

# PROMOTING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL MEMORIES THROUGH INTERNATIONAL BOOKMARK EXCHANGE PROJECT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP

**Leo F.H. Ma**

Upper-campus Libraries,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong  
E-mail address: [leo-ma@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:leo-ma@cuhk.edu.hk)

**Helen M.Y. Chan**

Library,  
Lam Tin Methodist Primary School, Hong Kong  
E-mail address: [helenc98\\_1998@yahoo.com](mailto:helenc98_1998@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract:**

With digital network technologies, school libraries have shifted the geographical coverage of library advocacy from a local to an international perspective. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how to use videos critically to promoting historical and cultural memories through International Bookmark Exchange Project of the International Association of School Librarianship. The authors outline an innovative approach by the Lam Tin Methodist Primary School in Hong Kong to advocate how videos inform, guide, and collaborate with school media specialists around the world in the International Bookmark Exchange Project. Over 800 students of the Lam Tin Methodist Primary School exchanged bookmarks with more than 10 schools from 9 countries in this worldwide program. The driving force of digital networking technologies enables School Media Specialists to adopt various digital media for school library advocacy and to promote historical and cultural memories both regionally and internationally. This paper highlights the YouTube Video Exchange Project 'Lunar Chinese New Year' with Tettenhall College of United Kingdom. Both Hong Kong and the United Kingdom celebrate Chinese New Year in January to February of each year with different traditions and practices. School Media Specialists of the two schools produced their YouTubes on celebrating Chinese New Year. The message conveyed in the exchanged YouTubes not only benefits all students and teachers of these two schools socially, intellectually and culturally, but also sheds light on further multi-level application of videos and other digital technologies on school library advocacy and education.

**Keywords:** International Association of School Librarianship, International Bookmark Exchange Project, Lam Tin Methodist Primary School, Hong Kong.

## **1.0 Introduction**

In the Era of Globalization, student reading activities should not be confined to the local community but should be extended to around the world instead. Students can acquire a broader perspective of the world and also experience learning without walls through these reading activities. Starting from 2007, Lam Tin Methodist Primary School in Hong Kong joined the International Bookmark Exchange Project organized by the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) and has received very encouraging feedback from the students. In this paper, the authors first introduce briefly the IASL and the International Bookmark Exchange Project, and second share the experience of planning and implementing this project in the Lam Tin Methodist Primary School.

**2.0 IASL: International Bookmark Exchange Project**

IASL was set up in 1971 aiming to advocate the establishment and development of school libraries around the world. In the past 46 years, IASL has been growing rapidly and is currently the largest organization of school libraries globally. IASL members come from more than 70 countries with different professional backgrounds including librarians, educators, publishers and those who are interested in school libraries. IASL provides an international platform for those who want to enhance school library services, and to connect and collaborate with others internationally. Also, IASL supports school library services by setting up professional standards and guidelines. IASL also collaborates with other professional organizations and agencies in striving for the development of school libraries. The objectives of IASL are:

- To advocate the development of school libraries throughout all countries;
- To encourage the integration of school library programs into the instruction and curriculum of the school;
- To promote the professional preparation and continuing education of school library personnel;
- To foster a sense of community among school librarians in all parts of the world;
- To foster and extend relationships between school librarians and other professions in connection with children and youth;
- To foster research in the field of school librarianship and the integration of its findings with pertinent knowledge from related fields;
- To promote the publication and dissemination of information about successful advocacy and program initiatives in school librarianship;
- To share information about programs and materials for children and youth throughout the international community;
- To initiate and coordinate activities, conferences and other projects in the field of school librarianship and information services. (IASL, 2017b)

IASL organizes a number of professional activities every year. The largest event of all is the annual conference of IASL. Established in 1971, the IASL conference provides a wonderful opportunity for the participants to address and discuss the changes and development of school libraries, education, quality assurance and improvement, etc. Other major activities include International School Library Month, Window On the World of School Libraries, etc. IASL also publishes professional publications *School Libraries Worldwide* and *IASL Newsletter*, to facilitate research and discussion of school libraries worldwide (see Figure 1). (IASL, 2017a). As Peter Genco, former President of IASL, put in his article, '(w)hile essentially a professional association, IASL is valued-based and reflect global ethics.' (Genco, 2003). IASL emphasizes the important role of school libraries in education as its core value of the association.

**Figure 1. The Home Page of International Association of School Librarianship**



Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians Association (HKTLA) has been actively engaged in IASL for many years. Apart from nominating experienced Teacher-Librarian to serve as the Hong Kong representative, HKTLA also invites members to join the International Bookmark Exchange Project. Being one of the major IASL events, IASL welcomes school libraries around the world to join the International Bookmark Exchange Project which has been organized for more than a decade. To facilitate the matching process, IASL collects information of the participating school libraries including: name and address of the school, name of the project leader, student age and class, student number, etc. They also need the details of the bookmark exchange partner such as the type of school, student class, communication method, language, area or region, etc. After pairing up with school library partners, the students start to prepare their bookmarks creatively which can be in different styles, shapes, sizes, etc. to exchange with students of their partner. The International Bookmark Exchange Project is a simple yet engaging activity. Students can share the joy of reading with students in the other part of the world. They can make new friends through the project that they never imagine before. Through these bookmarks, the students can understand and learn more deeply about their own custom and culture as well as their partners'. IASL starts the matching process from August to September every year, the students then exchange their bookmarks in October. The nicely designed handmade bookmarks by the students will be uploaded to the IASL web page (see Figure 2). (IASL, 2016) Serving as the voluntarily coordinator of the International Bookmark Exchange Project since 2010, Breege O'Brien commented that: '(t)he work of the Coordinator is done on a voluntary basis. It can be challenging, and time intensive, but that aspect of the role, I feel, is totally outweighed by the great personal satisfaction I gain from seeing the enthusiasm, delight, creativity and commitment generated by the Project from thousands of students and their teachers and librarians worldwide.' (O'Brien, 2013) No doubt, Breege has bridged the gap for students around the world to get to know each other and to learn from each other.

**Figure 2. The Home Page of International Bookmark Exchange Project**



**3.0 Lam Tin Methodist Primary School: International Bookmark Exchange Project**

Lam Tin Methodist Primary School has joined the “International Bookmark Exchange Project” of IASL for almost 10 years. The Teacher-Librarian of the School who also plays the role of School Media Specialist, implements the project in a collaborative mode. With collaboration with all English teachers and Visual Arts teachers, students exchange their bookmarks with more than 10 schools from 9 countries under the coordination of the Teacher-Librarian each year. Throughout these years, over 800 students of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School exchanged their bookmarks with students from the United States, United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Canada, Australia and Romania. The students are very excited to receive the colourful and imaginative bookmarks from the partner schools each year. In terms of logistics, the IASL coordinator of the International Bookmark Exchange Project will match suitable exchange partners of the participating schools and puts paired groups in touch. The participating schools are matched according to age profile and group size. The students of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School treasured the received bookmarks so much and well-used them for reading purpose. Some of the

bookmarks were made with intrinsic decorations like beads, pom-poms, sequins and googly eyes; some were made with materials of different texture like cardboard paper, aluminium foil or canvas patchwork fabric; some were made with different visual art techniques like rubber stamping, Papier Mache in addition to crayon painting, watercolour painting and acrylic painting. In fact, there were plenty of surprises when the students opened the packages received from the partner schools. They even once received a bookmark from an Indian school made with peacock feathers. The reading interest of the students and the good reading culture of the School are cultivated by these exciting in- and out-of-school reading activities of the International Bookmark Exchange Project. In return, many positive comments and high compliments on students' creativity were received from teachers and librarians from different part of the world every year.

#### **4.0 Localizing the "International Bookmark Exchange Project"**

As the coordinator of the International Bookmark Exchange Project in the School, the Teacher-Librarian intends to localize the Project and makes it a meaningful learning activity to best fit the needs of the students. The project is planned, implemented and evaluated in a collaborative approach under the collegial effort of the Teacher-Librarian, the English teachers and the Visual Art teachers which altogether consist of approximately 30 teaching staff. The project was re-titled as "Cross-boundary Bookmark Exchange Project" with the addition of home-school synergy in its implementation process. The Project echoes the learning activities of all Primary One and Primary Six students in the Library, English and Visual Art lessons. The Teacher-Librarian expects each student can hand in a bookmark with a creative design on one side and a book recommendation on the other.

This Project aims to promote students' interest in English reading so as to enhance their English proficiency, and also to enhance students' application of visual art techniques to express the unique Chinese culture and the attractive impression from their reading. In addition, this Project can guide the students to identify the basic bibliographic elements of a book (such as author, publisher, publishing year) and to have self-reflection after reading. Most important of all, the Project fosters the positive attitude of the students over multiculturalism. They enjoy sharing their reading experiences with students from different countries. The competency of communication, collaboration and creativity of the students cultivated by this Project are the essential skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that every student should have nowadays. To achieve these goals, the Teacher-Librarian sets up assessment criteria to measure the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the Project. The assessment result is instrumental to the sustainability of the Project in the School. With the collaborative effort of the Teacher-Librarian, English Panel and Visual Art Panel, the following assessment criteria were set up:

- 95% participants can conclude what they learn from their reading and give appropriate comments on the selected reading materials.
- 90% participants can use a repertoire of visual art techniques to express their feeling of the book and the Chinese traditions.
- 95% participants can broaden their global view with increase understanding of different countries' culture, custom and value.
- 95% participants recognize the importance of mutual respect to people around the world. Students are willing to share their reading and learning experiences with people from different countries.

#### **5.0 Cross-boundary Bookmark Exchange Project: A Collaborative Approach**

The implementation of the Project can be discussed from teacher's (including the Teacher-Librarian) and student's aspects. From teacher's perspective, the Teacher-Librarian starts the registration process in July and August. Once the Teacher-Librarian receives the contact details of the partner schools, she will send them a greeting message to introduce herself and her School, and provide them with useful information about Hong Kong. YouTube videos such as the "Discovery Hong Kong" produced by the Hong Kong Tourism Board will be provided to the partner schools to increase their understanding of Hong Kong. (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2017). The Teacher-Librarian also asks for basic information on schooling from the partner schools. The information collected will be disseminated to the Principal, teachers and students of the School as part of the cultural introduction of the partner schools on the Campus Television in the morning assembly. Some partner schools also provide their school videos

which will definitely enrich the bookmark exchange program. The students of the Schools were once thrilled when they saw a student of an elementary school in Spain using Hip Hop Dance to introduce their school

Well-preparation of teachers is the key to success in this Project. Lam Tin Methodist School Library adopts a whole-school approach in reading promotion in order to nourish a good reading culture in the School. After the collaborative program plan is discussed in school administrative group meeting and teacher meeting, the Project will be officially launched in the School. All teachers of the project team, including the Teacher-Librarian, English teachers and Visual Art teachers, give tremendous support to the students of this Project. It is scheduled that all partner schools of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School will receive their bookmarks in October for the celebration of the IASL International School Library Month (ISLM). Throughout September, the English teachers guide students to select their favourite books and to prepare the writings on one side of the bookmark. The Teacher-Librarian ensures all requested components including book title, author and publisher as well as a short book review are covered in the library lessons. The Visual Art teachers give advice to students in order to moderate their designs on the other side of the bookmark in the Visual Art lessons. The completed bookmarks will then be collected by the Teacher Librarian for packing and delivery to partner schools in different countries (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. A Student's Bookmark of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School**



From student's perspective, they can understand the customs and traditions of different countries through the Campus TV. The Teacher-Librarian and the Student Reading Ambassadors of the Library researched the background of the partner schools and countries before introducing the Project on the Campus TV. All students are able to recognize the national emblem, flag, geographical location, customs, and basic demographics of different countries through the Project. They are especially interested in viewing YouTube videos of other countries such as folk dances and rituals of festival celebration. Furthermore, the origin of the International Bookmark Exchange Project, the ISLM and its annual theme will also be introduced on the Campus TV as well.

Packages from the partner schools are usually received in October. The Teacher-Librarian does not only receive the exquisite bookmarks from around the world but also travel guides, postcards, letters, maps and children literature sometimes. The Teacher-Librarian shares what she has received and her happiness on the Campus TV with the students and teachers. Through this Project, students can understand the history, stories and key attractions of various countries gradually year by year. It is not difficult now for students to identify the Big Ben of London, the Lincoln Memorial of the United States and the maple leaves of Canada. The Project extensively provides students a global view of diversity and a culturally enriched educational opportunity. In addition, the students could practice and improve their English, the global language, through this meaningful project. This joyful way of learning is most welcomed by students.

### **6.0 The Extended Project: The Lunar Chinese New Year Video Exchange**

To the Teacher-Librarian of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School, the Cross-boundary Bookmark Exchange Project is not a one-off bookmark exchange activity. Many extended activities such as matching students with email pen-pals are very common after the ISLM. One of the most exciting extended projects was a video exchange program with



the Tettenhall College of the United Kingdom on the topic “Lunar Chinese New Year”. It is commonly known that Lunar Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival, is the most important traditional festival in the Chinese speaking community. Tettenhall College is an independent school which is located in Wolverhampton of West Midlands in England. They have pupils from aged 2-18 years, including some international boarding students from Germany, Vietnam, Hong Kong and Russia. The College held a special day for the celebration of Lunar Chinese New Year on February 25, 2015 (see Figure 4). Their students read Chinese stories and their teachers introduced Chinese food as a special lunch on that day. The College Librarian of Tettenhall College discussed with the Teacher-Librarian of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School the possibility of exchanging videos between the two schools. With YouTubes, it ends up with simply a link to access the videos produced by the students and teachers of the two schools.

**Figure 4. Poster and brochure of Lunar Chinese New Year Celebration at Tettenhall College**



From the videos, it is amazed to see the difference and similarities in celebrating the Lunar Chinese New Year: Hong Kong students emphasized on preserving the legend of Monster Nien in Lunar Chinese New Year while the United Kingdom students were interested in the stories of the Jade Emperor and the Chinese Zodiac. Students in both places recognized the red color is the lucky color and number eight is the lucky number in Chinese culture. They also realized that the customs of eating glutinous rice dumplings in sweet soup, visiting friends and relatives, watching dragon and lion dances are common activities for the celebration of the joyous festival.

**7.0 Concluding Remarks**

Lam Tin Methodist Primary School has been implementing the Cross-boundary Bookmark Exchange Project in their school for almost ten years. Apart from receiving the bookmarks from all over the world, their students also sent their hand-made bookmarks to the primary school students of many different countries. Their bookmarks showcase not only the creativity in art work and design but also the English proficiency of the students. Lam Tin Methodist Primary School has received a lot of appreciation from many oversea teachers. Throughout this exchanging process, the students were able to enjoy reading and learning from the bookmarks. Also, the Bookmark Exchange Project was recognized by not only the parents but also the media (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Press Report from the Sing Tao Daily (2014) on the International Bookmark Exchange Project in Hong Kong**



In the digital era, the Teacher-Librarian also adopted online videos to promote historical and cultural memories through the Lunar Chinese New Year Project with Tettenhall College of United Kingdom. This project not only benefits students and teachers socially, intellectually and culturally, but also sheds light on further multi-level application of videos and other digital technologies on school library advocacy and education. Looking ahead, the Teacher-Librarian of Lam Tin Methodist Primary School will use e-books as well as audio-books to enhance the Cross-boundary Bookmark Exchange Project. This will encourage students whose English proficiency is not as good as their classmates to participate in this project and, as a result, will help them to enjoy and love reading.

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