

BOOK REVIEW:

Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world

Virgilio Medina Jr

Qatar National Library: Qatar: mrvirgiliomedina@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEW: Patrick Lo, Heather Rogers, and Dickson K. W. Choi. (2018). *Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world* (2-volume set). New Jersey: Apple Academic Press. ISBN-13:978-1-77188-656-7. 262 pp. and 252 pp.

A key takeaway underpinning stories shared by school librarians worldwide is the value of school libraries, which significantly function as living organisms to support students' learning development. Throughout the last decade and regardless of the geopolitical background, school libraries have faced challenges to preserving their functions and indispensability. Interviews with school librarians highlight perspectives and insights into the actual condition of school libraries and help to establish good strategies for debunking the misconceptions about the role and contributions of libraries within schools. The two-set volume publication, *Effective school librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world*, tells readers about the importance of school libraries as a learning hub in the 21st century.

Volume one comprises two parts: part one focuses on North and South America, and part two focuses on Europe. Volume two comprises three parts: part one focuses on Africa, which includes the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Nigeria; part two focuses on Asia, which includes Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Thailand, Nepal and Vietnam; and part three focuses on Australia, which includes the states of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland.

Additionally, the volume includes forewords from well-known school librarians whose works and research about school libraries are exemplary, such as Dr Helen Boelens, Daisuke Okada and the late Dr Fadekemi Oyewusi. I have met some of these people at several International Association School Librarianship (IASL) conferences and know and admire them as persistent advocates of school libraries in their countries. It is impressive to see that the book's authors have invited these scholars to contribute to the publication.

The authors outlined a set of questions that encouraged a fruitful and meaningful conversation. Responses from participating librarians were significantly elaborated upon through follow-up questions by the authors, encouraging contributors to detail

BOOK REVIEW: Effective School Librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world.

locally based initiatives, programs and efforts and thus portray existing situations of school libraries throughout the world

For example, the focus on initiating the “makerspace” movement as part of the school club in Virginia, US, is interesting and provocative, in the sense that this library embodies the innovative and creative skills of being librarians—skills many people don’t expect or recognise. “Makerspace” is defined as a collaborative workspace inside a school, library or separate public/private facility for making, learning, exploring and sharing that uses high tech to no tech tools (Makerspace.com, n.d.). The librarian’s efforts around makerspaces justify the claim that school libraries are beyond a physical place or book storage facility. The Virginia school librarians’ successful work exemplify that school libraries can prepare and empower students in the real world. Similarly, many stories from other librarians reveal the strong commitment of school libraries to expanding and developing their knowledge in the aspect of technology. For instance, a Turkey-based school library facilitates a Digital Citizenship training program that seeks to equip students to become competent digital users. This initiative is a living testimony that libraries operate outside the box and even beyond “usual jobs” often associated with libraries and librarians.

The authors highlighted common problems school librarians face: lack of staff, lack of recognition, lack of opportunities to collaborate, and other challenges such as those defined by geographic location. Several publications (Leslie & Wilson, 2001; Lukenbill, 2002; Shonhe, 2019) have repeatedly cited these challenges, but these publications do not provide a detailed picture of what the challenges mean on the ground. By sharing professional practices and stories deeply embedded in personal lives and actual settings, Lo et al. provide that meaning. For instance, a school librarian in the Philippines specifically identified the current situation of school librarianship in the aspect of local governance. As mandated by law, creating jobs for a school librarian must be initiated by and adopted by the local government. Such a detail provides important background information when exploring the nature of school librarianship in that country. With this book left unpublished, readers would not be able to make sense of the full context of this story, along with the financial constraints that have always become a major setback in school libraries.

Having worked in school libraries in the Middle East for almost six years, I can relate to how school librarians are desperate to be included and treated as part of the faculty team. Some school librarians are not given opportunities by school administrators, principals, and heads of schools to collaborate with other teachers. The narratives provided by school librarians in this book effectively emphasize the shortcomings of this situation that should be addressed and understood in modern societies.

Though providing much valuable information, I think the book could usefully have presented relevant resources at the end of each narrative that might be valuable for addressing challenges within the profession and supporting the role of school librarians. Resources could have included a list of useful websites featuring various platforms, databases, resources, lesson plans, collection developments and selection tools, which would give readers access to a wide and rich information source. Such a resource would be especially beneficial to library professionals who have not been given opportunities

to attend various capacity-building activities in Asia, resulting in a lack of awareness of current practices and trends around school librarianship.

School libraries in the Middle East have diverse and noteworthy professional practices and approaches, particularly in the context of international school librarianship. I have witnessed the commitment of these school library professionals to sharing their stories, practices, and resources with the community. They even organized a set of informal meetings within the region to ensure that their colleagues are well acquainted with the latest trends, developments, issues, and events involving school libraries. However, these accounts were not included in the book. I hope that the authors will consider this work in future publications because the stories in the Middle East are key to developing new perspectives on the development of school libraries.

I am puzzled why some countries (e.g., Turkey, Sweden, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, and Thailand) were covered twice. A more ideal approach would be to include other countries not included, to provide a more diverse overview when discussing the effective roles of school libraries in the international context.

Overall, this two-set volume book offers unique stories of the school librarianship field that are impactful, relevant and stimulating. The authors successfully outlined a set of questions that revealed a critical understanding of the current situation of school libraries worldwide. The school librarians interviewed for the book have impressive stories that continue to be an inspiration in the field.

I highly recommend the book for scholars and library professionals and for everyone who wants to deeply understand the exciting role of school librarians and their valuable contribution in an era of information overload. More importantly, this book is a source of encouragement to school librarians seeking a deeper sense of worth in the school community. It is a book that deserves to be read and acquired in every single library. I will definitely recommend this book to our public library!

REFERENCES

- Leslie, R., & Wilson, P. P. (2001). *Igniting the spark: Library programs that inspire high school patrons* (Illustrated edition). Libraries Unlimited: Englewood, Colo, USA.
- Lukenbill, W. B. (2002). *Collection development for a new century in the school library media center*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Shonhe, L. (2019). A Consolidation of challenges faced by school libraries in developing countries. 2467. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/2467?utm_source=digitalcommons.unl.edu%2Flibphilprac%2F2467&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages
- What is a Makerspace?* (2015, November 27). Makerspaces.Com. Retrieved September 1, 2021, from <https://www.makerspaces.com/what-is-a-makerspace/>

BOOK REVIEW: Effective School Librarianship: Successful professional practices from librarians around the world.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: <https://freejournals.org/>

Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES