



Coping: an international view

While travelling in international waters, one gets an opportunity to view the whole field of school library program development from a slightly different perspective. Many of the issues are similar; only the degree is different.

Lack of trained personnel is the first crisis facing developing nations. Where there is an interest in school library development, there is rarely an institution that will offer courses to train beginners in the field. Few countries have any courses in their Colleges of Education to train teacher-librarians or to model the kind of information literacy programs that are needed. Distance Education programs could fill some of these needs, but financing these courses is very difficult on the limited budgets and incomes. With these two challenges, recruitment to the field is not easy.

The perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian in a modern school library program are very limited. Few leaders in education have considered the components of a modern program. Many have never had an opportunity to discuss the ways that a quality program could address the needs for educational change that they are often seeking. While this lack of understanding is not a crisis, it is one of the issues that seriously limits development.

In many developing countries the model for school libraries has evolved from a public library

model, with emphasis on access to materials. This is an important first step. However, if that is the scope of understanding and vision, then the role of the teacher-librarian as a collaborative partner is almost non-existent. This is a very important issue when it comes to searching out funding for development, since many of the proposals are initiated by National Libraries rather than Ministries of Education. The curriculum orientation component is frequently missing.

We need to keep in mind that not all developing countries have quality access to the Internet. Some regions still need access to electricity. For this reason, print publications are still of critical importance.

Enough of the issues. Are they different in Ontario? What can be done about them? Who is helping to solve these crises? How can we work together to strengthen the network?

The International Association of School Librarianship is one of the agencies that is working on these issues. As a volunteer association, IASL has much to offer both developed and developing nations. Following are some of its contributions.

The IASL Web site [<http://www.iasl-slo.org>] is one of the best on the Internet to connect people to resources, information, and contacts around the world. Dr. Anne Clyde, from the University of Iceland is the webmaster. She works