

GIVE AND TAKE FOR A GLOBAL VIEW

When Suzanne Parfitt qualified as a librarian in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s, she never imagined that 20 years later she would be working in Asia, while also studying as a distance education student in Australia. Technological advances have led to a shrinking world and new opportunities have opened for librarians. Now that it's so easy to connect and share across time and distance, Suzanne asked herself why it is so important for us to step out through our physical or virtual library doors and explore the world.

Many libraries are now serving customers who live around the globe. The library at the Australian university where I study offers an extensive range of services to me in Singapore. Similarly, the international school library where I work has students who come from all around the globe. The library meets their cultural needs in a number of ways, including the provision of mother-tongue collections, and an online virtual library, which enables students to access resources wherever they may be.

Like many libraries, we have an ethos of sharing. We create tutorials, videos and guides to support curriculum topics, which we make available on the internet with a Creative Commons license. In doing so, we actively contribute to the growing body of open access educational resources that make reliable information available to anyone with an internet connection, whatever their location or circumstance.

As libraries increasingly connect people around the world with the information they need, I feel it is essential that we, as librarians, have a global view.

Obviously, the ideal way to gain a global outlook is to travel. I work in Singapore, but I also enjoy visiting libraries and attending professional development events in other countries. I recently spent three weeks at La Trobe University in Melbourne on a work placement for my Masters course. By travelling to Australia, where I have never lived or worked, I gained valuable experience of library work in another country.

Conferences are another great way to network with people from around the world. I attended the IFLA Annual Congress held here in Singapore in 2013, and gained a wealth of knowledge on international librarianship through that experience.

While travelling may not be an option for everyone, but an international outlook is still possible. There are numerous ways to connect with librarians around the world without



Suzanne Parfitt: Why a global view is important

leaving home. I recently joined the International Librarians Network (ilnetwork.wordpress.com), which organises peer-to-peer mentoring, allowing librarians in different countries to share experiences and ideas. And if you can't attend conferences you can follow them through Twitter instead. You can find lots of library conference hash tags to explore on Twitter at libraryconferences.tumblr.com. I also gain current knowledge by following the blogs of information professionals across the world, including Phil Bradley in the UK (www.philbradley.typepad.com), Judy O'Connell in Australia (judyconnell.com) and Joyce Valenza in America (blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch).

I believe in grasping any international opportunity, in order to meet new people, learn from their experiences and find out about libraries in other countries. I've gained a broader view of our profession this way, and found out about the latest developments and ideas by connecting with leading thinkers.

It's also important to remember international connections are not all about taking. My library colleagues and I write blogs, and we tweet and share our resources through Creative Commons. We therefore contribute to the global librarianship network and help to provide reliable information for all.

I believe that, whatever the scale of your international engagement, it will be positive for you, your library, your community and also the wider world.

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