



#### Editorial



Thank you for downloading the latest issue of CILIP International Library and Information Group's Focus journal.

During what have continued to be difficult times for many, it's perhaps appropriate that this issue highlights libraries and organisations which aim to provide hope for the future. The theme is all about encouraging reading and literacy among children and young people. We've examples of fantastic initiatives that aim to open young minds up to whole new enchanting worlds of books and storytelling. Some of the projects are also about breaking down borders. Antonija Lujanac from Croatia writes about an inspiring and magical project which lets schoolchildren

share fairy stories with other young pupils in different countries, for instance. We've an interview with James Chong who tells us about how his organisation, Rolling Books, promotes reading amongst ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. In another interview, CILIP ILIG's own Premila Gamage enthuses about the vital work she has done to bring children's books to Sri Lanka's deprived communities. To round things off, Clare Tanswell reviews Literacy and Reading Programmes for Children and Young People - a collection which includes many further case studies from around the globe.



Our thoughts are with colleagues and all those who are affected by the war in Ukraine at this challenging time. CILIP ILIG Vice Chair - Aiden Baker - put together a piece for the East Anglia Bylines about this with recommendations on how to help colleagues in the library and information profession caught up in the conflict: <a href="https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/libraries-and-the-war-in-ukraine/">https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/libraries-and-the-war-in-ukraine/</a>. You'll find further information on how you can help librarians, libraries and cultural institutions in Ukraine in the CILIP ILIG Business section of this issue. Each year we use a different colour scheme for Focus and this time around we've used the colours of the Ukrainian flag throughout the issue as a small gesture of respect and solidarity.

We continue to welcome your own contributions to this journal. Please get in touch at the following address if you would like to submit your story: <a href="mailto:iligfocus@cilip.org.uk">iligfocus@cilip.org.uk</a>

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading this issue and that, wherever you are, you are keeping safe and well.

Philip Segall, Editor

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## Interview with James Chong, CEO and Founder of Rolling Books

## Reading Promotion for the Underprivileged and Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong

Dr Patrick Lo

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#### Introduction

Rolling Books, established in 2018, is a social enterprise focused on promoting reading experiences. In this interview, its founder and Chief Executive Officer Mr. James Chong shares his business experience and operating philosophy. He also details how this start-up social enterprise cooperates with various organizations, especially in supporting children from disadvantaged ethnic minority communities. The initiative has launched several innovative reading projects and distributed books to promote social integration and reading equality. While the initial state of his business was not all smooth. Mr Chong's passion for reading and knowledge from



past experiences helped him make good use of information technology, solving the problem of limited resources. Ultimately he looks forward to developing more social innovation projects for reading promotion, with a new model to enhance reading experiences.

## Patrick Lo (PL): Could you briefly introduce yourself? What did you study at university? Are your family members also creatives?

**James Chong (JC):** As a child, I seldom got in touch with books because my family did not advocate reading, and my home life lacked a cultural atmosphere. I studied in a Catholic school - St. Louis School, sponsored by the Society of St. Francis de Sales. During my secondary school life, I had little connection with books, and I rarely read books or

went to the library. Later, I went to Australia to study, where I had opportunities to get in touch with cinema. My cultural enlightenment was to watch art movies. But there weren't many opportunities in Hong Kong then, and the only arthouse cinema was Cine-Art House in Wan Chai. When I went to Australia to study, I had many opportunities to appreciate arthouse cinema. There are bookshops, mostly independent bookstores, around those art-house cinemas, so I became interested in books and paid more attention.

# PL: What are your reasons for liking books - is it because they contain lots of knowledge? I've realized many people like physical paper books, finding a sense of security and comfort in them.

**JC:** I didn't grow up reading the work of Jin Yong (a grand-master author of Chinese martial arts fiction). I never read his work in school. I was only exposed to reading culture in Sydney in connection with arthouse cinema. If you ask me if I'm familiar with Chinese or Western literature, many others would be much more knowledgeable, especially bookstore owners. Instead, I think Rolling Books plays a more prominent role in reading promotion; hoping to encourage individuals like me who were not exposed to books and didn't particularly enjoy reading before to cultivate a positive feeling with reading. When I finally could devote my time to reading, I found comfort and knowledge in it, and it helps build resilience too. I hope what I'm doing is beneficial through my promotion work, encouraging children or even adults to get interested in reading culture. I want to use different activities targeted at other age groups to change their perspectives on reading.

#### PL: What did you do before you established the company?

**JC:** Before I was in Rolling Books, I worked at Oxfam. As I've just mentioned, I learned about art and culture in Sydney, where I studied. Naturally, I came back to work in Hong Kong. My first full-time job was at International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) - a nice job for a Computer Science graduate. At that time, I encountered 'Y2K' or 'millennium bug'. A few years later, somehow I switched to different jobs. In the end, I opened a bookstore. I think being exposed to arts and culture very much influenced my desire to start a bookstore. It was in business for several years until I also established a restaurant with the same name, which created a brand. Soon, I realized there was no way to run both businesses together, as the bookstore couldn't make money, though the restaurant continued to operate. Such irony!

The bookstore was called "Mackie Study," and the restaurant "Mackie Kitchen". For a while, the bookstore closed but the kitchen continued to serve customers for over a year, but I felt it wasn't my ambition to work in the catering industry. Eventually, I sold the restaurant business and worked for other organizations. So, around 2015/2016, I started to work at Oxfam, which was fortunate, as I didn't have a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) background. At that time, Oxfam wanted to hold an exhibition using visual arts to tell

stories about poverty alleviation. I think Oxfam may have realized I worked in the cultural field before, so they accepted me. I did public education and exhibition work, and this slowly turned into my idea of establishing Rolling Books. Because of my job at Oxfam, I was able to come into contact with many underprivileged communities. Rolling Books put together my experience in operating a bookstore, promoting reading culture and carrying out public education activities.

## PL: Could you please introduce Rolling Books - what drove you to set it up?

**JC:** There were a few stages. I had experience in running a bookstore, though unsuccessful. However, I always believe in reading, so the primary aim of Rolling Books is reading promotion. Even in the business registration, I wrote 'reading promotion', but people asked me, "What does reading promotion do? You're not opening a bookstore, so you don't sell books. Are you just holding events? Is that a form of reading promotion? How does it work?" Thus, many questions arise. As I believe in reading, I believe I can do many different jobs. For example, I could organize stage performances in a school environment and help school librarians implement reading programs.



A Rolling Books event in collaboration with Paint in Sense Art Studio

Rolling Books, as a social enterprise, can apply for funding which helps our research and development. For example, I think one of my best-developed projects is to create a space for Hong Kong's ethnic minority groups. My first idea in reading promotion was mainly based within Chinese communities. After I contacted these Chinese communities, I wondered if they needed our services as much as ethnic minority groups did. Yes, we all want to help students to strengthen their language skills. But when we started interacting with those in ethnic minority groups, we realized their demand for reading promotion is much higher. We consider reading as composed of three levels; the first level is making books more accessible. We could fulfill the first stage through our second-hand collection and transfer/donation program by developing Rolling Books.

PL: Why is this program important in Hong Kong? Hong Kong is unlike Africa or India, why are books still considered luxury items in Hong Kong? If you want to read a book, you can go to the public library or somewhere else.

**JC:** Your question is very interesting. Yes, we can borrow books from public libraries, but from my observations, apart from having the need to physically go and borrow books, some people like to keep books at home at all times. It creates a positive atmosphere to encourage children to read - perhaps even suddenly show a large interest in books one day. There are a lot of studies that back this up.

PL: I have observed something strange that in many European interviews - the so-called "middle-class," such as politicians, artists, doctors, and lawyers... even in the case of an interview of Chris Patten - we find their bookshelves are stacked with 'real' books. However, you would only find books about this year's fortune in a reading room in Hong Kong.

**JC:** Yes, I believe everyone can borrow books from the library but in a family, having books at home is very important for children.

Indeed, there are debates about e-books, but we definitely see the value of printed publications. Books aren't too expensive, but many grassroot families won't spend on books. There are second-hand book donations in Hong Kong. First, we focus on collecting (second-hand) children's literature. Second, we have a clear guideline on what to collect. This allows us to receive high quality donations consistently. We have much new and old children's literature but reject donations of supplementary exercise books.

We tend to give our books directly to beneficiaries. Many NGOs would just invite them to pick up books at community centers or schools. However, we visit communities and deliver books directly to needy families. We find our beneficiaries treasure our deliveries,



Children searching through book donations collected by Rolling Books

especially ethnic minorities, as they lack access to information, not knowing there are annual book sales and free book giveaway activities.

## PL: Do you give out English or Chinese books? Who are the ethnic minorities you work with the most?

**JC:** They are mostly Pakistani and Nepalese. We give out books in both languages, though they like English books more. We have to avoid giving simplified Chinese books to them, as it is pretty confusing for them to read simplified Chinese while learning traditional Chinese at school. While it won't normally be a problem for Chinese communities, we have to filter our books before delivering them.

#### PL: Did they flee to Hong Kong?

**JC:** Most of them followed the footsteps of their family members, emigrating to Hong Kong and becoming permanent residents. Yet only permanent residents have the right to borrow books from public libraries while asylum-seeking families don't. How ridiculous

the policy is! We collect a lot of books, Chinese and English. Isn't it more meaningful when we give out books to asylum-seeking families? We approach different communities delivering books to people in need from various backgrounds and the impact varies. For school activities, we mainly deal with Chinese communities, whereas in ethnic minorities communities, we are facing ethnic minorities students who are permanent residents of Hong Kong. Our main task is to improve their Chinese level. As for asylum-seeking families, receiving books is a big bonus to them because they cannot borrow books from public libraries.

Rolling Books handles a lot of reading accessibility issues. Apart from giving out printed books, we work on enhancing students' Chinese proficiency. Many ethnic minority families don't have enough exposure to the Chinese language, while the school curriculum is designed for students whose first language is Chinese. While there are many organizations supporting ethnic minority students to learn Chinese, the learning progress for those students falls far behind. We use part of our funding to recruit volunteers who tell stories to these students in Chinese. We hope this can compensate for the limitations of [the] school curriculum and create opportunities for ethnic minority students to communicate in Chinese.

## PL: Can you tell us more about how Rolling Books helps minorities living in Hong Kong?



Books for Asylum Seekers' children

**JC:** One of our flagship programs is called Rolling Dialogue, which is mainly concentrated within ethnic minority families in Hong Kong. First, we will send books to them. Second, our volunteers communicate and discuss storytelling strategies with families over Zoom. It also helps children of minority families with their homework in Chinese so that they can communicate in Chinese and Cantonese and assimilate into the school environment. One of our goals is to communicate with them through storytelling activities so that these children can have confidence in speaking Chinese... [Then] it will be easier to communicate with Chinese-speaking children at school and become friends.

#### PL: How do you think Rolling Books has helped build the community?

**JC:** Many of these children come from different areas of Hong Kong, especially in Yuen Long. The first time we started working with ethnic minorities was in Hoi Lai Estate, Sham Shui Po, where a Community Center allowed us to use their place. I hoped social inclusion happened there, especially [for] children. We observed that Chinese and ethnic minority children played separately in the community center, even though the ethnic minority children can speak Cantonese well. We hoped through activities they could participate together and have more opportunities for communication. This was a good start, but it took a while to develop.

## PL: The internet is so developed now. YouTube has all-inclusive content, including audio books and audio dictionaries. Why do we need paper books?

**JC:** I think it's very interesting that two or three years ago, everyone was discussing online resources and e-books (/Kindles). Now, we see the trend of people returning to using physical books.

## PL: In addition to the advantages of reading physical books, is reading a meaningful interaction between people?

**JC:** Yes, this can be addressed at several levels. We hold many book clubs. Before I founded Rolling Books, I personally coordinated a running book club with no funding... Running has [allowed me to] regain my health, so I have organized several running reading clubs, such as leading people to run in Yau Ma Tei, and then attending reading clubs after running. These examples are just like what you just said; how do we use activities, through reading, to create relationships between people?

Speaking of physical books, I feel that during this period of time, I've learned to take things slowly when reading. There are many well-being courses and activities, such as yoga. When it comes to reading promotion, first, we feel that "knowledge changes destiny" - which everyone believes. We learn a lot of knowledge from reading outside of school. At the same time, we want to bring out a very important process that is to cultivate our own



Rolling Books also offers a project combining cooking and reading: http://www.rollingbooks.hk/cook-book-in-nam-chung/

solitude. Compared to yoga and meditation, this is the easiest activity and the cheapest method. Especially nowadays there are too many electronic screens, and these stimuli come from everywhere! When children grow up, we can use a book to let them learn to get along with themselves. We don't know what the world will be like in future, but it is [a good skill] to learn when growing up. So, when we receive books, especially physical books, off-grid, children will definitely learn to get along with themselves through a book; even if there is no other stimulation, they can be alone for thirty minutes. In the digital age, I think alone time is getting more important.

PL: I find that today's video games seem to take care of everything passively. Games are always stimulating your senses. You are a passive object in disguise and don't need to do anything. Your head will be paralyzed, right?

**JC:** How movie scenes can play out in your head is also a very important aspect of reading. Nowadays, public libraries mention these concepts. I feel that after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, we can realize the value of reading... I have read related articles which claim reading can actually help children build resilience during their growth. One

thing I like to go back to is the idea of imagination. People have suggested that science fiction is a medium that creates resilience - there are various challenges in science fiction, such as various [complex] technologies.

## PL: How do you deliver your products and services to school? Do you use performing arts?

**JC:** During the beginning stage, we often used books to conduct performing arts dramas and promoted the importance of reading in primary schools. This is an essential part of Rolling Books. Regarding book sales, many schools already have a supplier. To assist the school librarian, we often promote books in the form of performances and other venues, like with a book trolley or in the covered playground. With the school restrictions, we also conducted mini-workshops or interactions with students in groups of thirty. Adopting various children's picture books and performing them on stage, theater-style, can [give] teachers and students a break and generate a love of reading among children.

#### PL: Are your current users mostly government-aided schools?

**JC:** There are several areas involving schools - the first one being reading programs in primary school. To my understanding, if the school can obtain funding from the government, the school may invite Rolling Books to put on performances. The funding is given annually and the amount is around 40,000 Hong Kong Dollars [around £3,850 as of March 2022]. We also wanted to reach out to more grassroots primary schools because they are in need of a suitable reading program.

Further, we transformed a van into a wooden book cart at the West Kowloon Cultural District and [visited] promenades/waterfront parks. With this cart, we hope to reach out to more parents & children and create a parent-child bazaar.

#### PL: Are books being sold in the bazaars?

**JC:** Some bazaars sell books while others are a form of display, and we joined them mostly by invitation. We often negotiate our terms with the market operator for being a service provider to showcase books. To build a comfortable area for reading and the event itself, we handpick suitable books and provide a relaxed environment for parents and children to read. In this way, we don't need to worry about hawking violations, as the organizer handles the licensing matters.

## PL: But these bazaars have been established for many years in Japan and many European countries.

**JC:** Yes, like "Book Crossing" but these bazaars often have stage activities. Since we also



Some of Rolling Books' storytelling sessions combine both in-person learning and online sessions

provided performances at school, we have many storytellers as partners. Bazaars would invite us to run a storytelling section when they need one and this is a way we earn revenue.

Just now we have talked about schools and bazaars, let's move on to a key question related to social enterprises about making money. Many NGOs provide jobs because they are aware that we are working on reading programs. With their funding, these NGOs want us to teach via Zoom about how parents [can] become storytellers themselves. In contrast to a storytelling section being a one-off activity, parents with the skills of telling stories can read to their children and enhance parent-child relationships.

#### PL: What is the staffing structure like at Rolling Books?

**JC:** In the beginning, I was by myself, and most performers were business partners. In the beginning, we [had] quite a number of staff working on various projects. They only focused on certain areas; for example, some only focused on ethnic minorities... others involved projects that dealt with schools or bazaars. So, the funding is only able to support one to two projects and limited staff.

As for the administrative work, I am the one who handles it all. Occasionally, a part-time staff member handles social media or funding applications. Now there [have to be] changes to the manpower allocation. Some staff focus on the backstage operation while the CEO should look forward and be more involved in planning.

In terms of operation philosophy, we also employ lots of online tools and apps to help with everyday operations. Due to my personal background in Computer Science, I am very enthusiastic about being a smart user. Our team often uses Team Inbox to communicate, while some staff would monitor various conversations and act as a customer service outlet. With limited staff and manpower, we need these tools to help us out.

## PL: Do you think what you are doing now conflicts with the mobile libraries of the Hong Kong government?

**JC:** In the beginning, I drove a van to school. I felt that the school would not find us, so I switched to doing programs - for example, staging performances in a school hall, teaching parents to tell stories. We also collaborate with public libraries to hold storytelling sessions. Later, I changed to a wooden book cart to be more flexible. I could go to more markets and different schools. At this moment, I felt the idea of Rolling Books come to life, because there is a book cart with wheels that can go to different markets.

In addition, to complement the public library I think we need to focus more on software. Studying activities to make programs is more important than the physical cart to carry the books.

## PL: When someone talks about Rolling Books, what is the first image that pops up?

**JC:** I think people might imagine that we are pushing a wooden book cart. Obviously my first idea was to have a van, but this didn't work out. The first reason was because the van was rented, I had to re-decorate the vans every time. When people think of Rolling Books, they will say, "Oh! You have a wooden book cart to distribute books." However, I do hope people understand it's not just about the cart... we run lots of storytelling sessions beside it, or performances that may encourage people to read more.

#### PL: What do you think is the biggest challenge?

**JC:** The operation of the business is difficult. I'm grateful that many NGO jobs can support our operations. However, is it possible for us to target specific customers directly? Will I do more about Business-to-Consumer (B2C) [business modelling]? For example, when teaching storytelling, I may let NGOs or parents have a go. I am exploring whether I can have such a B2C experience. When parents know that I have such a program, will

they use our services? This is what I am planning now. I hope to expand and take care of ourselves as part of a business enterprise.

## PL: Final question, what do you see in the future of Rolling Books in the next three to five years?

**JC:** This question is difficult to answer. I will continue to look for funding but I also think about B2C business development at the same time. I'm thinking whether I can help more with training storytellers or new business model ideas, e.g. this co-working space you came to today. In the past two to three years, I've done a lot of social innovation projects and



Rolling Books Corner in One Seventh Bookshop @ Tai Nan Street photo by 小文人 via Wikimedia [CC BY-SA 4.0]

participated in competitions. One of my ideas revolves around whether I can help others participate in these entrepreneurial competitions and get funding.

In addition, I have a project called "One Seventh Bookshop," a six-month pop-up bookstore, and I am recruiting people interested in opening a bookstore. There are many incubation programs mentioned in social innovation. My specialty is bookstore operation, so I want to use "One Seventh Bookshop" as an incubation program for bookstore managers. This bookstore will operate at the Tung Nam Lou Art Hotel by gathering seven bookstore managers and different book selections.

As for the next few years, I imagine many similar programs appearing. We can also provide opportunities for interested people to open bookstores. I often talk about creating shared value now, and I hope I can do it. For example, the bookstore operators are interested, and the hotel has space. Can I aid cooperation even without government funding? I hope to think about more programs like this in the next few years.

My overall thoughts [are that] Rolling Books has many ideas and wants to put them into action, but realistically, how many can be done? It would be much better if I had employees to handle the administrative work. Many people think that "One Seventh Bookshop" is very interesting because there are more and more bookstores now. So, I can recruit seven store managers to collaborate on this project, which feels innovative and new.

**Editor's note:** You will find more information about Rolling Books via their website - <a href="http://www.rollingbooks.hk/home/">http://www.rollingbooks.hk/home/</a>

Photos used in this article have been taken from the Rolling Books website, unless stated, with kind permission from James Chong.



# Interview with Premile Gamage Let's defend libraries! A librarian in Sri Lanka

#### Mario Coffa

**Editor's note:** a version of this interview was previously published in the online Italian cultural magazine Insula europea here: <a href="https://www.insulaeuropea.eu/2021/09/25/lets-defend-libraries-a-librarian-in-sri-lanka-mario-coffa-interviews-premila-gamage/">https://www.insulaeuropea.eu/2021/09/25/lets-defend-libraries-a-librarian-in-sri-lanka-mario-coffa-interviews-premila-gamage/</a>. The piece has been reproduced in this issue of Focus with the kind permission of both Premila Gamage and Mario Coffa-librarian and creator of the Library World Tour. Two additional questions appear at the end of the interview which were not included in the original interview and were asked by myself.

### Mario Coffa [MC]: Premila, to start can you tell us briefly about your work and what it means to be a librarian in Sri Lanka?

**Premila Gamage [PG]:** Sri Lanka has a long tradition of libraries which goes back to the 5th century AD. However, the library movement in modern times began in the country after the British occupation from 1815. At present the country has a well-established public library system. In addition there are school libraries, research and academic libraries including government libraries and Non-Governmental Organisations' libraries.

Let me first begin with the second part of your question Mario: 'What it means to be a librarian (for the general public) in Sri Lanka'. I would like to give an example of an experience that I have to face often. It will give you an idea of what it means for the majority or the popular image of librarianship. At social gatherings, when I was introduced to people as a librarian — it's fine, no issues. But with time, when they get to know me a little bit more, then we always get into this conversation:

"Actually what do you do?"

"I'm a librarian"

"Yes, I remember but it seems you do other things - not library/library sort of things"

Even my very close friends who are teachers, bankers, media persons are bit confused. What their reference to me is "she says she is a librarian but she seems to be doing something else". I am sure you can get an idea – how others see a 'Librarian' – the common image of the librarian. If you are an Academic or Research Librarian then those communities and outsiders also to a certain extent have a slightly different image about librarians and they value the work of librarians. If you are a Public or a School Librarian

Premila Gamage is a librarian and currently holds the position of Independent Consultant - Library & Knowledge Management and Librarian at Verite Research. Colombo Sri Lanka. She is also the national coordinator of the National Library of Sri Lanka's Commonwealth of Learning (Skills for Work) Skills Online Sri Lanka Program (SOSLP). She holds a PhD in Information Management from Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Beckett) in the United Kingdom (UK). Premila is a seasoned professional who has contributed to a number



of local and international organisations including the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Access to Learning Award, and the National Centre for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (NCAS) Sri Lanka. She was elected to the IFLA Governing Board and elected Chair of the Division for Regional Activities (Asia and Oceania, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean). She has also been appointed to the IFLA Advisory Committee of Advancement of Libraries Program (ALP). As an accredited IFLA trainer, she has conducted numerous librarian training workshops in Lebanon, India, Nepal and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries on various topics, including leadership. She has also acted as a mentor for the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators Program (INELI) for South Asia. She was responsible for the national project of the IFLA Public Library Politics Project global research programme, which was initiated with the aim of evaluating the attitudes of policy makers regarding the role, value and impact of public library services. She has conducted a series of island-wide training seminars on library advocacy for the Sri Lanka Library Association with financial support from the ALP and the American Library Association. Premila has been internationally recognised and is the first Sri Lankan to be awarded an Honorary Fellowship of CILIP for her efforts to extend library and information services to young people in remote regions of Sri Lanka and for her deep commitment to promoting education.

then again you are recognised differently - you do not get the same recognition as Academic or Research librarians get. Their role is still being identified from a traditional perspective.

Despite the fact that the Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA) and library schools in Sri Lanka conduct study programmes in Library & Information Science to produce quality professionals, most public and departmental libraries are still run by non-professionals. One of the main reasons behind this is political interference - especially for filling junior level cadre positions - and bureaucracy. The SLLA, together with other library related institutes and authorities, are working on these and actually to a certain extent have addressed issues with bureaucrats. Policy makers, Government officials/administrators, and the general public in the country still do not appreciate the role of libraries and librarians in our society.

I think librarians themselves are partly responsible for this. Most librarians, including public and school librarians do super work in addition to the routine classical work of librarianship; for example they carry out excellent work which contributes to a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) but they are poor marketers. Most of the time their wonderful work has gone unnoticed or not been seen by the majority,



Pupils colouring in at the Macaldeniya Tamil School Library in Sri Lanka. This project has been supported over the years by what was the CILIP Career Development Group (CDG) and CILIP ILIG



Pupils at Macaldeniya Tamil School holding butterflies and caterpillars they had made

especially administrators and policymakers. Here comes the importance of advocacy and training - and the role that professional organisations like library associations need to play.

MC: You are coordinator of the Commonwealth of Learning (Skills for Work) and therefore you also deal with training. In your opinion, how is the training of librarians changing in recent years and especially [since the outbreak of] the COVID 19 pandemic?

**PG:** Yes, I am the Country Coordinator for the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada 'Skills for Work' programme. It is not a programme aimed at training librarians. It is a programme which was initiated in June 2020 by the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL) in partnership with Commonwealth of Learning (COL) – Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative (CWRI) initiative. The aim of NLSL's programme was helping job-

seekers in Sri Lanka to gain upskill and reskill to enter into the job market as well as to reinforce job-related skills to regain employment. COL-CWRI offered learners unlimited and free access to more than 5,000 courses designed to skill and reskill them.

The NLSL implemented the programme under the topical theme 'Skills Online Sri Lanka Programme (SOSLP) — Employed for the Unemployed'. This initiative was opened to all citizens of Sri Lanka even though very few librarians registered with the programme and completed courses. Commonwealth of Learning extended the programme until 2024 and in its new phase more and more librarians are enrolling. Regarding the library training — due to the pandemic, the mode of delivering programmes of the library schools changed to online. The content of these programmes have changed a lot, covering new knowledge and skills required to be a present and future librarian.

More and more short-term trainings are available for librarians covering topics such as research methods, communication, information technology etc. In addition to their usual degree and diploma programmes, all universities provide short-term training programmes which are open to all library professionals in the country.

The Sri Lanka Library Association provides training for librarians too. The National Library and the Department of Local Government conduct countrywide programmes to train public librarians. I believe that we need to focus more on library advocacy training. It is good to see that one leading library school has included advocacy in their programmes. Therefore, I think we are moving towards that direction as well.

## MC: Within IFLA you have a role that covers many territories. In your view, how is the Association evolving from an international perspective?

**PG:** My involvement began with IFLA in 1998 as a developing country travel grantee. I am very thankful to the Dutch Government for giving me the opportunity which has helped enormously to change and expand my professional life.

I believe in IFLA – a truly international organisation – IFLA's governing structure is such, even at a time when IFLA started to accommodate librarians from all over the world – it identified, assisted, addressed and worked for specific needs and issues of the library field in the regions and countries especially that are bit behind. The IFLA-ALP programme, the Building Strong Library Associations (BSLA) programme and the advisory committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) I think were particularly helpful. And from there IFLA moved to high-level international organisations such as the UN, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) – which stands and acts as a voice for entire LIS community and also closely



Pupils reading at the Macaldeniya Tamil School Library in Sri Lanka

work with them. The new governing structure which was established last August - Global Vision - was implemented and the Action Plan will take this to another level. Right now we are experiencing many changes in IFLA's activities and workflows.

The new governing structure allows regions to get involved in different levels of committees within regions, identify issues or concerns specific to regions and then work with different sections, Advisory Committees can thereby contribute to realizing IFLA's four strategic directions i.e. 1. Strengthen the Global Voice of Libraries 2. Inspire and Enhance Professional Practice 3. Connect and Empower the Field 4. Optimise our Organisation.

# MC: In partnership with the IFLA ALP, the American Library Association (ALA) and the Sri Lankan Library Association, you have conducted a series of library advocacy workshops; an act of courage that struck me very much. Can you tell us more?

**PG:** This is a programme started in 2009, with SLLA then President Prof Piyadasa Ranasinghe. As stated earlier, policy makers, Government officials/administrators, and the general public in the country do not appreciate the role of libraries and librarians in our society. Most of the time there was no library representation in the government's flagship developmental and other programmes — even the programmes that have a direct impact on libraries are almost entirely represented by other professionals — for an example, take development of laws and policies for copyright and intellectual property.

To exert any influence on library development, library association leaders, activists and educators & professionals must understand the role of library associations as pressure groups for political action and policy decisions. Leaders, educators and activists need to effectively influence government decisions. For that, these leaders, educators and activists must have the requisite skills. At that time library advocacy was not included even in library programmes conducted by universities and the SLLA. Therefore, there



Premila and her colleague Fathima at a storytelling session at Macaldeniya Tamil School Library in Sri Lanka

was an urgent need for training on 'Library Advocacy'. With the funding of IFLA ALP, a series of workshops were conducted island-wide. The workshops were organized with the intention of training LIS leaders, especially public librarians, educators and activists to gain the requisite skills in policy development and implementation; including developing government relations platforms, monitoring government proposals, effective advocacy campaigns and public relations. The primary training workshop was held in Colombo in 2009. The target group of the primary workshop was Library Association Leaders – including presidents of Indian and Nepal library associations, and Educators, Policy makers (Provincial Council Members etc.), Administrators (Secretaries) and Chief Librarians of the respective councils. The two eminent persons in the field, Mr. Michael Dowling, Director, International and Chapter Relations Offices, American Library Association and Ms. Moira Fraser, New Zealand Parliament Librarian, conducted the workshop.

A series of cascade workshops – around twelve, were conducted thereafter by the SLLA President, with me covering all the districts of Sri Lanka. With financial support from ALA, its 'Advocate's Handbook' was translated into native languages. As per the end-line survey, the workshops produced very positive outcomes. In addition to raising awareness among LIS professionals on advocacy, librarians regularly applied, at least on a small scale, to their respective libraries. The University of Kelaniya, a leading LIS department introduced advocacy into their LIS programmes.



Sponsors based in Wales donated a bike to the pupil at Macaldeniya Tamil School who passed the scholarship exam

MC: As a librarian and as a "super hero" you have made immense efforts to extend library and information services to young people in remote regions of Sri Lanka and promote education to the point of even receiving an award. I believe you are a perfect role model for many colleagues. What could you suggest to encourage me and others to be active and persistent in order to promote our wonderful work?

**PG:** I don't think I'm a 'super hero'; think outside of 'classical' library walls – walk out – be innovative and creative – understand your community – work with your community – establish partnerships with all stakeholders.

# Phil Segall [PS]: What have been the biggest challenges you have had to overcome in your efforts to bring library and information services to young people?

**PG:** There are few challenges which are common to almost all the projects that I have worked and am working with. One of the challenges is to do more than providing reading materials - instead to go further — to develop a long-term project that could create a sustainable future for children and young people. I believe that the best successes will come from not just providing schools/libraries with materials and other supplies but offering continued programming in order to provide students with a range of educational experiences through the library services that help to expand their horizons and open up new opportunities for their future.

The dedication of principals and teachers to their pupils is also equally important; their genuine commitment to the educational lives and well-being of their students is vital because local support is necessary for success.

## PS: What has been your proudest moment or achievement in your work with young people in Sri Lanka?

**PG:** There is more than one which we, not just me but all project partners including [what was the] CILIP Career Development Group (CDG) & CILIP ILIG can be proud of. But the most recent moment was the passing of a Year 5 government scholarship examination by a student at Macaldeniya Tamil School. The Macaldeniya school is one of numerous small schools that serve the children of Tamil tea estate workers - the most impoverished, disadvantaged group in Sri Lanka. This was the first time a student has passed the scholarship exam from this school. The student is now continuing his secondary education at a school in the nearby town.

## A note about the interviewer: Mario Coffa

Mario Coffa archivist and librarian, graduated in Conservation of Cultural Heritage at the University of Perugia (2005) and graduated in Archives and Palaeography at the Archival School of the Vatican Secret Archives (2010). Since 2010 he has worked for CAeB (Archival and Librarian Cooperative) at the libraries of the University of Perugia as a librarian and as an archivist at the Historical Archives of the Municipality of Gubbio. He deals with Digital Libraries and training in the field of digital librarianship. Since 2014 he has



been a member of the Regional Executive Committee of the Italian Libraries Association (AIB) Umbria section. He is also a member of the AIB group and during the three-year period 2017-2020 was elected President of AIB Umbria. From 2020 he has been a member of the Training Observatory of the Italian Library Association. He is the author of several articles and interviews for Insula Europea on the subject of archives, libraries and digital lending. He is the Creator of the international Library World Tour project which currently involves about sixty nations from all over the world.

#### Links:

https://mariocoffa.wixsite.com/e-portfolio https://mariocoffa.wixsite.com/e-portfolio/library-world-tour https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/it/map/library-world-tour\_616951#2/12.7/70.7 http://vegajournal.academia.edu/MarioCoffa



# International Cooperation between School Libraries through Storytelling

Antonija Lujanac Dobriša Cesarić Zagrebd Elementary school, Zagreb, Croatia

From September 2021 we started a virtual storytelling project involving poster-making, exchanging of bookmarks, video editing and other creative activities. The new project is called *Fairy Tales and Folktales around the World*. The coordinator schools are the Osnovna skola Dobrise Cesarica in Zagreb and the BINUS school Simprug from

Antonija works at Osnovna skola Dobrise Cesarica – a school in Zagreb. She has a keen interest in new modes of education and active learning. The work she has done in conjunction with other librarians on international cooperation between school libraries - described below - was presented at the Annual Conference of Malaysian Libraries 2022 (Persidangan Tahunan Perpustakaan Malaysia [PTPM] 2022) in May and was also due to be presented at the International Association for School Librarianship Conference at the time of publication (July 2022). Her library has taken the lead on many international projects about volunteering, urban



gardening, green entrepreneurship and arts. Some examples are included below:

**Oasis for Children** — a project promoting healthy living, sustainability and active learning in primary schools in Zagreb: https://una.city/nbs/zagreb/oasis-children\_

**Green Fingers** — a continuation of the Oasis for Children project, promoting urban gardening with children: <a href="https://cvs-bg.org/green-fingers">https://cvs-bg.org/green-fingers</a> oasis/?lang=en

**Arts Talk About Us** (Erasmus+ project) — an initiative promoting the sharing of art between schoolchildren in European countries: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/Arts-talk-about-us-2029517347279152/">https://www.facebook.com/Arts-talk-about-us-2029517347279152/</a>

**Upcycling** — a scheme educating children about creative re-use of recyclable materials to create items of higher value: https://twinspace.etwinning.net/123323/home

**Outside** — a project promoting creativity, sustainability, entrepreneurship and green competencies, implemented in 5 European countries - Italy, Belgium, Croatia, Lithuania and the UK: https://www.outsideproject.eu/

Jakarta. The project started because we wanted to celebrate International School Library Month 2021. As pupils' interest keeps growing, librarians continue to sustain their insatiable curiosity to learn more about folk tales and to interact with new friends from other countries.

The project has chosen an innovative approach, using storytelling in pupils' own mother tongues for development of key competences, bibliotherapy and empathy especially during stressful moments for the kids (these include the COVID pandemic, natural disaster, social crisis, health and family problems). The folktales convey a universal wisdom that children can understand if we convey them in their mother tongue. Stressful moments in fairy tales convey the message that we can overcome them if we are patient and hardworking, if we are kind and loyal friends.

Monthly meetings were conducted with participating schools and countries to share their objectives and expectations from this project. Initially, librarians from other countries were invited to tell stories. The students were mesmerised listening to the stories. They learned a new culture, asked critical thinking questions, and developed new vocabulary. Hamilton and Weiss (1993)<sup>1</sup> stated that storytelling helps children build trust and confidence, love for language, and an attitude of respect. Turan and Ulutas (2016)<sup>2</sup> also confirmed the value of stories for promoting character education, particularly in their case through the use of storybooks with pictures to teach students values, character and morals. In addition, Radaideh, et al. (2020)<sup>3</sup> revealed in their study that virtual storytelling enhances applied and analytic comprehension skills, pupils' participation, and interaction in a motivational atmosphere. Fortunately, during these challenging times, more online picture books are generously shared by private entities and book publishers to support pupils' education and wellbeing.

Schoolchildren, teachers and librarians from schools included in the project Fairy Tales and Folktales around the World have the opportunity to collaborate through video conferences and sharing of materials (posters, photos, videos, textual, audio) which can be accessed in the group's Google Drive. Participants have joined from Croatia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Finland, India, Nigeria, Turkey, Japan, Philippines and the United States of America. As part of the follow-up activities, students made posters illustrating the moral lessons of the folktales. Three countries (Finland, Croatia, and Indonesia) initiated a poster competition, setting out criteria to guide the schoolchildren as to what would be expected. The pupils expressed their understanding of the folktales and went beyond, applying the moral lessons such as doing simple chores at home and expressing the concept of trust and respect for others. This suggests that the new generations of schoolchildren learn from this rich literary heritage that allows them to appreciate other cultures. They also gain confidence in sharing their thoughts and develop their academic and digital skills.



## INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARY MONTH

#### **Definition of Storytelling**

Virtual storytelling is a powerful and universal form of communication, a tool for entertainment, interaction, learning literacy and cultural awareness.



## **Purpose of the**ISUM Team

A group of volunteers organized the International School Library Month event and conducted a few virtual programs. One of the programs was a virtual storytelling project in partnership with school librarians and academicians from Malaysia, Indonesia, Croatia, Nigeria and other countries. The innovative initiatives undertaken support the students' learning that can be extended outside the comfort of the school and that no one is left behind.



Onal Sc

Problem Statement

The argument exists whether

virtual storytelling still holds its

captivating value and proves to be effective for the skills and competencies needed

for lifelong learning.

#### Outcome

The outcome of the virtual storytelling enhanced the participants' media, information literacy, ICT, collaborative and comprehension skills and positive attitude picked up from the stories. The participants shared and created digital storytelling, which was shared on this website:

https://iasl-online.org/ISLM.

Dr. Maria Fe Nicolau Head Librarian and Extended Essay Coordinator BINUS SCHOOL Simprug, Indonesia.



Dr. Mayasari Abdul Majid Senior Librarian Nobel International School, Malaysia.



Antonija Lujanac School Librarian, Osnovna Skola Dobrise Cesarica, Zagreb, Croatia.



Dr. Sophia Adeyeye Lecturer Library and Information Science Programme Department of Information Management Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

International School Library Month poster

Students from Indonesia and Croatia participated in the Poster Competition after they explored the Philippine folk tale The Legend of Pineapple. After the storytelling, which was presented using video in the original language with English subtitles, they created posters and shared them using Padlet collaborative software. The international judges selected the best posters during video conferences where pupils meet each other and presented their entries. Video from the competition can be found here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KyQTgC4g9g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KyQTgC4g9g</a>

Some entries were really amazing and unexpected! For example, some schoolchildren from Croatia were surprised not only with the moral lessons of the Legend of Pineapple tale but also with the possibility that, in some Asian cultures, ten-year-old children know how to prepare a simple meal for themselves. This encouraged Croatian schoolchildren to try to prepare waffles in school! They learnt a lot about the pineapple (it is not a fruit), the time zones (7am in Zagreb is 1 pm in Jakarta), how to present in the virtual environment and how to use digital tools like Zoom, Padlet, Movie Maker, Google Drive, Book Creator and others.

You'll find a video which summarises what the project is all about here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDbglnYG5qM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDbglnYG5qM</a>

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Hamilton, M. and Weiss, M. (1993) M. Hamilton, M. Weiss. Children as storytellers, teaching the basic tools in School library Journal, Vol 50 (7). pp. 4-7
- <sup>2</sup> Turan, F., & Ulutas, I. (2016) Using storybooks as a character education tools in Journal of Education and Practice, Vol 7(15), pp. 169-176
- <sup>3</sup> Radaideh, E. et al. (2020) Digital Storytelling: Time to be Considered in Reading Comprehension in Universal Journal of Educational Research Vol. 8(6), pp. 2621 2633. Available online: <a href="https://www.hrpub.org/download/20200530/UJER45-19515919.pdf">https://www.hrpub.org/download/20200530/UJER45-19515919.pdf</a> [Accessed 22 May 2022]





Patrick Lo, Stephanie H. S. Wu, Andrew J. Stark & Bradley Allard. Literacy and Reading Programmes for Children and Young People: Case Studies from around the Globe (2-volume set: Volume I - USA and Europe, Volume II - Asia, Africa, Australia and the Middle East). Apple Academic Press, 2022. 692 p. ISBN: 9781774630327

Patrick Lo is the author of several books on librarianship from an international perspective, focusing on learning through conversations with those in professional practice. The varied backgrounds in education, community outreach work (specialising in mobile libraries) and journalism of his co-authors for this title clearly shine through to create a well-balanced accessible narrative.

Whilst Patrick Lo's previous book in this area (Effective School Librarianship, first published in 2018) focused solely on school libraries and their role in literacy and community, this book's focus is specifically on public sector community engagement initiatives to increase literacy amongst young people.

I must admit to being a little overwhelmed when I realised his latest book was 692 pages in total and delivered in two volumes. Before even reaching Part One, there are two studies of children's reference services and teen reference services touching on cognitive development of children. These demonstrate how and why reference services should differ for these groups compared to adult services. I have a background in psychology and education and can understand the importance of including this information to put the main aims of the book into context. It was a little disappointingly dry however, as a starting point, for me.

I was much relieved therefore when I reached Part Two to find a series of conversational-style case studies which were incredibly engaging, inspirational and insightful. These encompassed profiles of and interviews with forty-two library professionals delivering children's services in a variety of settings in fourteen different countries across the globe.



Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Middle East

Patrick Lo | Stephanie H.S.Wu

Andrew Stark | Bradley Allard

This compilation showcases not only the variety of literacy and holistic children's projects that have been initiated by library professionals worldwide in response to the changing needs of service users but also the depth of their passion and reflective practice. It challenges traditional ideas of libraries and librarianship as many interviewees did not identify themselves as librarians initially.

There are various themes running throughout the book. These include the importance of understanding the local community and providing local solutions. Other themes include consideration of what a library is, what it looks like and the life-changing importance of what it can provide to both communities and individuals. I appreciated the light shone on the theme of inequality of access caused by both the digital divide and/or being in a remote location, even in the most economically developed countries. I found this both extremely disconcerting and thought-provoking. I also found the programs showcased to tackle this and those who initiated these projects truly inspiring. This book particularly highlights the struggles for many in our profession of increasing and maintaining access to books and literacy in remote parts of the world. This also applies to displaced populations with an interesting emphasis on mobile libraries and the variety of forms these can take, for instance animal-powered mobile libraries and a refugee camp in Greece. I thought the efforts to overcome these barriers and local initiatives/solutions were fascinating and provided a positive perspective on traditionally negative situations such as refugee camps.

In my opinion this book succeeds in its aim to "encourage international cooperation in the field of library services" and "to shed new light on children and young adults' library services in different socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economical contexts" - it does both in spades. When pondering the future of young people's and children's services in Part Three, the authors provide useful acknowledgement of the limitations, in addition to highlighting the importance of the breadth of international perspectives this work offers, as well as the scope.

Presented in a question-and-answer format and peppered with photographs throughout, this book is eminently readable and easy to dip in and out of. As a professional with a keen interest in the children's library sector but little experience, it was a thought-provoking insight into how others have made the move, climbed the ladder and their journeys and experiences along the way. The intended audience is listed as "practising school librarians, public librarians working with children and teens, teachers and school administrators, education policymakers and stakeholders and researchers who specialise in library science and global librarianship" however I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone interested in a career in libraries or making a difference to the world.



Clare Tanswell, Kingston University





#### Support for Ukraine

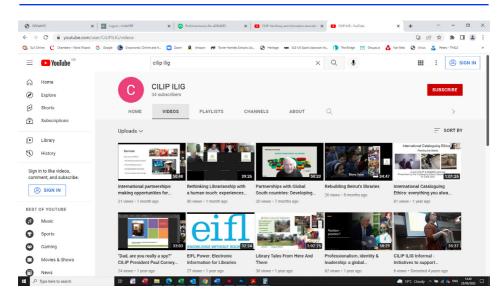
Russia's invasion of Ukraine this year has already had a devastating humanitarian and cultural impact which has been felt globally. CILIP has issued a statement of solidarity which has been shared with colleagues across Ukraine via the Ukrainian Library Association. It has been signed by twenty two national organisations and more than 1,000 information professionals in the United Kingdom and internationally. You can view and sign this statement here: <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/597028/Statement-of-solidarity-with-librarians-archivists-and-information-professionals-in-Ukraine.htm">https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/597028/Statement-of-solidarity-with-librarians-archivists-and-information-professionals-in-Ukraine.htm</a>

CILIP has also set up a dedicated site - the Ukraine Crisis Hub - with a range of options for those wishing to lend support to Ukrainian information professionals, libraries and cultural organisations: <a href="https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ukraine">https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ukraine</a>

Other organisations providing more information for those wanting to show solidarity include the European Bureau of Library Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and the Council for Slavonic and East European Library and Information Services (COSEELIS):

<u>Libraries for Ukraine</u> (EBLIDA)

Libraries helping Ukraine (COSEELIS)



#### The CILIP ILIG YouTube Channel: latest recordings

In May we were pleased CILIP President Kate Robinson could join us at our Annual General Meeting event. Kate spoke to us about the partnership between the Library at the University of Bath & Stellenbosch University Library in South Africa.

You can view the recording via the link below:

## 'International partnerships: making opportunities for friendship, collaboration & CPD' - https://youtu.be/oV2 mVkv|zw

Arjun Sanyal, recipient of the 2021 Alan Hopkinson Award, also spoke at one of our CILIP ILIG Informal events held on May 3 2022. Arjun discussed his experiences of participating in the virtual International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) 2021. He told us how it emboldened him to rethink the idea of librarianship as a human-centred paradigm underpinned by the notion of social justice and empowerment. He also encouraged viewers to apply for the 2022 Alan Hopkinson Award. You can watch Arjun's talk and the discussion which followed here:

'Rethinking Librarianship with a human touch: experiences of an Indian library professional at WLIC' - https://youtu.be/zSPJA-sSUAk

#### ILIG on Facebook and Twitter

If you're on Facebook, why don't you join us?

www.facebook.com/groups/13131232426

Make contact with librarians around the world and start networking!

#### @CILIP ILIG

Follow us to get the latest updates on CILIP ILIG news and events, tweets from CILIP conference, news from CILIP and of international interest, and to communicate with us and let us know what you would like CILIP ILIG to do for you.

### Notes for contributors to Focus

Articles for publication in Focus are always welcome. Focus is not peer-reviewed, and articles are primarily intended to keep readers (who are professionals from a variety of different types of library and information services) informed about what is going on in the international library and information world, to introduce new ideas and programmes, report on activities and experiences, etc., rather than be 'academic treatises'.

Articles are normally between 1,500 and 2,000 words, though can be a little longer if necessary. The inclusion of references and URLs/links to further information is valuable, as are relevant photos ( $640 \times 480$  at 300dpi), if appropriate.

Focus is usually produced twice a year, with publication normally happening in July and December.

Copy deadlines are typically at the end of May and October.

Please email material for consideration to the editor at iligfocus@cilip.org.uk

Articles should normally not have been previously published,

or be under consideration elsewhere.

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY CILIP ILIG INFORMALS AND MEETINGS

#### #ebookSOS update - Date: TBC

The next in our Informals series later this year will be an update about #ebookSOS – a campaign seeking an investigation into the academic ebook publishing industry

Keep an eye on the CILIP ILIG Events page on the CILIP website for further listings and booking information:

https://bit.ly/2zC2TQq

## IFLA World Library and Information Congress 2022

26-29 July 2022

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 87 th Annual General Conference and Assembly – Dublin, Ireland IFLA's World Library and Information Congress.

Keep up to date with the latest via the IFLA website:

https://www.ifla.org/news/were-back-wlic-to-be-in-dublin-ireland-in-2022/

