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**International Power:  
School Libraries  
Around the World**

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*Knowledge Quest* is read by building-level school library media specialists, supervisors, library educators, and others concerned with the development of school library media programs and services in elementary and secondary schools.

## Indexing and Abstracting

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School Library Media Research, AASL's online research journal, can be accessed at <[www.ala.org/aasl/SLMR](http://www.ala.org/aasl/SLMR)>.

# International Power School Libraries Around the World

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# A World View of the School Library Village

Carol A. Gordon, Guest Editor  
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**KQ** on the  
**WEB**

Carol A. Gordon's "Dictionary  
of Worldwide Librarianship" is  
available on the KQWeb at  
[www.ala.org/aasl/kqweb](http://www.ala.org/aasl/kqweb)

Have you seen this e-mail?

Subject: If we could shrink the world  
Date: Wed, 12 Feb 2003 14:39:20 -0500  
To: Carol Gordon cgordon@bu.edu  
If we could shrink the earth's population  
to a village of precisely 100 people, with  
all the existing human ratios remaining  
the same, it would look something like  
the following. There would be:

- 57 Asians
- 21 Europeans; 14 from the western  
hemisphere, both north and south
- 8 Africans
- 52 would be female
- 48 would be male
- 70 would be nonwhite
- 30 would be white
- 70 would be non-Christian
- 30 would be Christian
- 89 would be heterosexual
- 11 would be homosexual
- 6 people would possess 59 percent of the  
entire world's wealth and all 6  
would be from the United States
- 80 would live in substandard housing
- 70 would be unable to read
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition
- 1 would be near death; 1 would be near  
birth
- 1 (yes, only 1) would have a college  
education
- 1 would own a computer<sup>1</sup>

The message paints a picture of a world  
that is alien to most of us, but it places the  
familiar—and all our assumptions that go with  
it—into a global perspective. We have chosen  
the global perspective as the context for this  
issue of *Knowledge Quest*. As Alison Wills noted  
in her article, we all learn best in context—even  
teachers. This issue of *Knowledge Quest* pro-  
vides a global context for school libraries, as  
they are commonly called in the rest of the  
world, and for information literacy.

An article by Margo Fryling, who lives in  
Grand Rapids, Michigan, is about her experience  
setting up a school library (never called a library  
media center outside the United States) in Kenya.  
Mildred Rawlings and Julie Van Valkenburg, who  
are probably closest on the continuum to the  
world of the library media center as many of us  
know it, write about their experiences in an  
independent school on the Tennessee River. All  
of our contributors are writing from perspec-  
tives that give us a unique piece of the world  
puzzle. Alex Morgan is a classroom teacher who  
comes from Australia and writes about his view  
of a school library in the Bahamas. Wills is a  
British librarian presently living in Hong Kong  
who writes about her experience in Monaco. Kay  
Bishop gives us a tour of information literacy  
around the world from the perspective of  
American higher education, and Ross Todd  
writes about the Australian school library experi-  
ence from the point of view of a researcher.  
Where does your library media center stand on a

*Carol Gordon is the Author  
of the Knowledge Quest  
column "Measuring Up"  
and a member of the  
Knowledge Quest Editorial  
Board.*

continuum of libraries that are nested in a spectrum of schools and cultures around the world?

### What Is an International School?

International schools are independent schools that operate autonomously in countries around the world. They are often confused with the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS), which are funded by the U.S. government to educate the children of military personnel. Most are nonprofit, or nonproprietary, and are administered by a board composed of members of the community, some of whom are parents of children attending the school. They are usually located on the borders of cities whose names they bear, and there may be two or more international schools in such cities as Hong Kong, Singapore, Paris, Frankfurt, and London. Children of multinational corporation employees, diplomats, officials of state, and missionaries attend these schools. Some are boarding schools, but most are day schools.

The author developed a profile of international schools (see figure 1) by surveying the catalog and statistics of the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), an accreditation agency that provides professional development programs.<sup>2</sup>

Most of these schools were founded after World War II. Their student populations are generally small, and they include grades pre-K through twelve. In most cases the teacher-student ration is low and the tuition is high. International schools are sometimes called American schools because Americans founded them. At least one-third of student populations in these schools are American, but the faculty and student body are from as many as fifty nations. It is often the case that local hires, or teachers from the host country, comprise from 10 to 40 percent of faculty.

**Figure 1: Profile of ECIS Schools**

Characteristics	ECIS Mean
Founding Date	1955
Enrollment	650
Students	4-18
Teacher-student ratio	14 to 1
Tuition	\$10,000

### Curriculum

The curriculum is Anglo-American and the language of instruction is English; however, all students study the history, culture, and language of the host country. Some schools adopt an immersion approach to language learning whereby students will learn a subject alternately in English and the language of the host country. International schools celebrate their diversity with international fests, and they participate in the holidays of the host country. English as a second language (ESL) programs are leveled, and children progress from beginner through intermediate groupings as they are progressively mainstreamed. Most are fully mainstreamed within the first year.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) for grades eleven and twelve is an academically rigorous program originally conceived for the children of expatriots, or for United Kingdom citizens living outside the country, who wanted their children to qualify for admission to British universities. The middle years (grades six through ten) often subscribe to the International Baccalaureate Organization's (IBO) middle years' program, which has an interdisciplinary approach. The Approaches to Learning component intensively integrates tools for learning, study skills, information literacy, and technology skills into subject curricula. Tenth graders are required to do a personal project. The primary, or elementary, schools emphasize experiential learning. The primary years program (PYP) offered by IBO is based on inquiry learning. Teachers plan thematic units based on the questions, "What will they learn?" "How will they best learn it?" "How will we know they've learned it?" The program culminates in a fifth-grade project.

### School Libraries

How does a school library in an international school differ from an American library media center? The collection strives to be multilingual, since international schools encourage children to maintain their first language. The fiction collection is eclectic, including novels from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The history collection tends to emphasize world rather than American history. The collection of periodicals for recreational and leisure reading is large and includes magazines

that are popular in the host country culture. A books-on-tape collection is well-used by families, who travel extensively. While library budgets are healthy, almost one-third of the funds are spent on shipping costs. The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) sponsors events that bring storytellers and well-known writers of literature for children and young adults to the school. Since most international schools include pre-K through twelve grades in one building or on one campus, the school library is K-12, or there is a primary and secondary library. There is a lot of parent and administrative support for the school library, which usually occupies a central location on campus. The number of parents who work in the library as volunteers is high.

The school library has special significance in these schools. It is the hub for English language as well as for multilingual materials. Teachers, students, and parents use the school library, and, despite its name, the library media concept thrives. The younger grades come to the library on a fixed schedule, but upper primary grades are involved in project-based learning, driven by the PYP program. Middle and high school programs are also library friendly, although library use tends to drop off in eleventh and twelfth grade when students are preparing for their IB exams, which are externally monitored and graded.

Moyra Hadley, head of the American Community School, Egham, in Surrey (south of London) talked about her school libraries in an interview held in New York City on February 8. Hadley is Welsh and was educated in England. She has worked in Africa, Asia, and the European continent, and received her master's degree in California. She was in the states attending a recruiting fair to interview candidates from around the world for international school positions. In her school, five hundred students range from three-year-old scramblers and four-year-old pre-K through twelfth graders. While 65 percent are American and 10 percent are British, students come from more than thirty different countries.

**Q:** *What does a successful school library mean for you?*

**A:** A school library should make good teachers better. In our lower school the librarian

is responsible for integrating the information literacy and core curriculum while retaining essential skills.

**Q:** *What do you mean by "essential skills?"*

**A:** Information literacy skills. The librarian defines the essential skills and associates them with units of study at each grade level. The librarian is the information literacy facilitator. His or her role as a staff developer is to work with teams of teachers to plan units and integrate library and computer skills. The computer teacher works with the librarian to look at the package of information literacy skills—library, computer, and research skills—and together they work with teachers to develop the units of study.

A good library is well-resourced with materials that support the curriculum, including the English as an additional language program. It has a lot of computers, and a computer lab within its walls. It is important that students can move between and among resources in various formats.

**Q:** *As head of school, how do you know that your school library is successful?*

**A:** We have multiple ways of assessing that. We do curriculum mapping, so all unit planners are in a database that is accessible to everyone. We look at the unit planners to see if information literacy, which includes libraries and information technology, is evident in the planning. Second, we look at the products of student work to find evidence of resources, primary sources, and research skills. We also look for development of skills from one grade to the next. Third, we observe whether teachers are meeting with the librarian and computer teacher to reflect on the units of study to determine how they can do them better next time. We call these reflection meetings.

Lastly, we conduct a philosophy audit. We take the statements from our philosophy, or vision, and ask students, teachers, and parents to rate each of the statements on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest rating. We also ask them to provide evidence for their ratings. For example, we asked parents if information literacy is integrated into the academic program.

More than 90 percent responded "yes" with a rating of four or five. The evidence they provided was that they observe their children using computers and the library for research as part of their units.

**Q:** *How are parents able to judge that?*

**A:** They have home access to such library databases as Britannic Online and EBSCO. We invite parents to view student work at school on a regular basis, and we use portfolio assessment whereby student work is sampled, saved, and evaluated over time. We also do a lot of programs for parents. For example, we held a writing workshop that included reading so parents could support these methods at home with their children.

**Q:** *How do you think school libraries need to change?*

**A:** The role of the librarian needs to be redefined in the perceptions of teachers and parents. They should be seen as staff developers, working with teachers to facilitate teaching all skills in the curriculum, not just library skills. Students are coming to us with computer skills. It's the ability to use information and think well that is important to stress. It's also important for librarians to keep a passion for reading. For example, we do not use computers in the early childhood program. Rather we emphasize reading aloud and telling stories. Librarians also need to have a flexible time frame in which they can work with the computer teacher and teams of teachers. Their role as resource finders is also one that should grow in the future. Their primary role should be to ensure an articulated research skills scope and sequence for all children. Librarians should monitor research happening in the school. They should collect evidence of student research projects. I think future libraries should be libraries without walls, in that there is remote access into homes, and librarians should be mentors for parents, helping them to think of the computer as a room in their homes. If they do not enter that room, they will not know what their children are doing. The school library and good Web-based resources, as well as the dangerous and undesirable sites, are in that room, and librarians can help parents to keep that room safe.

If we could shrink world of school libraries into an issue of *Knowledge Quest*, what would we learn? ●

## References and Notes

1. This e-mail became popular when Phillip Harter, an assistant professor of surgery at Stanford University School of Medicine, received the original message and became an accidental beneficiary when he forwarded it his friends. Harter, however, had no idea of the origin of the statistics. Magazines, newspapers, columnists, principals, and even a Latvian newspaper used the quotation and attributed it to Harter. An article reported that a Latvian newspaper paid homage to Harter in a full-page story. The e-mail was posted on discussion boards of the First Unitarian Church of San Antonio. A population course at a university listed the e-mail as suggested reading. Harter received a copy of the statistics in calligraphy and laminated with pressed flowers. Harter, however, did not create the original message and had no documentation for the statistics. He was surprised to receive e-mails from the World Health Organization, professors, and teachers asking him to verify the data. When the president of Stanford University used the data in a commencement speech, he did verify the statistics, and demographers say that the assertions listed do check out. To view an annotated version of the statistics, with sources, go to <[www.fastcompany.com/keyword/email45](http://www.fastcompany.com/keyword/email45)>, which paraphrases the article "Please Don't Forward This Email" by Rekha Balu that appears in an electronic magazine, FASTCOMPANY, <[www.fastcompany.com/online/47/harter.html](http://www.fastcompany.com/online/47/harter.html)>. Accessed 12 Feb. 2003. Aside from providing a context for this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, the story stands as an object lesson in evaluating Web sources.
2. European Council of International Schools, *The Statistical Survey of ECIS and The International Schools Directory* (Petersfield, England: European Council of International Schools, 2002).