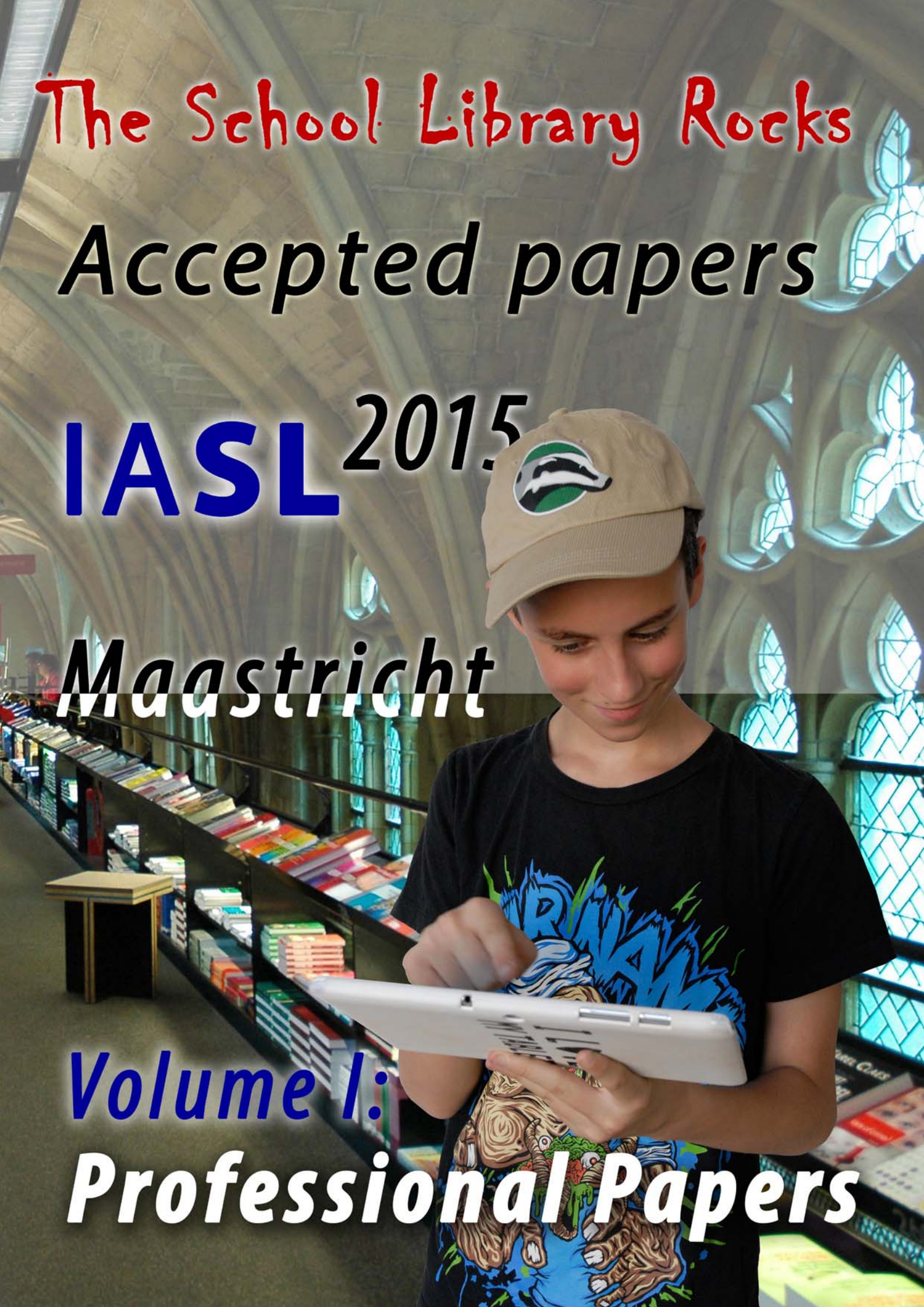# The School Library Rocks

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Living it, Learning it, Loving it

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School Libraries in Kid's Voices: multilingual, multicultural open access eBooks written by children themselves

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Abstract

Research confirms that there is a serious shortage of reading materials in school libraries, especially in developing and emerging countries. Students who were interviewed during surveys, some of whom attend very poor schools which have no electricity and no internet connection, told the survey team that they wanted to be able to read about things which are familiar to them, preferably in their mother tongue.

Discussions have been held with school library colleagues about the possibility of children writing their own stories and poems, in their mother tongue, resulting in a series of books where children will respond to a variety of prompts. Members of the school library community throughout the world are being asked for their help to collect the required material. Children's drawings, and writings will be forwarded to the international team of editors.

A publisher has been found for the first open-access book and an editorial team is being formed. Collecting of stories, drawings, poems etc. will begin in 2015. The first prompt is "Why I love my school library.

Keywords: School libraries, Reading, Global literacy, eBooks, Multicultural schools.

Background information

Since 2010, a group of people who are based mainly in the Netherlands have been working together in an attempt to help and advise educators in Sub-Saharan Africa to set up or improve school libraries. Discussions about different possibilities have been held at the

Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. These efforts have resulted in a large number of presentations and papers which will be referenced later in this paper.

Not all school library programs in Sub-Saharan Africa are mentioned in this paper. Only those which have been affected by the Dutch support group are discussed.

In 2010, The Equal Education (EE) Campaign for School Libraries in South Africa published "*We can't afford not to"* describing the urgent need for the provision of functional school libraries in South African public schools (Equal Education, 2015; Equal Education Campaign for School Libraries, 2010). The Dutch group supported EE throughout this campaign. In November 2013, this campaign eventually resulted in the publication of legally binding norms and standards for school infrastructure, which included the provision of a library in every school. (Ministry of Basic Education, 2013). Unfortunately this law did not provide a clear description of what these school libraries should be like and who should run them, however indications are that school libraries throughout South Africa are improving.

Also, in 2010, a message appeared on the IASL listserv requesting volunteer assistance and consultation with the establishment of a library at the Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (UCBC) in Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This request was answered by Boelens and Van Dam. A report of the ongoing activities at both the university and school library will be presented at the IASL 2015 Conference in Maastricht (Henton, Shaw, van Dam and Boelens, 2015).

Furthermore, in 2012, Helen Boelens and Albert Boekhorst were approached by Daniel Mangale with a request to carry out a survey of school libraries in Kenya   Boelens and Boekhorst agreed to do so (Boelens, Boekhorst and Mangale, 2012). A presentation about this research project, entitled *A pilot survey of 19 primary school libraries in (rural) Kenya: A voyage of discovery* was presented to the IASL Research Forum at the IASL 2012 Conference in Qatar.

In the meantime, both Boelens and Van Dam have taken an active interest of the Dutch school library project *My Book Buddy* (2015), which supports basic school libraries in developing countries throughout the world, providing reading materials to 119.000 children in 260 schools, in 20 countries throughout the World. In Sub-Saharan Africa, schools in the following countries receive support from *My Book Buddy*: Senegal, The Gambia, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zanzibar (and also Ethiopia which is located in the Horn of Africa).

The need for school libraries

School library buildings and associated services
The Kenyan report reveals that very few of the schools which were surveyed actually have a school library room or building (Boelens, Boekhorst and Mangale 2013). Books are usually kept in a large box, under lock and key, with limited access for the school community, however some schools reported that library shelves had been built for the books.

Many of the schools in rural areas which were surveyed during the research have no electricity and no internet access. In some cases, where there facilities were available, the internet access was very unreliable. Similar problems are reported in DR Congo.

The need for reading materials.
As Henton ... et al (2015) have clarified, there may not even be a reading culture which supports reading in some of the countries or regions mentioned above. Public and school libraries are almost non-existent, although some private and/or mission schools have good facilities. All of the projects mentioned above have clearly indicated the desperate need for reading materials, especially in normal (rural) public schools.

Also, very little funding is available for the purchase of new books. Indeed, in some areas there are very few bookshops, because there is no reading culture to support them. Some schools rely on donated books, however these are

> *"frequently culturally irrelevant or confusing to students, especially young children. Early readers full of foreign images or concepts make it difficult to use context clues to figure out words or phrases. Donated books often arrive in various states of use or disrepair. Without access to supplies and skills to repair and protect books, even those arriving in good shape quickly become dog-eared in the loving and careful hands of students and teachers. Replacing books locally is not possible, and regional selections are limited. … transportation costs of bringing books to schools often make a donation null and void. (Henton … et al, (2015).*

During the Kenyan research, it became apparent that some schools did not have even one story book (reader) per child. The research report shows a ratio of one book for three children at some schools. Some of these books are more than 20 years old, are dirty and in generally poor condition (Boelens, Boekhorst and Mangale, 2012).

Members of the school communities, including the students, were asked to describe the kinds of books which they would like to have in their school library. The answers from these children were quite blunt and very revealing. They wanted stories about things which they know and love, taking place in a location which they understand. These books should be preferably in their own, native language. They should also be suitable for children of their own age group (and not for babies). Teachers confirmed these statements, however they also mentioned that books in English were needed because this is the official language.

Contact with a librarian from Zimbabwe, Mr. Hosea Tokwe, who does much to support the Matenda Primary School in Gweru, revealed that there is also a great need for books for "slow readers". This statement has been confirmed by Prof. Genevieve Hart from South Africa.

Children who are fortunate enough to attend a school which is supported by the *My Book Buddy* program are given access to books which meet these needs. The My Book Buddy Facebook page shows that these children are delighted. They are even allowed to take a book home (in a special bag which is supplied for that purpose). This is very unusual. It

should be noted however that when a child takes a book home, he reads it to the entire family, by sunlight. Few homes have electricity or electric lights.

The Bookery, South Africa
Currently over 90% of public schools in South Africa do not have functional libraries. The Bookery (2015) is working towards ending this shortage.

> *"It sets up and supports functional school libraries across the country, Each library established by The Bookery contains a minimum of three books per learner per school, and caters for the needs and interests of its readership through a comprehensive selection of fiction, non-fiction and reference works. To ensure sustainability, each school has to have an existing library space and a member of staff committed to fulfilling the role of teacher librarian."*

One of services that The Bookery provides is this: donated books for school libraries can be sent to The Bookery for distribution to school libraries throughout South Africa. When these books arrive, they are sorted, and then distributed to schools which have requested these particular titles or topics of interest. Unwanted books are sold to provide funds.

In South Africa, school library collections and facilities seem to be slowly improving, however this is a slow process.

A solution to these problems – Kids writing books themselves.
Discussions have been held with school library colleagues about the possibility of children writing their own stories poems and pictures, in their mother tongue, resulting in a series of Open Access E-books. The concept is as follows: Educators and members of the school library community throughout the world are being asked for their help to collect the required material School librarians and educators throughout the world will be asked to talk to children about writing their own books, in their own languages. I simple set of instructions with regard to format etc. will be available at the end of this session. They will also be available through a website.

For the first book, children will be asked "*Why do you love your school library*?" They can answer this question with a story, poem, picture etc.. Some children may not like their school library. Why? Stories can be submitted in any language, however the teacher who sends in the story will be required to "sign off" – i.e. to verify that the story or text does not contain unsuitable ideas, suggestions, etc.. If appropriate, children can include a photo of themselves, or of their school library.

Publication of the book
A printed and eBook would be made available from Learning Commons Press at lmcsource.com. The printed and eBook would be more of a pamphlet describing the idea and providing an online resource of actual examples from children in a variety of formats that could be downloaded to computers, library digital collections, and to handheld devices. The first edition could showcase essays on "*Why do you love your school library*?" but could also include creative pieces of stories, poetry, and informational pieces about home, family, culture, etc.. Some examples would include those with illustrations or multimedia and also

just plain text that could be read on a variety of devices from simple flip phones to smart phones and on to tablets of various types.

Children's submissions will be forwarded to the international team of teacher librarian editors. If you would like to be part of the Editorial Board, please contact us either through the IASL or at the E-mail address shown on the instruction sheet. The editorial board will select the content of the first E-book from these submissions.

Children, teachers and schools from all over the world will be able to access the E-books free of charge via the internet. It is hoped that this very special E-book will draw attention to the benefits of school libraries throughout the world, and that it will be publicized and advertised through websites and list-servs.

Earlier in this paper, reference was made to the fact that some children or schools have very little (or no) access to the internet, for various reasons. It has been suggested that

Rationale

While children in many different countries are being encouraged to write stories and poems for various national competitions, we, as librarians and educators, have not yet leveraged our true power as global connectors. Technology and social media make it far easier for *some of us* to realize opportunities to break down the walls of our libraries and model what geo-collaboration looks like for learners. Never before have we had truly effective tools for synchronous conferencing and media-rich asynchronous group discussion. Never before have we been able to leverage our emerging online communities of practice.   Never before has participation been so possible.

Never before has our world been so flat. Never before has it been more obvious that the prefix *geo* might amplify themes in any curriculum. Along with the impact of social media, publishing and communication technologies, we see the convergence of a number of powerful themes or movements: crowdsourcing, participatory culture, online communities of practice, global citizenship. What we are learning is that we can consider any issue from both a local and a global lens to amplify what students are already learning.

As far as we can tell, there has been no formal collaborative book project, however, we see examples of informal collaborations in the form of global digital storytelling efforts.

The *IFLA School Library Guidelines,* 2nd edition (2015) encourage school librarians to "think globally," (p.13) remembering that "worldwide, people's lives are being affected by trends such as globalization, economic and social instability and change, evolving digital and mobile technologies, and sustainability or "greening" of the environment" (IFLA, 2015).

Furthermore, the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) Standards for students (standard 2) refer to:

> "*Communication and Collaboration: Students can use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.*

- Interact, collaborate and publish with peers, experts or others employing a variety of digital environments and media.
- Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.
- Develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures.
- Contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems.(ISTE, 2015)

Connecting children across continents with shared projects is a way to keep young generations aware of their international peers and identify commonalities between them. Student-produced content has a positive effect on creators as well. Having ownership over content and receiving recognition from peers encourages children to take pride in their work. In a public school in Norfolk, Virginia, the library created a "Read and Rock" center specifically for student-produced content, and before long "authors and illustrators appeared in ever increasing numbers…These books became the most popular reading material in the school (Madison, 1977). Students taking an active role in their education "facilitates a sense of ownership, motivation, and the foundational constructivist principle of embedding content in what the student already knows and is familiar with" (Hills, 2015). This is a way for children to make sense of their world using their own experiences to facilitate learning (Hills, 2015).

Students interacting by sharing their self-produced content across countries can also "[heighten]…awareness of differences and similarities across cultures" (Song & Donovan, 2013). Using Voice Thread, Song & Donovan facilitated a project in which students in Massachusetts and South Korea wrote poems about the ways in which the places they live influence who they are. The format of the poem and the decision to have children write in a common language (English) initially made the project harder for the South Korean students. However, as the project developed and different media was introduced, all students enjoyed finding commonalities across cultures and expressing themselves in a more creative and collaborative way.

Another example of storytelling by children is the Talisman Chronicles: a collection of stories written and illustrated by children. "*Children of all ages have been finding magical talismans all over the world. In some cases, the talismans take them on a magical adventure and in other cases, the magical charms give them a vision of someone else's magical adventure.* These charming stories have been created by children from all around the world

Furthermore, in 2012, Andrea White, a popular American children's author invited children to help her to edit her latest novel.

Global literacy
Global is the new literacy. Educational leader Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2013) describes three different literacies, which overlap each other:
- Digital literacy – the ability to select and apply and choose an application or digital tool to match a purpose;
- Media Literacy – the ability to be a good receiver of media literacy in multiple forms and also to be a good media maker;

- Global literacy – competencies which help students to be fluent investigators of the world around them and to examine different perspectives, to be able to report on and share ideas, and to take action on those ideas. She writes: "The globally literate individual possess current knowledge about the world, has the ability to connect people to places, and can develop informed decisions regarding contemporary issues" (Jacobs 2013, p.89). These global literacies are only possible if students are already digitally and media literate.

If educators want students to become global citizens, then they need to develop these three literacies. Global literacy, taught in the multicultural/lingual learning commons, stresses the importance of links with other schools, making it possible for students from different schools and countries to discuss contemporary issues and common problems. These discussions should not be superficial. The Curriculum 21 project (2015) attempts to map the classroom of the future, while taking these three literacies into account.

Free and inexpensive connection/conferencing platforms like Google Hangouts and Skype, with its new translation service, allow us to connect and participate beyond our walls. As school librarians, we've recognized this capability in the form of virtual author visits and field trips, as well as activities like Mystery Skypes, International Dot Day, and The Global Read Aloud. Students collaborate on writing projects as modeling in the Flat Classroom Project and Quadblogging, This year, teacher librarians launched the GlobalTL: Librarians Without Borders Google+ Community to facilitate collaborations through curricular connections.

We can regularly and transparently partner with other classrooms and libraries in inquiry learning, synchronously or asynchronously. We can engage in global citizen science projects and move science fairs beyond our brick and mortar gyms and cafeterias. With our knowledge of the curriculum and understanding of emerging technologies, teacher librarians ought to be the ones to hit the *start button* on connections for curricular and meaningful project-oriented purpose, leveraging global communities of practice on a global scale.

The book, or book series we propose will engage students in writing and sharing their own stories and poems, in their mother tongue. Inspired by a series of prompts, members of the school library community throughout the world will collect children's drawings, and writings and possibly other media to be juried and curated by an international team of school librarian editors.

This open-access work in progress will celebrate and advocate for school libraries and school librarianship globally, demonstrate the potential for international professional collaboration, and present children with opportunities to take pride in new opportunities for authorship. We hope our first publication becomes a proof of concept and launches a series of works inspired by prompts relating to global issues and literacy. Furthermore we hope it inspires links and activities between the young writers, who may or may be living in similar circumstances.

WikiScibi: And International Writing Project
Perhaps a current project in proof of concept development would assist librarians in understanding how to actually participate in a global literacy initiative. While librarians are

already experts at assembling the best of what is available through commercial sources and distributing those resources to youth, the central idea of a logical next step is to have young people *create* and *share* their own stories and created materials via the ubiquitous technology: the cell phone soon to become a smart phone or other preferred device.

Currently, the most international participatory writing culture is Wikipedia. Their model embraces the idea of international authorship in a wide variety of languages. Its model of volunteerism is the largest example of a participatory global culture or crowd sourced publishing in the history of the world. What it does not do is to collect literary creations of stories, poetry, narrative non-fiction, etc. More multimedia sharing is underway in YouTube, but neither Wikipedia or YouTube is quite there as an international literacy movement aimed at basic and advanced literacy across the young peoples of the world.

We would propose a fresh idea for a global literacy culture known as WikiScribi. Modeled after Wikipedia, the word scribi is "write" in Esperanto." Aided by a local mentor such as teacher or librarian, children and teens would write their own books, stories, etc. and learn how to present them properly to be read by other children and teens around the world. To protect privacy, each child or teen would create their own pseudonym under which they would contribute to the collection. As soon as an adult mentor felt that the piece was ready for consumption, they would forward the piece to a super moderator for approval. Upon acceptance, the piece would be uploaded to the main WikiScribi site and become available anywhere in the world. Children and teens could then read from the collection in their own language or in a language they would like to learn much as they would connecting through social media.

The practicalities of such an approach have been designed to use free, ubiquitous, and available technologies and at times when children and teens have Internet access so that both on and offline activities could happen and serve a variety of phone devices or other preferred and available technologies. Currently Project Gutenberg is the best example of the distribution of literary materials in a wide variety of formats and platforms and their examples and experience can inform this project.

WikiScribit is currently available at: https://sites.google.com/site/wikiscribi/ and we encourage the reader to probe that site for specifics, languages, and ideas.

We would propose that individual librarians, teachers, schools, public libraries, and national libraries do their own investigation of this project and conduct local tests of feasibility, communicating back to Dr. David Loertsher at reader.david@gmail.com their successes, challenges, and ideas for improvements.

Conclusions

This open-access work in progress will celebrate and advocate for school libraries and school librarianship globally, demonstrate the potential for international professional collaboration, and present children with opportunities to take pride in new opportunities for authorship. We hope our first publication becomes a proof of concept and launches a series of works inspired by prompts relating to global issues and literacy. Furthermore we hope it

inspires links and activities between the young writers, who may or may be living in similar circumstances.

A simple idea which began as an attempt to provide open access online reading materials in their own language for students in developing and emerging countries has exploded into an exciting project which will encourage children all over the world to become globally literate. School librarians and educators are encouraged to investigate the possibilities which are explained above and to contact the authors of this paper for more information.

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Biographical notes

Helen Boelens was awarded a Ph.D. degree by Middlesex University, School of Arts and Education in 2010 after carrying out research into the role of the school library and information center in Education in digital Europe. She now focuses her work on the development of and assistance to hundreds of thousands of school libraries in developing countries. She is the former coordinator of the Research SIG of the IASL (International Association of School Librarianship). She is also one of the founders of the ENSIL Foundation (Stichting ENSIL).

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For ten years, Joyce wrote the techlife@school column for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Joyce has authored books on information skills for ALA Editions and Information Today and developed video series for Schlessinger Media. Joyce writes the NeverendingSearch Blog for *School Library Journal* and also writes *VOYA's* Technology Tag Team column. Her Library Technology Report, *Social Media Curation* for ALA Editions was published in October 2014..
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