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Internationalize your professional network

Christine F. Smith
Bishop's College School

Clare B. McKenzie
University of Wollongong, claremc@uow.edu.au

Kate Byrne
University of New South Wales

Alyson Dalby
University of New South Wales

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Internationalize your professional network

Abstract

The article discusses the internationalization of a librarian's professional network which can be beneficial to the librarian and the library in Canada. It states that international librarianship can help one build a global support system through mutual learning from each other, and can help one better understand Canada's multicultural and multilingual environment. The International Librarians Network (ILN) initiative reportedly aims to help librarians develop international networks.

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Internationalise your professional network

As those who participate in professional development are aware, interaction with fellow librarians and information professionals can be an immensely rewarding experience, both professionally and personally. Learning about projects, collaborating in research, sharing stories and building relationships are all ways to connect with others in the field. International interactions add another dimension to professional and personal networking and reflection. When we look at our profession, at our libraries, and at ourselves from a new perspective, we are better able to think critically about ourselves and determine what is best for our patrons. By 'thinking globally and acting locally' librarians can capitalise on the experiences of our colleagues around the world and by learning about resources and methodologies used in other countries, librarians are able to share innovations and inspiration to help make each of us better at what we do.

There are a number of ways that internationalising your professional network could benefit both yourself and your library. First, international librarianship can help you build a global support system. Libraries all around the world are struggling with similar challenges and hearing the experiences of colleagues around the globe can help you find new solutions to your own challenges. Second, international librarianship can help you better understand Canada's multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment. Both French- and English-speaking Canadian librarians can gain a better understanding of Canada's multi-cultural environment by engaging with other countries where their native tongue is spoken. From Belgium to Haiti, India to Ghana, a shared language provides a gateway to understanding the similarities and differences within the global library space. This can identify ideas and opportunities to benefit your own library patrons. Third, international librarianship creates opportunities for librarians to unite to help others. From building libraries in areas where there are none, to joining voices to advocate on a global scale about topics like copyright and access to information. Fourth, you can meet some amazing librarians and build some great connections.

There are a number of options for beginning to internationalise your professional network. Attending international conferences, like the IFLA World Library and Information Conference is an exciting way to plunge into the international library space. However it is expensive and travelling the world is not always possible. Social media provides a plethora of avenues for building international connections, as there are strong library communities on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. However it can be daunting to know where to start if you don't know anyone already in that space. A third option is to join the International Librarians Network. The International Librarians Network (ILN) peer-mentoring program is a facilitated program aimed at helping librarians develop international networks. It was created based on the belief that innovation and inspiration can cross borders, and that by building professional networks beyond national borders, ordinary librarians can learn from one another to become better skilled and more engaged professionals.

Participants in the program apply online and are matched into partnerships

with a colleague from outside their country. Partnerships are for a 6-month term and during this period are supported by monthly discussion topics led by the program coordinators. At the end of each term the participants can choose to continue their communications independent of the program and have the option of signing up for another round. It is envisioned that over time participants would develop a widening network of on-going, independent professional relationships. At the moment, ILN is primarily conducted in English, however information about additional language skills are welcomed and can be taken into account when the partnerships are assigned.

If you are interested in getting involved, the next round of partnerships will commence in September 2013 with applications closing at midnight on Thursday 29 August 2013. ILN is open to anyone working in the library and information industry around the world. The program remains free and the only requirements to participate are an internet connection, an hour each week and a desire to build professional connections and learn from colleagues. Visit www.ilnetwork.wordpress.com for more information about the program and links to other resources to help you internationalise your professional network.