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School librarianship in Canada: An introduction

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An introduction School librarianship in Canada

Ken Haycock

School librarianship in Canada is unique. There has developed, in the past decade, a national consensus on the role of the school librarian, on the aim of the school library program and on the validity of the school resource centre as an integral part of the school's instructional program. Since the aim of this article is to provide a brief introduction for international visitors (particularly to the annual conferences of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions in Montreal), readers from abroad will find an overview of school librarianship in Canada; regular readers of *CLJ* will note the unique features of school librarianship in this country and school librarians will find a summary of the current status of school librarianship in a qualitative sense. The selected readings listed at the end of the article provide source material and further information for readers who wish to pursue this topic and the issues it notes.

Institutional context

Canada is a federal state comprising 10 provinces and two territories. Education is a clear provincial responsibility but, unlike several other countries where this is the case, there is no strong federal office of education providing national leader-

ship or funding. School libraries fall within the provincial framework of education but local school boards have become increasingly autonomous such that the degree of support and leadership provided is determined primarily at the school district level, not at the provincial level.

Several provinces do provide general statements of policy or guidelines and provincial consultative assistance but few of these have the force of legislation and no provincial personnel in school librarianship any longer have strong supervisory responsibilities. Again, unlike the situation in several other countries, the provincial ministries of education do not support strong school library offices; rather, the norm is one professional position working in a consultative capacity. School libraries, as a result, have developed along provincial lines within a general framework.

There is a national continuum of development and school resource centres in different provinces fall as a group at different points along this continuum; indeed, even within a province school districts can be found with strong school library services and other districts have none at all or small libraries staffed by clerical or technical personnel or volunteers.

It must be quickly added, however, that in the great traditions of the Canadian

character and school librarianship generally, school libraries are better funded and better supported than school librarians lead others to believe. In fact, school libraries in Canada are among the best supported in the world, and there is ample good reason for this. Further, school libraries in Canada are better supported on a *per capita* basis than almost any other type of library and this support has tended to be maintained even in times of fiscal restraint.

School library's aim

The aim of the Canadian school library program is to assist students to become informed decision-makers and life-long learners. To achieve this goal, teachers and school librarians co-operate to plan and implement units of study as teaching partners. These units integrate those skills necessary to locate, evaluate, organize and present information from a variety of sources. Through such planning and co-operative teaching, students develop, master and extend research and study skills in different subject contexts and at varying levels of difficulty. Emphasis is also placed on language improvement and enjoyment and the promotion of voluntary reading. A program such as this requires administrative support and considerable flexibility. Similarly, a wide range of complex tasks must be performed to

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assure the appropriate selection, organization and management of the human and material resources essential to the implementation of an effective program.

It is obvious from this definition of the school library program that the emphasis in Canadian school librarianship has shifted to a strong educational role assisting students to develop skills to process and use information effectively. It is important to note that while school libraries throughout the world have begun at the periphery of the instructional program, Canadian school librarians have moved gradually from that peripheral role with its scheduled library classes and emphasis on organization and routine to a teaching partnership with classroom teachers. School librarians in Canada have not attempted a quantum leap from a subservient role to attempt to be a "curriculum consultant" as so often appears in the American literature but have forged a partnership, a professional teaching partnership, with classroom colleagues to develop and implement units of study cooperatively and to team teach them, integrating research and study skills.

School librarian's role

The Canadian School Library Association (CSLA) has provided strong leadership in clarifying the role of the school librarian and providing support for its implementation. The association has recognized the need to develop individuals who are "prepared to think rationally and logically for themselves and to assume responsibilities." To develop this type of student, schools have moved to emphasize learner-oriented methods such as guided discovery and inquiry as well as traditional teacher-oriented methods.

In the association's *Qualifications for School Librarians* policy statement the following introduction is provided:

"This broadening of educational

methodology has had a great impact on school libraries. Many school librarians have been leaders in understanding and focusing on the expanding variety of teaching approaches and student experiences which the changing needs of society require. It is fact, however, that the inclusion of inquiry, individualization and independent study programs has placed many additional demands on the library and on the librarian. The need today is for the teacher-librarian to be a highly skilled teacher, able to function on the school team as a professional with competencies from teacher education and classroom experience as well as competencies from school librarianship and media services. Similarly, the library has moved from being a subject and merely a place to a service and a concept, a learning resource centre for teachers and students.

Expectations for teacher-librarians are very high. It is expected that a teacher-librarian will be in the forefront of curriculum and professional development services, will be familiar with the full range of instructional strategies and learning styles, will be able to organize time, personnel and materials to maximize utilization of each and will be active in professional concerns within the school and the district.

For the teacher-librarian to achieve these expectations, adequate support staff is essential to free the professional from clerical and technical tasks. School districts must recognize this need if the potential of the teacher-librarian and resource centre is to be realized.

It should be noted that successful completion of formal course work will not guarantee success as a teacher-librarian. Personality factors, interper-

sonal relations skills, creativity, flexibility, professional commitment and willingness to participate in continuing education, should be major factors in evaluating a teacher-librarian.

Recent advances in education make it essential that the teacher-librarian demonstrates the competencies outlined if the resource centre is to offer an educational service which is vital to the school's instructional program."

Nine areas of competence are recommended for Canadian teacher-librarians. Teacher-librarians require competence in the *administration* of the learning resource program which includes the ability to manage resource centre programs, services and staff in order that the services may contribute to the stated educational goals of the school. There is a requirement for competence in the *selection of learning resources* which includes the ability to apply basic principles of evaluating learning resources for the purpose of developing a collection which will support the instructional program in the school.

Teacher-librarians have skills in the *acquisition, organization and circulation* of learning resources including the professional tasks of classifying and cataloguing information and of organizing circulation procedures and the supervision of efficient and systematic technical and clerical support services.

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While not as strongly emphasized as in the American professional literature, Canadian teacher-librarians do recognize

the need for competence in the *design and production of learning resources* through the ability to plan, design and produce materials for a specific instructional purpose, such as to improve communication effectiveness skills, where appropriate commercial materials are not available. Of all areas of competence recommended by the CSLA, this is probably the least implemented due to sometimes inadequate facilities or personnel and also a far lower priority for most teacher-librarians.

The traditional *information services* include the ability to use reference materials in seeking answers to questions. The teacher-librarian also acts as a liaison between the resource centre/school and outside agencies for information services and resources. The teacher-librarian *promotes the effective use of learning resources and services* through the ability to alert users to the full range of available resources.

Most importantly, the teacher-librarian has a unique role in *co-operative program planning and teaching* with an ability to participate as a teaching partner in the accomplishment of identified learning objectives through a knowledge of recommended resources and appropriate teaching/learning strategies. This is a strong professional teaching role and requires the skills of advocacy to ensure the implementation and integration of research and study skills in the school curriculum. *Professionalism and leadership* allow the teacher-librarian to develop and promote the use of the human and material resources of the school resource centre and its facilities through co-operative professional activities.

For each of these nine areas of competence, CSLA also provides several performance indicators as a foundation for communication between teacher-librarians and other teachers and administrators, as a basis of determining priorities in the schools and for self-evaluation

by teacher-librarians.

The unique role of the Canadian teacher-librarian in co-operative program planning and teaching cannot be over-emphasized. Knowledge of research and study skills in a sequential, logical K-12 progression allow the teacher-librarian entry points into the school curriculum for planning with other teachers. These skills extend far beyond traditional "library skills" as they include not only the location of materials but also how to locate information within materials (such as using indexes and tables of contents), acquiring and analyzing information (such as skimming and scanning skills, study techniques, comparing and contrasting information and recognizing bias and propaganda), organizing and recording information (such as making an outline and taking effective notes) and communicating and presenting information (such as writing the research essay, giving a seminar, participating in a debate or developing a slide/tape presentation).

The development of these essential skills are the responsibility of all teachers but require the leadership and advocacy of the teacher-librarian to ensure that the integration and the flexible grouping and scheduling of students takes place. (Flexible scheduling [usually called "open libraries" elsewhere] requires advance planning with the classroom teacher. Canadian teacher-librarians do not generally take scheduled library skills classes in order to provide spare periods for classroom teachers. This is well known to be ineffective and archaic; as well, the provision of preparation time for elementary school teachers is a totally separate issue from the nature of the library program.) The teacher-librarian also provides and arranges in-service programs for teachers on aspects of resource-based learning and is becoming increasingly skilled in strategies for change.

This approach has enormous implications for other aspects of the school resource centre. If a premium is to be placed on planning between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians, obviously this affects the priorities for the teacher-librarian. Co-operative program planning and teaching is the most important service offered by the resource centre, and, as a consequence, other services such as story-telling and reading aloud may have to be shifted to classroom teachers following workshops and in-service programs to assist them to undertake these areas. The load of the teacher-librarian cannot be enlarged without recognizing the need for a refinement of priorities.

Other services also fall within the framework of co-operative program planning such that teachers are increasingly aware of the role that the teacher-librarian plays in their students' education. Program budgetting becomes more important as the selection of materials reflects units of study that require library resources rather than simply buying materials on a variety of subjects to meet anticipated curricular and recreational information needs. CSLA has recognized this important area and is providing intensive three-day workshops across Canada for teacher-librarians, consultants and coordinators. These sessions are being filled in spite of the enormous time commitments and fee involved, suggesting that this is a recognized area of need.

Guidelines and standards

For the past decade teacher-librarians have been involved in a philosophical struggle to determine whether national direction should come in the form of recommended quantitative standards or qualitative guidelines for effective service. For some the issue was resolved in 1977 with the publication of *Resource Services for Canadian Schools* which

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based library services firmly in the philosophical framework of the individual school. It was recognized that schools which emphasize the development of increasingly independent students through resource-based learning and various modes of inquiry as well as other teaching strategies would require the services of a well-staffed and well-stocked resource centre, whereas the school which emphasized more traditional textbook-based and teacher-centred learning would require less staff time and far fewer resources. The school resource centre, including the teacher-librarian, does reflect the goals and objectives of the school program.

It has become increasingly obvious, however, that the current reality requires some quantitative bench mark for the profession. While recognizing the need for advocacy by teacher-librarians to better integrate resource services and to develop strong support for library programs, it must be recognized that this is exceedingly difficult if the teacher-librarian joins a school staff where library services have had a low priority and must begin work with inadequate support staff and few materials.

Similarly, as regrettable as it may be, decision-makers still respond negatively to quantitative statements of recommended numbers for staff, materials and facilities as well as to philosophical arguments about the central role of the teacher-librarian and resource centre in the school. Some provincial associations have consequently supplemented national guidelines with realistic standards for their province which teacher-librarians can use in negotiating better support.

Statistics quickly date and personal opinion is always suspect but many would concur that a "reasonably" well-supported resource centre would have one full-time teacher-librarian for 350 elemen-

tary school students with some paid clerical assistance and one full-time teacher-librarian and one full-time clerk for 1,000 secondary students, three to five square feet per student for facilities and 10 to 15 volumes per student in collection size. This same "reasonably" well-supported resource centre would have a budget of approximately \$15 per student that would include all library resources with the exception of furniture and equipment.

It is worth re-emphasizing, however, that although there are hundreds of school resource centres that meet this level, the disparity is often great between provinces and between school districts within a province; in many jurisdictions, the disparity is even as great between individual schools within the districts as anywhere else.

These figures, however, are not standards to be aimed at. They are a projection of the norm in the country for a reasonably well-supported program. Personnel ranges from student and adult volunteers in one centre to full-time professionals and clerical and technical assistance in schools of 250, facilities range from a corner of a classroom or an empty hall to resource centres exceeding 10,000 square feet for 1,500 students. Collections range from an out-of-date encyclopedia and a few dusty books to 45,000 volumes in a large secondary school and budgets from \$1 per student and perhaps even less to more than \$30 per student in one large school district. The professional literature of Canadian school librarianship tends to sound alarms about decreases in school library services and support but generally fails to seek out the success stories of increasing support in a large number of school districts in the country. Many school resource centres do meet recognized standards of service and implement guidelines for programs that match the best anywhere in the world.

District support services

District support services are available to most teacher-librarians and resource centres in Canada; again, however, the range of services provided varies greatly. The traditional services of co-ordination and leadership, the provision of district collections and materials such as films, videotapes and professional materials for teachers, support for the selection of learning resources and personnel for the cataloguing and organization of materials are common. Most of these services are operated through a district resource centre under the direction of a supervisor or through a district resource centre under the direction of a supervisor or co-ordinator.

Unlike many other countries, but consistent with comments made earlier about provincial support services, school districts in Canada tend to invest funds in professional personnel at the school level rather than at the district level. Many believe that this is an appropriate priority but naturally would prefer well-supported services at both levels.

Some features are more well-pronounced in Canada than others. The first would be the advocacy role performed by the district co-ordinator, particularly in working with administrators, officials and trustees. The co-ordinator has the responsibility to work with principals and others to ensure an understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian and resource centre and to work with teacher-librarians assisting them to work effectively for the maintenance and extension of existing support.

More and more school districts are also placing a greater emphasis on staff development through professional in-service programs aimed at clarifying further the role of the teacher-librarian and discussing means of integrating research and study skills through planning and devel-

oping co-operative units of study with teachers. This emphasis is becoming more marked as financial restraint becomes more obvious. Those districts which have placed priority on in-service for teacher-librarians in program development rather than on business meetings and the evaluation of materials have tended to maintain their services rather than see them reduced to a minimal level.

Issues

The overriding issue in Canadian school librarianship is to ensure that the role of the teacher-librarian is both understood and supported by not only teacher-librarians but teachers, administrators and decision-makers. This necessitates a clearly defined and well-respected program for education for school librarianship in the country.

Such is not the case at the present time. The faculties of library science and to a much lesser extent the faculties of education have not responded to the needs of the profession through research and publication in the area of education for school librarianship and in developing programs which respond to newer roles and priorities. The faculties of library science have too often criticized the essential requirement of a teaching certificate for school librarianship (in eight of 10 provinces) but have not developed programs which address the needs of school librarians.

More and more teacher-librarians are also recognizing and requiring support for a new priority of developing public understanding and support for school librarianship as more and more taxpayers have no children in the public schools. Declining enrolments and declining financial support have made community understanding and involvement crucial.

A continuing issue in Canadian school librarianship is the nature and quality of

Canadian content in library collections. Although publishers and professional associations have encouraged the selection and acquisition of Canadian materials, too many teacher-librarians (as well as both teachers and librarians generally) react in all too common Canadian fashion of requiring the Canadian product to be twice as good as the foreign product before it is purchased. The logic of this escapes international observers but this is a phenomenon that pervades collection development (indeed life!) in Canada.

More and more teacher-librarians are faced with French immersion programs which requires special knowledge of materials in another language when the teacher-librarian is often unilingual. Some school districts are developing guidelines and standards for teacher-librarians who work with French immersion programs.

With a large influx of immigrants and refugees in the past five years, teacher-librarians, as part of the general school setting, are faced with an increased number of English as a second language (ESL) students and programs. This obviously requires a certain type of material but also raises questions of the best ways of developing not only language fluency but independent learning skills in ESL programs.

Many school districts are also facing the issue of first language or heritage collections when the research and leaders in the ESL program recommend the development of collections of materials in languages other than English while many professional practitioners, namely teachers of ESL programs, often prefer that only English language materials be available to students during the school day.

Like teachers and librarians everywhere Canadian teacher-librarians are struggling with the application of newer technology to resource centre operations and services. There is a growing concern that microcomputers and other more available

equipment support and enhance the role of the teacher-librarian rather than being an outlet for administrative and technical interests. There is simply no reason to try to do better and better what perhaps should not be done at all.

Another issue, also identified in the international literature of school librarianship, is resource sharing, a concern being addressed by teacher-librarians at the present time. Resource sharing in Canada, however, will only be successful if structures incorporate the needs of students for immediate information and if developmental approaches to resource sharing with and without technological support are researched and implemented.

A major struggle for Canadian teacher-librarians will be to convince the National Library of Canada that school libraries, the vast majority of libraries in the country, have a strong contribution to make to national bibliographic networks and other methods of sharing resources. At the present time, the National Library has offered only excuses to exclude schools in spite of their vast well-selected and well-organized collections which meet the needs of millions of Canadians.

Conclusion

School librarianship in Canada has made remarkable progress in the past 20 years and owes much to its early pioneers and leaders. What is most noteworthy in its achievement, however, has been the strong role of the school librarian in instructional programs and the communication of this role to teachers and administrators. With growing clarification of the role of the teacher-librarian and growing confidence in that role, teacher-librarians are willing to take more and more risks in making professional stands for their contribution to the education of young people. By leaving the handmaiden, materials-oriented image and respon-

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sibilities behind, Canadian teacher-librarians are emphasizing co-operative teaching and advocacy in order to ensure a bright future both for assisting young people to realize their potential and for the profession itself.

Ken Haycock is co-ordinator of library services and a supervisor of instruction, Vancouver School Board, British Columbia. Haycock is the only teacher-librarian to have been president of both the Canadian School Library Association (1974-1975) and the Canadian Library Association (1977-1978).

Selected Readings

Background information

- Jenkinson, David H. "School Libraries," in *Canadian Libraries in Their Changing Environment*. York University Centre for Continuing Education, 1977. p.201-229. An overview of school libraries in their educational context, emphasizing the current (1976) state of affairs across Canada.
- Scott, Margaret B. "School Libraries in Canada 1971." *Canadian Library Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, March-April, 1972. p.118-138. Also in *School Libraries: International Development*. Scarecrow Press, 1972. p.171-205. A status report on school library development to 1971, province by province.
- Mustard, Mary I. and Doris P. Fennell. "Libraries in Canadian Schools," in *Librarianship in Canada, 1946-1967*. Canadian Library Association, 1968. p.122-139. A useful overview of positive influences on school library development to 1967, province by province.

Role of Teacher Librarian

- Haycock, Ken. "The Role of the School Librarian as a Professional Teacher." *Emergency Librarian*, vol. 8, no. 5, May-June, 1981. p.4-11. Also in *Moccasin Telegraph*, vol. 19, no. 3-4, 1977. p.2-6 and foreign publications. Details the role of the teacher-librarian with emphasis on co-operative program planning and teaching. Includes bibliography.
- The Qualifications For School Librarians*. Prepared by the Qualifications for School Librarians Committee of the Canadian School Library Association. Canadian Library Association, 1979. 7p. Also appeared in *Emergency Librarian*, vol. 6, no. 5-6, May-August, 1979 and *Moccasin Telegraph*, vol. 22, 1979 as well as reprints in several provincial association journals. Outlines the association's policy on the role of the teacher-librarian with nine areas of competence (including indicators) and guiding principles for education for

school librarianship. Stresses the need for highly skilled teachers with additional education and experience.

Standards and guidelines

Resource Services for Canadian Schools. Frederic R. Branscombe and Harry E. Newsom, editors. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977. 152p. National guidelines for school and district resource centre programs and services. Developed through local and regional groups and a national committee, and endorsed by both the Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada (AMTEC) and CSLA (note: "learning resource teacher" is used here but CSLA endorsed "teacher-librarian" in 1981). Includes qualitative guidelines rather than quantitative standards. Supercedes CSLA's *Standards of Library Service for Canadian Schools*. Ryerson, 1967. and AMTECs (formerly Educational Media Association of Canada) *Media Canada: Guidelines for Educators*, 2nd ed. James D. Miller, editor. Pergamon, 1970.

Sources and Resources: a Handbook for Teacher-Librarians in British Columbia. Library Manual Revision Committee, B.C. Ministry of Education, 1978. 83p. Without a doubt the best manual for teacher-librarians, *Sources and Resources* has been used as a model by several jurisdictions. Includes a relatively enlightened ministerial statement of library policy and guidelines for operation of the resource centre. The major weakness is the omission of procedures for program development and implementation. The ministry's Modern Languages Services Branch has also released *A Handbook for Bilingual School Resource Centres* (1982) to assist teacher-librarians working with French immersion programs.

Partners in Action: The Library Resource Centre in the School Curriculum. Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982 (in press). One of the few official descriptions of the roles of classroom teachers, teacher-librarians and principals in co-operative program planning and teaching, this book provides a good overview with several examples. An excellent companion to *Sources and Resources* since the emphasis here is on programs.

Education for school librarianship

A Recommended Curriculum for Education for School Librarianship. Prepared by the *ad hoc* Committee to Develop a Model Curriculum for Education for School Librarianship of CSLA. Canadian Library Association, 1981. 22p. Relatively detailed program outlines for a post-baccalaureate diploma in school librarianship followed by a MEd and a MLS with school librarianship concentration. This document follows from *The Qualifications for School Librarians* and has been the basis for several national symposia.

Strategies for change

Birch, Joyce. "Advocacy: What Is It?" *MSLAVA Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, October, 1981. p.4-7. This important component of the role of the teacher-librarian is both legitimate and essential. Several suggestions are included.

Bowman, Jim. "Power and the School Librarian—Starting Here, Starting Now." *Emergency Librarian*, vol. 9, no. 1, September-October, 1981. p.6-11. The director of the government relations office of the B.C. Teachers Federation, a former school library supervisor and superintendent of schools, outlines several important strategies for influence by teacher-librarians. The issue is not the survival of school libraries but the future of professional teacher librarians.

Haycock, Ken. "Strategies for Change," in *Crucial Issues in School Library Development and Professional Education*. International Association of School Librarianship, Conference Proceedings, Annapolis Junction, Md., August 1-3, 1976. p.39-50. Reprinted in *Ohio Media Spectrum*, vol. 29, no. 4, October, 1977. p.49-57. Summaries of similar speeches by Haycock are found in *MSLAVA Journal* ("The Fix is In"), vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1977 and in *The Medium* ("Selling the School Library"), vol. 18, no. 2, 1977. p.15-18. Also, "Program Advocacy: The Missing Element," in *Emergency Librarian*, vol. 7, no. 4-5, March-June, 1980. p.3-4. Teacher-librarians must have a clear role, have confidence in it and ensure that it is understood by trustees and officials. Strategies for both school and district staff are outlined.

Professional literature

- Burdenek, Gene. "A Critical Review — The Literature of Canadian School Librarianship." *Canadian Library Journal*, vol. 37, no. 6, December, 1980. p.397-401. "The bibliographic control of the literature of Canadian school librarianship is in a primeval state." Burdenek provides an important bibliographic essay on the monographic literature from 1917 to the present.
- Emergency Librarian* (journal). Dyad Services, P.O. Box 4696, Station D, London, Ont., N5W 5L7. Five issues per year. \$28. Canada's only independent library journal changed direction in 1979 and now serves as a forum for teachers and librarians working with children and young adults in school and public libraries. Five special review sections.
- School Libraries in Canada* (journal). Canadian Library Association, 151 Sparks Street, Ottawa, Ont., K1P 5E3. Four issues per year. \$35. Formerly *Moccasin Telegraph* (1961-1980), the official journal of the Canadian School Library Association provides a professional medium of communication among members. Available by subscription since 1981.
- In addition, all provinces have a school library association which publishes a newsletter and/or journal. The best examples of these journals are all coincidentally from the three prairie provinces: *The Alberta Learning Resources Journal* (three issues per year) from the Alberta Learning Resources Council, Alberta Teachers Association, 11010-142 Street, Edmonton, Alta., T5N 2R1; *The Medium* (four issues per year) from the Saskatchewan Association of Educational Media Specialists, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2317 Arlington Avenue, Saskatoon, Sask., S7J 2H6; and the *MSLAVA Journal* (four issues per year) from the Manitoba School Library Audio-Visual Association, Manitoba Teachers' Society, 191 Harcourt Street, Winnipeg, Man., R3J 3H2.