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# Role clarification and role dilemmas: New challenges for teacher-librarians?

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# FEATURE

## Role Clarification & Role Dilemmas:

### *New Challenges for Teacher-librarians?*

*The role of the teacher-librarian has been increasingly clarified by national and provincial school library associations. Successful teacher-librarian, that is, those teacher-librarian who have a positive effect on student achievement and who enjoy the respect of teachers and administrators, collaborate with classroom colleagues to integrate information literacy processes and strategies into instructional programs. These teacher-librarians are viewed as equal teaching partners and teacher leaders, providing a value-added function in the school.*

#### **Role Clarification**

Current role statements are based on solid research evidence (see, for example, Haycock, 1999 and 2001) and validated by the experience of outstanding professionals in schools. Both professional competencies and personal competencies have been articulated. Professional competencies relate to "the teacher-librarian's knowledge and skill in the areas of collaboration and leadership, curriculum and instruction, collaborative program planning and teaching, information resources, information access, technology, management and research, and the ability to apply these abilities as a basis for providing library and information services;" Personal competencies represent "a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable teacher-librarians to work efficiently and effectively, be good communicators, focus on continuing learning throughout their careers, demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions and thrive in the new world of education." (Association for Teacher-librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association, 1997). These competencies are listed in the sidebar.

Further, specific examples of each competency are provided for illustration and for assessment purposes, for review for professional development needs and performance (ATLC/CSLA, 1997).

Recently, however, reduced government spending for public education, restrictive union/management labour contracts and drives for access to better technology as the sole purveyor of information, have resulted in less support for school libraries and teacher-librarians, in use of teacher-librarians to satisfy contractual obligations for teacher release time, and in marginalization of libraries and teacher-librarians as somewhat anachronistic symbols of books and reading (Haycock, 2001, Oct.).

***"Is it better to have a half time teacher-librarian with a flexibly scheduled program or a full time teacher-librarian with responsibility for relief teaching half time?"***

These stresses on the system cause significant role dilemmas as teacher-librarians work to reconcile best practice with current realities.

#### **Role Dilemmas**

Several issues for teacher-librarians push evidence-based practice up against a new reality such that there may no longer be "one right answer" or "one size" that "fits all". Here are but a few examples.

#### **Best Schedule vs. More Time**

The evidence is clear that teacher-librarians have an impact on student achievement where they collaborate with classroom colleagues and integrate information processes and strategies in instructional programs that are well-planned and well-implemented in flexible scheduled programs (Haycock, 2001). However, where there were full-time elementary school teacher-librarians with flexibly scheduled programs there are now more teacher-librarians who also have responsibility for providing preparation time or relief for classroom teachers.

#### **The dilemmas:**

Is it better to have a half time teacher-librarian with a flexibly scheduled program or a full time teacher-librarian with responsibility for relief teaching half time? Is it better to be a half time TL and work to increase one's time based on demonstrable performance and improved achievement, while being a half time classroom teacher as well, or to be full time in the library recognizing that half of one's time has no effect on achievement? How does one engage the school administration and teachers to recognize

that even this "mixed" schedule still requires collaboration to be relevant? How does one reconcile the core element of a successful program-planning with classroom teachers, when one is providing the planning? Is one really a full time teacher-librarian or a half-time TL and a half time prep teacher? How should one present this dichotomy to colleagues and decision-makers, e.g. 1.0 TL or .5 TL and .5 Prep? Are these discrete roles? Should one organize the relief periods as a classroom teacher and close the "classroom"

[library] to others? Or should one organized the relief periods in ways to enable the collaborative program to continue regardless, such as by clustering classes, or focusing on providing time for sustained silent reading only? How does one distinguish between booking the facility and booking the teacher-librarian? Should the criterion be only those activities requiring two teachers, the classroom teacher and TL?

### Redefined Partnerships

Effective teacher-librarians collaborate with classroom colleagues as equal teaching partners. Diminished time and dwindling resources necessitate reassessing priorities and methods of accomplishing those priorities.

#### *The dilemmas:*

In order to be as effective as possible should the teacher-librarian focus on teams of teachers (grade level meetings; subject area meetings) rather than individuals? What is the effect on achievement of the TL's involvement in planning only and not in implementation, i.e., planning improved units with

teachers who implement them themselves? How does one establish a formal partnership with technology teachers that recognizes and respects unique areas of expertise and activity for maximum benefit for the school and best use of time? Should the teacher-librarian become more of a staff developer and trainer than a hands-on teacher? What are the principals' expectations for superior performance in times of declining time, support and resources? What is the nature of the partnership with community agencies such as the public library? How are those resources, both the youth services librarians and materials, exploited systematically and formally for maximum gain? Are formal policies and standard practices required to enable coordinated planning and mutual benefit?

### Budget Realities or Budget Dreams

Increasingly the contribution of the school and school board to the library budget is matched or exceeded by school - and community-raised funds (e.g., book fairs, parent donations, fundraisers, grants).

#### *The dilemmas:*

What are the implications for the role of the teacher-librarian if increasing time is spent on fund-raising for student resources? What district level training and coordination is necessary to support this role? Is it important to recognize the decreasing percentage of school district funding and target it specifically for district level services such as site licences for electronic resources, Canadian children's books, new district-wide initiatives, etc., leaving the school to raise funds for school-specific projects? What are the implications and inherent pressures on teacher-librarians for fundraising for school collections? What coordination exists between the school, school district and public library to ensure a coordinated approach to resource management? Does the school have a written policy on resource management, ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from all learning resources funds, whether for technology, textbooks, supplementary materials or library resources? What is the teacher-librarian's role in providing leadership in the selection and management of all

resources in a period of reduced clerical assistance?

These are not easy dilemmas to resolve: there is no one right answer, as the culture and priorities of each district and school varies, and there is no one right way to develop understanding and support, as situations and contexts vary. Further research and evidence is needed to provide direction and clarity. However, there is no question that a critical new role dilemma for teacher-librarians is how to move advocacy based on evidence up the priority list. We need more action-based research projects in schools where Tls model the research process for teachers and students and collect evidence of their impact on student learning. Whining, lobbying and the public venting of frustration are no longer reasonable means of advancing one's cause, if indeed they ever were: our ability to present our case based on our effect is what will make a difference for student achievement-and that's the bottom line.



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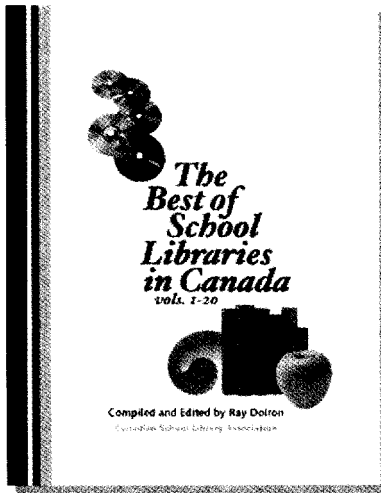
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