  [http://www.library.ubc.ca/edlib/table/awards/information.htm](http://www.library.ubc.ca/edlib/table/awards/information.htm)

  Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children's Non-Fiction  

  Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award  

  Vicky Metcalf Award for Children's Literature  
  [http://www.canauthors.org/awards/metcalf.html](http://www.canauthors.org/awards/metcalf.html)

  Young Adult Canadian Book Award  
  [http://www.cla.ca/awards/yac.htm](http://www.cla.ca/awards/yac.htm)

• **Australia**

  Children's Book of the Year  

  Young Australian Readers' Award  
  [http://www.yara-online.org/](http://www.yara-online.org/)

• **New Zealand**

  Esther Glen Award  

  New Zealand Book Awards  
  [http://www.booksellers.co.nz/mba_main.htm](http://www.booksellers.co.nz/mba_main.htm)

• **Great Britain**
Carnegie Medal
http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/carnegie/

Guardian Children's Fiction Prize
http://books.guardian.co.uk/childrensfictionprize2004/

Kate Greenaway Medal
http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/greenaway/

Nestlé Children's Book Prize
http://www.booktrusted.co.uk/nestle/index.php4

Costa Book Awards

- Asia

National Book Development Council of Singapore
http://www.bookcouncil.sg/

Noma Concours for Children's Picture Book Illustration
http://www.accu.or.jp/noma/english/e_index.html

- Africa

Katrine Harries Award
http://www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/awards/harries.html

M. E. R. Prize
http://www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/awards/mer.html

Noma Award
http://www.nomaaward.org/

Percy FitzPatrick Award

Sanlam Prize
http://www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/awards/sanlam.html

Vivian Wilkes Award

International Book Review Websites

- Comprehensive Children's Literature Database
  http://cled.odyssi.com/

Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature
http://www.dawcl.com

Education Oasis

International Youth Library
http://www.ijb.de/

TeachingBooks.net
http://www.teachingbooks.net/
Resources for Graphic Novels and Comics

The following websites provide lists of graphic novels and comic strips. A few of these websites may contain graphic novels and comic strips published in the United States and in other countries as well as those published in the United States that depict a foreign culture.

- Berkeley Public Library Teen Services - Sequential Art
  http://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/teens/good_books.php

- Comic Book for Young Adults
  http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/lml/comics/pages/index.html

- Recommended Graphic Novels for Public Libraries
  http://my.voyager.net/~sraiteri/graphicnovels.htm

- The Librarian's Guide to Anime and Manga
  http://www.koyagi.com/Libguide.html

- Yale University Library – Mass Media and Popular Culture
  http://www.library.yale.edu/humanities/media/comics.html

Graphic Novel and Comic Review websites

- Dark Horse
  http://www.darkhorse.com/

- Diamond Bookshelf
  http://bookshelf.diamondcomics.com/public/

- No Flying, No Tights
  http://www.noflyingnotights.com/

- The Comics Get Serious
  http://www.rationalmagic.com/Comics/KidFriendly.html

Some useful Online Children's Forums

- Brave Kids
  http://bravekids.org/

- Feral.com

- Teen Lit
  TeenLit.com

- Young Writer's Society
  http://dmoz.org/Kids_and_Teens/Arts/Creative_Writing/Teens_Only/

E-books
American Council of Learned Societies: History e-Book Project.  
http://www.historyebook.org/

Athena  

Bartleby.com  
http://www.bartleby.com/index.html

Bibliotheca Augustana  
http://www.fh-augsburg.de/%7Eharsch/a_index.html

Follett Library Resource Company  
http://www.flr.follett.com

International Children's Digital Library (ICDL)  
http://www.icdlbooks.org

Project Gutenberg  
http://www.gutenberg.org

Project Gutenberg of Australia  
http://gutenberg.net.au/

World e-Book Library  
http://netlibrary.net/WorldHome.html

References


Burt, S. (2005). "Blown to atoms or reshaped at will": Recent books about comics [Electronic version]. College Literature, 32 , no. 1, 166-176.


Church, A. P. (2005). E-book resources for the school library [Electronic version]. Multimedia & Internet@Schools, 12 , no. 4, 9-12.


LaFaye, A. (2001). Teaching students to be historians: Historical literacy through the interpretation of non-fiction, primary resources, and historical fiction [Electronic version]. *Yearbook: Claremont Reading Conference*, 56-63.


Return to the Post-Tracks Overview page.
Return to Volume 1/Issue 3 Table of Contents.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.5 License.

Contribute to this topic

Do you have an article, presentation, or other content to share on this topic?

You can post it on this topic page. Find out more about submitting documents in the Member Center.

Ratings You must be signed in to rate this item

Average (0 Votes)

Comments

Show All