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# Reinventing school libraries: Alternatives, models and options for the future

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# Reinventing School Libraries: Alternatives, Models and Options for the Future

by Ken Haycock

*The following is an excerpt from the paper presented by Ken Haycock at the Forging Forward symposium. For the sake of brevity, references have been removed. The complete text is available at <http://uviclib.uvic.ca/symposium/symposium.html>.*

THERE IS MORE than thirty years of research to support the notion that teacher-librarians affect student achievement, yet this information is almost unknown outside the school library community. Even then, it is known only by the relatively small number who have professional qualifications, belong to professional associations and read professional literature. Teacher-librarians, through collaboration with teachers, have an impact on academic achievement in research and study skills, or "information literacy", and in content areas as measured by teacher assessment, standardized tests and scholarship examinations.

The mere presence of staff, facility and resources, however, are not sufficient in and of themselves to bring substantial gains. Studies indicate that the development of student competence in information skills is most effective when integrated with classroom instruction through collaborative program planning and team teaching [CPPT] by two equal teaching partners—the classroom

teacher and teacher-librarian [TL]—in a flexibly scheduled resource centre. The teacher-librarian plays important roles as information specialist, teacher and instructional consultant. A key component in influencing positive student attitudes toward the resource centre and reading is flexibly scheduled programs. Students taught through collaborative program planning and teaching have a better understanding of effective use of the library resource centre and achieve significantly better academic scores for both content and skills/strategies.

In what is commonly referred to as the "Colorado study" the Colorado Department of Education determined that among school and community predictors of academic achievement, the size of the resource centre staff and collection is second only to the absence of at-risk conditions, particularly poverty and low educational attainment among adults. Students who score higher on norm-referenced tests tend to come from schools that have more library resource staff and

more books, periodicals and videos, and where the instructional role of the teacher-librarian and involvement in collaborative program planning and teaching is more prominent.

The researchers concluded that the school resource centre should be staffed by a certified teacher-librarian who is involved not only in identifying materials suitable for school curricula, but also in collaborating with teachers and others in developing curricula. These activities require that the teacher-librarian have adequate support staff. The degree of collaboration between the teacher-librarian and classroom teachers is also affected by the ratio of teachers to students. Collaboration of this type then depends on the availability of both the teacher-librarian and teacher [it thus cannot be the role of the teacher-librarian to provide the teacher's preparation time]; teacher-librarians who play an instructional role tend to have teacher colleagues whose workloads permit such collaboration. This involvement in the instructional process helps to shape a larger — and presumably more appropriate — local collection of resources. School expenditures affect resource centre staff and collection size and, in turn, academic achievement.

Students learn more, and produce better research products, following planned, integrated information skills instruction by the teacher and teacher-librarian together. During the research process students move through different stages, with predictable thoughts, feelings and actions; these thoughts progress from general to more specific to focused, and confidence increases from initiation of the search through to closure; this knowledge base enables teachers and teacher-librarians to plan appropriate intervention strategies. For example, students typically lack a clear research focus at the beginning of the process. A co-operatively planned library

program integrated with classroom content and taught by the planning team has been found to advance student learning and success.

At the secondary level one often hears the plaint that teachers need to "cover the curriculum" and process issues, as embodied in resource-based learning, cannot be incorporated with classroom instruction. However, students learn best when units of study emphasize both subject matter and information seeking and use and these units are best planned and implemented by teacher and teacher-librarian together.

Several domains or learning strands influence the decisions a student makes about information seeking and use: for example, the subject-matter domain (e.g., science), the life skills domain (including problem solving, planning, interpersonal communication) and the production domain (e.g., the required product or output). Students make most of their decisions based on prior learning. As they work in a domain their ideas become more connected. The domains then act as learning strands and together support student activity during a unit of study; in other words, prior learning in each domain—for example, subject matter and information skills and strategies—support or interfere with overall student learning.

Problems occur regularly for students without these connections; to illustrate:

- if the student does not understand the subject matter, the student cannot recognize or state information needs to guide searches; however, if the student has useful prior learning in information seeking, projects can be started by finding a general overview to expand subject matter understanding;
- if the student has limited prior learning of information sources, decisions about the usefulness of the

school resource centre are made after one limited search;

- if the student does not have strong understanding of organizing information, the information will be left essentially as originally recorded.

Student learning in the subject area is impaired by lack of knowledge of appropriate and effective information seeking and use, behaviors and skills. The teacher-librarian's intervention and support of student learning is impaired as student knowledge of subject matter is often overestimated and the student's inability to clarify the information need is not recognized. The teacher's intervention and support of student learning is impaired as teacher knowledge of information seeking, especially in libraries, is limited. Students cannot overcome these adult barriers alone.

Units of study which emphasize one strand only, that is, subject matter or information seeking and use, limit learning on all strands. Clearly, specialists in the domains, teacher and teacher-librarian, should collaborate in planning and implementing the unit of study for the benefit of student learning and academic achievement.

### **Impact on the Teaching and Learning Environment**

Recent studies place the school library and teacher-librarian firmly in the context of the school's culture. Where the school fosters and supports collaborative work environments, the role of the teacher-librarian is more easily achieved. Where this collaboration leads to greater cohesion around instruction, there are greater gains in academic achievement.

At the same time, while the teacher-librarian can markedly improve the school's teaching environment, the degree of material and intellectual support the principal is prepared to offer is critical to the success of the teacher-librarian's role. A higher level of awareness about the role of the

teacher-librarian among teaching colleagues and students is encouraged by close working relationships between the teacher-librarian and individual teachers or groups of teachers. Again, collaborative program planning and teaching is central to the role of the teacher-librarian but this is the most difficult part of the job, as CPPT requires a high level of marketing, meticulous planning, effective interpersonal skills and a high degree of bravado on the part of the teacher-librarian.

- Both qualitative and quantitative use of resources by teachers and students increases with a qualified teacher-librarian. It is perhaps interesting to note here that other jurisdictions are re-examining the evidence for decisions taken during budget reductions and making different choices today.

- The Chicago Public Schools, for example, often touted as a model for school-based decision-making and site management, is nevertheless rebuilding its central support system for school libraries, integrating libraries, media and technology and last year had openings for more than 100 full-time teacher-librarians but, still today, cannot locate sufficient qualified personnel.

- The Los Angeles public schools recently redirected \$ US 5.3 million to revitalize elementary school libraries due to declining reading scores.

- The state of Arkansas now requires a full-time teacher-librarian in every school to improve student achievement, as do several other states.

- The DeWitt Wallace Foundation provided \$ US 43 million over five years to local public education foundations to develop partnerships with urban school districts to revitalize school library programs based on the elements of effective programs outlined above, as a catalyst for improved achievement—this is the largest non-governmental school reform effort in the history of the United States.

### **Forging Forward: Current Problems and Proposals Role Clarification**

Professional associations have developed clear research-based role statements for teacher-librarians with requisite professional qualifications. These statements have informed university professional preparation programs to some extent but study after study still indicates lack of consensus among teacher-librarians themselves about their role, especially among those with no specialized education or training.

Trained support staff can relieve the teacher-librarian of routine tasks and make the resource centre more efficient and effective. Teacher-librarians and aides perform different functions in schools where each is the sole staff member, particularly in the areas of budgeting, curriculum work and extra-curricular activities, where the TL is more active. A general library media technician with a broad understanding of media and administration would be helpful in schools, especially with the abilities to get along with people and supervise and discipline students. Principals are more eager to engage technicians as support staff for Tls than are school superintendents. Further, superintendents have a propensity to misuse technicians as "teacher-librarians". Differentiated staffing is critical for school library resource centres, however, the effective use of support staff will need to be addressed at the district level through negotiation and written agreements.

### **Education for Teacher-librarianship**

Perhaps the single greatest impediment to realization of the role of the teacher-librarian and potential impact on student achievement is education for this position. The Canadian School Library Association developed a competency statement for the role of the teacher-librarian and a proposed

educational program to address those competencies. The beneficial outcome of these national guidelines was the almost total elimination of undergraduate programs for teacher-librarians as part of teacher education; the unfortunate side effect was that the proposed graduate programs were not put in place and existing university faculty were assigned to other teaching positions. In one decade almost 90% of the university faculty positions in teacher-librarianship in Canada were eliminated. Nowhere has the effect been more deleterious than in Ontario where programs of education, typically at the post-baccalaureate and graduate level elsewhere, have devolved to the profession as a series of summer continuing education programs. Not only has the traditional professional service leadership of faculty been lost but the research component that undergirds the profession as well.

Research in education for teacher-librarianship suggests that applicants should have professional preparation and successful classroom teaching experience prior to entry. This is supported by research in program effectiveness, in teacher-librarian effectiveness and in perception studies with teachers, principals and school principals. In this regard, Canada is far ahead of many countries in recognizing and accepting this premise. Personal attributes such as initiative, independence, extroversion, personal stamina, self-confidence should be considered in the selection of candidates, a difficult proposition at best and certainly not in place. Personal attributes and skills such as leadership, communication and social interaction, and ease in personal relations should also be considered in the selection of candidates and built into the program as specific competencies or skill sets; again, not in place.

School libraries and teacher-librarians will survive and thrive in the twenty-first century only if educators

understand their importance in the educational enterprise. Central to any program of education for teacher-librarians is the development of competencies in the selection, organization and management of resources. The ability to specify and articulate information problem-solving skills and strategies at various developmental levels and in different subject contexts is necessary for the teacher-librarian to be a credible resource person and teaching colleague. Knowledge of adult learning theory and experience in leading in-service programs should also be built into education programs.

### Marketing and Advocacy

The future of teacher-librarians, even with this evidence of effect, will depend on decision-makers' understanding of their role and importance in the educational enterprise. Simply stated, unless the program and service of teacher-librarians is marketed their contribution to the instructional program of the school goes unnoticed. Paradoxically, as the program becomes better integrated and more effective, it also becomes more "seamless" with the classroom program and more difficult to profile. Connecting agendas with classroom teachers and administrators and making certain of understanding and support can assist with taking the collaborative message forward.

It is both interesting and perhaps instructive that a national campaign, Library Advocacy Now!, sponsored by the Canadian Library Association, is having difficulty engaging the school library community in spite of a willingness on the part of other professionals to take on this advocacy project. Furthermore, the American Association of School Librarians is engaging in a five-year, carefully constructed plan of advocacy for the implementation of new guidelines and standards using two Canadians to design the plan and initiate the training.

### Resource Management

Administrative interest and leadership in developing and supervising resource management policies is long overdue. Duplication of effort, of funds and of resources occurs in most schools and school districts without identification or resolution; the same material can be purchased for individual classroom teachers, for a learning assistance centre, for a supplementary materials collection in the staff room, for the school library resource centre and for many other areas in the building; in some cases these resources may be expensive but used infrequently without even rudimentary support systems for resource sharing between and among schools and district services. This is wasteful of public funds but attempts at resolution for the improvement of access to quality teaching and learning resources can too often be characterized as "control" issues rather than "access" issues; "turf" is alive and well in public education.

Even in the most common areas of duplication there is evidence for savings funds and improving education. To take one example — where school library resource centres are integrated with classroom instruction, there is greater collaboration in building classroom "library" collections and more effective use of resources. There are three models of classroom collections and these levels of integration in the school reflect their relationship to the school library resource centre and the teacher's relationship with the teacher-librarian:

- independent — a separate and unique collection that reflects the classroom teacher's interests and is used to promote independent reading; it operates as a parallel collection with the library and seeks self-sufficiency;
- interactive — a collection that reflects individual and grade level

interests, which is supplemented by the library collection and used to support themes and greater selection for reading; it operates as a co-operative collection with the library;

- integrated — this collection is part of the overall resource collection in the school and reflects curriculum needs; it is linked to program needs through collaboration with the teacher-librarian and works as one collection with the library.

Schools that build a collaborative approach to resource development and integrated instruction by teachers and the teacher-librarian make more effective use of available funds and improve student interest in reading and academic achievement.

### Administrator "Technolust"

Certainly technology is a useful tool for teaching and learning. Certainly schools require improved access to information technology. However, it is important to note the issues related to technology acquisition.

First, by way of example, almost every position for district coordinators of school library media programs in British Columbia has been eliminated. In spite of severe budget reductions, however, most districts now have a district coordinator for information technology. There was seemingly little thought that the two might be connected. The former were almost exclusively women, the latter are almost exclusively men but the issue of gender is not acknowledged let alone addressed. This is mirrored in individual schools. Further, those closest to the day-to-day use of technology, those who use the Internet, for example, as a search tool with teachers and students, are well aware of its strengths and limitations and its relationship with other print, audio, visual and electronic resources, whether CD-ROMs or online commercial databases; those furthest from

frequent and consistent use and work with young people seem most enamored of the possibilities for financial savings, without experience or evidence.

Second, there is no shortage of information in schools. Our problem is that too many of our schools face becoming information rich but knowledge poor unless we recognize the serious difficulties that students face in using information effectively. If it was difficult to use print-based information how will computer-based information be any easier? It is critical that we distinguish here between physical access to information, the challenging but nevertheless easiest steps in the process, and intellectual access to information, the ability of students to process and use information effectively, where we have a long history of poor achievement. We are facing the prospect of the "dumbing down" of education to "download, cut and paste" unless we build more effective programs.

This is not to disparage the efforts of classroom teachers. It is simply recognition, based on years of research, that knowledge of available, high quality Canadian resources is difficult to achieve as a classroom teacher and that implementation of inquiry-based programs is also very difficult for one teacher to achieve, even with a computer on every desk. Information problem-solving skills and strategies are complex and developmental and require shared expertise and a school-wide effort.

Cutting libraries and teacher-librarians, under the guise of providing an information rich school, is accepting a promise over performance, surely a problematic decision for children who go through our system only once.

### Research and Statistics

Major school districts are undertaking studies of the future of their school

library information centres while still others are clarifying roles based on reduced budgets and time allocations. The results of these studies need to be shared.

We also need to face two major problems. With the decline of university positions in teacher-librarianship, research production is minimal. Further, there is no central agency collecting data on school libraries in Canada, whether staffing or expenditures on collections. It is impossible to track developments at the district, provincial or national level. It is well nigh impossible to debate alternatives and options when documentary evidence on the current situation is largely unknown and comparisons with the recent past impossible.

#### **Co-ordinated and Congruent Approaches: District and School**

Individual schools as learning environments and as organizations need to develop co-ordinated and congruent approaches to resource management and use. Then protocols can be developed for improved resource sharing between and among schools, whether print resources or site licensing for appropriate databases. However, the evidence suggests that: there is no effort to eliminate duplication of effort in most school districts; there is no effort to build information systems across schools in most school districts; there is no validation of effective practice in most school districts; there is no effort to develop and identify the most effective use of personnel of various categories in most school districts.

The result is that malpractice is common, resource allocations wasted and personnel poorly used. Decisions tend not to be based on evidence but rather on intuition, experience and attitude. Documentation of best practice in various parts of the country is required to provide some direction and benchmarks for measuring

effectiveness. Coalitions of national associations could provide leadership in this area. We need to examine alternatives to scheduled classes in elementary schools, making effective use of paid aides and adult volunteers, and negotiating resource allocation issues to focus on access rather than control.

#### **The Connected Learning Community**

Teacher-librarians are ideally placed to work with senior administrators to develop the connected learning community, broadly defined across an entire community, in a way that features learning rather than hardware acquisition and access to "free" information. Partners might include vendors, public and academic libraries, municipalities and other information providers such as government departments and consumer and health information services.

We need more models for what used to be called the "multi-type library network" that builds on telecommunications capabilities and includes all community members. We also need to provide access and training for community groups such as seniors. This provides visible evidence of school district leadership in the community and teacher-librarian leadership in the school district. This extends beyond access to the Internet and public information to connecting CD-ROM products and online databases through broader site licenses. It is becoming increasingly common, for example, for state departments of education to sign site licenses for all school libraries in the state and to connect these to public or academic library services as well. This should be adopted in this country and extended by districts to local communities.

Instructional programs for students are also emerging for the effective use of the Internet that could be extended to other educational and community

agencies. For example, at the primary level, the teacher-librarian captures sites appropriate for the topic of study and "bookmarks" them for teacher and student use; indeed there are software programs available to assist with this process. Students can then use pre-selected and pre-screened sites for their inquiry. This can be made available beyond the school or developed in co-operation with local public libraries. The American Library Association's youth divisions have identified more than one thousand exceptional and continuing web sites highly recommended for young people; some universities have similar projects; there are regular selection guides to recommended web sites. Can we afford for every teacher in every school to undertake locating, assessing, capturing and organizing appropriate remote sites? We need to work with our community partners on this.

At the early intermediate levels students search together with their teachers and are taught basic search strategies such as Boolean logic; some school districts taking a more broadly-based approach to resource management and information technology have found that students use their school library and commercial on-line databases and CD-ROM sources, when they are available, for their information needs far more than the Internet as the information is more accessible, accurate, reliable and complete. There are also search engines appropriate for these age levels that screen sites for age appropriateness; this allows for positive selection of age-appropriate sites rather than random censorship of all information for all ages.

At the intermediate/junior level and up, we offer short "courses" in Internet ethics and appropriate use and provide a "driver's license" or simply add relevant additions to our schools' already comprehensive codes

of conduct. A colleague who has consulted widely with principals and superintendents suggests these rules: I respect equipment, software and materials; I respect other student's work; When I quote or copy others, I give credit; I realize that all e-mail may be public information; When I find something inappropriate, I exit immediately and inform my teacher; I don't give out my name or personal information over networks. These could, of course, be modified and can be supervised. Occasionally, the school may need to "suspend" a license to ensure compliance.

Our students are taught to be effective navigators capable of turning information into knowledge, acting as their own filters. Working together communities can build graphic user interfaces guiding students to appropriate and useful community-based information and sources.

Essential in all of this is parent education. Parents need to be assured that their child's own teacher, or at least the teaching staff at the local school, have the competence and confidence to provide appropriate programs for young people and teacher-librarians should be at the forefront of this effort.

Greater co-operation between school boards, community agencies and the private sector is being encouraged to provide more effective service delivery and this is an agenda that teacher-librarians can help to advance. In British Columbia it was public libraries that employed young people to teach citizens how to use newer technologies at their local library; surely a community-based effort involving schools and other information agencies would best support a community-based approach to information access and learning opportunities. We need to work more effectively together for the good of the communities we serve.

#### **Conclusions**

There is a rich research base

supporting the models by which teacher-librarians have a positive impact on student achievement in both subject content areas and information-based problem-solving, on reading motivation and ability, and on positive and collaborative school cultures. These need to be recognized and acknowledged by decision-makers.

Current foundation issues requiring immediate attention for educators include the need for role clarification for the teacher-librarian, for appropriate and accessible graduate programs of education for teacher-librarianship, for student standards for information literacy clearly connected with curriculum guides, for articulation of guidelines for effective programs and for research-based and well understood criteria for program evaluation.

Beyond these foundation issues, teacher-librarians require more sophisticated skills in marketing to ensure client satisfaction and student achievement and in advocacy to develop a deliberate and sustained plan to build understanding and support incrementally over time for resource-based learning and the centrality of teacher-librarians to the educational enterprise; national programs to document research and collect statistics will assist in this process. As schools and school districts focus more on the management of

resources to improve access and avoid duplication of effort and of funds, the leadership role of the teacher-librarian in working with materials in all formats, on site and off, should become more apparent. We also need to move from concentration on delivery systems, such as information technology or books, and take a more holistic approach to resources in all media and for different instructional purposes.

With appropriate leadership based on these precepts for effective programs, partnerships in the district and community can afford teacher-librarians the support needed to forge forward to make their skills and expertise visible and essential. Leadership in building these community learning networks should be a prime consideration for school districts and public libraries.

More discussion of these issues and propositions is essential to resolve conflicts arising from differing perceptions and frameworks in the education and library communities. □

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