

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 18/06/2007</p> <p><b>The International Children's Digital Library - Using technology to expand children's access to books from around the world</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Ann Carlson Weeks</b> University of Maryland College Park USA</p>
<p><b>Meeting:</b></p>	<p><b>105 Libraries for Children and Young Adults</b></p>
<p><b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL</b> 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa <a href="http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm">http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</a></p>	

**Abstract:**

*Now celebrating its fifth anniversary, the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL)<sup>1</sup> began as a research project to create a freely available online library of outstanding children's books from all over the world. The IC DL's focus is on identifying materials that help children to understand the world around them and the global society in which they live. The materials in the collection reflect similarities and differences in cultures, societies, interests, and lifestyles of peoples around the world. The current collection, which available without cost over the Internet, includes more than 1,600 books in 38 languages. Among the earliest supporters of the IC DL project was the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section of IFLA. In a meeting with the members of the Standing Committee of the Section in August 2002 – before the project was even launched -- ideas were exchanged about the benefits of such a project for children and their parents, teachers, and librarians around the world. Members of the Standing Committee offered to support the project by contacting publishers, National Libraries, authors, illustrators, and librarians in their home countries to promote the initiative and to assist the research team in building the collection. A celebration at the Durban Conference showcases the growth and development of this international, collaborative project and highlights plans for its future.*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.childrenslibrary.org](http://www.childrenslibrary.org)

## **Celebrating Five Years of Collaboration**

A little more than five years ago, a research team at the University of Maryland (UMD) began to discuss the feasibility of using technology to make outstanding children's books from around the world freely accessible via the Internet. The goal was to create an online library of books in their original languages that could be easily used by children. The books in the library would help children to understand the world around them and the global society in which they lived. The materials in the collection would reflect similarities and differences in cultures, societies, interests, and lifestyles of peoples around the world. When this idea was introduced to researchers, authors, publishers, technologists, and librarians beyond the research group, it was met with some skepticism.

While it was acknowledged that the computer scientists and researchers at UMD had the expertise in working with children as research partners and in building effective interfaces for children, it was believed that the difficulties inherent in getting copyright permissions to include children's books in a digital library were virtually insurmountable. Undaunted by the naysayers and initially supported financially by the US Government's National Science Foundation (NSF), the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) was introduced at an international celebration at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. in November 2002. At its introduction, the ICDL collection included fewer than 200 books in 15 languages. The current collection includes more than 1600 books in 38 languages from Croatian to Malay. While obtaining permissions to include books in copyright in the collection has been the most difficult aspect of the project, it has not been impossible and as the collection continues to grow more and more rights holders around the world are agreeing to contribute their titles.

The research team that created the ICDL is interdisciplinary and includes computer scientists, librarians, educational technologists, classroom teachers, graphic designers, and graduate students from the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies (CLIS) and the UMD Human-Computer Interaction Lab (HCIL), a leader in children's interface design. It also is intergenerational. Throughout the creation and development of the ICDL, important contributors to the research have been the members of the Kidsteam, children ages 7-11, who work regularly with the adults in the Lab.

From its beginning, the ICDL collection has had two primary audiences. The first audience is children ages 3-13, as well as librarians, teachers, parents, and caregivers who work with children of these ages. The second audience is international scholars and researchers in the area of children's literature. Both contemporary children's books and significant historical works are included in the collection to meet the needs of each of the primary audiences. The resulting ICDL collection includes children's literature that represents exemplary artistic, historic, and literary qualities. Books are selected by experts in children's literature in the country or culture of origin. All books are presented in their entirety and in the original language(s) in which they were published. Only books that have been published in print form are included in the collection. This effort intends to make children's books more accessible worldwide and preserve the best of children's literature through technology. Reflecting the principles in the ICDL Collection Development Policy, which appears

on the project's web site<sup>2</sup>, the current collection includes approximately 900 titles that are in copyright and 700 titles, which are in the public domain. Almost 300 books in the collection have received awards in their country of origin or have been recognized internationally.

In the five years since its creation, the ICDL truly has become a library "for the world's children." In the last year alone, there have close to one million visitors to the Library. During May 2007, visitors came from more than 180 nations around the world. Not surprisingly, the largest number of visitors came from the United States; however, the next largest numbers came from India, the United Kingdom, Canada, Iran, Egypt, China, and Indonesia. The search interface is available in fourteen languages including Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Mongolian, German, and Arabic to extend the accessibility of the collection.

Among the earliest supporters of the ICDL project was the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section of IFLA. In a meeting with the members of the Standing Committee of the Section in August 2002 – before the project was even launched -- ideas were exchanged about the benefits of such a project for children and their parents, teachers, and librarians around the world. Several members of the Standing Committee offered to support the project by contacting publishers, National Libraries, authors, illustrators, and librarians in their home countries to promote the initiative and to assist the research team in building the collection. As a result of this collaboration, the first book to be contributed to the collection was *Plavo Nebo (The Blue Sky)* by award-winning Croatian author, Andrea Petrlík Huseinović. The relationship between the IFLA Children and Young Adult Section was formalized in 2005 through an official partnership agreement. Through this partnership, the ICDL has been promoted at IFLA conferences, on the Section's web site, and in the Section's award-winning newsletter.

The ICDL would not exist without formal and informal collaboration with organizations and individuals throughout the world. As noted above, the books from each country are identified and often obtained through the work of dedicated volunteers worldwide. Individuals from National Libraries, public and school libraries, publishing houses, institutes for children's literature, as well as authors and illustrators assist the research team in determining the books that appear in the collection. Other individuals work as volunteer translators in preparing and submitting the metadata that must accompany every title. Translators also volunteer to translate the book summary pages so that children around the world can learn about stories that appear in the ICDL even if the texts are not in their mother tongue.

Other individuals have volunteered to be ICDL Ambassadors. Now numbering more than 400 from 80 nations, these ICDL Ambassadors have indicated their willingness to share the books in the collection with children in libraries, schools, and community centers; have identified titles they believe should be included in the ICDL, and sometimes, have contacted the rights holders to enable us to add the books to the collection; have promoted the ICDL in presentations and journal and newsletter articles to their constituencies; have submitted "Featured Books" entries; have used the ICDL in primary, secondary, and university level courses; and have carried out

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.icdlbooks.org/about/collection.shtml>

small research studies to determine how children respond to digital books. The ICDL Ambassador roster continues to grow and efforts are beginning to identify ways for the participants to share information among themselves and the research team.

In early 2006, the first ICDL “Branch Library” was created in Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. In cooperation with the Mongolian Ministry of Education and supported by funding from the World Bank, the ICDL interface was translated into Mongolian and a special ICDL Mongolian web site <sup>3</sup> was created. Although all books in the ICDL are accessible through this site, it was designed particularly to be used in rural Mongolian schools to encourage literacy in the Mongolian language. The books in Mongolian that are being added to the Library also are being provided to the rural schools in print format. Among the goals of the project is to determine if having access to books in both physical and digital formats increases children’s interest in reading for pleasure. Preliminary discussions have been held in Egypt and Argentina regarding the possibility of replicating this project.

Presentations about the ICDL have been made at international book fairs in Italy, Peru, Egypt, and Argentina. Articles about the ICDL have been published in journals, newsletters, blogs, newspapers, and web sites around the world. And yet, the ICDL is little known in most communities around the globe. What is its future?

The International Children's Digital Library Foundation, a public, nonprofit corporation, was established in April, 2006 to support the ongoing growth and expansion of the Library. The Foundation is the oversight organization that supports the collection strategies, builds alliances worldwide, promotes the value of the ICDL, and expands access to the online collection. The Foundation was created to manage the growth of the Library and to ensure that it is operationally and financially strong enough to aggressively implement its mission. Led by a team of businesspeople and library specialists, the Foundation directs ICDL activities with support from a number of international government agencies, corporations, and individuals.

Three new Special Collections are expected to be added to the ICDL by the end of summer 2007. These unique materials from the holdings of the Alice M. Jordan Collection at the Boston Public Library, the Dodd Collection of Northeastern Children’s Literature from the University of Connecticut, and the Kerlan Collection of Children’s Literature at the University of Minnesota are expected to increase the value of the collection for researchers and scholars of children’s literature around the world.

In late 2006, a new feature, “Get This Book,” was added to the book summary page for a number of in-copyright titles. This feature was added in response to library visitors’ requests that they wanted to know how to locate a physical copy of one of the digital books in the collection. Now, through a link on the web site, if a book is available for purchase online or appears in WorldCat, Library visitors are given purchase or location information to enable them to obtain a physical copy of the book. This feature is particularly useful for school and public librarians who can use the ICDL to identify and purchase materials in languages needed by their community of users but not readily available in local markets. The research team also has begun developing proposals to seek funding to adapt the ICDL for use on mobile devices.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.read.mn](http://www.read.mn)

As cell phones and hand-held devices become more ubiquitous, if the ICDL can be used on these technologies the access to the world of children's books can be greatly expanded.

What can you do? Encourage rights holders to consider making their contemporary books accessible digitally so that the Library's mission of helping children to have tolerance and respect for diverse cultures, languages and ideas by making the best in children's literature available online can be realized. Encourage agencies that are undertaking large digitization projects to investigate working with the ICDL research team so that children's materials will be included in these large international projects and be more readily accessible to children through the ICDL's child-friendly, multi-lingual interfaces. And, perhaps most importantly, continue to promote the existence of the ICDL and champion its value to children, teachers, librarians, and parents around the world. Although presentations and articles about the ICDL have appeared throughout the world, it continues to be a little known resource within the library and education communities. The International Children's Digital Library can be "a library for the world's children" only through the collaboration of individuals throughout the world who understand the power of connecting the right book to the right child at the right time – now possible in libraries across the street or through technology from authors and illustrators from around the globe.