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## Editorial

### Mapping the Lived Experience

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In the call for papers for this issue of *School Libraries Worldwide*, we asked contributors to send us accounts of a typical day in their working lives. Our goal was to present a map of the world of school librarianship, not in data but in narratives.

*SLW* is a research journal, and most of our articles report on observations and facts that have been gathered to answer specific questions. The writers have collected their data, organized them, tested them, analyzed them, used them as the basis for a story that is intended to explain particular phenomena or processes. Even case studies and action research, which are perhaps the two methodologies that bring researchers closest to the practice they are studying, are necessarily reported as stories made up by the researchers.

These research stories are theories—interpretations intended to make sense of what we see and to predict and generalize about similar occurrences. Theories allow us to understand, to evaluate, and to set expectations. They may be consciously formulated and articulated, or implicit unexamined. But they are always *about* reality, the observed world, rather than reality itself. The purpose of this issue of *SLW* is to remind us all of the widely different realities of school librarianship around the world.

Eight narratives were sent to us at the journal, and six shorter ones posted to the "School Libraries Online" Web site. We have included them all, with very little editing. The stories came from Jerusalem, Inuvik, Sydney, Johannesburg, Ruacana, Gaborone, Reykjavik, Krasnoyarsk, Charlottetown, Atlanta, Saskatoon, and Edmonton. Possibly only three or four of these names will be well known to all of our readers. Few of us have been in more than one or two of these places. That's what maps are for—to show us unfamiliar territory.

These "day in the life" accounts have the immediacy of informal snapshots. Laid out side-by-side, they show a number of strong resemblances, and a few equally strong contrasts. The most striking contrast is that between the resources available in private and state schools. Anneli Silvennoinen describes the Resource Centre in St. Mary's, an independent school in Johannesburg, South Africa. With 450 students, St. Mary's has had a full-time qualified librarian since the 1960s. The Resource Centre includes an

auditorium and a computer classroom, and is rich in resources in every medium. The librarian is free to order what she needs—videos, CD-ROMs, Afrikaans teen fiction.

The situation is very different in Ruacana, Namibia, where Kati McClurg is a Peace Corps volunteer working at the Teachers' Resource Center. Ruacana is a small town at the very end of the paved road, and Kati visits the rural primary schools on foot or bicycle for story hours. They have no libraries, at best a small box of books kept in the office. The children are making their own picture books, which will be the nucleus of a library collection. Donations of children's books from all over the world are beginning to make a difference, but there are not yet enough books to make a circulating collection. A child can't take a book home to read.

These two examples are at the extremes. The fact that St. Mary's is located in a city of international importance obviously makes a difference. So does the fact that Anneli Silvennoien is in a senior school, whereas Kati McClurg is describing the situation in primary schools, which are always more likely to be short of library staff and resources. But it isn't just a question of urban or rural, or of school level. Lyuba Shkapar writes from Krasnoyarsk, an industrial and cultural center with a population of close to a million. Her state school has 1,400 students, no computers, and its only vehicle to transport books between buildings is a "centipede" of children. In Sydney, Australia, John Free worries about the growing gap between privately funded and state schools created by the "let them eat cake" attitude of the government bodies responsible for cutting school funding. And Margaret Baffour-Awuah reports from the National Library of Botswana that while the private schools in her country have computers in their libraries, the government schools do not. Both here and in Ruacana, the problem is not a matter of losing money, but of never having had it.

The resemblances I see in these stories make much more cheerful reading. Whether north of the Arctic Circle or in the Antipodes, shivering with cold or sweating in extreme heat, many kilometers from anywhere else or in a cosmopolitan city, these writers have much in common. Their days don't follow orderly schedules. Every day they respond to the needs of teachers and students as they arise. The descriptors for these school librarians that come to mind are *innovative* and *responsive*. In Inuvik, Jennifer Branch helps students get information not only for school work but for their own interests—popular music groups, skidoos, colleges and universities for their future. John Free calls his time in the library "organized chaos," and he loves it.

There is also agreement that the librarian must be an active part of the school community. Dania Ansenberg at Givaat Gonen School in Jerusalem puts out a monthly bulletin for the teaching staff. A recent issue focused on marriage proposals in literature, "from Shakespeare to Garcia-Marquez, from *Little Women* to *Tarzan*." Anneli Silvennoien runs St. Mary's photography club, and is taking 11 girls on a trip to Lapland, her home. Jennifer

Branch in Inuvik spends social time with teachers both inside and outside the school. In Alford, Scotland, Kay Wilson's library is a social center in rainy weather. Lyuba Shkapar cites Tagore: "What makes a library big is not the size of its stock but its friendliness."

For those that have computers, the coming of technology has enhanced the status of the school librarian. As John Free puts it, "Technology has given me more clout." In the libraries that have electronic resources, these new media are integrated with the print collection. Nowhere have books taken a back seat. Dania Ansenberg teaches students the use of information databases and the Internet, and pastes new poems on the library tables each month to encourage reading. Kay Wilson bookmarks useful Web sites for her teachers, and keeps "topic box" files of clippings from newspapers and magazines for student projects. Jennifer Branch uses the Internet to fill gaps in the book collection, which is unsatisfactorily small. In South Africa, where much of the library material has to be ordered from overseas, Anneli Silvennoien depends on the Internet for material that simply isn't available locally. But she also has an actively circulating collection of Afrikaans novels for teenagers.

The demographics of several of these schools are challengingly varied. In Sydney, John Free "now speak[s] fluent ESL" because he has students from every continent in the world. In Inuvik, the students are not only Inuvialuit and Gwich'in, the local First Nations communities, but also from Lebanon, Korea, Syria, California, and other faraway places. St. Mary's in Johannesburg has been a multiracial school since its founding more than 100 years ago. The children in Ruacana, who speak dHemba at home, are taught in Oshindonga and English. In a big, well-funded school in Atlanta, Georgia, Ken Vesey hopes "to push the American notion of multiculturalism beyond our continental borders."

Although their days are uniformly demanding, all of these writers are enthusiastic about their work, and find it rewarding. Dania Ansenberg sums up her day as "hours packed with activity, learning, fun, and weariness." Her colleagues worldwide would agree.

This issue of *SLW* is further enriched by four articles" of special interest." Nancy Everhart reviews and assesses research that recasts the sort of lived experience described by the "day in the life" authors as data. The studies she discusses are American and British investigations of how school library media specialists spend their day at work: what tasks they do and how much time they devote to them. Yuriko Nakamura reports on her survey of teachers' perceptions of school libraries in Tokyo, Japan, and Honolulu District, Hawaii. Do the value teachers put on school libraries and the expectations they have of them affect school library development? Her results are inconclusive, but the study does map an aspect of the context in which school libraries operate in these two parts of the world. The final two articles report on the past and present condition of school libraries in countries not repre-

sented among the "day in the life" narratives. John Abdul Kargbo looks at the history and development of school libraries in Sierra Leone from the 1960s to the present. His conclusion is that "the general school library situation in Sierra Leone is far from satisfactory." Byong-Ju Kim, writing about the state of school libraries in the Republic of Korea, describes a sadly similar situation.