

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACTORS THAT SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
EXEMPLARY SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS

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This Capping Course Document is Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

WINTER 2010

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: DIANA PATRICIA MALISZEWSKI

TITLE: FACTORS THAT SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXEMPLARY  
SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS

DEGREE: MASTER OF EDUCATION

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 2010

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April 15, 2010

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The Undersigned Has Read And Accepts The Document Entitled  
Factors That Support the Development of Exemplary School Library Programs

Submitted by Diana Maliszewski

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

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Dr. Julia Ellis  
Capping Course Instructor

April 15, 2010

## **DEDICATION**

This capping paper is dedicated to my husband, James David Maliszewski, who is exemplary in so many ways. Thank you for being a great husband, a devoted father, and an insightful editor. I couldn't have completed this journey without you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To Elizabeth Lee, for sharing her own reference list with me and for being part of the team that produced the recent Ontario studies on school libraries.

To Ken Haycock, for presenting a session during the Ontario Library Association Superconference that helped me to find a promising direction for my paper to take.

To Dianne Oberg, for sending me many important articles and for suggesting a framework when I desperately needed structure.

To Brenda Dillon, Sandra Gunson, Wendee Neuenfeldt-Lyons, and Joanie Proske, for editing the multiple versions of my paper and providing academic and emotional support.

To Ruth Hall, for clarifying my questions about rescinded Ministry documents.

To Diana Liu and Grace Jamieson, for working behind the scenes in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta to help the graduate students.

To James Maliszewski, for offering the “matrix solution” to my organizational woes, and for being patient and tolerant while I wrote this paper.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Professional Connections – Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario**

The Canadian school library world took notice in 2009 when *Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario* was published. This joint research venture between Queens University, the Ontario School Library Association, and People for Education was the first qualitative study in Canada to examine, in the words of Klinger, Lee, Stephenson, Deluca, and Luu (2009), the “characteristics and procedures that enable a school library to be an integral part of a school’s literacy initiatives and overall success” (p. 3). The findings from their investigations indicated that “there is not a unitary conception of an exemplary school program, nor is there a single approach that creates an exemplary library program” (p. 36) but there were some common personality traits among the teacher-librarians they studied. This groundbreaking study also examined influencing factors such as scheduling and funding, and presented these in an accompanying four-level rubric. This rubric could help teacher-librarians examine the extent to which they have exemplary school library programs.

### **Personal Connections – Do I have an exemplary program? Maybe yes.**

I was a member of the Ontario School Library Association council when this study was undertaken. As the editor of the association’s magazine, *The Teaching Librarian*, I needed to be familiar with this research and the results so that I could disseminate the information to Ontario’s school library community via the magazine. This study fascinated and challenged me. It was the first research study I had ever read for self-interest and not as part of a course requirement. I thought deeply about the implications behind the discoveries of Dr. Klinger, Dr. Lee, and the others, and about the application

of these implications for further developing my own exemplary school library program. Several events made this reflection even more poignant. In 2008, I won the *Follett International Teacher-Librarian of the Year Award* from the Canadian Association of School Libraries for my work in my school, board, and province. I was not aware that I had been nominated for this prize. My colleague, and the president of the Ontario School Library Association, Lisa Weaver, phoned me at home one Sunday evening to inform me that members of the Ontario School Library Association Council, in conjunction with my principal, had secretly nominated me and that I was the chosen candidate. The press release issued by the Canadian Association of School Libraries (2008) read, in part:

Diana has engaged in many of the exemplary practices of teacher-librarianship of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her contributions are evident in her students in whom she has instilled enthusiasm for books and passion for learning. She provides leadership within her school by planning and implementing research skills and integrated technology with her teaching partners. She strongly supports the Forest of Reading Program, both within her school and by serving on the Selection Committee. Diana's commitment to collaboration and communication extends beyond the school walls. She works closely with the staff of the Parent Drop in Centre and opens the school library to pre-school children once a week for literacy activities. She works with a Family of Schools group to organize an author's day for eight schools. This year, she initiated and coordinated a Professional Learning Community based on action-based research in school libraries for 24 teacher-librarians within her Family of Schools.



Several of the accolades in this press release refer to programs or organizations specific to teaching in Ontario and require explanation. The Forest of Reading is a series of eight programs focused on Canadian literature for readers of all ages that culminate in readers' choice awards presented at a gala two-day celebration. The Silver Birch Awards Reading Program, targeted to children in grades 3 to 6, was the first program to be developed by Larry Moore, the director of the Ontario Library Association, in 1994. I was on the Selection Committee for several years and helped to choose the nominated titles. The Family of Schools is an organizational structure within the Toronto District School Board that groups schools located within a close geographic area that share a common superintendent. After attending the Solution Tree seminar on Professional Learning Communities by Richard Dufour and his associates, I was motivated enough to branch beyond the school to try and recreate this model of professional development and collegiality at the Family of School level. I was able to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia on May 23, 2008 to receive the award. It was one of the highlights of my career to date.

**Personal Connections – Do I have an exemplary program? Maybe no.**

In 2009, my professional situation changed. On March 11, 2009, the Toronto District School Board trustees considered a recommendation to reduce the number of teacher-librarians by 36 in an effort to balance the budget. This translated to a reduction in the allocation from 0.6 to 0.5. Several teacher-librarians, including myself, attended this meeting to put a face to the position they were thinking of trimming. I wore my "So Many Books, So Little Time" sweatshirt and added a sticker to it saying "Not Enough Teacher-Librarians". The meeting lasted for hours with lots of tangential arguments. It

looked as if the teacher-librarian positions would not be cut, but then there was a brief recess in the proceedings, and when the meeting resumed, a compromise had been reached between the opposing parties and the cuts to teacher-librarians were made. I was disappointed with the outcome but I never expected that the reality would hit so close to home. In the 2009-2010 school year, the majority of my collaborative teaching time was removed due to declining enrolment at my school and the reduction of required minimum teacher-librarian time board-wide. My teaching position now included being the junior and intermediate special education resource teacher for literacy and numeracy in addition to being the teacher-librarian. My library schedule only held six periods available for collaborative teaching time with class teachers, the lifeblood of a healthy school library program; all the rest of my library time was designated for providing preparation time for class teachers by taking groups for book exchange and teaching isolated library skills instruction for every class in the school. I was very disappointed by this turn of events. How would this change impact my school library program? How could I ensure that the school library program I offered was the best it could be? I realized that this was the reason I had begun my studies at the University of Alberta in the first place; to seek current, innovative professional development so that I could become the best possible teacher-librarian I could be and provide an exemplary school library program. But what does it mean to be “the best” or “exemplary”?

### **Focus for Research**

In this capping paper, I intend to examine pertinent research literature to determine the factors that contribute to or are associated with the development of exemplary school library programs. I realize that the “ideal” school library program can

be ambiguous and subjective, identified by assorted stakeholders in different ways. This is why the literature review will examine a wide range of studies and then focus on the context for Ontario, my home province. In the final section of the paper, I will examine the implications and discover whether it is possible for me to have an exemplary library program even with a reduced timetable and other responsibilities.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **What is an exemplary school library?**

Before examining the features that contribute to an exemplary school library, it is important to first define the various descriptors used in the literature to build a common frame of reference. For the purposes of this paper, exemplary, effective, quality, and powerful all refer to the same standard of outstanding school library. The term “exemplary” is most commonly used in library program research studies. Some studies include the term exemplary (see, for example, Alexander, 1992; Fedora, 1993; Haycock, 1997; Klinger et al., 2009). Other research studies use the term “effective” (Asselin, 2001; Haycock, 1999; Sinclair-Tarr & Tarr, 2006). A few research studies use the term “quality” (Burgin, 2003; Lance et al., 2002). When researchers choose exemplary school libraries in order to study their characteristics or benefits, they may select the libraries based on recommendations from professional organizations. Klinger (2009) consulted the Ontario provincial school library association for a list of recommended schools to use for his study (p. 2). Alexander (1992) selected exemplary school media specialists in her study based on two criteria: that they had been nominated for a Teacher of the Year award within the past ten years and that they had to be singled out by one of the three Library Media Services Office professionals from their district (pp. 4-5). Fedora (1993)

used five items for consideration when choosing two schools for a study on scheduling patterns and she wanted to consult school media center specialists that were “exemplary in the instruction consultant role with the faculty, as identified by experts in the field (professors of library science/information resources, district-level supervisors, leadership of state professional association)” (pp. 54-55). Gehlken (1994) specifically sought out school libraries that were part of “nationally recognized” and “blue ribbon” schools (p. 1). Haycock (1999) has studied and written about school librarianship for decades and in the introduction to a collection of essays on effective school library media programs, he recommends that policy makers cannot be focused solely on staff, facility and resources when determining a quality program and cites program aims, role definition, collaborative planning, systemic approach to teaching based on a continuum, flexible scheduling, and evaluation by administrators as key components of effective programs (p. xi). The studies discussed here illustrate that a wide range of qualifiers may be considered when attempting to identify an exemplary school library program.

### **Why are exemplary school libraries important?**

Many studies in countries throughout the world have indicated that exemplary school libraries have a positive impact on student achievement and on learning. Lonsdale (2003) notes that the concept of student achievement is measured in different ways by different studies. Some use standardized tests or literacy development (p. 3). Regardless of the definition of student achievement or the methodology of the study - whether the results stem from large-scale quantitative studies (Asselin, 2001; Atcherman, 2008; Baumbach et al., 2003; Burgin et al., 2003; Elley, 1992; Klinger & Shulha, 2006; Koda & Harada, 1989; Lance et al., 1993, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2005; Sinclair-Tarr & Tarr,

2006) or from small-scale qualitative studies (Alexander, 1993; Charter, 1982; Fedora, 1993; Gehlken, 1994; Klinger et al., 2009; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004; Williams & Wavell, 2001; Yetter, 1994)- studies from around the world have indicated that school libraries have the potential to support student achievement. However, it cannot be merely the existence of school libraries that maximizes learning. In 2003, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (as cited in IASL, 2008) reviewed research studies to answer the question “What effects do school libraries have on student achievement?” and they concluded that “school library *characteristics* may account for up to 8 percent of the variance in reading-related test scores” [emphasis added] (p. 1). Consequently, it is important to identify the characteristics that make a school library exemplary and are therefore key to student achievement and learning.

### **What are the factors that support the development of exemplary programs?**

Lonsdale (2003) argues that the impact of exemplary school libraries on student achievement is the result of a complex interaction of variables (p. 25). Researchers use different terms or categories to describe the factors, both human and material, that support the development of exemplary school library programs, but in this literature review I will group them into the following broad categories: purchases, policies with practices, and people with philosophy.

#### **Purchases**

Collection size, availability of technology, and budget allocation to the library are components that can enhance the school library’s positive effects on learning.

**Collection Size.** The size of a school library’s collection has an impact on creating an exemplary program. (Asselin, 2001; Baumbach, 2003; Elley, 1992; Lance et

al., 1993, 2002, 2003, 2005; Sinclair-Tarr & Tarr, 2006; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004). A healthy, well-stocked, current collection of print and non-print resources offers students a wide variety of materials to choose from for research or for pleasure reading. Elley (1992), in his examination of the reading proficiency of 9 year old and 14 year old students in 32 countries, found that large school libraries, as defined by his study as containing more than 7,000 books in the collection, were associated with increases in literacy scores. Moore and Trebilcock (2003) note that resource quantity does affect educational outcomes but what is more important is how those resources are used (p. 169).

**Technology.** Having and using technology effectively and with educational aims in mind helps to make a school library an exemplary one (Baumbach, 2003; Gehlken, 1994; Lance et al., 1993, 2000a, 2002, 2003, 2005; Sinclair-Tarr & Tarr, 2006; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004; Yetter, 1994). Technology can include videos as well as computer-related tools such as electronic databases and websites. In Iowa, Lance (2002) and his fellow researchers found a connection between high levels of library staffing, itself a factor of exemplary programs, and the number of computers in the library accessing the library home page (p. 49).

**Budget.** A large budget is often an indicator of the perceived value of the school library, and the greater the percentage, the more powerful the library. (Asselin, 2001; Lance et al., 1993, 2002, 2003, 2005). Lance (2002) asserts that “a strong LM program is one that is adequately staffed, stocked and funded” (p. ix).

## **Policies and Practices**

Policies and practices involve how school libraries operate and can be further subdivided into scheduling, collaboration, programming/instruction, and staffing.

**Scheduling.** For the purposes of this paper, scheduling refers to the times students are permitted to visit or access the library during and beyond instructional times (Koda & Harada, 1989; Lance et al., 2002) and to the type of schedule a teacher-librarian has to see classes. The types of schedules are often referred to as fixed, in which a teacher-librarian sees a particular class for a set period every week, or flexible, in which a teacher-librarian has an open schedule that can be booked for a short or long period of time with a particular group to work on a specific project (Fedora, 1993; Van Deusen as cited in Haycock, 1999; Van Deusen, 1991). Mixed schedules, combining a fixed and flexible timetable, are also possible. A schedule conducive to arranging purposeful time in the library is characteristic of exemplary school library programs (Asselin, 2001; Fedora, 1993; Haycock, 1996; Lance et al., 1993, 2000a, 2005; Van Deusen, 1991). Flexible scheduling appears to support more frequent library use by individual students (Fedora, 1993; Lance, 2000; Van Deusen, 1991). The case has been made in other studies that there are some advantages to a fixed schedule (Amdursky as cited in Fedora, 1993, pp. 31-34). Van Deusen's (1991) earliest work found that flexible scheduling made the most difference in collaborative evaluation practices but not necessarily in other curriculum involvement activities (p. vii); subsequent work by Van Deusen (as cited in Haycock, 1999) revealed other advantages to flexible scheduling with regards to the teacher-librarian's leadership role and collaboration (pp. 225-226). The majority of research supports the use of flexible scheduling over fixed scheduling; however, it is

possible to have positive results with a mixed schedule. More consultation, more integrated information skills lessons, and more involvement in student assessment can occur in both mixed and flexible school library schedules (Haycock, 1996). A fully open / flexible schedule is better than a partly open / mixed schedule and a partly open schedule is better than one that is fixed / not open at all (Lance et al., 2000a).

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is a key factor in creating exemplary school library programs (Asselin, 2001; Bell & Totten, 1992; Haycock, 1996; Klinger et al., 2009; Klinger & Shulha, 2006; Lance et al., 2000a, 2002, 2003; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004; Todd, Lamb, & McNicholas, 1993; Williams & Wavell, 2001). Bell & Totten (1992) found that teachers employed in academically successful schools tended to choose the teacher-librarian significantly more for cooperation on instructional problems than did teachers serving in academically unsuccessful elementary schools. Lance (1993) noted that the degree of collaboration between the library media specialist and the classroom teachers is associated with the ratio of teachers to pupils. Oberg (1990) suggests that collaboration comes with a cost – time spent to plan, teach and assess, a willingness to change practice and compromise. If teacher-librarians establish a positive rapport and shared goals, classroom teachers will see that the benefits of collaboration outweigh the risks.

**Programming and Instruction.** When the school library program involves team teaching with classroom teachers and direct ties to the regular curriculum, it can begin to qualify as exemplary (Asselin, 2001; Lance et al., 2000; Sinclair-Tarr & Tarr, 2006). If instruction also involves defining the teacher-librarian's role as curriculum leader, then even more studies confirm this as a factor to developing an exemplary program (Asselin, 2001; Lance et al., 1993, 2002, 2005). After examining an elementary, middle, and



secondary school library in their study, Moore and Trebilcock (2003) conclude that there is no one “right” or “best” model of instruction, as long as teacher-librarians maintain and extend the intellectual role of the library in both teaching and learning (p. 163).

**Staffing.** Staffing refers to the amount of personnel working in a school library and the qualifications and training they possess. What counts as qualified varies from country to country and even from province to province (Asselin, 2001, p. 1). Barring debate on what constitutes adequate training, many studies state that qualified teacher-librarian staffing results in exemplary school library programs (Asselin, 2001; Atcherman, 2008; Baumbach, 2003; Klinger & Shulha, 2006; Lance et al., 1993, 2002, 2003, 2005; Todd, Lamb, & McNicholas, 1993). The amount of staff assigned to the school library also results in higher quality school library programs (Canadian Association of School Libraries, 2003). Shannon (2001) points out in her review of the literature on the education of school library media specialists that ongoing training needs to occur in collaborative teaching, curriculum development, advocacy, and leadership (p. 12).

### **People with Philosophy**

Administrators, the personal characteristics of teacher-librarians, and beliefs around learning, change, and collaboration are important to the development of exemplary school libraries.

**Administrators.** Supportive principals are key to the effectiveness of school libraries (Asselin, 2001; Klinger et al., 2009; Lance et al., 1993, 2000, 2002; Moore & Trebilcock, 2003; Yetter, 1994). The administrator plays a critical role in terms of the decisions made for budget allocation and creating timetables that allow for flexible scheduling and teacher collaboration. Principals demonstrate their commitment to school

libraries inconsistently. They believe that they should be doing more to support school libraries, but they sometimes misinterpret the support they do provide as being more extensive than it is (Asselin, 2001, p. 8). When teacher-librarians meet with their principals frequently, the library personnel act more as curriculum co-leaders and this benefits the library program (Lance, 2000; Yetter, 1994). Lance (2002) recommends that principals set the tone in their school for how the teacher-librarian is regarded (p. 91). Yetter (1994) offers a list of traits she considers vital for supportive principals - respect, trustworthiness, honesty, genuineness and organization (p. 232).

**Personality of the Teacher-Librarian.** In several studies, another category or factor that affected the quality of a school library program was identified: the characteristics, knowledge, skills, and abilities of the teacher-librarian (Alexander, 1992; Charter, 1982; Gehlken, 1993; Klinger et al., 2009; Yetter, 1994). Yetter (as cited in Lance et al., 2000a) found that exemplary teacher-librarians “were energetic, healthy, and enthusiastic; showed leadership abilities; had theoretical understanding of resource-based learning; had the ability to translate theory into effective instructional plans; and were knowledgeable about specific learning resources” (p. 18). The teacher-librarians in Yetter’s (1994) case studies were admired for their interpersonal and collaborative skills and valued as being both expert teachers and a pleasure to work with (p. 224). Alexander (as cited in Lance et al., 2000) noted good teacher-librarians were good teachers with excellent classroom management and innovative techniques. Their tasks related to their triple role as teacher, information specialist, and instructional consultant (Alexander, 1992; Gehlken, 1994). Gehlken (as cited in Haycock, 1997) found that exemplary teacher-librarians view their profession as multifaceted and dynamic and are skilled at

public relations (p. 27). Their learning space provides support and sanctuary for their students (Gehlken, 1994, p. 139). Klinger (2009) noted that a key attribute of exemplary library programs is “the exemplary teaching skills of the teacher-librarians, coupled with their enthusiasm and ingenuity” (p. 36). In light of these findings on “expert teacher traits,” Callison (as cited in Shannon, 2001) suggested that school media preparation programs should “concentrate on the media person more than the development of the components of the media place” (p. 5).

**Teacher-Librarian’s Philosophy of Education.** The beliefs of teacher-librarians with regards to learning, change, and collaboration help determine the level of effectiveness of the school library program (Moore & Trebilcock, 2003; Oberg, 2000; Yetter, 1994). According to Oberg (2000), the beliefs of the teachers can actually limit the efficacy of the other factors of exemplary school libraries: “Structural changes, such as improved library collections, flexible scheduling, fulltime librarians, and collaborative planning between teachers and librarians, do not directly address the underlying beliefs of educators about the nature of the child, the nature of learning, and the nature of teaching” (p. 22). Lonsdale (2003) agrees with Oberg’s argument, and in her own overview she maintains that, “[r]ather than focusing on such things as ... collection size ... and technology infrastructure, the focus now must be on outcomes in relation to what students have learned” (p. 9). When Moore & Trebilcock (2003) grouped their findings into seven dimensions of school librarianship, the first on their list was the underlying philosophy of a school library program (p. 163). They also created an eighth dimension based on their own research that relates closely to the first – that of creating and adapting to change. Like Klinger (2009), Moore and Trebilcock (2003) stress that there is no one right or best

model of a school library program because “the combination of similarities and differences gives each school library team a distinctive character” (p. 163). All of these factors that create exemplary school libraries interact in conjunction with their setting and context.

### **Conditions affecting Ontario’s school libraries**

Ontario’s demographics, unique teacher-librarian training programs, and actions by the provincial Ministry of Education shape the school library programs found there. Ontario is Canada’s most populous province, with thirteen million people and two million children under the age of fourteen. A third of the country’s citizens live in Ontario. There are 72 school boards in Ontario, with a combination of English and French as well as public and Catholic boards. According to the Ministry of Education’s website, in the 2007-2008 school year, there were 4,026 elementary and 897 secondary schools. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry of Education directly affects school libraries with its grants and the documents it produces about libraries. The grants, the documents, and the training of school library staff influence purchasing, policies, and people respectively.

#### **Purchasing – Ontario Ministry Grants**

Efforts have been made recently by the provincial government to address the funding shortfall in elementary school libraries but these efforts have still resulted in some concerns. Within the last decade, the Ontario Ministry of Education infused funding into the elementary school library system via their Library Investment Project. The Ministry allocated \$15,000,000 in 2008-2009 and \$15,000,000 in 2009-2010 (Howson, 2009, p. 2). The process of purchasing resources using this money has been criticized by

the Association of Canadian Publishers (Howson, 2009) because the objectives outlined by the government lacked a focus on buying Canadian books (p. 2). Other stakeholders worry those schools without trained library staff are less likely to purchase Canadian books or materials that add to the overall needs of the school (People For Education, 2009, p. 13).

### **Policies – Ontario Ministry Documents**

There are few Ministry of Education documents that deal specifically with school libraries or teacher-librarians. The Education Act of Ontario (as cited in Ontario School Library Association, 2010) states that no teacher shall be placed in charge of a school library program unless the teacher's certificate of qualification indicates qualifications in the subject. Only one Ministry of Education document has focused primarily on school libraries. *Partners in Action* was published in 1982 and revoked by the ministry in September 2009. *Partners in Action* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982) was a resource document that described how collaboration between the teacher-librarian and classroom teacher, resource-based learning, and a supportive principal will help students. The role of the teacher-librarian involved six components: consultation, curriculum development, instruction, selection of learning resources, management, and program advocacy (p. 13). Changing the school library into a library resource centre involved examining the program, personnel, facilities, collections, management, board-operated resource centre support, financial support, and program advocacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982). The revocation by the Ministry does not mean that the province wishes to dismantle school libraries. Ruth Hall, 2010 president of the Ontario School Library Association, suggests that *Partners In Action* may have been removed because it is old,

dated, is limited to the elementary panel, and lacks references to technological changes (Ruth Hall, personal communication, March 29, 2010).

A document intended to be the successor to *Partners In Action* was never published. *Information Literacy and Equity Access: A Framework for Change* (1995) was a draft document that never became an official Ministry of Education publication. In it, school libraries were described as school information centres and teacher-librarians had three key areas of responsibility: educational leader, information manager, and access agent (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1995).

The most recent document regarding school libraries has been produced with the support of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of the government of Ontario's Ministry of Education but is not considered an official ministry document. *Together for Learning* was written by the Ontario School Library Association and was published in 2010. This vision document describes school libraries as learning commons, where teacher-librarians and other learning partners work on developing reading engagement, multiple literacies, critical and creative thinking, and discovery and guided inquiry so that students can learn how to learn (Ontario School Library Association, 2010).

Other documents, including curriculum documents, have mentioned school libraries in small sections. The Language curriculum (2006) contains a paragraph on the role of the school library in language programs in the section dealing with considerations for program planning. The role of the school library is to support student success across the language curriculum "by encouraging students to read widely, teaching them to read for understanding and enjoyment, and helping them to improve their research skills and to use information gathered through research effectively" (p. 30). Resource documents

such as *Me Ready? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills* (2004) and *Think Literacy: Library Research, Grades 7-12* (2005) provide suggestions on the instructional strategies teacher-librarians and other language teachers can use in their lessons.

### **People – Ontario Teacher-Librarian Qualifications**

Teacher-librarians in Ontario become qualified to take their positions by taking an Additional Qualification course with an accredited university provider. Oberg (1991) recognized this provincial requirement as unique at the time because in the rest of Canada, “teachers in charge of school library programs are not required to have specialist training or certification” (p. 346). Elementary teacher-librarians are only required to take Part 1, whereas secondary teacher-librarians who wish to be department heads need to have their Specialist qualification. Different boards in Ontario staff school libraries in a variety of ways, using paraprofessionals (library technicians), teacher-librarians, or volunteers. Staffing has been a focus of several of the Ontario studies dealing with school libraries.

### **How do the Ontario studies impact school librarianship in Ontario?**

Informal and formal studies of school libraries in Ontario have added to public awareness and the scholarly body of knowledge on the topic. Glenn Turner (2007), a teacher-librarian in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, undertook an informal study to determine the staffing levels in all of the boards in Ontario. He telephoned every board during the 2006-2007 school year and reported that 57% of elementary schools in public boards and 22% of elementary schools in separate boards have teacher-librarians (Turner, 2007). In the secondary panel, these figures increase to 74% of the public boards

and 57% of the separate boards. These results were published in Volume 15 Issue 1 of *The Teaching Librarian* magazine and the subsequent issue featured a few letters in which staff members in specific boards suggested that their spokespeople had not accurately portrayed the status of school library staffing when Mr. Turner contacted them.

Another group that examined Ontario school libraries is People for Education. People for Education is a non-profit education advocacy group and it annually publishes a report on the state of schools. In the 2009 booklet, it states that the staffing of school libraries is irregular across boards and on the decline in general. People for Education (2009) noted the government's efforts to improve elementary school library collections via designated funding grants but expressed concerns that, without qualified school library staff, the love of reading and selection of quality Canadian resources will suffer.

In conjunction with People for Education, Don Klinger (2006) and his team conducted the first quantitative study on school libraries in Ontario. Entitled *School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario*, the study demonstrated results similar to those of other international studies, showing positive relationships between professionally staffed school libraries and student achievement. The data used were the standardized test scores from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and the information collected from the People for Education surveys. The presence of a teacher-librarian was the single strongest predictor of reading enjoyment for both Grade 3 and Grade 6 students.

In 2009, their follow-up study, *Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario*, was a qualitative examination of the factors that aided student success via school libraries. Eight



school libraries were chosen for this case-study, selected from diverse communities in Southern Ontario. They examined the co-variants of urban vs. rural, socioeconomic status, school size and immigrant-heavy or –light populations. The data collection involved school and library documents, a summary of extra-curricular and program-integrated library practices, interviews with the school administration, teachers, and teacher-librarians, student and teacher surveys and observations of the operation of the school library and teacher-librarian. Their findings indicated that there was not a single approach or teaching method associated with exemplary practices but that there were some common personality traits in the teacher-librarians in exemplary school library programs: enthusiasm, ingenuity, and adaptability. “When the school library and teacher-librarian are recognized as playing a critical role in supporting the educational outcomes of the school, the term ‘exemplary’ can be attached to the school library.” (Klinger et al., 2010). The Ontario studies provide information based on the local situation that corroborate the work completed by others in the field. There are many factors that contribute to the development of exemplary school library programs and situational factors can help or hinder this development.

## **REFLECTION**

**Is it possible to have an exemplary school library program when several factors are absent?**

There are many factors that support the development of exemplary school library programs: collection size, use of technology, budget allocation, scheduling, collaboration, staffing, instructional programming, administrative support, personal characteristics and educational belief systems. Many studies have linked effective school library programs

with student academic achievement. Creating an exemplary school library program is not a simple matter of collecting all the factors together. As Oberg (2000) has argued, a school library can have everything that the research says is needed to support student learning and yet, in fact, can be a force for limiting student learning. On the flip side, some school libraries may lack many of the resources required, based on the literature, but they still make a positive impact on student learning. The impact of reduced resources, both human and material, on the learning success of students must be examined case-by-case. Teacher-librarians need to take charge of the factors they have control over, work on the factors that they might have influence over, and temporarily accept the factors that are beyond their control. To quote Saint Francis of Assisi, “Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

### **Accept the things I cannot change**

Some factors are not possible for teacher-librarians to change directly. In Ontario, ratios for teacher-librarian allocation in a school are determined by school boards. School funds are distributed at the discretion of the principal. Technology and collection sizes are directly linked to the amount of money available to spend, and school budgets must cover everything from photocopying to professional development. Depending on the amount of available teachers able to provide preparation time coverage, the principal may alter the schedule of the school library staff. Some of these factors can only be altered through the intervention of professional organizations such as the Ontario School Library Association, the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, or People for Education. These changes will take a long time to make and filter down to the individual schools;

however, there are factors that can be changed or influenced, even if they might be factors that are deemed unchangeable.

### **Change the things I can**

Teacher-librarians can make changes that will allow factors that support the development of exemplary school libraries to “do their magic”. First of all, teacher-librarians can start with themselves. Do they spend their time whining or despairing at all the things they lack? If teacher-librarians can alter their attitudes and come to work excited to try new things and eager to interact with students and teachers, they will be modeling the same type of outlook that exemplary teacher-librarians possess. If teacher-librarians truly believe that all students are capable of learning and the way they teach makes a difference to learning, their philosophy will alter their own practices. Teacher-librarians can establish a rapport with the principals and through many conversations and demonstrations, they might be able to persuade an administrator to increase the flexible portion of the library schedule, or loosen the purse-strings a bit for purposeful spending. Teacher-librarians can advocate for different staffing models or scheduling changes in their school by joining the staffing committee or volunteering to help the administration when they design school schedules. Collaboration, even in a schedule filled with prep coverage, can be achieved by consulting with the teachers on the kind of topics they would like the teacher-librarian to delve into with their students while they are away from their classrooms.

In my own, less-than-ideal situation, I had to consciously remind myself that “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” I forced myself into a positive frame of mind and looked at the bright side of the situation – I was never granted constant access

to the intermediate division students before. I used my 30 minutes per week with them to create a wiki, called the Macphail Virtual Commons. I approached the intermediate division teachers and offered to help generate media literacy marks by doing projects using the wiki and they were delighted to receive assistance. The teachers themselves joined the wiki and participated with the students in learning and sharing. My principal scheduled me to be involved with both the junior and intermediate school Professional Learning Community because of my work with the students in those divisions as a special education teacher. Being a part of these groups kept me informed of their instructional focus points and I was able to incorporate these priorities into my own teaching. I was still able to purchase resources to supplement these priorities. My budget was cut in 2009-2010 but I was able to access additional funding by working on a project; as an appreciation for the work completed, my school was given \$2,500 to spend with a specific vendor. The previous year, the Junior/Intermediate Home School teacher and I taught a collaborative unit and entered the final product into the Best Buy Best in Class Fund contest. We won second place in that contest and received \$30,000 in technology from Best Buy. This year, even though I possessed less time for collaborative teaching, I located a small group of keen students who were willing to enter another contest by creating a project as volunteers. We did not win the Microsoft-Mindshare Learning Report 21<sup>st</sup> Century Digital Classroom Challenge but the experience developing the video was rewarding itself. The number of collaborative units I have been able to teach this year has dwindled significantly but the ones I have been able to squeeze into the limited time I have available have been very successful. Creating exemplary school library programs is an attainable goal.

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