

**TEACHER/TEACHER-LIBRARIAN COLLABORATION: A STUDY OF  
INSTRUCTIONAL CHOICES MADE BY FREQUENT, MODERATE AND  
NON-USERS OF SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES**

**BY**

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## Introduction

All available research points to a strong correlation between increased student achievement and effective school library programs. Given this evidence, one might expect that all teachers, certainly all teachers of academic subjects, would enthusiastically engage in collaborative planning with their teacher-librarian, and that administrators would support their efforts with all possible resources. Such is not the case. Research indicates that teachers engage with teacher-librarians to plan, teach and evaluate curriculum occasionally at best (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994; Pickard, 1993). The need for collaborative practice has never been greater than in this information age; sadly, only a small minority of teachers engage in it.

## Statement of the Problem

The most problematic aspect of teacher-librarianship is also the most crucial, and that is the challenge of collaboration: problematic because it depends on two or more individuals seeing a common goal through to completion; crucial because individual effort no longer suffices if teachers are to equip their students with the skills necessary to their future success. In *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, the American Library Association (1998) explains the importance of collaboration thus: “Effective collaboration with teachers helps to create a vibrant and engaged community of learners, strengthens the whole school program as well as the library media program, and develops support for the school library media program throughout the whole school” (p. 51).

Whereas no educator could deny that this is a worthy goal, very few engage in the practice. If information literacy is so important to students’ futures, and therefore to the

future of our country, why is its instruction so sporadic, random and under-valued? Why do so few teachers choose to collaborate with teacher-librarians? Why are principals not using their influence to ensure that teachers and teacher-librarians plan, teach and assess together? Who is responsible for the general lack of awareness of the benefits of the school library program in the education system?

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the basis on which teachers choose to work, or not to work, with teacher-librarians. The number of variables affecting this decision is great, including the teaching style of the classroom teacher, the quality of the school library collection, the effectiveness of the school library facility, the level of expertise of the teacher-librarian, the school culture, the instructional leadership of the principal and the previous training and experience of the staff. The researcher was fortunate enough to eliminate a few of these variables by finding a school with an exemplary teacher-librarian renowned for her skill in curriculum design and who was fully satisfying the requisite professional and personal competencies. The school library possessed a current, vibrant collection of print and electronic resources that met or exceeded the norms for British Columbia secondary schools, and the facility itself was large, open, bright, and inviting.

Even still, while some teachers collaborated frequently, others seldom or never used the school library program. Given the almost ideal circumstances, what causes the variance in use at this school?

To make its determination, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent does teachers' pre-service education affect their instructional choices?
2. To what extent do school policies and perceived principal support regarding resource-based learning and information literacy affect teachers' instructional choices?
3. How do workloads, rigid curricula and standardized exams affect teachers' willingness to work with the teacher-librarian?
4. How do teachers' perceptions of the teacher-librarian as a school leader affect their willingness to share planning, delivery and assessment of lessons?
5. To what extent do teachers' planning styles affect their ability to collaborate?
6. Do teachers at this school have or believe they have sufficient skills to integrate information literacy standards without the services of the teacher-librarian, and does this affect the extent to which they collaborate with her?

## **Description of Terms**

Information literacy: "The ability to recognize the need for information to solve problems and develop ideas; pose important questions; use a variety of information gathering strategies; locate relevant and appropriate information; assess information for quality, authority, accuracy and authenticity. Includes the abilities to use the practical and conceptual tools of information technology to understand form, format, location and access methods, how information is situated and produced, research processes, and to format and publish in textual and multimedia formats and to adapt to emerging technologies" (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 85).

School library program: “The collaboratively planned and taught units of study developed through the shared expertise and equal partnership of classroom teachers and teacher-librarians based on the principles of resource-based learning and designed to achieve the educational goals of the school” (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 85).

Teacher-librarian: “A professional teacher with a minimum of two years of successful classroom experience and additional qualifications in the selection, management and utilization of learning resources, who manages the school library and works with other teachers to design and implement resource-based instructional programs (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 84).

## **Review of the Literature**

This review of professional and research literature is divided into two parts. These are:

1. Background information, including
  - a. A history of the studies regarding the effectiveness of school library programs;
  - b. The importance of information literacy integration; and
2. Factors influencing the integration of school library programs, including
  - a. School culture;
  - b. The principal;
  - c. Teacher-librarian leadership;
  - d. Teacher training;
  - e. Teacher overload.

## ***A history of the research***

For sixty years, researchers have been conducting studies regarding the connection between school libraries and student achievement and demonstrating strong correlations between the two. Early researchers conducted studies on relatively small samples and did not explore the instructional role of the teacher-librarian. The implication was that simply having a teacher-librarian on staff led to improved results (Lance, 2001). However heartening this information may have been to teacher-librarians, it did not provide data on which aspects of their responsibilities led to improved student success. This lack, combined with today's very different teaching and learning context, resulted in a need for more current studies.

In this generation, the seminal study was *The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement* (Lance, Wellborn & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993). The data generated from this study had greater significance than previous studies in that the sample was of considerable size, and it examined individually the services of a school library most likely to have a positive impact on student achievement. This first Colorado Study found a strong correlation between library spending and standardized test performance especially where teacher-librarians took on an instructional role (Lance, 2002).

However, factors beyond the researcher's control made it necessary to use a non-random sample, with the result that senior grades were not well represented. There was no control for alternative teaching styles, discipline problems, or student turnover, and recent census data was not available to assist in accurately controlling for socio-economic factors. The study did not address important factors such as scheduling, delivery of the



information literacy program and the use of technology (Lance, 2002). The conclusions were interesting but non-generalizable.

Over the next ten years, Lance and other researchers have conducted many more studies--in Alaska, Pennsylvania, Oregon, again in Colorado, in Ohio and Scotland--succeeding in replicating earlier results and eliminating the limitations of the first Colorado study. The common finding of these studies is that *next to socio-economic issues, the single greatest factor affecting student achievement is the school library*. Students with well-funded libraries, and therefore richer collections and higher staffing ratios, tend to do better on standardized tests. Students whose teacher-librarians take active planning and teaching roles also tend to achieve higher test scores. At the heart of these findings is the ability and willingness of teachers and teacher-librarians to work together to plan, implement and evaluate lessons and units of study (Asselin, 2001, Lance, 2001; Lance 2002b).

Whereas this is great news for teacher-librarians, it is important that teacher-librarians look closely at the findings in order to improve their practice, advocate for their role within their own schools, and fully realize the potential of the school library program. In other words, the data in these studies provide teacher-librarians with a proven framework for success, but it is up to them to use it. First, the research indicates that teacher-librarians need the backing of their principal in order to affect change since the principal controls budget and staffing allocation as well as the composition of influential committees. Second, teacher-librarians need to be seen as school leaders in order to earn the trust and respect of the teaching staff. Teacher-librarians must engage in teaching students the skills of information literacy and provide training to teachers in

such areas as resource-based instruction and the integration of technology and information literacy into the curriculum (Lance, 2002). To do this, teacher-librarians must be highly trained, skilled and confident, both in information literacy skills and in themselves as educators.

Clearly, this is not a linear process. Each element is as complex and as interdependent as the reeds in a tightly woven basket. Which comes first? Teacher-librarian skills? Principal support? Teacher training? Teacher-librarian leadership? Teacher confidence? Just what is the formula for a fully integrated, collaborative school library program? Just as a house divided will not stand, a school library program needs all of these strands to function optimally.

### ***The Importance of Information Literacy Integration***

In previous generations, information was hard to come by. The textbook evolved as a method of gathering available information on a given topic at an appropriate reading level to deliver a curriculum to students. Teachers and students regarded textbook writers as authorities, so they rarely considered thinking critically about the quality and possible bias of the information. Currency was not as great an issue at the time because the rate of world change was slow enough that the information brought together in these texts stayed up to date for many years. The ability to read with understanding was all that was required.

Information is no longer a scarce commodity. In fact, students and teachers are awash in it. Reliance on textbooks to provide the content of a curriculum is no longer either necessary or desirable. Today's students need to locate, evaluate and use today's information, both in school and beyond. It is vitally important that students receive

research assignments that develop information literacy skills if they are to be successful in our information-based world (Smith, 2002). Today's school library must bring together technology that links the user to the outside world, and teacher-librarians must use what we know about how the brain learns to guide our practice (Sykes, 2002). It is time educators had a good answer to the perennial student cry of, "Why do we have to know this?" by placing greater emphasis on skills acquisition for the information economy. Fullan (1999) states that the 21<sup>st</sup> century school must develop in students the ability to use information technologies to communicate and create knowledge. This ability can hardly be considered a frill. In fact, keeping up with the rapid growth of knowledge has become the key factor in economic, social and cultural progress. "In this light, information literacy is central to economic development" (Asselin & Lee, 2002, p. 11).

An information literate school is one where both teachers and students are engaged problem-solving and decision-making much of the time, and where staff has the skills and support required to develop thinking and questioning skills. Assignments in an information literate school call for higher level thinking skills and the creation of personal meaning from facts. Students learn to find, select and assess information with a minimum of wasted time. All curriculum documents include clear statements regarding the information literacy expectations appropriate for each grade level (MacKenzie, 1998). The creation of an information literate school relies upon several interrelated variables. It requires an effective school library program managed by a fully trained teacher-librarian possessing all or most of the personal and professional competencies outlined in *Students' Information Literacy Needs In The 21st Century: Competencies For Teacher-Librarians* (Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada & The Canadian School Library

Association, 1997). That teacher-librarian must have the support of his or her principal so that the library receives the financial and clerical support it needs, and the teacher-librarian is able to assume a position of leadership beyond the library, perhaps even beyond the school. The school principal needs to understand the importance of the school library program and to provide the necessary encouragement and resources to provide for teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration and to encourage a collaborative culture in the school (Asselin, 2001; Hay & Henri, 1995). In order for collaboration to occur, teachers have to be willing and able to let go of their traditional, classroom-centred orientation and embrace school-oriented practices and goals. Ideally, teachers, teacher-librarians and principals should work together to set the goals of the school library program. In other words, this ideal requires acceptance from everyone in the school and represents a significant shift from the traditional classroom-centred norms of teaching (Oberg, 1990).

The ideal school library program is the heart of the school for both teachers and students. It is a place where the teacher-librarian works with teachers to support their learning objectives and further school goals. Here the teacher-librarian lends his or her expertise in resource selection, technology, information literacy, and critical thinking to help create, deliver and assess authentic assignments. The print and electronic sources of information inside and beyond the walls of the library, brought to focus by a skilled teacher-librarian and a creative teacher, provide students with the opportunity to practise resource-based learning, acquiring transferable skills and strategies for life-long learning. Along the way, they attain better problem-solving and information technology skills (Asselin & Lee, 2002).

Doyle (1992) describes an information literate person as one who:

- \* recognizes that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making;
- \* recognizes the need for information;
- \* formulates questions based on information needs;
- \* identifies potential sources of information;
- \* develops successful search strategies;
- \* accesses sources of information including computer-based and other technologies;
- \* evaluates information;
- \* organizes information for practical application;
- \* integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge;
- uses information in critical thinking and problem solving. (p.4)

This is precisely the sort of person required by today's job market, economy and culture.

The development of the information literate person requires the communal efforts of teacher-librarians, classroom teachers, principals, and faculties of education.

Collaboration is forged from shared vision, respect and trust, the latter of which may be the most important factor in fostering collaborative relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). The requisites of shared vision, respect and trust must be rare in education because, despite the known benefits to student achievement, research consistently shows that only a minority of teachers collaborate with teacher-librarians (Asselin, 2001). Is this because of a failure to communicate the benefits of collaborative practice, a lack of shared vision, or a failure to establish trust and respect?

Not only does collaboration with teacher-librarians vary widely in frequency, it differs in quality as well. Loertscher's *Taxonomy of Library Media Services* (1988) cites a range from no collaboration at all to planning and structuring school and district curricula. At the highest level, information literacy skills are fully integrated into the curriculum and teacher and teacher-librarian are equal partners who plan, deliver and assess work together. At the lowest level the school library is a "self-help warehouse" (Loertscher, (1988, p. 15). Sadly, only one in ten teacher-librarians is able to operate at Loertscher's higher levels (Pickard, 1993). Seventy percent of teacher-librarians surveyed by Asselin reported that the teachers they worked with were either unformed or only somewhat informed about the role of the teacher-librarian and school library program (2001). Given the potential benefit shown in the research on school library programs, this communication failure is having a profound negative impact on student achievement.

## **Factors That Influence the Integration of School Library Programs**

### ***School Culture***

What teacher-librarians are asking of teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a huge shift in values. In fact, it demands nothing less than a revolutionary change in the culture of the school. The integration of information literacy requires that classroom teachers let go of isolationist practice, reliance on textbooks, and being seen as experts by their students. Teachers need to accept the idea of working with the teacher-librarian, a figure with whom they may have had negative experiences from their own schooling, and let that person be an expert in their class from time to time. This transgresses teachers' habits of autonomy. Teachers need to learn to use primary resources in multiple formats, despite

lack of training and/or experience. They need to build be prepared for student resistance to change and learn to support them through the frustrating early stages of the research process rather than abandoning the approach. They need to teach students critical questioning skills, not just how to answer fact-based questions. In other words, when we initiate a cooperative, integrated library program, we are asking that all members of the school community change their activities, the roles they play, and the values that shape their behaviour (Oberg, 1990).

However challenging this shift may be, it is imperative because collegial collaboration is the factor that most clearly characterizes successful schools. When teachers discuss classroom practices with each other, observe and analyze one another's teaching, work together to design units of study, and participate in instructional improvement together, they improve the quality of learning in their schools (Oberg, 1990). In fact, the characteristics of outstanding schools are shared goals, teacher collaboration, and teacher learning. For this to occur, the principal needs to establish a school culture that supports collaboration. Even strongly classroom-centred teachers who have never engaged in collaborative practice and hold it in a negative light will become more school-centred in a collaborative school culture (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Teachers also need to be encouraged to shift their focus from the student in their classroom to the student as citizen of the school. Classroom-centred teachers see their work as being the most significant factor in student learning; school-oriented teachers see the whole school affecting their teaching and student success. Schools where school-oriented teachers predominate are more successful in implementing change (LaRocque 1986).

Clearly, it is not possible for a teacher-librarian working alone to affect this kind of change. A successful school library program requires a whole-school approach and the teacher-librarian lacks the authority to affect school-wide change. The school librarian's role in this transformation is critical, but his or her task is impossible without whole-school support beginning with that of the principal (Henri, Hay & Oberg, 2002).

### ***The Principal***

Research on the role of the principal in developing an information literate school tells us two things: one, that the principal's role is vital to the school library program, and two, that most know very little about it.

School library programs cannot be fully successful without a committed principal. The principal is a major factor, perhaps *the* factor, in effective library programs (Hartzell, 2002a). The school library requires significant portion of the school's budget, for which the principal is ultimately responsible. The principal needs to understand that these monies are not required for the good of the library, but for the benefit of the whole school. Strong, well-staffed libraries with robust collections and current technology make schools more effective (Hartzell, 2002a). "Principals should support school libraries because it is in both their students' and their own interests to do so. Quality library programs can enhance student achievement, and informed, committed teacher-librarians can help principals enhance their own administrative practice" (Hartzell, 2003c, p. 1). In this time of decentralized control of schools, it is vital to the academic success of students that all administrators learn about the research on school library programs so that funding and staffing of the school library is not left to caprice.



As the curriculum and instructional leader of the school, the principal has great influence over how well information literacy is embedded in the school's curriculum. The principal is in a position to be a powerful ally for the teacher-librarian by providing budget, moulding school culture, allocating time, and creating leadership opportunities. However, many principals feel unsure about the place of school libraries in their schools, (Asselin, 2001) and there are several reasons why. The school library probably did not play a significant role in their early education. In all likelihood, their school librarian, if there was one at all, was not a trained professional. As a result, it is unlikely that there was a fully functioning school library program. Second, school library programs seldom receive mention in administrative training programs. When they do, it is often in the light of difficult issues such as censorship, copyright law or book challenges by parents. Nowhere in their training are they given the tools to assist in the creation of a successful school library program, or to evaluate its effectiveness. Third, administrator journals rarely publish school library research (Hartzell, 2003c). As a result, school principals are often unaware of what a 21<sup>st</sup> century library can offer (Hartzell, 2002b). Where this is the case, the burden of creating, promoting and validating the school library program falls entirely on the shoulders of the teacher-librarian.

Because of this lack of understanding, teacher-librarians and principals generally do not share the same priorities for the school library program. Most teacher-librarians place greatest importance on cooperative planning and teaching, whereas principals rank providing in-service to teachers highest (Hay, Henri & Oberg, 1998). Only 16% of principals report that teacher-librarians have a great deal of influence in adapting curricula (Hartzell, 2002a). The teacher-librarian must work with the principal so that he

or she comes to understand the importance of prioritizing time for collaborative planning and teaching. The principal is the key person in setting expectations for teacher involvement in the school library program. The authority of the principal's voice is necessary in helping teachers understand that integrating information literacy skills with curriculum programs contributes to the achievement of school goals (Oberg, 1997). Currently, only 13% of Canadian principals hold regular planning sessions about the school library. However, 87% provide time at staff meetings and 92% elicit support from parent associations (Asselin, 2001). Teacher-librarians must strive to earn the principal's trust and respect in order to motivate his support for and involvement with the school library program.

The lead of the principal is also crucial in fostering and sustaining the collaborative culture required by an integrated school library program (Hay & Henri, 1995). Teachers collaborate more with other teachers and with the librarian when the principal openly encourages it and structures schedules that facilitate it (Haycock, 2002a; Oberg, 1997). It works even better when assessments of collaborative activities become a part of teacher evaluation (Hartzell, 2002b). However, it would be unreasonable for teacher-librarians to expect this level of assistance unless principals first understand the nature and benefits of the school library program. Before principals provide "specific and concrete support for the school library program and for role of the teacher-librarian" (Oberg, 1997, p. 5) he or she must understand the benefits of such support. This will require work on the part of the teacher-librarian.

On a more positive note, the studies suggest that, in general, principals have a clearer understanding of the school library program and a more positive vision for the

school library program than do classroom teachers. Principals' views of the school library programs are closer to that of teacher-librarians (Oberg, 1997). Whereas a new teacher-librarian might instinctively choose classroom teachers as early allies, research suggests that the principal is a more natural beginning point for teacher-librarians wanting to work within a more collaborative environment. Teacher-librarians must make every effort to educate principals as to the role and function of the school library program, to share the research on school libraries and achievement, and to encourage the evaluation of the school library program.

Teachers need to perceive the teacher-librarian as a school leader in order to trust him or her to assist with planning and teaching. Here again, the principal, who organizes and guides the committees, can be a powerful partner. A dynamic and dedicated librarian may be eager to take part in leadership activities within and beyond the school, but this is unlikely to happen unless the principal wants it to (Hartzell, 2002a). Alternatively, if the principal views the teacher-librarian as trustworthy, reliable and skilled, he or she is likely to give that teacher-librarian every opportunity to take on leadership roles. In fact, most principals are quite willing to support teacher-librarians as leaders, to rely on the teacher-librarian's judgement and recognize their professional autonomy, and to treat the teacher-librarian as a "quasi-senior member of staff" provided that the teacher-librarian merits that esteem (Hay & Henri, 1995).

Just as classroom teachers need to become more school-centred and less classroom-centred in a collaborative school culture, so also should the teacher-librarian become less library-centred. Teacher-librarians need to understand and promote the school's goals and to work with the principal to realize them. This not only builds the

teacher-librarians' credibility, it helps principals to see the connection between library program goals and school goals (Oberg, 2003). To provide proof of their skills and commitment, teacher-librarians should routinely supply principals with current information before board, faculty, or parent meetings (Hartzell, 2003c). To create more confidence and equity, it behoves teacher-librarians to be at least as educated as their principals, to be assertive in advocating for the school library program, and to be unstinting in supporting the goals of the principal for the school.

### ***Leadership of the Teacher-Librarian***

The extent to which teacher-librarians engage in leadership activities has an impact on student achievement. Strong leadership on the part of the teacher-librarian influences teachers to make more effective use of library services (Asselin, 2001). In fact, a healthy, effective school library program is one whose staff is comprised of leaders, actively involved in the school's teaching and learning (Lance, 2002).

It might be instinctive to assume that leadership opportunities would flow from collaboration with teachers, that working with classroom teachers to improve the effectiveness of their teaching and the achievement of their students would naturally elevate the teacher-librarian to a position of influence in the school. Such is not the case. Lance (1999) indicates that classroom teachers need to perceive the teacher-librarian as an assertive, involved leader in the school *before* they are willing to collaborate. Therefore, the teacher-librarian's first priority must be on school-wide leadership activities (Branch & Oberg, 2001).

In a school where the role of the teacher-librarian lacks professional status, the teacher-librarian must become proactive to change the environment (Lance, 2001).

Taking the lead, in this instance, involves creating connections between the library, administrators, teachers, counsellors and support staff, seizing every opportunity to contribute, seeing things through, and putting the needs of the school first (Hartzell, 2003b). Classroom teachers face a high rate of change and challenge. To support teachers, the teacher-librarian can create a professional collection, and bookmark web sites that support instruction (Hartzell, 2003a). Joining a listserv such as Webbits and forwarding pertinent articles to teachers is also useful. Teacher-librarians can also demonstrate their leadership through technological competence, teacher in-service, and involvement with technology planning.

Teacher-librarians have many opportunities to lead in their schools and districts. Leadership activities studied by Asselin (2001) were chairing or serving on school committees, participating or initiating school-based special projects, providing workshops to colleagues, advocating, holding office in a professional organization, reviewing materials and publishing in professional journals. Lance (2002a) saw a correlation between student achievement and weekly meetings with the principal, participation in staff, curriculum and standards committee meetings, and meeting with other teacher-librarians at local and district levels

### ***Teacher Training***

Teaching is an extremely challenging career, especially in the first few years. New teachers, with as little as six weeks of practicum teaching, plunge alone into tremendously challenging work that demands a vast breadth of professional and personal skills. It is not unusual for a beginning secondary teacher to enter the profession facing four different lesson preparations per day, difficult classes, and five months of teaching

without a preparation block! Furthermore, since secondary school teaching is performed in such isolation, there is very few occasions to observe experienced teachers or to share responsibilities (Oberg, 1990).

Faculties of education, where self-sufficiency is still taught, also participate in this painful induction process. Teachers still graduate from faculties of education having never observed, let alone experienced, collaborative teaching. Where other professions have embraced collaborative and consultative models, faculties of education still teach young teachers, explicitly or implicitly, to rely on their own skills alone. As a result, aspiring teachers do not think of school librarians as potential partners in curriculum and instruction (Hartzell, 2002b).

Although, teacher training strongly reinforces the culture of classroom-oriented teaching, implementation of the school library program assumes cooperative planning and team teaching using a variety of resources (Oberg, 1990). Sadly, this lack has strong repercussions for schools. Approximately one third of new teachers leave the profession in the first three years, unable or unwilling to tolerate the stress. (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002) A more collaborative teaching culture would do much to alleviate this situation, and to improve the quality of student learning.

To make matters worse, instructors in faculties of education remark that their students, our future teachers, have few skills in information literacy (Asselin & Lee, 2002). How can new teachers possibly teach what they have not learned? Add to this the complete absence of teacher-librarians as instructors on most faculties of education, and it is no wonder that university education programs generally do not promote how to advance student learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century school library (Skyes, 2002). Pre-service

teachers have neither information literacy skills themselves, nor the encouragement to seek partnership with their teacher-librarian

Asselin and Lee (2002) in their study made the following recommendations as to how to improve information literacy instruction in schools.

We would begin with pre-service teachers thus increasing the likelihood that future teachers would have the opportunity to incorporate knowledge of information literacy into their evolving conceptions of literacy. We would focus on a process-based problem-solving model of information literacy and an instructional framework of resource-based learning and collaboration with teacher-librarians. (p.2)

In fact, pre-service teachers who participated in Asselin's studies significantly increased their understanding of information literacy, collaborative planning and teaching, resource-based learning, and the role of the teacher-librarian (Asselin & Naslund, 2000; Asselin & Lee, 2002). It is of vital importance to our students that faculties of education include models of collaborative teaching practice and the integration of information literacy skills in their programs. Otherwise, teachers will continue to face education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with 19<sup>th</sup> century tools.

Despite this lack of preparation at the university level, or perhaps because of it, it is very important that teacher-librarians provide an orientation to the school library and its program to pre-service teachers during their practica and to new teachers as they join the profession. Working in isolation tends to increase insecurity amongst teachers, which decreases the likelihood of sharing. Teachers who feel insecure about their practice are unlikely to risk examination of their methods by a peer (Oberg, 1990). Experienced

teachers who have been accustomed to privacy and self-direction for too many years may perceive the teacher-librarian to be encroaching on their time, methods, program and relationships with students (Oberg, 1990), an intrusion whose benefits they may not necessarily understand. If the teacher-librarian can work with new teachers to temper the habit of isolation before it is set, she or he will have done a service to the school culture as a whole.

### ***Teacher overload***

Teaching has never been an easy career. As members of a care-giving profession, teachers have always been relied upon to put their students' needs before their own and to take time from their own families and private lives to meet professional expectations. Many studies indicate that teaching has become even more demanding in the past decade. Teachers are required to teach ever-increasing amounts of information in the same amount of time. Their accomplishment is measured by their students' success on standardized tests. Technology grows while budgets shrink (Loerschter & Achterman, 2002). Classrooms have more English Second Language students and students with special needs. Sadly, more students live in poverty and instability, bringing with them the all the problems associated with those conditions. The range of teaching duties has expanded to encompass areas once the province of the home. The rapid rate of curricular change creates high work volumes, instability and stress. In an extensive British Columbia study, teachers reported feeling chronically short of the time, resources, support and respect necessary to accomplish their duties (Naylor, 2001).

Into this miasma of stress, fatigue and guilt strides the teacher-librarian, exhorting classroom teachers to use what is left of their time and energy for collaborative planning



sessions. No wonder this enthusiasm all too often falls on deaf ears. What teacher-librarians intend as support and encouragement, teachers may perceive as one expectation too many. Teacher-librarians offer resources, but classroom teachers do not have time to read them and adapt their teaching to their use. Hay, Henri & Oberg (1998) found that large classes, curricular change and expansion, provincially set examinations, and lack of time were significant factors in teacher resistance to the integration of information literacy skills. Compulsory courses with rigid content requirements are additional barriers (Oberg, Hay & Henri, 1999). At the very time when their need is greatest, teachers find themselves too overwhelmed to seek the support of partnership with the teacher-librarian.

### **Themes emerging from the Research Literature**

This examination of the literature regarding information literacy and teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration reveals the following themes:

- Students are in great need of information literacy skills, the teaching of which requires the joint efforts of teachers and teacher-librarians;
- Neither teachers nor principals know very much about information literacy or what to expect from their school librarian;
- The integration of information literacy skills with curriculum requires a profound change in school culture, which the teacher-librarian cannot accomplish alone. It requires the leadership of the principal, the support of the teacher-librarian and the good will of a majority of teachers;
- Trust – between principals and teacher-librarians, and between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers – is a key factor in collaboration.

These findings taken together go a long way to explain the frustrations many secondary school teacher-librarians experience as they begin to assist teachers to integrate information literacy skills into their lessons. If a the principal has not taken pains to encourage a collaborative culture in the school and does not fully understand the role that the teacher-librarian can play in furthering the school's growth plan, if teachers have not had a positive experience working with teacher-librarians in the past, either as students or as teachers, then it is extremely unlikely that a new teacher-librarian's first offers of support will be accepted.

This study seeks to explore the correlations between levels of collaboration and most of the various factors known to affect collaborative practice, i.e. teachers' pre-service and current knowledge of the role of the teacher-librarian, perceived principal support, perceived teacher-librarian leadership, teacher workloads, external restrictions and teaching style.

## **Methodology**

In order to gather information from as many teachers as possible in a short period of time, the researcher developed a paper-based questionnaire for distribution to all teachers at the target school. (See Appendix A.) Questions were based on the review of the literature and sought to gather information about:

- how often and how deeply each teacher worked with the teacher-librarian;
- teachers' pre-service knowledge of the teacher-librarian role;
- their years of experience;
- their teaching and planning style;
- attitudes toward teaching;

- attitudes towards collaborative practice;
- perception of the teacher-librarian as leader;
- perceptions of principal support;
- knowledge of the role of the teacher-librarian, and
- awareness of issues where teacher-librarian expertise would be useful.

The instrument was pilot-tested by several members of the teaching profession not working in the target school. Revisions were made based on their feedback.

Participants responded to some questions with a yes/no answer, some with yes/know/don't know and others by means of a four-point Likert scale. In addition, participants were invited to supply their definition of information literacy, and to add any comments they would like about teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration, school library programs or the survey itself.

The principal requested that the questions related to teacher workload be eliminated from the survey on the grounds that they were "too political." These questions were:

1. For how many different class preparations are you responsible this year?
2. What is your average class size?
3. How many officially designated and special needs students are you currently teaching?
4. How much time do you spend per week on lesson preparation, photocopying, marking, mark recording, and home contacts?

He also asked that the question “Does your teacher-librarian provide in-service to staff?” be eliminated as it might be seen to be asking teachers to judge the teacher-librarian’s performance.

## **Setting**

The school under study is in semi-rural Western Canada, with a population of approximately 780 students, three administrators, and 50 teachers. The teacher-librarian has been in the school for 13 years, taught in another school library for three years before this, and was an English teacher for ten years prior to becoming a teacher-librarian.

The library facility is brand new, open, bright and inviting. Low shelving creates perfect sightlines, and the large book preparation room has glass walls. The library is adjacent to a computer lab. The teacher-librarian benefits from the services of a full-time library technician who does all cataloguing, preparation and circulation of both library books and texts, this freeing the teacher-librarian for planning and teaching. The library is equipped with 35 computers and a wireless network.

Whereas the teacher-librarian does not have a regular place on the staff meeting agenda, she makes reports on an as-needs basis. She has not offered in-service to staff, but has been very active with professional development in her school. Over the years she has served as chair of the school’s Professional Development Committee, as well as created a well-subscribed professional book club and a professional growth group for interested staff.

The library currently receives about \$5,500 per year from the school’s operating budget, \$4,000 from the Learning Resources (Educational Supplies) budget and \$5,000 from the International Fund supporting international students, for a total of \$14,500. The

collection consists of approximately 12,000 books, half of which have been purchased in the past year to replace those lost to fire. These new books, half of which are reference sources, were purchased with an \$80,000 insurance disbursement. The library has subscriptions to Electric Library, InfoTrac, World Book Online and Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Patrons can access all of these resources from the school and from home.

## **Participants**

Participants were self-selected teachers solicited from the entire teaching staff. The mean graduation year of participants was 1989, and the median was 1994. The most experienced teacher had been teaching since 1970 and the least experienced since 2002. Responses indicated that they represented a broad range of library users.

## **Collection of Data**

The researcher left 40 questionnaires with the vice-principal for distribution to teachers at the January 2005 staff meeting. The teacher-librarian explained the purpose of the study and reassured the staff that the researcher was proceeding with her permission and support, and that in no way was she under scrutiny. Each teacher got a copy of a letter explaining the purpose of the study, and if they were interested in participating, received an envelope containing the consent form, the questionnaire and a pencil. They were instructed to seal their completed consent forms and questionnaires in the envelope and return them to the office. Twenty-eight teachers accepted questionnaires, and of those, fifteen were returned completed forms. Although this is a good rate of return, it provides an insufficient sample on which to draw conclusions.

## **Analysis of data**

Responses were entered into SYSTAT 10.2, with yes responses receiving a value of one, and no a value of zero. Questions based on a Likert scale were given values of one to four. Responses were rejected where participants selected two choices. Some participants did not respond to all questions.

Many questions were collapsed into theme groups. For example, questions two to five were collapsed to form a general picture called “Training”, questions six through nine became “Current Practice” and questions ten through 14 were collapsed under the heading of “Adequate Time”.

## **Findings and discussion**

Two-thirds of participants indicated that they take their classes to the library at least once per semester. All teachers who used the library planned their lessons with the teacher-librarian. Only half of those, that is one-third of respondents, engaged in team-teaching and only 3 out of 15 had the teacher-librarian assess student work.

There was a slight correlation between the year in which they had done their teacher training and their pre-service experience with collaborative planning; more recent graduates planning slightly more often than more experienced teachers. However, the change was not related to the practices of the universities. This would seem to indicate that in the 35 years since the most experienced teachers did their training and today there has been little change in the methodological approach of faculties of education as regards collaboration.

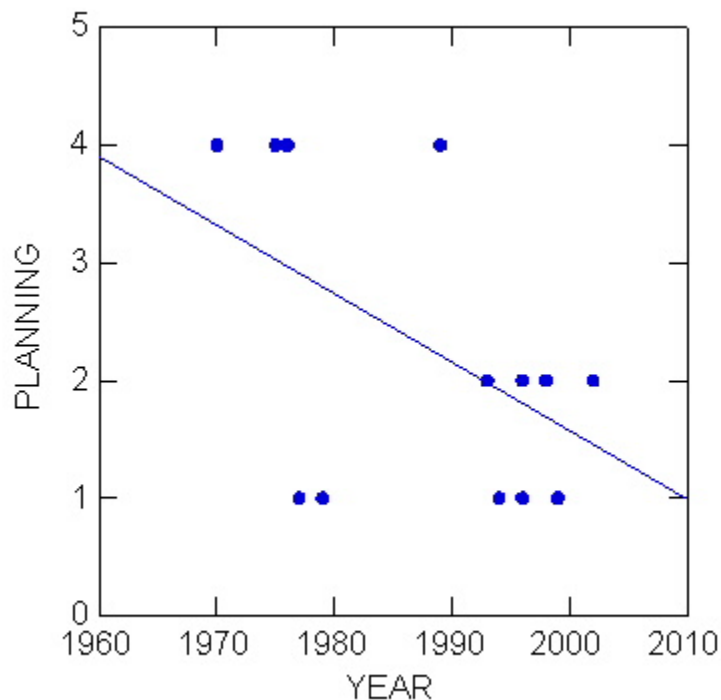


fig. 1

However, there was a statistically significant correlation of .667 between the collapsed heading of “Training” and that of “Current Practice”. This seemed odd, given that very few of the respondents had benefited from instruction about working with colleagues or teacher-librarians during their pre-service training. To discover what was causing the positive correlation, the researcher compared each aspect of pre-service training -- instruction in collaboration, the presence of a teacher-librarian, collaboration with the teacher-librarian during the practicum and the modelling of the sponsor teacher – to their current frequency of library use. Only one factor was statistically significant, that being a sponsor teacher who modelled collaborating planning and teaching. The correlation between the modelling of the sponsor teacher and frequency of library use in current practise was .665. In other words, in the absence of meaningful instruction within

the faculty of education, the sponsor teacher was a powerful influence on teaching practice.

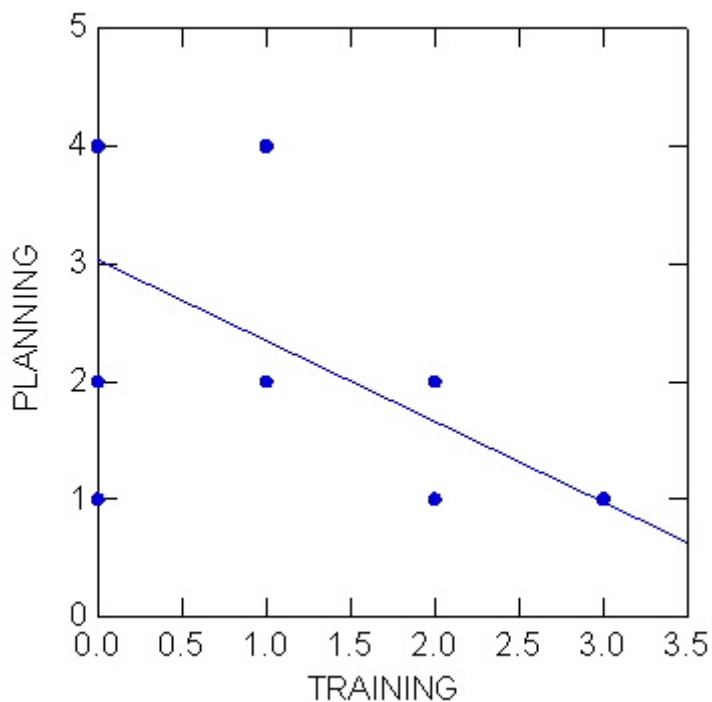


fig. 2

In this sample, not one teacher felt that he or she had adequate time for planning with others most of the time, and the majority felt that they seldom or rarely had the time to plan with others. However, they were confident and optimistic about their own preparation and marking. About half seldom or never had the time to keep up with pedagogical research, indicating dependence for external leadership in this area. Nevertheless, 60% were familiar with the research linking school library programs to improved student achievement.

Surprisingly, there was no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of their workload or with their perceived success at coping with those demands, and the frequency with which they engaged in collaboration with the teacher-librarian. Teachers



in this sample were just as likely to collaborate with the teacher-librarian if they felt overworked and behind with their marking and preparation, as if they felt were managing their workload easily.

Only three teachers found their curricula too rigid to allow for resource-based learning experiences. However, 53% felt that the new provincial examinations were barriers to collaborative practise, 27% thought not, and 20% were unsure about the impact of external exams.

The planning style of almost all of the teachers in the sample allowed sufficient time for collaboration with the teacher-librarian, with very few planning their lessons on the fly or a day ahead. That said, there was no statistically significant correlation between planning style and current practice.

Only two participants indicated an emphasis on teaching content over skills; most professed taking a balanced approach. However, the preference of skills over content or a balanced approach did not correlate to current use of the library. The content-driven teachers were just as likely to use the school library as the skills-driven teachers.

Responses about the school library itself were overwhelmingly positive. 100% of participants were confident in both the print and electronic resources provided. 86% of participants believed that working with the teacher-librarian would improve their students' achievement, and only one believed that such collaboration would not improve their students' enjoyment of learning. All teachers believed that working with the teacher-librarian would improve their teaching. This lack of variance precluded any correlation to collaborative planning.

All participants indicated that the school had a plagiarism policy, but only just over half felt that plagiarism was increasing since the arrival of the Internet in schools and homes. 78% were confident that they could identify plagiarized work and 77% indicated that they had effective strategies for circumventing plagiarism.

100% of participants recognized the teacher-librarian as a school leader. This indicated enormous support and respect, but rendered correlation between teacher-librarian leadership and collaborative planning impossible.

Responses did not indicate many concrete efforts on the part of the principal to foster teacher/teacher-librarian collaboration. For example, fewer than 27% of participants found that the principal encouraged teachers to use a range of resources beyond the textbook in their instruction. Only half of the respondents believed that the principal encourages teachers to plan with the teacher-librarian. Nevertheless, all believed that the principal supported the school library program and almost three-quarters supported the idea of using school funds to release teachers for planning sessions with the school librarian. The teacher-librarian and her program seemed to account for this high approval rating. Interestingly, sixty percent answered that teaching information literacy was part of the school growth plan, whereas the teacher-librarian indicated that it was not a term she used, or that her staff was apt to understand.

### **Anecdotal comments**

Several of the participants availed themselves of the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey.

“Be careful separating the person from the position.”

“I wish I had more time with our teacher-librarian. Sometimes though I don’t use the library as it has become a ‘victim of its success’ – I can’t book the library when convenient.”

“Normal time constraints of a full-time teaching position make collaboration difficult and often incomplete.”

“I may hesitate to do it [collaborate] because the library is so busy that it may be difficult to mesh all the time lines.”

“Collaborative teaching and school libraries are imperative to student learning and student achievement. Both my access to collaborative teaching and library use have been curtailed by the Grade 10 provincial exams.”

“I love my school library and my librarian!”

## **Summary**

The study was not successful in determining the cause of the variance of frequency of collaboration with the teacher-librarian in this school. There was a correlation between pre-service modelling in collaboration by sponsor teachers and teachers’ current instructional choices. No link could be shown between either school policies or perceived principal support regarding information literacy integration and actual library use. Heavy workloads, rigid curricula and standardized exams did not correlate to teachers’ willingness to work with the teacher-librarian. All participants, whether they chose to work with the teacher-librarian or not, recognized her as a leader in the school. Teachers’ planning styles did not affect their ability to collaborate. Teachers’ personal skills in information literacy did not affect the extent to which they collaborate with the teacher-librarian, nor did their classroom vs. school focus.

Generally, this is a very positive, optimistic staff who respect and support their teacher-librarian.

### **Limitations of the study**

The sample used in this study was far too small for generalizability.

Low variance on several key questions made correlations impossible.

Librarian should have been interviewed in order to put responses into a more meaningful context. For example, do few staff members ask her to assist in evaluating because they see that task as uniquely their territory, or has the teacher-librarian never asked to be involved in assessment?

If this survey were to be done more broadly, questions pertaining to the collection, facility and program quality would be required.

### **Recommendations**

Universities with teacher-librarian programs must advocate for the inclusion of teacher-librarians in the instructional team of faculties of education so that prospective teachers learn about collaborative practice and know what to expect of a teacher-librarian both during their practicum and in their teaching careers. Such training would create an expectation of a collaborative school culture as well as placing positive pressure on the school library program. Bringing teacher-librarians into faculties of education might also encourage more teachers to seek careers as teacher-librarians. Because planning with a teacher-librarian improves student achievement, then faculties of education might consider choosing sponsor teachers partly on the basis of their willingness to model high level collaboration with teacher-librarians. As of this writing, there is a groundswell of

support building across Canada to reinstate teacher-librarians in every school. However, very few teachers are registered in courses in teacher-librarianship. It is vital that as positions become available, qualified, capable, enthusiastic professionals fill them.

Because schools with collaborative cultures tend to be more successful than those that encourage isolation, principals might consider fostering a generally collaborative school culture as an important goal. Teacher-librarians should make every effort to assure that the acquisition of information literacy skills becomes part of the school growth plan.

A master teacher-librarian should be part of the instructional team in the education of administrators so that principals are better able to understand how and why to fund, staff and evaluate school libraries. If principals received concrete instruction in school library programs, then senior administrators drawn from their ranks might tend to write district policies to support school library programs.

Teachers' pre-service experiences affect their teaching style in the long term. Therefore it is vitally important that teacher-librarians meet early and often with prospective teachers during their practicum, teach them what the school library program has to offer them and their students, and encourage them to work with the teacher-librarian during their time in the school. Because this study indicates the strong influence of sponsor teachers on the future practices of pre-service teachers, sponsor teachers should be included in these meetings and planning sessions whenever possible. All involved would gain from such a practice.

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## Appendix A - Questionnaire

<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>					
1	In what year did you complete your teacher training?				
2	Did you receive instruction on collaborative teaching practice during your teacher training?	Yes	No		
3	Was a teacher-librarian part of the instructional team in your methods class?	Yes	No		
4	Did you engage in collaborative planning with the teacher-librarian during your practicum?	Yes	No		
5	Did your sponsor teacher engage in collaborative planning and/or teaching with the teacher-librarian during your practicum or observation period?	Yes	No		
<b>CURRENT PRACTICE</b>					
6	How often do you take classes to the school library?	At least once a term	At least once a semester	Seldom	Rarely or never
7	How often do you plan lessons with your teacher-librarian?	At least once a term	At least once a semester	Seldom	Rarely or never
8	How often do you team teach with your teacher-librarian?	At least once a term	At least once a semester	Seldom	Rarely or never
9	How often do you have your teacher-librarian assess student work?	At least once a term	At least once a semester	Seldom	Rarely or never
<b>COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES</b>					
10	I have adequate time for planning with others	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
11	I feel adequately prepared most days	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
12	I am up to date with my marking	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
13	I have time to keep up with pedagogical research	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
14	I have sufficient time to incorporate information literacy into my lessons	Yes	Sometimes	No	
15	My curriculum is too rigid to allow for resource-based learning experiences	Yes	Sometimes	No	
16	The new provincial examinations are barriers to collaborative practice	Yes	No	Don't know	

17	I generally plan my units...	On the fly	A day ahead	A week ahead	A month ahead
18	I am confident in my own information literacy and technology skills	Yes	Somewhat	No	
19	My lessons generally emphasize...	content over skills	skills over content	50/50	
20	I am familiar with the research linking school library programs to improved student achievement	Yes	No		
21	I feel confident that my school library can provide enough print resources to support my curriculum	Yes	No	Don't know	
22	I feel confident that my school library can provide enough electronic resources to support my curriculum	Yes	No		
23	I believe that working with the teacher-librarian would improve my students' achievement	Yes	No		
24	I believe that working with the teacher-librarian would improve my students' enjoyment of learning	Yes	No		
25	I believe that working with the teacher-librarian would improve my teaching	Yes	No	Don't know	
26	In the last five years, I have seen a significant increase in plagiarism in student work	Yes	No		
27	This school has a plagiarism policy	Yes	No	Don't know	
28	I have effective strategies for identifying plagiarism	Yes	No		
29	I have effective strategies for circumventing plagiarism	Yes	No		
30	Our teacher-librarian has a regular place on the agenda of staff meetings.	Yes	No		
31	Our teacher-librarian is a leader in our school.	Yes	No		
32	Our principal encourages teachers to plan with the teacher-librarian	Yes	No		
33	Our principal encourages teachers to use a range of resources beyond the textbook	Yes	No		
34	I have the impression that the principal supports our school library program	Yes	No		
35	Teaching information literacy is part of our school plan	Yes	No	Don't know	
36	It is an appropriate use of school funds to provide release time for teachers to plan with the teacher-librarian	Yes	No		
37	I prefer to work alone	Yes	No		

38	My greater interest is in...	my classes	my school		
39	I believe I can influence student learning	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
40	I have high expectations of myself	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never
41	I have high expectations of my students	Most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom	Rarely or never

<b>TEACHER-LIBRARIAN RESPONSIBILITIES</b>					
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42	Rate each of the following responsibilities of a teacher-librarian in terms of their importance.				
	Knowledge of curricula	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Knowledge of pedagogy	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Technological competence	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Knowledge of the research process	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Collection development	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Promotion of reading and literature	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	In-service to staff	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Interpersonal skills	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Teaching skills	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	Personnel management	Very high	High	Low	Very low

**OPTIONAL BUT GREATLY APPRECIATED:**

How would you define "information literacy"?

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Any other comments about collaborative teaching practice, school library programs or this survey?

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Thank you so much for your time and  
care in completing this survey.

Karen Lindsay

## Appendix B – Letter to participants

Dear teaching colleague:

I am a Victoria teacher-librarian preparing a Masters paper on collaborative practice between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians for which your information is invaluable. I wish to explore how and why classroom teachers decide whether or not to work with their teacher-librarian to prepare, deliver and assess units of study. I will be gathering the data by means of a survey of approximately 10 minutes' duration. Whereas its primary purpose is to fulfil the final requirement for my Masters in Teacher-librarianship, it is possible that the results of this study will be printed in an educational journal. I assure your anonymity in either case.

You have, of course, the right not to participate in this study, and to withdraw at any time once it has begun. Should you opt out, I will withdraw your responses from the database without prejudice and not include them in the study. I assure your anonymity and the confidentiality of the information you share with me. I will keep the results and analyses of the survey on my home computer, which is secure. (The University of Alberta keeps data for a minimum of 5 years following completion of research.) To the best of my knowledge, this study does not represent a conflict of interest on my part. At your request, I will provide free of charge, a final copy of my thesis to you.

The results of this study may be used for a research article in an educational journal, and/or as the basis for teacher and teacher-librarian in-service. Data for all uses will be handled in compliance with "Human Research - University of Alberta Standards



for the Protection of Human Research Participants.” This document is available on the University web site at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html>

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This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.

I do hope you will agree to participate in this study. Our work together could improve understanding of a problematic piece of teaching practice, and ultimately assist in making instructional changes that could increase student achievement.

Yours truly,

Karen Lindsay, Hons. B.A., B. Ed.

