

**NOVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER
LIBRARIAN**

**BY
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Introduction

I spent over twenty years in the secondary classroom, in four different schools, yet, at the end of this time, I had very little idea or understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian. Although I worked with at least half a dozen good teacher-librarians in my various schools, I rarely set foot in the library. After two decades of teaching experience, I knew as little of what the teacher-librarian could do for me, as I did the day I started teaching.

This situation changed dramatically in the summer of 2001, when I started a post-graduate degree in, of all things, teacher-librarianship. I very quickly became much better informed as to the role of the teacher-librarian, and one of the first things I learned is that many educators, teachers and principals alike, do not understand the role of the teacher-librarian.

Statement of the Problem

I am concerned by what I see as a serious problem in schools today-the apparent lack of understanding on the part of teachers and administration about the role of the teacher-librarian in the public school system.

In fact, it may be that the role of the teacher-librarian in public schools is the most misunderstood of all those that work in schools. Over a decade ago, Haycock (1991) noted that “administrators and teaching colleagues have little or no knowledge of, or experience with, the role of the library media center and library media specialist”(p. 62). This sentiment is echoed repeatedly in the professional literature (Haycock, 1996; Hurray, 2000; McCracken, 2001).

Giorgis (1994) found that, “Most teachers in [her] study were unaware of the role of the school librarian. This was evident for those teachers who had been in the classroom for a number of years as well as for ...the first year teacher”(p. 324).

As a result of my coursework in teacher-librarianship, I became aware of the importance of working cooperatively with classroom teachers to incorporate information literacy skills throughout the K-12 curriculum. Prior to taking these courses, I had never heard of the term “information literacy”. Had I just been exceptionally obtuse, or are most teachers unaware of this concept?

I am just now completing my second year as a teacher-librarian. In that capacity, I have been working in two schools, from kindergarten to grade 12. My recent teacher-librarian experience and training has left me with these confounding questions.

- How could I have been so ignorant, for so long, of the role of the teacher-librarian in the secondary school?
- Are newly graduated teachers today more aware of the role of the teacher-librarian than I was upon my graduation?
- Are novice teachers being prepared, during their pre-service training, to work with teacher-librarians?

- Are novice teachers aware of the role that the teacher-librarian can play, in implementing information literacy skills across the curriculum?

Purpose

This qualitative research was undertaken in an attempt to explore some of the questions above. Obviously, the number and scope of these questions would require numerous studies, so I narrowed my focus. Specifically, the questions I will be researching are:

- What are the perceptions of newly graduated teachers, concerning the role of the teacher-librarian?
- Are novice teachers being trained to collaborate with teacher-librarians to implement information literacy skills?

This qualitative study was undertaken in an attempt to explore the perceptions of novice teachers, regarding the role of the teacher-librarian in secondary schools. I have restricted the scope of the study to novice teachers, in an effort to focus the research. What do novice teachers think that teacher-librarians really do, or could do, or should do? How accurate are their perceptions? Are they aware of the concept of information literacy?

After collating the information provided during interviews with the novice teachers, I hope to identify perceptions that need to be expanded or clarified. The data obtained will provide the basis for constructive dialogue and collaboration between teacher-librarians and novice teachers, in an effort to improve practice. Additionally, it

could provide information and feedback to university and college faculties involved in pre-service teacher training.

Definitions

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). The teacher-librarian is also known as the media specialist, the school librarian, and the school library media specialist (SLMS).

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).

Novice teacher- for the purposes of this study, a novice teacher was defined as a qualified teacher who had completed their pre-service training but had less than five years of classroom teaching experience.

Review of the Literature

I reviewed the professional and research literature in the three areas pertaining to my study. These areas are:

- the role of the teacher-librarian
- teacher and administrative perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian
- the concept of information literacy.

Role of the Teacher-Librarian

Before interviewing novice teachers about their perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian, it was initially important that I have a good understanding of the teacher-librarian's role myself. Fortunately, numerous articles and research papers have been published on this topic.

McIntosh (1994) provides a thorough, historical perspective of the evolution of the role of the teacher-librarian in the United States, from the time of Melvil Dewey, until the implementation of *Information Power* (1988). She notes the traditional stereotype of the teacher-librarian as the person in charge of the books, while underlining that, in fact, the modern teacher-librarian is more concerned with organizing and enabling access to information, in its many and evolving formats. Todd (1997) also acknowledges the change in the “perceived image of the role of the teacher-librarian from that of keeper of the books to that of a learning-centered curriculum expert” (p. 39).

The American Library Association (ALA)(2003) recently produced a standards document for school library media specialist preparation. This document briefly reviews the evolution of professional standards for school librarians over the last century, and

notes that “the instructional role of the school library media specialist has emerged over the years and assumed importance” (p. 6).

This theme of the changing role of the teacher-librarian is continually reiterated. Referring to library media specialists, Haycock (1991) observes that, “Indeed, the reality of change as a constant in our world requires more than lip service on our part” (p. 63).

The impact of information technology.

Technology is frequently pinpointed as one of the main reasons behind the changing expectations of the teacher-librarian’s role. Starting with the introduction of audio-visual resources in the sixties and continuing through to the proliferation of computers and digital appliances in the nineties, teacher-librarians have had to adapt to the rising tide of information technologies. Many of these technologies permit access to information, or transmission and presentation of information, and would seem to fall within the jurisdiction of the teacher-librarian. There is, however, some blurring of the lines of responsibility between the teacher-librarian and the person responsible for information technology in the school, which has increased the confusion over the teacher-librarian’s role (McCracken, 2001).

Haycock (2002) also notes the growing confusion about the role of the teacher-librarian, particularly with regard to information technology (IT) while Reidling (2001) asserts that the roles/duties of the school library media specialist have changed to deal with our information-rich and technological society. Reidling’s study resulted in a

“model” job description which stressed the importance of information literacy, lifelong learning and the proper and efficient use of the technologies of the 21st century.

Shannon (2001) observed that the introduction of computers for automation; management; and information storage, access and retrieval has had a major impact on the set of skills school library media specialists need to function effectively.

In some cases, the teacher-librarians have resisted technological change. Eisenberg (1987) notes that, in times of change, the teacher-librarian’s responsibilities do not diminish, but rather widen in scope. Lacking the training or inclination to embrace technology, some teacher-librarian’s feel overwhelmed. This observation is supported by Lupton (1996), who found that “Information technology presents a special challenge to teacher-librarianship for, unlike its effect on some workplaces, this technology has expanded the role to the extent that many teacher-librarians are unable to accomplish their duties or maintain up-to-date services despite their desire to do so” (p. 91).

McCracken (2001) acknowledges that the rapid changes and advances in technology, since its introduction to the library media centre, have had a profound impact on the role of the SLMS (teacher-librarian). She notes that in some cases, the library media specialists view technology as diminishing their role with regard to literature and books.

National standards.

In an attempt to come to grips with the uncertainty surrounding the evolving role of the teacher-librarian, both the American and the Canadian national school library

associations have recently published comprehensive and remarkably similar documents containing role clarifications and guidelines for teacher-librarians.

Information Power (1998) outlines four roles for the American school library media specialist: teacher, instructional partner, program administrator and information specialist. These roles are reiterated in the list of professional competencies for Canadian teacher-librarians outlined in *Achieving Information Literacy* (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003, p. 78-85). In the Canadian document, the teacher-librarian:

- provides leadership in collaborative program planning and teaching; this mirrors the expectation that the teacher-librarian be a teacher and instructional partner stated in *Information Power*.
- manages library programs, services and staff ; this equates to the role of program administrator from *Information Power*.
- provides appropriate information, resources or instruction to satisfy the needs of individuals and groups; is thus the information specialist from *Information Power*.

The evolving role of the teacher-librarian is clearly explained in *Information Power* and in *Achieving Information Literacy* but I wonder if many educators are aware of these documents. Were I still in the classroom, I'm sure I would not know of them. How *do* classroom teachers and school administrators view the role of the teacher-librarian?

Teacher and Administrative Perceptions of the Role of the Teacher-librarian

Teacher perceptions.

The research and the professional literature overwhelmingly suggest that most teachers do not understand the role of the teacher-librarian, particularly the teaching and instructional partner role. Hurray (2000) observes that teacher-librarians who have completed their certification know that the school librarian is also a teacher, but this is often not well understood by other teachers and administrators. There are many in the school community who do not have a clear understanding of the potential contribution of the library media program (Shannon, 2001). Many, perhaps most [teachers and administrators] do not understand the value and educational potential of libraries and librarians (Hartzell, 1997). A recent comment from LM_NET was quoted by Braxton (2003). “The truth is that here in California, and I’m sure in other places, very few people have any idea about what a library media teacher does. I am constantly having teachers who are surprised when I tell them about something I could do for them or with them” (p. 41).

Reporting on a recent *School Library Journal* survey, Whelan (2003) cites more examples of the lack of understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian. She found that classroom teachers may view teacher-librarians as inconsequential because they don’t assign grades. Additionally, some elementary teachers tend to view the librarian as a baby-sitter, while secondary teachers tend to take ownership of what they do, to the exclusion of the librarian. And all too often, media specialists are more clerical than they are a resource person or teacher (*School Library Journal*, 2003, p. 55).

School library media specialists, themselves, believe that most educational stakeholders [teachers, administrators, future school librarians] do not understand their value to students or the benefits of collaborating with them (KRC Research, 2002).

Library media specialists who attempt to fulfill their instructional roles, as specified in *Information Power*, may find their attempts viewed as "...academic incursions ...and encroachments on teacher autonomy by an arrogant peer" (Hartzell, 2002b, p. 102).

International perceptions of teacher-librarian's role.

Lest we imagine that this lack of knowledge about the role of the teacher-librarian is strictly a North American phenomenon, an Australian study from fifteen years ago pinpoints the same concerns. Hallein & Phillips (1991) observe that, in spite of wide promotion in the professional literature, in curriculum documents and at workshops, classroom teachers and teacher-librarians are not co-operatively planning and teaching. They attribute this to a lack of understanding, on the part of the classroom teacher, of the role that teacher-librarians can play, and they note that graduating teachers are as unaware of the potential role of the teacher-librarian now, as they were fifty years ago.

A New Zealand study of four elementary schools recently found that teachers were uncertain as to the role and function of school librarians, and that teachers in all four schools "...were uncertain whether the library was central to learning" (Moore, 2000, p. 8).

Nakamura's (2000) study, comparing teachers' perceptions of school libraries and librarians in Tokyo and Honolulu, noted that there was still some confusion among the Honolulu respondents about the school librarian's role. "Perceptions about school librarians differed from one teacher to another, and many teachers still seemed to have limited awareness of the role of the school librarian" (Nakamura, 2000, p. 81). Clearly, a

lack of understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian is an ongoing concern, domestically and internationally.

Nakamura further observed that a teacher's perceptions of the role and effectiveness of the school librarian tended to be influenced by the librarian in the school itself. This finding is supported by Haycock (2002) who found that teachers, including pre-service teachers, form their views of the role of the teacher-librarian based primarily on their experience working with teacher-librarians.

Unfortunately for students today, many teachers in our aging workforce remember the libraries and teacher-librarians they encountered in the past, bringing to mind former recollections of libraries as warehouses, and teacher-librarians as resource providers (Asselin, 2000, p. 74). Wolcott (1999) concurs with this finding, concluding that even the [presumably younger] pre-service teachers in her study closely identify the library media specialist with the more "traditional" role, and lack an understanding of the learning and teaching role of the teacher-librarian.

Reporting on a recent study in British Columbia, Mikalishen (2001) noted that, although teachers "...were very anxious to discuss the roles of teacher-librarians and their working relationships with them...it became evident that there was confusion in the minds of some of the participants as to the role of the teacher-librarian"(p. 20). One participant observed that, "Without a common definition of the role of the teacher-librarian, it was unclear whether the teacher-librarian was a teacher, a clerk, a network technician, a this, a that" (p. 20). Another commented that, despite the many combined years of experience of the participants, and the sustained discussion they had shared, they were still unable to define the role of the teacher-librarian (p. 20).

It is obvious that there still exists considerable confusion around the role of the teacher-librarian. The changing nature of the job, due to information technology, seems to be partially responsible for this lack of definition. Additionally, many teachers do not seem to recognize the teacher and instructional partner aspect of the role of teacher-librarian. Nationally and internationally, it appears that teachers are unsure what to expect from the teacher-librarian.

The only dissenting voice is that of Lai (1995), in her Tennessee study, who reported that there was no significant attitude differences between the beliefs of teachers and school library media specialists regarding the instructional consultant role of the latter. She acknowledges that her results are contrary to other published studies, and suggests that the difference may be due to changing attitudes and more professional awareness of the instructional consultant role of the SLMS. This study stands out from other research already cited, both preceding and succeeding, which contradicts her findings.

If classroom teachers are generally uncertain as to the role of the teacher-librarian, are principals and administrators any more informed?

Administrative perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian.

Hartzell (2002) cites numerous studies and reports indicating that the principal plays a key role in the development and maintenance of quality school library media programs. Given the importance of principal support to an effective library program, it is easy to see how important it is to teacher-librarians that the administration understands their role.

Schon, Helmstadter & Robinson (1991) found a high correlation between Arizona principals' and library media specialists' perceptions of the major competencies or skills required by the latter. They concluded that these results also show that the principals and librarians agree on the major goals of the library media program.

These findings are contradicted by Dorrell & Lawson (1995), who noted that although principals generally have a good understanding and appreciation of the role of the teacher in an educational setting, they do not have the same understanding of the role of the library media specialist. Dorrell & Lawson concluded that principals are not sufficiently aware of the potential of the librarian as a teacher and collaborator, as specified in *Information Power* (1988).

McCracken (2001) reported on research conducted by Naylor & Jenkins in 1988 which corroborates that of Dorrell & Lawson; they found that school principals did not have a clear understanding of the school librarians' role. Wilson & Blake (1993) noted that anecdotal comments in their study highlighted teacher-librarians' concerns that principals do not understand their job or their role in the school.

A multinational study found that "limitations in the principal's understanding and leadership and lack of a school information-skills policy or curriculum was seen as a barrier...." to implementation of information literacy skills across the curriculum, in all the countries studied, except one (Henri, Hay & Oberg, 2002, p. 60).

Generally, it would seem that many administrators have neither accepted nor understood the changes in the role of the teacher-librarian, as it is outlined in *Achieving Information Literacy*. To rectify this situation, it has been suggested that, in addition to their other duties, teacher-librarians should make it a priority to communicate with their

administration, ensuring that the principal is aware of, and supports, the aims of the school library media program.

The research I have cited seems to indicate that neither teachers nor principals have a very clear idea of the role of the teacher-librarian. Do they have a better understanding of the concept of information literacy?

Information Literacy

The concept of information literacy is not recent; in fact, it dates back to a least 1986 (Doyle, 1995). In the early 1990's, in Australia, Todd (1997) began a program of action research, centered on integrating information literacy skills in the classroom. By 1994, in the United States, Bleakley & Carrigan were able to state definitively that, due to our overly rich information environment, information literacy had become a new basic skill. They concluded that, in order to develop information-literate students, the librarian and the classroom teachers must assume new roles. For their understanding of the concept of information literacy, they referred to *Information Literacy: Final Report*, produced by the American Library Association Presidential Committee in 1989.

In British Columbia, the concept of information literacy has been recognized since at least 1991, when the B.C. Ministry of Education enshrined it in *Developing Independent Learners: The Role of the School Library Resource Centre*.

The term “information literacy” has thus been in use for almost twenty years, in North America and internationally. The concept is well established and has been referred to in professional and research literature. In 1995, Kuhlthau noted three important trends in library media centre instruction, the first being a shift from instruction in library skills

to instruction in information skills and information literacy. She also predicted a shift to process orientation in skill instruction, and increased integration of information skills into the curriculum, involving cooperative planning between teachers and library media specialists. Craver (1996) echoed Kuhlthau's predictions, noting that classroom teachers would be expected to integrate information literacy skills into their curriculum; she further predicted that most of them would never think to use the resources of the teacher-librarian and the library media center. Her predictions are supported by Hurray (2000), who observed that, "Many teachers and administrators do not yet realize that librarians have precisely the training and skills needed to implement information-literacy skills in the curriculum" (p. 26).

In 2000, Moore's research indicated that the majority of teachers in her study did not have a clear understanding of the concept of information literacy and tended to confuse it with research or library skills. Even more recently, *School Library Journal* (September, 2003) conducted a survey, involving more than 800 teacher-librarians, on information literacy and the school librarian's instructional role. Their results indicated that, overwhelmingly, neither teachers nor students recognize the importance of skills tied to information literacy. In her discussion of these survey results, Whelan (2003) indicated that the main barrier to implementing information literacy is a lack of support from classroom teachers, many of whom don't really know what information literacy is.

Despite almost two decades of discussion and research, it appears that an understanding of the concept of information literacy is restricted almost exclusively to teacher-librarians and researchers in the field of school librarianship.

Themes Emerging from the Research Literature

After examining the research and professional articles of the last twenty years, it would seem that:

- The role of the teacher-librarian continues to change and evolve, partly due to the introduction of information technology.
- Although trained and qualified teacher-librarians understand their role, most teachers and administrators do not.
- Teacher-librarians recognize that their role has evolved and that it now emphasizes teaching, in collaboration with classroom teachers, in order to incorporate information literacy skills instruction across the curriculum.
- Most teachers and many administrators do not understand the concept of information literacy.
- Teachers and administrators have not understood the role that the teacher-librarian can play in implementing information literacy.

These conclusions, drawn from my examination of the research and professional literature, reinforce my own experience as a longtime classroom teacher, and more recently as a new teacher-librarian. What, however, are the perceptions of novice teachers towards the role of the teacher librarian? Do novice teachers understand the concept of information literacy? Is the new generation of recently graduated teachers aware of the potential for collaboration with the teacher-librarian in order to integrate information literacy skills? Are novice teachers being prepared, during their pre-service training, to take advantage of the potential of the teacher-librarians? I entered teaching without any knowledge of the role of the teacher-librarian. Are today's novice teachers, the most recent graduates of our universities and colleges, being exposed to the literature

and research around the role of the teacher-librarian in implementing information literacy skills? This qualitative study, consisting of interviews with five novice teachers, should help to answer these questions.

Method

I chose to conduct qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, because I felt personally involved in the research problem. Was my lack of knowledge about the role of the teacher-librarian unique to me, or was this a common situation? I hoped to learn from the experiences and perceptions of a small group of participants; I felt that their words would be valuable to me. I was interested in exploring and understanding the problem.

The interview process allowed me to follow up on statements that I found provocative or unusual, while giving the participants the flexibility to elaborate on their responses. This flexibility was particularly valuable when it became clear that the participants were unsure about the meaning of some of the terminology used in the questions. I believe that the perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian, which were shared with me during the interviews, are more detailed and richly nuanced than what would have been elicited by a more formal and impersonal survey format.

Setting

This study took place in a town in Western Canada, with a population of 70,000, with thirty-seven elementary schools and seven secondary schools. There are 16,300 students in the school district, and approximately 1,000 full and part-time teachers. The families of the students in this school district have higher levels of unemployment and poverty than the provincial average (B.C. Stats, 2003). The major employers are the forestry industry, the community college, the hospitality and tourism industry, and small manufacturing and businesses.

Participants

I had hoped to interview a homogeneous sample of five novice teachers, to explore their perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian in the public school system. With the help of our local professional association, I identified eighteen novice teachers, defined for the purposes of this study as teachers with less than five years of classroom experience. This apparently low number is explained by the fact that recent budget cuts and layoffs have forced many recently graduated teachers from their positions, and those who didn't leave for jobs elsewhere are now working on the TOC (Teacher on Call) list.

I initially eliminated four of these teachers, as I knew them personally, and did not want that to influence the research. With the permission of the school district's senior administration, and the knowledge of the teachers' association, in October, 2003 I sent a letter to each of the other fourteen teachers, asking if they would participate in my study. This letter is found in Appendix B. Unfortunately, I received six negative responses to my first letter. Three weeks later, in November, 2003 I sent out another request to the non-respondents, elaborating on the first letter. This time I received three negatives, and one affirmative response. Comments made on the forms returned indicated that the

novice teachers were too busy to participate. I therefore decided to approach the four novice teachers that I knew personally, although very slightly, and they all agreed to participate. Between November, 2003 and January, 2004, I interviewed all five participants.

Matt is an elementary trained teacher, in his late forties, who entered teaching after a previous career in the private sector. He has worked at both the elementary and the secondary level, and has held several long-term TOC positions, of three months or more. He presently has a .2 position, one day a week, in an elementary classroom, and is available as a TOC for the other four days of the week. He is married with teenage children.

Like Matt, Cam is also an elementary trained teacher in his late forties, who came into teaching after a previous career. He is a music teacher, with strengths in the areas of learning assistance and information technology. He has also held various long and short term TOC positions, at both the elementary and the secondary level. Cam is married with adult children. Both Cam and Matt completed their teacher-training at the local community college, and entered teaching at a time of budget cuts and layoffs; neither has been able to obtain a permanent full-time job.

Steve is a secondary math and social studies teacher, in his late twenties. He is working full-time in a small secondary school, although he trained as an elementary teacher at the local community college. He is married with a young daughter.

Tony, in his late twenties, is married with a new baby. He is a secondary math and science teacher, with considerable knowledge in the area of information technology. He is the only participant who did not complete his pre-service training locally. Tony was

caught in the last round of budget cuts, lost his job and moved to another teaching position in northern B.C. He agreed to meet for the interview when visiting at Christmas.

Francine, the only woman participant in the study, is in her late thirties. She is married with two elementary aged children. She trained locally, and has a .4 temporary position at a French immersion elementary school. Like Matt and Cam, she entered teaching as a second career. Her father is a retired secondary school principal, and as her comments will show, she is particularly politically aware.

Procedures

All participants were asked the same eight questions in the same order; a copy of the question sheet is found in Appendix A. The questions were designed to explore the participants' perceptions of teacher-librarians throughout their own educational history and up to the present. Their responses ranged from succinct to very expansive. Interviews were arranged at the participants' convenience, at their own schools, and lasted from twenty to thirty-five minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded, and later transcribed, coded and analyzed. Trends, themes and areas of agreement and disagreement were noted

Findings

Participant Responses

Question 1- What were your experiences with teacher-librarians, when you were a high school student?

Four of the five participants had positive recollections of librarians from their high school days, and used the descriptors helpful, friendly and available. Their

memories of their high school days were generally dim; none of them could remember the librarian's name. Steve wondered whether the librarian was also a teacher. Cam doesn't remember any high school classes or lessons in library instruction. Tony "didn't hang out much in the library".

Question 2- What were your experiences with librarians, when you were a university student?

All five participants had positive recollections of librarians from their university training, and used descriptors such as friendly, knowledgeable and available. Francine mentioned that tutorials in how to use the university library were offered, and she took advantage of them. Cam indicated that he didn't use the university library much, as he was generally involved in practicing in the music building. Matt and Francine mentioned that the university librarians were technology experts, and guided them in the use of information technology. All agreed that the university librarians were a valuable resource.

Question 3- (How) did your pre-service training prepare you to work with teacher-librarians?

The novice teachers were unanimous in their responses to question #3. Matt simply said, "Not at all." Cam replied, "It didn't, at all." They all agreed that they had received no training, experience or opportunity to work with teacher-librarians in their pre-service training. Francine mentioned that her teacher-training was an eighteen month program, following her initial undergraduate degree, that it had been very compressed, there just wasn't enough time, and "...there was no discussion of the role of the teacher-librarian." Steve acknowledged that he had received "...very little training regarding

dealing with teacher-librarian, how you can use them as an incredible resource, I'm finding them a huge resource now...they are under-utilized, in my opinion..."

Francine made the interesting observation that, although they had been required to provide a reflection document on the roles of other staff members, such as the school secretary, the custodian and the principal, there had been no requirement to reflect on the role of the teacher-librarian. She also suggested that the role of teacher-librarian might have been ignored as it was a "political hot potato" at the time, due to budget cuts and layoffs, and that the community college carefully ignored any politically sensitive situations during teacher training. She also wondered if perhaps the education program directors themselves didn't understand the role of the teacher-librarian.

Question 4- What is your understanding of information literacy?

All five novice teachers were again unanimous, agreeing that they had never heard the term "information literacy", neither during their pre-service training nor during subsequent teaching experience. Cam was able to come up with quite an accurate off-the-cuff definition of the term, and the others guessed it would have something to do with research skills. Steve was sure that his teacher-librarian would be familiar with the term. Matt and Francine though it would have something to do with computers and technology.

Cam echoed Francine's previous comment that their pre-service training had been very intense and compressed, so information literacy had not been part of the program.

At this point, I gave a brief description of the term "information literacy", based on the definition provided earlier. After some discussion and clarification, all the participants agreed that they understood the concept, but had been unfamiliar with the terminology.

Question 5- How were you prepared, as a pre-service teacher, to implement information literacy in your teaching?

Since these new teachers were unfamiliar with the term “information literacy”, none of them felt they had been specifically prepared to implement it in their classrooms. Cam had some personal IT experience, and felt that although he could successfully instruct students in the online components of information literacy, he would ask the librarian for help with print sources. Matt mentioned that, “...students have trouble reading and finding information...it’s a problem we’re going to have to face and deal with...teachers haven’t been trained...” All participants agreed that it would have been useful to have had training in implementing information literacy, and Cam commented that the teacher-librarian would be a useful resource.

Question 6- Do you think a teacher-librarian might help you in meeting your instructional objectives?

All of the participants agreed that the teacher-librarian could help them in meeting their instructional objectives. However, in spite of our recent discussion about information literacy, when asked how the teacher-librarian could assist them, all of the novice teachers immediately referred to the teacher-librarian’s ability to find books, videos and resources, and none mentioned the teacher-librarian as an educational partner or collaborator in information literacy. Matt suggested the teacher-librarian could help by finding books for students and staff, and by keeping staff informed of good, new literature. Cam and Steve both viewed the teacher-librarian as a person who could locate books, resources, and websites. Tony noted that he appreciated the librarian’s help when he brought classes to the library. Francine appreciated the teacher-librarian’s knowledge

of the curriculum, and assistance in identifying subject and theme specific resources. To all these novice teachers, the teacher-librarian is apparently still seen as a support person, useful for locating resources.

Question 7- In your teaching experience to date, how much use have you made of the libraries in the schools you have been assigned to?

Cam had made little use of the libraries in his teaching experience to date, since he had been mainly working as a TOC, and was required to follow the lesson plans of the teacher he was replacing. Matt had made little use of the library, and noted that the (elementary) library was often closed or unavailable, due to a lack of teacher-librarian time, or was staffed by parent-volunteers. The other three had used the library, mainly for research projects with the students, or for locating resources for upcoming units. Steve liked using the library because it "...gives the students a change of scenery."

Question 8- What is your understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian?

The final question evoked a flood of responses. All five novice teachers felt that the role of the teacher-librarian involved showing staff and students what resources were available. Matt and Tony mentioned that the teacher-librarian should be knowledgeable about online resources. Matt and Cam mentioned the expectation that the teacher-librarian would purchase books and resources, and be involved in circulation, shelving books and keeping track of overdue items. Tony and Francine mentioned teaching research skills to students and Francine and Matt mentioned supporting literacy in the school. Tony added that the teacher-librarian should assist students with information literacy skills, and Francine noted that the librarian should teach library skills.

Cam made the interesting comment that teacher-librarians, like music teachers, shouldn't be used for elementary release time for other teachers, as it demeaned the importance of both music and library as important areas in their own right.

Steve commented that perhaps parent volunteers could take on some of the duties of the teacher-librarians, because, "...really, read to the kids, show them how to find books, you don't need to be a genius to do that." This was a disappointing remark, coming at the end of our interview, as it seemed to suggest that the teacher had not really understood what we had been discussing about the potential role of the teacher-librarian.

Francine thought the teacher-librarian should promote literacy by modelling the joys of reading. Cam, Matt and Francine stated that they felt teacher-librarians were very important and that they were dismayed by the cutbacks in library time and staffing.

Limitations

This study was limited by the small number of participants, and the unequal gender balance. I have outlined the difficulties I faced in attracting participants, and my decision to carry on with these five participants. The study was further limited by the fact that I was slightly known to four of the five participants, although I did reiterate in each interview that the participants should try to avoid personal references in their responses, and that they should attempt to respond in general terms. I don't think this was a serious factor in any of the interviews, and in fact may have helped the participants to feel at ease, and more comfortable in the situation. In one situation, the teacher had forgotten I was coming, so had students in another room he was supervising. He left the interview once to answer a student's question, but this did not unduly interrupt the flow of the interview.

Four of the five participants completed their pre-service training at the same college, so it is not surprising that they share the same experiences and beliefs.

Themes Arising from the Interviews

Based on my analysis of my interviews with the five novice teachers, I believe that new teachers are generally unaware of the collaborative role the teacher-librarian can play in implementing information literacy skills across the curriculum. In addition, novice teachers are not aware of the concept of information literacy. They view the teacher-librarian as a support person, a provider of resources and as someone who is technologically competent. They are aware of the teacher-librarian's role as program administrator, and as information specialist, but are not aware of the teaching and instructional partner component of the role.

Hartzell (1997) reported exactly the same findings in his article "The Invisible School Librarian". He noted that many teachers and administrators view the library as "...a support service that responds to needs they define....To them, your job exists only to fulfill the first of the three roles called for in Information Power—you find them the information they want when they want it and guide students to sources they might otherwise miss"(p. 25). Although his comments were made seven years ago, they are clearly applicable today, in my school district.

I had hoped to discover that newly-graduated teachers were better prepared today,

than I had been in the past, to understand the teacher-librarian's role. This does not appear to be the case. These results support the recent findings of Asselin & Branch (2003), who note that "...teacher educators do not address the role of the school libraries in teaching and learning, and ... pre-service teachers are not learning how to teach information literacy" (para. 6).

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Although disappointing, these results were not surprising. In my two years as a teacher-librarian, I have observed that many of my colleagues don't really understand my role. Most school librarians have been teachers, but few teachers have been librarians. There is a big gap between teachers' perceptions of the role of the librarian, and the reality of the job. I have also found that most of my colleagues are very willing to learn more about what I do, and could do, to assist them. Clearly, however, the initiative is going to have to come from the teacher-librarian.

I have three recommendations:

- practicing teacher-librarians need to get involved with teacher training programs in order to incorporate knowledge of the role of teacher-librarian during pre-service training
- teacher-librarians should mentor new teachers and staff members
- teacher-librarians need to become advocates for information literacy, in order to raise their profile and increase understanding of their role.

Pre-service Training

For the last decade or more, teacher-librarians, researchers and other professionals in the field have been calling for more and better preparation of new teachers regarding the role of the teacher-librarian. In 1989, the American Library Association recommended that teacher education programs should include information literacy concerns (Asselin, 2002). Over ten years ago, Wilson (1993) noted "...a need to train candidates for teaching degrees in using the school library. Colleges should place more emphasis on the library than they do (p. 23). Her statements are corroborated by Giorgis (1994) and Hartzell (1997). More recently, Lowe (2001) has noted, "Few teacher training programs mention the roles of the library media program and the library and information professional at all" (p. 31) while Hayden's (2000) study concluded that teachers are unaware of the role of the school library media specialist, and that "...school library media specialists and colleges and universities share the responsibility to increase this knowledge base"(summary).

Clearly, researchers and school-based professionals have long been requesting that information on the role of the teacher-librarian be included in the training of pre-service teachers. Several universities have responded. Doiron's (1999) study in Prince Edward Island tracked pre-service teachers at six elementary schools, part of whose training involved working collaboratively with teacher-librarians. He found that the student teachers "developed a deep understanding of how the school library program is essential to the integrated use of information technology and students' information literacy" (p. 10). At the University of British Columbia, Asselin & Lee (2002) pioneered a study requiring pre-service teachers to work collaboratively with a teacher-librarian, during practica.

Despite these encouraging programs, it is apparent that most teacher-training institutions are not preparing new teachers to work collaboratively with the teacher-librarian. It may be that school-based teacher-librarians, workers in the field, as it were, will have to take the initiative and approach their closest Faculty of Education. We will need to initiate some liaison between teacher-librarians and the Department of Education at our local community college. We need to build a power base from which to influence the training of teachers and administrators—and of future school librarians (Hartzell, 1997).

Rather than waiting passively, in the bottom half of a top-down model, for the arrival of new teachers fully cognizant of the role of the teacher-librarian, we need to be part of a continual loop; a reciprocal give and take of information and support between the Faculty of Education which is training the new teachers and the school system which is receiving them.

Mentoring

Teacher-librarians should actively approach novice teachers, and new staff members, offering to plan and work with them. Nakamura (2000), Hayden (2000) and Haycock (2002) all found that classroom teachers' perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian are profoundly influenced by the teacher-librarians with whom they work in close contact. It would be naïve to assume that new teachers are going to learn about the role of the teacher-librarian through observation. They need to be drawn in, welcomed, and included; from one positive experience more will flow. First year teachers and teachers new to staff are often very busy and are sometimes overwhelmed. Collaboration

with the teacher-librarian must be beneficial and helpful, and not considered just “another extra chore” by the novice teacher.

It has been my experience that patterns established in the first years of teaching may be difficult to change. This explains the present lack of knowledge of and collaboration with teacher-librarians, on the part of many experienced teachers, and further underscores the importance of “breaking in” the new graduates as early as possible in their careers.

Wilson & Blake (1993) were speaking of principals when they noted that “even if universities assume the responsibility of educating the principals, teacher-librarians must continue to provide knowledge about the library and the teacher-librarian’s role in the school” (p. 23). This comment would apply equally to newly graduated teachers. Clearly, the universities, on the whole, are not educating the pre-service teachers about the role of the teacher-librarian. The teacher-librarian must thus take on this responsibility in the school setting.

Almost twenty years ago, Hauck (1985) observed that “as soon as members of a profession are able to define their roles, their profile becomes clearer and other people [e.g. principals, teachers and students] with whom they come into contact are more likely to accept them in the roles they have adopted” (p. 38). Teacher-librarians who understand their roles need to accept the responsibility of clearly communicating these roles to educational colleagues.

Information Literacy

Hartzell (1997) noted that library media specialists have done a poor job of promoting themselves, partly because they haven't been schooled in the need for it. Since I have only two years of experience as a teacher-librarian, I can't speak on past practice in the area of advocacy. However, I do feel strongly that (a) what we do is important and necessary, (b) this should be self-evident, and (c) who wants to be forever self-promoting and tooting their own horn?

Unfortunately, it now appears that self-promotion and horn-tooting have become an integral part of the role of the teacher-librarian. The importance of what we do is not evident to everyone, and particularly not to our colleagues and administration. The research and professional literature is rife with recommendations that the teacher-librarian actively communicate and promote the value of the library media program (Bush and Kwielord, 2001; Lowe, 2001; Shannon, 2001).

Eisenberg (2002) observes that "school librarians do a poor job of getting the word out about the importance of their library programs" (p. 48) and he suggests that librarians should [among other ideas] emphasize information and technology literacy efforts and standards.

I agree, and think that developing an integrated continuum of information literacy standards, across the curriculum, to be delivered in partnership with the classroom teachers, would raise our profile and demonstrate to our colleagues that our role extends beyond that of warehousing resources. Oldford (2002) notes that resource based programs, which supported information literacy, have existed in the past, but that the synergy which sustained them has dissipated. Whelan (2003) observes that barriers to

teaching information literacy include (a) little support from teachers, closely followed by (b) little knowledge about what information literacy really is.

We need to revive these resource-based programs and revive the teaching of information literacy skills in schools. We as teacher-librarians must take a leadership role in educating staff and students in the importance of information literacy skills. We need to use the term “information literacy” at every opportunity: in conversation, in staff meetings, at professional development activities, in the school newsletter, in the staff room, in curriculum meetings and in every other conceivable context. The concept of information literacy should be known and understood by colleagues, administration and students, and the term “information literacy” should be a part of the current vocabulary of every stakeholder in the school.

Also, the teaching role of the school librarian, and the potential for collaboration with the teacher-librarian, to implement information literacy, should be well understood and accessed by our classroom colleagues. I personally have worked with individual teachers, spoken at staff meetings and led workshops on professional days, in an attempt to raise awareness around the role of the teacher-librarian. All teacher-librarians will need to work together, in advocacy, to promote a better understanding of our role.

Future Research

The findings of this study reflect those of other studies. It would be beneficial, however, to implement a long-range project, involving a larger number of participants and universities, to observe trends and/or changes over time, in the perceptions of future new graduates around the role of the teacher-librarian in the school.

Conclusion

Working in collaboration with teacher training institutes, mentoring newly graduated teachers, and advocating for the implementation of information literacy skills from kindergarten to grade twelve are just three ways we can work to raise the profile of the teacher-librarian, in an effort to change the present perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian, not only with novice teachers but with more experienced colleagues and administrators alike. It has been almost ten years since Haycock (1995) noted that “school libraries and teacher-librarians will survive and thrive in the twenty-first century only if educators understand their importance in the educational enterprise” (p.14). The findings of this study seem to indicate that there is still work to be done.

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Appendix A- Interview questions

_____ (person's name) Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

First of all, you should know that you don't have to respond to a particular question, if you prefer not to. You can withdraw from the interview at any time, and if you change your mind later, you can ask that your interview not be included in my research.

There are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in exploring your experiences with school libraries and teacher-librarians, in an effort to improve my practice.

1. Going back in time, what were your experiences with teacher-librarians, when you were a high school student?
2. What were your experiences with librarians, when you were a university student?
3. How did your pre-service training prepare you to work with teacher-librarians?
4. What is your understanding of information literacy?
5. How were you prepared, as a pre-service teacher, to implement information literacy in your teaching?
6. Do you think a teacher-librarian might help you in meeting your instructional objectives?
7. In your teaching experience, to date, how much use have you made of the libraries, or the teacher-librarians, in the schools you have been assigned to?
8. What is your understanding of the role of the teacher-librarian in secondary schools?

Is there anything else you would like to add, on this topic?

Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with me.

Appendix B- letter asking participants to join the study.

September 28, 2003

Dear _____

I am writing this letter to ask if you would be a participant in my study. I am presently completing a Master's degree, with a library focus, through the University of Alberta, and the study will form part of my final "capping" paper. My research project will examine teachers' perceptions of the role of teacher-librarians in secondary schools. Participants will be asked to agree to a personal interview, to discuss their perceptions of the role of teacher-librarians. The interviews would take approximately 30 minutes to complete, and would be scheduled at the participant's convenience, during the months of October and November, 2003.

I would value your input, and your consent to be involved in this study. Please be assured that confidentiality will be maintained. You are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw at any time. If you decide to opt out later in the term, than any collected data can be withdrawn at that time. A tape recorder would be used to record our conversation; I would later transcribe the tapes. I will use a pseudonym to represent you in all work that is written about the study. I will keep your interview tape and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet in my office for a minimum of five years following completion of the research.

This study will examine participants' past and present experiences with school and university libraries, and librarians, and will explore participants' perceptions of the role of the teacher-librarian. This topic is of interest to me, as I was a classroom teacher for 22 years, but have recently been appointed to a library position.

The attached consent form will explain this study more fully. If you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at (250) 758-9191, or my

advisor, Dr. Jennifer Branch, at (780)492-4273 ext.242. Please complete the attached consent form, to indicate your decision. If you are willing to participate, please return the consent form to me. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

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