

INTRODUCTION

My Journey Begins

When I began the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning (TL-DL) Master of Education program at the University of Alberta, I knew my capping paper would relate to my mother's tenure as teacher-librarian in the early 1970s. My focus was unclear, however, until I came across my late mother's retirement album created by many of her colleagues. I laughed and cried as I read the tributes bestowed upon her for establishing teacher-librarian positions in a small Saskatchewan town. In the pages of the album, many times she was identified as the "Strategy Queen" and, although these entries are dated June 1991, some of the same successes, same struggles and same strategies are ubiquitous in my life as a teacher-librarian in a 21st century school library.

Over the years, it became her mission to work at garnering support from administration, and she did so in unique ways as she created, developed and maintained the library program. The journey my mother travelled some 35 years ago is a journey I now take using anecdotes and strategies from her days as a teacher-librarian and connecting them to my education and experiences today.

"Mom, why are we going to school today? It's Sunday!" My mother's reply is as clear today as it was 35 years ago. "I need to work in the library. There just isn't enough time in a week to get things done." I also remember sitting in the library after school waiting for Mom at another of her meetings. Although busy reading *Anne of Green Gables*, *Lassie* or *Black Beauty*, I do recall Mom's conversations with colleagues about successes they were experiencing in the library--creating meaningful projects, cataloguing books, showcasing student work and teaching grade-specific library skills.

However, difficulties and dilemmas also crept into their conversations. Even as a 10 year old, I could see the struggles they were encountering. My mom's retirement tribute page showed me why these meetings were so important to her and how committed to creating change for teacher-librarians and library programming Mom truly was.

I specifically recall the use of the word 'strategies' in their conversations with each other. Today this word is entwined in my vocabulary and teaching philosophy as I focus on the educational needs of students I teach. *Collins Canadian English Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines strategy as "a particular long-term plan for success" (Summers & Holmes, 2004, p. 1192). As I reflect on my mother's long career as a teacher-librarian, I realize that those Sunday afternoons were spent strategizing. St. John the Baptist school library is where Mom planned—planned lessons, planned resources, and planned strategies. At the beginning of my teaching career in the library field in 1994, many issues I face today did not appear to be so significant, quite possibly due to my inexperience and naivety. However, as my life experiences grew and as the Information Age exploded, both the successes and the strains of teacher-librarianship grew in magnitude for me. As my confidence increased and as the number of successful collaborative library projects increased in my school, I focused on the positive. Presenting student inquiries at TL meetings was common, purchasing new materials to support curriculum was expected and attending conferences was encouraged. However, as time went on, I began to question what possibly more I could do, and frustration set in. Seeking answers, I asked myself, "What was wrong and how was I going to fix it?" I had learned the pedagogical underpinnings of teacher-librarianship and school library programming while earning my undergraduate degree. However, it did not prepare me for all the challenges I would face as a teacher-librarian.

As a new teacher-librarian, I spent a lot of time talking to Mom about my library woes. Through our conversations Mom helped me realize that my concerns revolved mostly around the need for support from the principal. At first I thought of support strictly related to the principal providing money to fund the school library program. Quickly though, I came to see this as a very limited concept of support. And now, through conversations, experiences and education, support has come to taken on new meaning for me.

My capping paper will address:

- why teacher-librarians and school library programs are vital to 21st century learners;
- how school administrators can support the teacher-librarian and the school library program; and
- how TLs in this 21st century can gain support for the position of teacher-librarian and for the school library program.

Today's Educational World

We live in an age of abundance—abundant information and abundant technologies. Key to survival in today's educational world is the ability to not only engage in learning in this environment but also to learn how to learn in this new environment. One of the greatest challenges today is helping all children to become proficient with, and to develop strategies to deal with rapidly changing technologies. Technology's impact has changed the learning environment from a few resources to an abundance of them in varying formats. Students today need to be better prepared for the

world outside the school and, as educators, “we need to develop ways for them to learn from information as they will encounter it in real-life situations, information that is not pre-digested, carefully selected, or logically organized” (Kuhlthau, 1999, p. 6).

In the past, school libraries addressed shortages of resources by collecting and providing numerous print and audiovisual resources to meet the needs of the students. However, today’s digital world allows students access to an enormous range of information--some near, some far. This abundance of resources actually creates a great need for the services that teacher-librarians can provide. Although a lot of information is available, at times retrieval of it is frustrating and time-consuming, and new sets of skills are required for using the information once it is found. The role of the teacher-librarian in this information age has changed from transmitter of information to facilitator. Kuhlthau (1999) states that students must be able to “learn in dynamic situations where information is constantly changing” and she notes that learning includes “the ability to manage information overload” determining that “enough information is as significant as locating and selecting relevant information” (p. 7). Richardson (2007) states that educators must provide “guidance and experience,” helping students build their own learning spaces, “preparing them for a much more collaborative, open world” (p. 1). Armstrong and Warlick (2004) state that our continuously changing learning spaces “require that students become not only literate but also able to use that literacy within their personal information environment in order to succeed now and in the future” (p. 1). As our world continues to change, we should remember (and adapt our instruction accordingly) that “in times of change, it is the learner who will inherit the earth while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists” (*In times of change*, 2007).

Today's School Library World

In this ever-changing world, students still need the basics—reading, writing and arithmetic—but as educators we need to adapt our teaching of the basics to teaching in information rich environments including new technologies. Today's students need to develop the ability to:

- learn in changing situations without becoming overwhelmed and discouraged
 - learn from abundant information without becoming frustrated, distracted, or bored
 - go beyond finding facts to constructing their own understanding at a deeper level
- (Kuhlthau, 1999, p. 9).

Schools today need to be structured around the “inquiry approach to learning rather than a transmission approach to teaching” (Kuhlthau, 1999, p. 9). In our schools, we should see:

- students actively involved in construction of knowledge
- students engaged in problem solving, questioning, seeking information, identifying prior knowledge, demonstrating new learning and sharing with others
- school libraries as the place where inquiry meets the minds of students

Gone are the days of single textbook use in the classroom and of library visits once a week for book exchange. Today's libraries are extensions of the classroom where integration of the curriculum occurs through use of a multitude of resources and the collaborative efforts of the classroom teacher and teacher-librarian in teaching and learning. Teacher-librarian roles have changed from finding resources for projects and teaching library skills to enabling students to approach learning from a questioning

perspective. Today's teacher-librarians provide expertise in accessing a network of resources, selecting resources, and teaching how resources are used.

The National Library Power Project, funded by the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, recognized these factors as important in the restructuring of today's schools:

- Libraries must be adequately funded for resources and technology
- Libraries must employ a full-time educated and certified teacher-librarian
- Teacher-librarians must work with a flexible schedule to allow for optimum learning
- Collaborative planning and teaching involving professional development must be orchestrated and supported by school administration (Kuhlthau, 1999).

Kuhlthau identifies one further critical element in educating and preparing students in today's world—"an underlying philosophy of learning shared by the library media specialist [teacher-librarian], teachers, and principal" (p. 13). She states that teacher-librarians need to collaborate and demonstrate leadership in creating this new understanding of learning that prepares students to live fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Although we see transformation all around us in the educational world, teacher-librarians and school libraries today, more than ever, continue to be necessary components of teaching and learning. "Libraries can adapt to social and technological changes, but they cannot be replaced" and [teacher-librarians] "are the most suited professionals to guide" students "towards a better understanding of how to find valuable information" (Valenza, 2007, p. 27).

The Importance of Principal Support

To be successful, teacher-librarians and school library programs require principal support. This has been known in the field of teacher-librarianship for a long time. Winifred B. Linderman in a 1944 issue of *The School Review* stated “The principal’s support of the library as a vital part of the educational system is extremely important” (Oberg, 1995, p.1). Oberg and LaRocque, in their 1990 study, found that principals were key elements in successful library programs. Asselin (2005) has pointed out that, although literacy teaching and learning are supported by school libraries, development of school libraries is dependent upon “funding and administrative matters” (p. 11). The school library provides support to teachers and students, but the school library needs support from school administrators in order to provide that support.

The teacher-librarian has a role to play in administrative support for the school library. Henri and Boyd (2002) found, in a case study addressing TLs’ perception of their “influence, or [their] influence power” (p. 1), that TLs’ perception of their power was a critical factor in determining the meaning of support within the workplace and the job that TLs will do. If teacher-librarians did not view themselves as holding any “formal organizational power” (p. 1), the task of gaining support from school administrators was more difficult for them. People who “believe their actions affect other people and events in lasting and varied ways are more satisfied with their lives and are more productive” (p. 1). This statement applies to the roles of both the TL and the administrator.

My Focus – My Inspiration

On a recent Saturday morning walk, I contemplated how I could address gaining support for myself and the library program in a positive way. Having recently read

Langford (2003) where she describes two hungers—“a lesser hunger framed in value-adding” and “a greater hunger, adding value” (p. 1)--I realized I could be ‘selfish’ in dealing with those two hungers. I needed not only to serve others, as TLs do, but I needed also to “renew, revitalize, recharge” myself, adding value for me as I focused on my goal of seeking support. I acknowledged to myself these selfish “hungers” thinking about how they could result in me being “better prepared and equipped to be a value-adding professional” (Langford, 2003, p.19). I reflected upon the last week of school (second last week of June) and thought about individual events during the week. With inquiry-based learning activities pretty much wrapped up for the year, my focus turned to my literacy classes with kindergarten. Knowing these little ones would fill their summer holiday with many days of playing with siblings and friends, I chose Amy Krouse Rosenthal’s *Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons* (2006) as my final reading choice, hoping they would take some ‘life lessons’ with them. I had not realized what insights I would gather simply from reading this book with them.

As I continued my walk that Saturday many thoughts of those ‘life-lesson’ filled my mind. The book is written with so much positive language. It truly teaches life lessons in an optimistic way. As I thought of support for myself as teacher-librarian, I looked at the life lessons in the book and saw how they paralleled qualities teacher-librarians should aspire to—that of being patient, proud, modest, respect, fair, compassionate, generous, optimistic, honest, courageous, loyal, open-minded and content—qualities that would sustain them in their quest for support.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Value of School Libraries

There is a plethora of research literature addressing the value of teacher-librarians and school libraries. This research gives three main reasons that might convince principals that they should support teacher-librarians and school libraries: increased student achievement, increased teacher collaboration and contributions to leadership in many areas of the school.

Hartzell (2003) specifically points to increased academic achievement as a reason why principals should support school libraries. Similar findings related to increased achievement have been echoed by many others. *School Libraries Work!* (2008), an American research foundation paper, outlines the benefits of both teacher-librarians and school libraries and the need for administrative support. *Achieving Information Literacy*, our Canadian document for standards in school libraries, notes that substantial research identifies the importance of leadership by the principal in development of a viable school library. Callison's research (2004) cited in the National Commission of Libraries and Information Science (2008), confirmed that "higher performing school library media specialists and programs may be a function of a more enriching learning environment that includes a supportive administration" (p. 11).

Lance, Rodney and Russell (2007) found that school performance was linked to principal perception of the teacher-librarian. However, Oberg (2006) points out that "gaining the respect and support of school administrators" (p. 1) may be the biggest challenge for 21st century teacher-librarians. She explains that teacher-librarians are seen by some, not as leaders, but as "service providers" (p. 1) responding to needs to students and staff. Hartzell (2002) extends this low-profile image describing teacher-librarians as

“suffering from occupational invisibility” (p. 2) and stating that principals tend to focus infrequently on the TL or the school library. He also points out that the teacher-librarian’s isolation in the workspace and the nature of library scheduling can hamper empowering or building of relationships with others. The invisibility of the teacher-librarian in the education field and in the research literature are also reasons why principal support can be hard to achieve. Teacher-librarians should be aware of these barriers and consistently work to address these barriers.

Increased Student Achievement

Academic achievement is and will continue to be the focus of all educators. For the last 50 years, researchers have confirmed the impact of school libraries on academic achievement. More recently, Keith Curry Lance and his colleagues in the United States have generated much of the research that positively identifies the connection between academic achievement and the presence of school libraries with qualified teacher-librarians (Lance, 1994; Lance, Hamilton-Pennell & Rodney, 1999, 2000; Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000; Rodney, Lance & Hamilton-Pennell, 2002; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004). “School libraries staffed by certified library media specialists [teacher-librarians] do make a measurable difference on school achievement” (NCLIS, 2008, p.

1). Haycock (2003), a Canadian researcher, agrees that:

in schools with well-stocked, well-equipped school libraries, managed by qualified and motivated professional teacher-librarians working with support staff, one can expect: capable and avid readers; learners who are information literate; and teachers who are partnering with the teacher-librarian to create high-quality learning experiences (p. 10).

Lance, Hamilton-Pennell and Rodney (2000) found students attained higher test scores with increased library/information literacy instruction.

Today's school library provides numerous opportunities to enhance student achievement through instruction by informed/qualified teacher-librarians who provide children with tools to build new knowledge. The focus in today's library is "connections, not collections; actions, not positions; and evidence, not advocacy"—all facets of today's educational reform (Todd, 2001, ¶ 3).

Increased Teacher Collaboration

In today's highly interactive world, collaborative efforts are sought after and instituted for effective learning to occur. Collaboration includes "the need for a shared vision; the different roles played by the collaborators; the planning required; the strengths brought by the teacher-librarian and the teacher to their collaboration; and the positive results" (McGregor, 2003, p. 200). Planned collaborative efforts affect in a positive way grade-specific curricula and movement along both information and technology literacy continuums. When collaboration occurs between classroom teachers and TLs combining teaching strategies with differentiated instruction, quality learning experiences and increased student achievement are found (Haycock, 2003; Needham, 2007; Lance & Loertscher, 2003). Teachers who collaborated regularly gain the additional resources required to create and enhance instruction (Lance, Rodney & Russell, 2007). Teacher-librarians working together with classroom teachers addressed issues related to intellectual freedom, plagiarism, networking privacy and confidentiality, evaluation of websites and ongoing digital divide (Johnson, 2004). Morris and Packard (2007) found that moving "a learning experience from the classroom to the media center" resulted in "two teachers instead of one, an information-rich and technology-rich environment" and "twice as much professional support" (¶ 12). Lance & Loertscher (2003) and McGregor

(2007) found collaboration efforts integrated the curricula through a planned library program and allowed for best results in overall academic achievement. In 2008 the United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Studies (NCLIS) confirmed that increased teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration impacted student achievements. Lance, Rodney and Hamilton-Pennell's second Colorado study (2000) found initial collaborative efforts pro-actively set the stage for further collaborative efforts and extended the positive effect on student achievement. Although these studies focused on student academic achievement influenced by increased collaborative efforts, the greatest change in achievements occurred when principals supported all members of the team in the collaborative effort.

Teacher-librarians should continuously seek collaboration opportunities and obtain support from administrators. Principals play a significant role in the success of collaborative efforts since they oversee TL scheduling, library programming, professional development and leadership opportunities (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003; Oberg, 1995). Loertscher believes collaboration between staff and TL is necessary in the creation of a successful library program and suggests that teacher-librarians need to move out of their support role "to one of intervention in learning" (McGregor, 2003). McGregor also suggests that TLs should move outside their comfort zone into unknown territory and be seen as collaborators beyond the library.

In the past 25 years researchers have directed their attention on teacher-librarians and library programs focusing on library leadership, an aspect within the TL position greatly affected by administrator support. A Colorado study by Lance (2000) found a direct relationship between leadership and collaboration which invariably resulted in higher grades and achievements (Haycock, 2003). TLs who were positioned in leadership

roles throughout the school provided a benefit to both students and teachers through their expertise in teaching of information literacy skills along with a more meaningful engagement for students with information that matters in the world in which they live (NCLIS, 2008). A further study by Baumbach (2002) found increased academic achievement in schools where TLs were placed in leadership roles. Their dual teaching certification (both teacher and librarian) qualified them to demonstrate leadership in more than one area—the library and the classroom.

Another significant factor found in relationship to student achievement was teacher-librarian scheduling which is normally a responsibility of the school's administrators. Flexible scheduling positively affects student academic performance and contributes to increased collaboration amongst professional staff which results in increased student achievement in curricular studies. Lance, Rodney and Hamilton-Pennell's (2003) study of elementary and high school students found that students in schools with a flexible schedule performed "better in reading and in writing" at the elementary levels and that "6% of students met or exceeded reading standards" in their studies at the high school area (NCLIS, 2008). Library staffing numbers were related to higher reading scores at all school levels and when TLs were operating a flexible schedule which allowed them to assist and identify resources for students both for curricular and pleasure use, increased reading scores were noted (NCLIS, 2008).

The latest research by Lance, Rodney and Russell (2007) in an Indiana study found evidence of increased student achievement in schools where administrators valued the collaborative efforts of teacher and teacher-librarian, where flexible scheduling was supported, and where TLs were found in leadership positions within the schools.

Contributions to School Leadership

Teacher-librarians possess many leadership qualities and are able to support and assist the principal in attaining school goals. The U. S. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2006) states “accomplished library media specialists [teacher-librarians] are instructional leaders who forge greater opportunities for learners.” Hartzell (2002) maintains “Perhaps nowhere is a principal’s power to affect library media programs more apparent than in the extent to which the librarian has the opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity outside the library itself” (p. 2). Lance & Loertscher (2001) state that expanding the teacher-librarian’s role outside the library walls creates an increased awareness amongst colleagues of the importance of their work with students. Working outside of the library provides opportunities for TLs to demonstrate their expertise in specialized areas, creating avenues where others will recognize their work resulting in support for them and the school library program. Hartzell (2002) credits the increase in positive effects of library programming to teacher-librarians ridding themselves of the library boundaries and allowing them to work outside the realm of what the traditional library offered as a learning space.

Teacher-librarians are prepared to be leaders in areas of reading, information and technology, in the creation of collaborative teaching and learning communities, and in guiding students to achieve more and to become independent lifelong learners. When principals create opportunities for leadership, TLs can provide professional development for staff, plan activities that include collaboration, invite principals to curricular grade/subject meetings, and share the library vision with all staff (Morris & Packard, 2007). School administrators need to see TLs as valuable assets to the students, the staff and the entire learning community. Providing opportunities to recognize the leadership of

teacher-librarians and the impact they have on school library programming is the responsibility of the administrator.

The principal's role is one of leadership. Research indicates one significant role in defining the TL – that of leader. “Administrators and library media specialists are by the very nature of their work natural allies” (Pasco, 2003, p. 195). Their combined leadership abilities allow them to work in building a strong partnership for the school library.

One area in which the TL can contribute to leadership within the school, district and community is in the area of information literacy. Information literacy is more than ‘library skills.’ In the 21st century, information literacy is defined as a set of “skills, strategies, and ways of thinking that are essential to success in a knowledge-based world. Information literacy is the ability to find and use information with critical discrimination in order to build new knowledge” and an “information literate person” is “a lifelong learner, skilled at using complex cognitive processes and diverse technological tools in order to solve problems in personal, social, economic, and political contexts” (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. ix).

Our Canadian standards for school library programs document, *Achieving Information Literacy* (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003) states “The major learning outcome for the school library program is to develop students who are information literate” (p. 4). ...“If each school library were to have a teacher-librarian who taught children and youth the skills necessary to be effective users of information in all its forms, a powerful mechanism would be in place for enabling Canadian children and youth to be literate citizens, lifelong learners, and contributing adults in a learning society” (p. 5).

Traditional literacy programs embedded the concept of information literacy within the teaching of reading and writing skills (Lee, 2005). However, today's students require a broader set of skills and tools integrated into core curricular subjects. Changes in literacies have impacted the educational world greatly (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004). In today's Information Age, students need to be able to identify problems, locate useful information related to the problem, critically evaluate the information they find, synthesize this information to solve the problem and then communicate the solution. "Consistent and comprehensive implementation of information literacy programs is critical for 21st century learners" (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 9).

"Today's students "often referred to as Millennials or Net Geners" come from a world "heavily influenced by information technology and have never known life without computers, the Internet, video games, cell phones, high-speed networks, instant messaging, social networking sites, iPods, YouTube, and Google" (Rosenfeld & Loertscher, 2007, p. vii). This exposure enables continuous connectivity with friends and allows them to "communicate and collaborate in real-time regardless of physical location; access a wealth of diverse information; and contribute content instantaneously to web sites and weblogs" (Geck, 2006, p. 2). Today's students are equipped with management and storage tools needed for information use and expect great things from this myriad of tools. Although these this net-savvy generation of individuals have had much "experience with digital technologies, they do not have a deep understanding of the inner workings of the Internet" and require guidance and instruction (p. 2).

"Computer technologies and the Internet have changed nearly all aspects of society" (Baule, 2007). Being a technology leader in the 21st century requires great

responsibility and diversity. Since technology's debut in schools, libraries have become "media centers with computer resources that enable children to engage meaningfully with a wide variety of information" (NCLIS, 2008, p. 4). In a technology leadership role teacher-librarians "support the use of electronic information resources" integrating them throughout the curriculum" (p. 4) and "establish and design online communities of learners" through use of new technologies (Geck, 2006, p. 3). Today's teacher-librarians play an integral role as technology leaders in schools as the digital world constantly changes and continues to grow in complexity and magnitude.

Teacher-librarians create the necessary connection between information and technology. Harris (2003) states "technology enables flexible and powerful information retrieval, analysis and production" (p. 173)—all elements of information literacy. Technology can be used to aid in teaching of information literacy skills, in developing critical thinking skills and in ethically educating our students to determine validity, credibility and authenticity of information. Teacher-librarians recognize the necessity of working with students helping them develop thinking skills needed to determine the validity of information, to use information ethically to avoid false judgement about information and to understand bias (McPherson, 2007).

Today's libraries are high tech media centres. "The Internet has transformed a once static source of information into an interactive tool for both teaching and learning" (Beaudry, 2005, p. 81) creating a need for a new skill set for the 21st century learner. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) standards document (2007) identifies "technology skills as important both now and in the future." Technologies in schools have become an essential and ubiquitous component, rapidly advancing to include podcasts, whiteboards, MP3 players, blogs, wikis and video-conferencing

(Franklin & Stephens, 2007). As new technologies emerge, their impact can change education in a positive way (Muir-Herzig, 2004). Students require consistent instruction to help them maximize the benefits of these tools. Teacher-librarians play a critical role in supporting students in accessing and using information through the use of many formats and tools. Lance's Indiana study (2007) concluded that teacher-librarian leadership in technology instruction in the right place at the right time promotes the best environment for student learning. A study by Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell (2003) found that increased TL contact time with students advanced their access, analysis and use of information; where TLs helped students to access on-line databases and to use the Internet to link resources to their school networks, students' reading achievement improved. TLs endorse a global view and teach students to "seek diverse perspectives, gather and use information ethically, and use social tools responsibly and safely" (AASL, 2007, p. 4). Leadership is needed in order to use technology to create higher-order thinking and ethical response, and "teacher-librarians are well positioned to take this role" (Asselin, 2005, p. 33).

Technology in today's world is a need, not a want—a requirement for teachers and students to be successful. Many teachers were not born into the digital world and experience uneasiness and discomfort with mention of it, creating barriers or obstacles for themselves and the students they teach. Muir-Herzig (2004) found that the greatest blocks to technology use in schools were: limited access to equipment, an unclear vision and lack of understanding and support. Today's technology has positively impacted the work of the teacher-librarian, creating increased credibility and significance to the library's program and the role of the teacher-librarian.

Many provinces have developed Information Communication and Technology (ICT) documents outlining specific technology skills and outcomes that 21st century students require. Teachers need to feel a comfort when using this document and TLs as technology leaders can assist them by providing professional development encouraging and supporting technology implementation into the curriculum through collaborative efforts and planning. Teacher-librarians create the necessary connection between information and technology, by providing necessary professional development for staff and by modelling ethical and effective use of new and emerging technologies in the creation of wikis, blogs and podcasts. Using and connecting these 21st century tools to curricular studies provides TLs with opportunities for supporting teachers in the use of technology as a catalyst for creative exploration and connection to the world outside of school. TLs providing leadership in technology through instruction are working to create the best environment for student learning and providing many opportunities for teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration. Many avenues to support these ‘right place, right time’ opportune learning moments can be fuelled through the support of the principal.

WHAT TEACHER-LIBRARIANS CAN DO TO ACQUIRE SUPPORT

The topic of ‘how to gain administrator support’ has been raised many times during library meetings throughout the 14 years I have been a teacher-librarian, both in formal and informal conversations. Oberg (1997) states that teacher-librarians seem to have a clear understanding of the concept of principal support and of how important this support is but she believes that some TLs may not have a complete understanding of how to gain this necessary support. Oberg states “developing principal support for the school library program and for the role of the teacher-librarian is an important task ... that must

be learned” (p. 8). After reflecting on my experience and reviewing the professional and research literatures on the topic, I believe we can garner support from the principal for the school library program and the teacher-librarian position through:

- Educating administrators
- Creation of partnerships
- Promotion and advocacy
- Personal commitment to lifelong learning

Educating Administrators

Oberg and Wright in 1991 (cited in Oberg, 1997) noted the debut of school libraries in Canadian secondary schools in the 1940s and in elementary schools in the 1960s. Yet many teacher-librarians in Canada and in the United States would agree that even today “in most schools, principals don’t know what we do as library media specialists or what constitutes a quality program; they basically lack understanding” (Beyers, 2006, p. 1). Beyers contends that, although principals have been visitors to libraries for many years, they often lack knowledge regarding roles of the teacher-librarian and the school library in today’s education. Principals need to be aware of the expertise that teacher-librarians bring to the school landscape: teacher education, classroom experience, and knowledge of librarianship and information studies.

One of the ways in which teacher-librarians can address their principals’ lack of knowledge about teacher-librarianship is by providing principals with a teacher-librarian evaluation document along with the school library’s policy and procedures manual. This information creates a greater understanding of the scope of the position

addressing “collaboration, administration, teaching and information specialist” roles (Beyers, 2006, p. 1). Hartzell (2003) believes principals can best support libraries by “effectively and accurately evaluating both the program and the teacher-librarian on jointly developed criteria recognizing school library work as simultaneously integral to instructional quality but distinct from classroom teaching itself” (p. 3).

Highlighting the differences between classroom teacher and teacher-librarian roles helps administrators become aware that each position brings some similar and some different competencies to the classroom and the learning environment. The *Teacher-Librarian Competency* document (Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association, 1997) outlines the teacher-librarian’s personal and professional competencies: highly skilled and knowledgeable in information and technological literacy skills, curriculum, cooperative and collaborative planning and “familiar with the full range of instructional strategies and learning styles” (p. 1). After some time for perusal of these documents, a meeting between the teacher-librarian and the principal should be scheduled to discuss the information presented in the documents about the role of the teacher-librarian and the place of the library in today’s education.

Teacher-librarians have many opportunities to display their competencies both in the school and beyond. For principals to see the value of the teacher-librarian, they need to be informed. I continuously update my principal about my professional obligations including:

- providing professional development for fellow staff on library or technology related issues at the school and divisional levels

- committees I have active memberships with locally, provincially and nationally including Children's Literature Roundtable
- extra divisional courses I take related to libraries, literacy, technology and cooperative/collaborative planning
- my journey to complete my Master's degree

I believe it is important for principals to see and acknowledge the work of the teacher-librarian with students. They need to visit learning space of the library and experience our work with teachers and students. I invite my principal to informally visit at any time and extend to her numerous opportunities to see me in all phases of the learning journey from planning with classroom teachers to the assessment of student learning. Principals also require knowledge about the administrative work of the teacher-librarian. Today's library computer programs keep statistics on many aspects of the teacher-librarian's job including work with classes, accessions, questions asked, audio-visual bookings and circulation of materials. Providing principals with these data helps to explain the value of the TL position within the school and the reality of what the library can do for teachers and students. These data can be used to demonstrate how the collection addresses curricular concerns along with reading for pleasure.

Creating Partnerships

Teacher-librarians are collaborators working to build positive partnerships with teachers and administrators. Anderson (2007) believes that administrators and the teacher-librarian can "form a team that can make a difference in student learning and, in turn, in student achievement" (p. 23). She stresses the idea of teacher-librarian as a

member of school planning, curriculum, instruction and assessment teams and specifically addresses the notion of building relationships through the curriculum. Teacher-librarians “know the curriculum at every grade level and in every course” (Anderson, 2007, p. 23) and collaborate with teachers to build successful learning units for students. Both principals and teacher-librarians need to recognize the time commitment needed to establish and build these collaborative/cooperative efforts and to create effective and flexible schedules where these relationships will grow and mature as we integrate the school library program into curricular studies.

Oberg (1995) found “teacher-librarians generally have low expectations of their principals” (p. 1) and should work to establish positive working relationships with them. She (2006) believes teacher-librarians can gain respect and support—“by building their professional credibility, by communicating effectively with principals, and by working to advance school goals” (p. 3). This can be accomplished by:

- meeting with principals regularly discussing both successes and concerns of the teacher-librarian and the library program
- providing the principals with current professional and research information relating to the school library and student learning
- demonstrating leadership within and outside the school including department head positions, teacher-in-charge designation and divisional representation on assessment/new curriculum teams where post meeting communication between the teacher-librarian and the principal is critical in awareness and knowing

Other ways to build working relationships with principals include setting goals (being a member of the school planning committee) where our “work is viewed by stakeholders,

as critical to the success of the school” (Gallagher-Hayashi, 2001, p. 4). Becoming leaders in different areas of the school allows teacher-librarians to be noticed and recognized as teaching staff members. In my experience, out-of-library opportunities have allowed me to be identified more closely with the teaching staff. For example, I lead students on sports teams in the gym, teach crafts in the art room, create special songs in the music room, serve as safety patrol advisor and sponsor scrapbooking during lunch hour activities. Serving on decision-making bodies within the school, particularly those involved with assessment, rubric making, reflection processes, technology and literacy, have helped me to be viewed as an active participant within the school and as a member of the team. Working with other faculty and the principal on these committees has allowed me to build positive relationships where I am seen as a credible and contributing member of the school’s teaching team.

Promotion and Advocacy

“Unless we tell them, they will not know” (Church, 2006, p. 2). Research indicates that, although many classroom teachers and principals view teacher-librarians positively, they are unaware of their role both as teaching partner and instructional staff member. Classroom teachers and principals often have received little information about the scope of the teacher-librarian’s job or the extent to which the library program can benefit themselves and the children they teach. Active participation through collaborative teaching experiences and through leadership opportunities can help to promote and advocate for the role of the teacher-librarian and the library program. Advocacy for the teacher-librarian’s role and library program could include:

- preparing and submitting a monthly library report about inquiry based learning at specific grade/curricular levels and publishing student work both in a newsletter and on the school's web page
- presenting, talking about and sharing evidence of student learning and achievements at staff meetings
- making presentations to parent council groups at different times of the year focusing on inquiry, on specific happenings in the library and on technology's influence on the library program
- inviting the principal to join in or observe an active inquiry learning environment where the teacher-librarian teaches the skills/processes of the 21st century
- involving community in different aspects of the school library program (guest speakers, authors/illustrators and volunteers)
- displaying student work throughout the school in showcases, during assemblies and at learning fairs
- in-servicing staff through professional development opportunities focusing on information literacy, technology literacy and collaboration
- providing all faculty including the principal with professional and research literature which supports a strong school library program based on appropriate resources, staffing and funding
- preparing a budget and informing all staff of the need for funding based on statistics from the library
- meeting with the principal to discuss long term planning and vision

- being a lifelong learner advancing my knowledge base through experiences, reflection and further education

Teacher-librarians can promote the program and their role outside the realm of the library and the school. Gallagher-Hayashi (2001) states we “must have an active voice” (p. 7). Attending and presenting at library and technology seminars outside the division, provincially or nationally, creates a voice for our positions and programs. Writing articles and making presentations to educators allows us opportunity to be heard. Oberg (1995) believes we need to take part in and develop a strong and active networks committed to ongoing professional development, mentoring, advocacy, and policy development. School library education, such as the TL-DL program offered by the University of Alberta, can provide teacher-librarians with a strong educational and advocacy network. The collaborative discussions during the courses and the sharing of experiences gives teacher-librarians new knowledge and strategies along with a deep sense of commitment to the profession and the program that they can take back to their own schools.

Personal Commitment to Lifelong Learning

As with any profession, personal commitment is critical. Doiron (1999) outlines four areas where teacher-librarians play major roles in creation and maintenance of the school library program. He states that teacher-librarians need commitment to their work as instructional leaders, as partners with classroom teachers, as advocates for the school library program, and as administrators of the overall library function including budget, staff and resources. These commitments are reflected in my experience as a teacher-librarian.

As instructional leaders, teacher-librarians “come from the frontline of school librarianship” having a “unique opportunity to develop in all educators a clearer understanding of information literacy, resource-based learning, the role of the teacher-librarian, and how crucial school libraries are to achieving the learning outcomes set for all students” (Doiron, 1999, p. 5). Using our education, knowledge and experiences, we have ample opportunity to show the deep commitment we have to our profession as we work with students to achieve. I see my personal commitment as an instructional leader by extending my learning beyond what I was offered in my early university days. This journey over the past three years as I worked to complete my master’s degree has helped me to realize the importance of a continued commitment to myself as an educator and learner and to the students and staff.

My commitment as a teaching partner continues to grow each time I work with teachers whether it be on a unit of study that we have done before, making changes to improve it, or perhaps trying something new that we muddle through as we connect it to new curriculum or skills. I believe wholeheartedly in the saying “two heads are better than one” and live by this motto daily working with fellow staff using my knowledge and competencies. I believe this commitment extends beyond the local school to fellow teacher-librarians—to those just entering the field of teacher-librarianship and to others looking for new ideas and strategies. My belief is that I must be a learner to be a teacher-- and communicating and sharing of knowledge and ideas with others strengthens the partnerships previously established.

We must blow our own horns. We need to be deeply committed willing to ‘go the extra mile’ extending ourselves onto sometimes shaky ground if we truly want to make others aware of the footprint we leave on today’s students and their education. We have

got to step outside our comfort zones and move “beyond the frontline” (Doiron, 1999, p. 1) bringing to administrators and colleagues our positive energy and passion for our positions and our programs. My mother said often, “We must continue to learn until we are unable,” and I believe that as teacher-librarians we are learners always seeking out and yearning for new knowledge. A commitment to being a lifelong learner is critical in today’s information age as what is new today may become old and obsolete tomorrow. We need to continuously strive to stay abreast with learning in such a changing field.

Finally, teacher-librarians are administrators within their own domain. Management of the collection, circulation of the resources, maintenance and inventory of all materials including print, non-print and electronic resources requires a commitment to stay current and objective. Dedication to developing a collection that meets the needs of everyone in the school is a requirement. Teacher-librarians have a unique opportunity to offer customized, just-in-time, relevant, and authentic service and instruction. In today’s Information Age, teacher-librarians need to understand “how different resources in school library media centres are used for different purposes and how these resources are complementary” (Johnson, 2002, p. 1). Today libraries need to extend a multitude of resources to accommodate the diversity amongst our learners. In addressing the needs of each student, collections need to include a multitude of resources at many different levels and in many different formats.

A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY

As a teacher-librarian the journey I travel takes new turns every day creating both adventure and frustration. This 21st century continues to create many new avenues for exploration. As we seek administrative support we need to explore many areas that once were considered outside the realm of teacher-librarianship and school libraries.

Today's education includes an escalation of technologies where communication is immediate and where retrieving, managing and making sense of information are now considered essential life skills. As our world becomes more encompassing and more globally diverse, so too is the support we seek for ourselves and our libraries. The shift from the traditional approach of doing research in the library to "a more pervasive understanding that information literacy must be a major part of the school curriculum" (Lee, 2005, p. 66) strengthens the need for the role of teacher-librarians in schools. Smith's 2006 study, cited in a 2008 National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) research foundation paper, affirms that "certified library media specialists as the most critical component of the library media program at all school levels" (p. 15). Evidence from numerous studies over the past 25 years (see, for example, Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005; Todd, 2001, Smith, 2006) have validated the impact teacher-librarians and school libraries have on student learning. Teacher-librarians teach unique skills "not necessarily covered in the classroom—especially information, communication and technology skills" all essential and critical in today's education (NCLIS, 2008, p. 15). Principals, by acknowledging and supporting the special contributions that teacher-librarians make in helping students to think critically and to gain deeper understanding will see benefits both for students and for teaching staff. The findings of Lance's 2005 study, as those in many of "its predecessors support the belief that powerful libraries—and librarians—do, indeed, make powerful learners" (p. xiii)—something all principals seek.

As the educational world continues to change, the challenge in creating "powerful learners" becomes even greater. Again, Rosenthal's *Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons* provides simple, yet compelling inspiration to me in seeking support from my principal

for myself and the school library. I made these connections: I will remain optimistic (we do great things – they’ll see our value); open-minded (we need to be included in the school’s big picture); wise (we’ll keep our principals aware of anything and everything we do); cooperative (principals and teachers will see our benefit); patient (we know everything takes time) and passionate (we truly love what we do).

The continuous journey that teacher-librarians travel will always have us wondering which road to take and when but we should ponder Robert Frost’s inspiring words “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.” I chose the road my mother did—and I strive to make a difference!

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