

School Libraries in Pre-service Teacher Education

A Research Program Examining the Inclusion of School Libraries and Information Literacy in Pre-service Teacher Education from National and International Perspectives

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This paper describes a multi-stage research initiative focused on the place of school libraries in teacher education and how pre-service teachers learn to teach information literacy. Given the multinational agenda of governments and business of the creation for a knowledge-based society and economy, the research is premised on the prime opportunities of school libraries to support development of the skills and abilities essential to fulfilling these agendas by ensuring new teachers are informed and equipped to collaborate with teacher-librarians. Results and implications of one national study are given and the challenges of revising the research instruments for use in other countries are described and examples provided.

Around the world, school systems are responding to pronouncements by government and business about the urgent need to ensure citizens and workers are able to solve problems, think critically, collaborate, and use information and communication technologies to create knowledge. Since development of all these abilities is the mandate of school libraries (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2000), one would assume a central place of school libraries in education systems at all levels. However, there is little evidence that this is the case in Canadian public schools as indicated by severe budget cuts to school library programs and services, and to teacher-librarian positions (Doiron, 2003; National Library of Canada, 2002). What is not known is how new teachers are being prepared to carry out curricular expectations reflective of the 21st century.

This paper describes a research program that examines the place of school libraries in teacher education programs and specifically how pre-service teachers are learning to teach information literacy. The first phase of the research was conducted in Canada. The second stage is currently in progress and expands to other countries where Canadian instruments are being adjusted for use in specific international contexts. With prototypes of research instruments available from a variety of educational contexts, it is hoped that the third stage will be conducted in countries in all countries with IASL members. As in Canada, findings from each country could be used by the national school library community to inform advocacy initiatives with teacher educators.

Background to the Research Program

Three areas inform this research initiative focused on the place of school libraries in teacher education: current political agendas around the New Economy, current literacy theory and research, and current policies and reforms in pedagogy and teacher education.

Current Political Agendas: The New Economy

The advent of the Information Age raised the issue about the purposes and outcomes of the availability of an infinite amount of information. Many countries have responded with visions, policies, and plans for building knowledge-based economies and societies with the new tools engendered by information, communication, and multimedia technologies (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). This new era of globalization, technology, and a view of knowledge as capital is referred to as New Times (Luke & Elkins, 1998) in the literacy field. In Canada, the federal document Canada's Innovation Strategy (2002) defines the goals and means of establishing the country as a competitor in a global network of knowledge-based economies. Three major conditions underscore plans to ensure Canadian success in the next decade of change and growth:

- An ever-increasing demand for a well educated and skilled workforce in all parts of the economy and in all parts of the country.
- A demographic crunch that will exacerbate these skills shortages.
- The need to strengthen the country's learning system to be able to meet the demands of the next decades (Government of Canada, 2002, pp. 7 – 8).

Emanating from these directives are descriptions of employability and workforce skills that will create and sustain Canada's position in the world's knowledge-based economy. One important target is to become one of the top five countries for research and development by 2010. It is not surprising that skills related to information literacy figure prominently in attaining current goals although these skills are not specifically labeled information literacy. For example, assuming a prominent place on the Conference Board of Canada's (2002) list of employability skills is "Manage information: locate, gather, and organize information using appropriate technology and information systems: access, analyze, and apply knowledge and skills from various disciplines."

Literacy Theory and Research in the 21st Century

The educational reform literature echoes the political and economic platforms of countries moving towards knowledge-based identities. Although not labelled as such, the essential message from this literature is that information literacy is a critical factor of survival. As Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) stated, "Never before has the success, perhaps even the survival, of nations and people been so tightly tied to their ability to learn" (p. 2).

Similarly, the new frontier in literacy research focuses on the convergence of literacy and technology in a knowledge-based economy. The Information Age has spawned new literacies necessary for accessing, gaining, transforming, and transmitting information (Gilster, 1997; Hull, 1997; Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Reinking, McKenna, Labbo & Kieffer, 1998). As economic, political, and cultural capital, literacy researchers are tackling the urgent task of ensuring students' proficiency of these new literacies. Projecting what literacy will consist of in New Times, Kibby (2000) connected the workplace to literacy in this way:

Like it or not the workplace is competitive, and the key to competitiveness will be gaining, transforming, and generating knowledge . . . future workplaces will require the full range of multi-literacies—most especially, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of multiple pieces and forms of information" (p. 381).

Literacy researchers also write of the deitic nature of literacy (Leu, 2000) in this time of rapidly changing technologies. That is, unlike the past when the technologies of literacy were stable and what constituted effective literacy skills was consistent over long periods of time, the processes and skills necessary to represent and construct thinking (i.e. literacy) evolve interactively and in conjunction with seemingly daily technological advances.

Finally, literacy researchers emphasize the importance of attending to the deeper and more critical dimensions of information literacy and not to limit conceptions to technical skills of finding and using information. Instead, information literacy instruction must include "critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure, and its social, cultural, and philosophical context and impact" (Shapiro & Hughes, 1996; see also Kaptizke, 2001 and Luke & Kaptizke, 2000).

Current Policy and Reform in Pedagogy and Teacher Education

In Canada, national agencies view education as “a lifelong learning process and (educators must) strive to create a learning society in which the acquisition, renewal, and use of knowledge are cherished” (Council of Ministers of Education, 1999). Proponents of media literacy also embed information literacy in their policy and curriculum documents (Media Awareness Network). Such vision statements enforce the national agenda that information literacy is the concern of all educators and one of the principal expectations that society has for future citizens. Across North America, information literacy figures prominently in current learning outcomes across multiple curricular areas (Western Canadian Protocol; Ministry of Education, 2000) and specifically in language arts (National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, 2000; National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, 1996) and technology (International Society for Technology Education, 2000-2002). For example, one of the 12 IRA/NCTE standards for language arts is “use a variety of technological and informational resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.” Local school systems support these broad information literacy goals through more specific outcomes. In the province where I teach, two examples of language arts learning outcomes pertaining to information literacy are:

- Collect specific information from a variety of sources, including print, oral discussions, electronic media, and computer technology (grade 4)
- Identify viewpoints, opinions, stereotypes, and propaganda in literary, informational, and mass media communications (grade 7)

While professional organizations and some higher education institutions have recognized the need to include information literacy in the development of pre-service teachers, Carr (1998) reports that this integration has not taken place widely, in spite of there being several models for such integration that have worked well in some teacher preparation programs (Asselin & Lee, 2002). However, the pressure is growing as teacher education leaders call for renewal (Shapson, 1998). Renewal focuses on restructuring teaching to address issues around accountability and differentiated roles for teachers, as well as redesigning curriculum and instruction to promote and develop higher-order thinking skills and effective use of technology to increase knowledge (Hargreaves, 1995; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Stokes, Kaufman, & Lacey, 2002/2003).

The Canadian Study (2001 — 2002)

While the emergence of information literacy has been a major force in educational reform in both compulsory and post-secondary education, school library programs within many Faculties of Education in Canada have declined (Haycock, personal communication, February 26, 2003). There are still some courses offered in a few institutions, but unless the Faculty offers a diploma or graduate degree in school librarianship, most new teachers are unlikely to receive training or even exposure to the role that the teacher-librarian plays in developing an information literacy curriculum in partnership with classroom teachers. It could be that the traditional attention paid to the role of the school library and its instructional program that is led by a teacher-librarian may have been subsumed under other courses, but until this study, there was no evidence to support that assumption. Specific objectives of the Canadian study were:

- to examine the extent and character of the erosion of school library education in Canadian Faculties of Education;
- to identify alternatives that Faculties of Education may have found for including the role of the school library in pre-service programs; and
- to identify if and how Faculties of Education prepare pre-service educators for their role of developing information literate citizens.

Methodology

The research was conducted with a representative sample of Faculties of Education from across Canada. A stratified random sample of 17 teacher education programs from all regions of Canada was identified. The sample represented large programs (over 500 students), medium-sized programs (200- 499 students) and small programs (less than 200 students). Data collection was based on a questionnaire and telephone interviews to extend the questionnaire data.

For each institution, questionnaires were sent to the coordinators of the literacy and social studies methods courses, the practicum coordinator, and a library staff person with major responsibilities in the Faculty of Education. Thirty-eight percent (n = 26) of those surveyed, representing 16 of the 17 programs in the sample, completed a questionnaire. Telephone interviews lasting 30 minutes were conducted with nine volunteers drawn from those who had completed a questionnaire. For each of the three research objectives, data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and the constant-comparative method for identifying themes in questionnaire responses and telephone interviews.

Findings

The major finding was that school libraries are playing a limited role in the preparation of pre-service teachers. A complete report of the findings is available in Asselin & Doiron (in press). For this paper, a summary of results is provided below:

- There is a serious erosion of school library education in Faculties of Education. In most cases, participants reported that “the topic never comes up” and that “everyone assumes someone else is dealing with the matter.”
- Only weak or no alternative practices for introducing pre-service teachers to the role of the school library in their future teaching career exist. Pre-service teachers receive only cursory reference to the role of a school library and little or no practicum experience with school libraries when they get to the schools.
- Information literacy pedagogy is not explicitly developed in pre-service programs and there appears to be no expectations that pre-service teachers transfer the learning experiences in methods courses to their actual classroom practice. It is assumed that by completing assignments with a strong connection to information literacy learning outcomes, pre-service teachers will develop similar outcomes with their future students.
- Respondents to the questionnaires and the interviews repeatedly said that they had not considered the school library in any explicit way in their work with pre-service teachers and their participation in the study served as “a wake-up call.” They unanimously requested copies of the results of this study to share with their colleagues and they suggested we develop information packages and teaching strategies that could be included in the Faculty’s program.

Results showed that staff working in the Education libraries understand the concept of information literacy and its pervasive role in their daily work with students and faculty members. They could identify many areas where the need for information literacy was essential in the teacher education program and they were excited by some of the collaborative program ideas that were shared during the interviews. The librarians were actively seeking ways to connect their library programs with pre-service teachers’ learning and course instructional goals. In the words of one librarian, “we need to stop acting like academic libraries and start acting like school libraries.”

Conclusions

Beyond the information that was gained about the research objectives was the realization of the gap between teacher and school library educators’ understandings of the role of the school library in education. Findings indicated that those from the school library field speak a different language from those involved in teacher education, and by implication, from those in schools. As well, the extent that Faculties of Education have forgotten the role of the teacher-librarian and the value of school libraries in the educational system was alarming. Either much of what school libraries purport to contribute to education is already being done in other ways or the school library community had better start targeting teacher education programs as part of a national strategy to raise awareness and offer support to Faculties of Education trying to revitalize this all but forgotten part of education.

Given the value in modern educational policy and curriculum of attaining information literacy standards within the context of inquiry-based learning, integrated approaches to learning, and embedded use of information technology, the time is ripe for ensuring new teachers are informed about the leadership role school libraries play in these areas. There is little evidence that information literacy is given high priority in Canadian schools, despite known requirements of the knowledge-based economy and the inclusion of information literacy in desired characteristics of Canadian employees. This trend will continue if new teachers remain unequipped to teach information literacy through collaboration in effective school library programs.

The Canadian school library community needs to reposition its role in light of significant developments in wider educational reform and in teacher education programs and start to include new teachers in professional development activities. Teacher-librarians need to seek out opportunities to have a pre-service teacher do a practicum in the school library. They need to meet with all pre-service teachers when they start their practicum and show them how school libraries can advance student achievement and add creative energy to their classroom programs. Professional organizations of teacher-librarians need to collaborate with teacher educators to provide pre-service teachers with authentic information literacy lesson planning experiences as part of their required coursework (Asselin & Lee, 2002).

Those working in Faculty of Education Resource Libraries offer promise in modeling the role of the teacher-librarian in Faculty of Education programs. Examples related during the interviews of how a qualified librarian working in an academic library can collaborate with Faculty members and students to integrate resources and create exciting learning experiences need to be shared. While the challenges are great, this study has begun to point the Canadian school library field towards effective ways of reinventing teacher preparation.

The International Pilot Studies (2003 — 2004)

Four countries with IASL membership are participating in this stage of the research program: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and China (Hong Kong). At this time (February 2003), the questionnaires and interviews are being adjusted to more accurately represent the structures and language used in particular national contexts in preparation for use in data collection from small samples in participating countries. I contacted key people in teacher education in each of the four countries and sought their participation. They in turn identify “key informants” within their institutions to review the instruments. Instruments are revised according to feedback and then emailed to the contact person at each institution. The questionnaires are then distributed to representatives of the three groups (teacher educator, practicum director, library staff) who return completed forms by email to the researcher. Follow up interviews are conducted by email.

What is becoming apparent through this revision process is that despite globalization, education remains a local matter as well. For example, in one institution in one of the participating countries, the teacher education program includes only secondary teachers and students specialize in subject areas rather than take a generalist program of many required curricular areas. One respondent commented that the idea of a pre-service teacher spending some of their practicum time in a school library is unheard of in their institution but found the question important to ask nonetheless as it raises the issue of why this is not done. Informants have also clarified terminology (e.g. “information literacy” vs “information skills”; “subject” vs “course”) and extended both the questionnaire items and interview questions to enable more valid and consequently useful responses. For example, a question has been added to the teacher educator instrument about their view of the role of the teacher-librarian and one to the library staff instrument requesting any additional information (e.g. brochures, web pages) about their programs and services with faculty and pre-service teachers. Respondents have suggested ways of sharpening the interview questions as well as making them more objective. Appendix A provides an example of the library staff questionnaire currently under revision, and Appendix B contains a version of the interview questions that will be asked to representatives of each group.

At this early stage of the international extension, it is clear that many of the same factors that make comparing information literacy progress within and between nations difficult also make studying how pre-service teachers learn to teach information literacy challenging. Moore (2003) reviews the problems of comparative information literacy research and below I list parallel challenges in my research program.

- The inclusion and importance of information literacy in compulsory schooling policy and prescribed learning outcomes. The degree of fit between K – 12 curricular expectations and teacher education programs must be considered.
- The availability of resources in both K – 12 schools and libraries or resource centres in teacher education programs. The extent to which information literacy instruction can be effectively planned and carried out will be affected by the range and quality of types and formats of information sources. This includes access to information and communication technologies which varies widely even within school districts.

- The pedagogical approach to information literacy that is taken in K – 12 schools which can range from bibliographic and technical to cognitive and metacognitive. Teacher educators who include information literacy instruction in their courses will likely reinforce approaches observed in the schools.
- The “personnel infrastructure” of information literacy that includes a) teacher educators’ and pre-service teachers’ own
- The “systematic infrastructure” of information literacy in schools particularly in a school wide culture of an inquiry-based constructivist view of teaching and learning, collaboration, and actual time and opportunities to collaboratively plan and teach information literacy.

While the pilot studies will form the basis of further investigation to participating countries’ teacher education programs, it seems clear that each IASL country should take ownership of the process of adapting the research instruments to their unique contexts. Findings must take into consideration the five complex factors described above and be seen as only one more source of information directing a multi-faceted action plan to work with both pre-service and in-service teachers in realizing the national agenda to participate and compete in a global world of knowledge-based societies and economies. It is time to seriously respond to the call to position school libraries in teacher education programs (American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989) as a critical component of preparing teachers for their work in New Times. In this way, the international mission of school libraries may be finally realized:

The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today’s information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens. The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2000).

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Biographical Note

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Appendix A

Draft of Library Staff Questionnaire

Draft of Library Staff Questionnaire

1. What special programs or services does your library offer to pre-service teachers?
a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
2. What does information literacy mean to you?

3. In what ways does your library program helps pre-service teachers increase their own information literacy skills?
a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
4. Does your library offer any programs or services aimed to help pre-service teachers learn to teach information literacy to school students?
No _____ Yes _____

If "Yes", please list below.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

NOTE: For all the above questions, please submit any additional materials such as brochures or reference to a web page identifying and explaining your library's programs and services concerning pre-service teacher education and information literacy.

5. What do you see as the greatest challenge(s) to equipping new teachers to teach information literacy to school students?
a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
6. What role(s) do you see your library playing in to the challenges listed in question 4?
a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
7. What is your title in the library?

8. Please provide basic information about your role. If you have a job description, please attach it to this question.

As you know, questionnaires are a valuable way of obtaining general information on topics. However, it is also very valuable to a research project if the researchers can communicate directly with respondents in order to clarify and expand some areas.

I would be very grateful if you would allow me to contact you by email to obtain your permission for a brief interview. This will in no way compromise your anonymity, as all data will be aggregated, and all personal information will be destroyed. If you would be willing to have me contact you, please complete the information below or phone me at () so that I may give you further information about this interview.

Name: _____
Phone: () _____
E-Mail: _____

9. Is there anything you would like to add?
No _____ Yes _____

If "Yes", please do so in the space provided below.

Thank you for your participation in this research survey.

Appendix B

Draft of (Email) Interview Questions based on Reviewers

Dear Participant;

I thought you might appreciate receiving beforehand a copy of the questions I will be asking during our up-coming email interview. The six questions cover several key areas I am probing in this study and they offer you a chance to comment on these issues.

1. In (name of country), as in many countries, political visions and descriptions of workforce skills stress the importance of being able to access, analyze, synthesize and evaluate multiple pieces and forms of information. These skills fall under the concept of information literacy and include learning to use information for a variety of critical thinking activities.
 - a. What does information literacy mean to you?
 - b. Do you agree with its projected importance in the workplace?
 - c. How is the concept of information literacy influencing your teaching methods or program area?
2. An examination of a school system's curriculum shows that information literacy learning outcomes are embedded in the areas of literacy, technology, and content areas like social sciences and science. How do you see the role of the school library in supporting these information literacy outcomes in the school curriculum?
3. What qualifications should people hired to run school libraries have?
4. In a recent study of Canadian teacher education programs, I found that school libraries do not have a significant role in pre-service education. No one in most Canadian Faculties has responsibility for school libraries and courses in this area have been dropped.
 - a. What do you know about the situation in your teacher education program?
 - b. What do you think is the impact it is having on preparing new teachers?
5. What are your opinions about the future of school libraries in your country?
6. What actions, if any, do you see your School or College of Education taking in supporting the role of school libraries in the classrooms of the future?

In all cases there are short follow-up questions that build on your initial response. Please don't feel you need to prepare answers beforehand; these are merely provided as a courtesy before we have our conversation.

Thank you again for your continued support. I look forward to discussing these issues with you soon.