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*This paper looks at the collaboration between teachers and school librarians necessary for the effective teaching of information literacy skills in schools with specific reference to secondary schools in Jamaica. It discusses the barriers that school librarians sometimes face in seeking to teach collaboratively as a result of perceptions held of their role in the delivery of the curriculum. It argues that, if the goal of information literacy is to be achieved, school librarians will need to forge strategic partnerships with stakeholders who can help to influence change.*

### Introduction

Information literacy has been a central issue in the literature on school librarianship for more than a decade. Many definitions have been offered and various models developed for the teaching of the information literacy skills considered necessary for survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most of the research has come out of the developed countries where developments in information and communication technologies have made the preparation of students to cope in an information society an imperative. However, while there may be comparatively less activity in developing countries like Jamaica, library and information professionals recognize the importance of information literacy and the value of partnerships in developing students' information literacy skills.

The promotion of an integrated approach in developing students' information literacy skills followed earlier unsuccessful attempts to teach skills in isolation in the school library. This approach is intended to make programs more meaningful and relevant to students' needs and interests. Standards such as those published by the American Library Association in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998) have provided guidelines for librarians seeking to collaboratively deliver student-centered library programs with the aim of preparing students that are independent and lifelong learners. The importance placed on partnership in the delivery of programs is evident in the shift in emphasis in these guidelines to the role of "instructional partner" from that of "instructional consultant" described in the earlier edition - *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (1988).

In Jamaica, where there has been increasing interest in information literacy among library professionals, school librarians since the early 1990s have been lobbying for policy and administrative support for the introduction of information literacy skills instruction in schools. However, although the new curriculum for Grades 7 to 9 with its emphasis on integration offers opportunities for the successful integration of information literacy skills across the curriculum, this has not taken place. "Library skills" are still generally taught in isolation in schools. As Harris (1997, p. 9) suggests, any integration that may be taking place in Jamaican schools is "teacher-based rather than teachers-based". Thus, the teacher-librarian who also teaches in the classroom will plan integrated activities that are meaningful for his/her students. However, collaboration with teachers to plan and teach information literacy skills remains an ideal. In the absence of collaboration with teachers, and of policy and administrative support for it, school librarians are likely to continue to play a marginal role in the delivery of the new curriculum.

The focus of this paper is the collaboration between teachers and school librarians necessary for the effective teaching of information literacy skills in schools. It looks at some of the challenges faced by school librarians as a result of perceptions held of their role in the delivery of the curriculum with specific reference to librarians in secondary schools in Jamaica. It argues that, if school librarians are to play a meaningful role in the education process they will need to forge strategic partnerships with stakeholders who can help to influence change. The paper discusses the partnerships that need to be forged at all levels within the education system for success in teaching information literacy skills collaboratively in schools. The terms “library media specialist” and “teacher-librarian” are used in context interchangeably for the generic term “school librarian” used throughout the paper.

## Information Literacy Defined

A number of definitions have evolved for the term “information literacy”. The classical definition is that offered in the Final Report of the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989): “To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (p. 1). Spitzer (1998) observes that “this definition has been widely accepted by those within the library field and forms the basis of subsequent definitions” (p. 22-23). This certainly is the one to which reference is most often made in the literature. Inherent in the concept of information literacy is the notion of an individual who has learnt how to use information from a variety of sources critically and ethically for problem solving and decision-making in all spheres of his/her life.

In a report on a *Literacy Improvement Initiative* in Jamaica, the writers include information literacy among what they describe as “a burgeoning field of definitions available” for literacy (University of the West Indies, School of Education, Education Research Centre, 1999, p. 15). Building on other definitions, they go on to offer “a dynamic definition of literacy” that encompasses information literacy:

Literacy refers to a complex set of abilities to understand and **use** the **dominant** symbol systems/language of a culture for individual and community development. In a technological society the concept of literacy is **expanding** to include the **media** and **electronic** text, in addition to **alphabet and number** systems. Literacy includes critical understanding, problem-solving abilities, and oral/aural abilities.

Literacy abilities are not static and will vary according to contexts and need. They begin with the child’s acquisition of his/her first language and the intuitions developed about the way communication works in natural settings. To continue on-going growth in literate behaviour, individuals should be given **life-long learning** opportunities to develop all aspects of their literacy potential. (p. 15) [The writers’ emphasis]

It is argued that “there is no one pathway to literacy or one type of literacy”; and that because literacy is “cognitive behaviour”, opportunities need to be created for “thinking” behaviour when promoting literacy (p. 16).

Whether we choose to promote information literacy independently or in the wider context of literacy for individual and community development, there is no doubt that partnerships are critical to success. Information literacy should not be the concern of librarians only.

## The Value of Partnerships for Information Literacy

What are the characteristics of a “partnership”, and what are the implications of forging partnerships in the context of the school? The term “partnership” encompasses many different types of relationships (The Family Literacy Action Group of Alberta, 1996, p. 17). A partnership is an undertaking between two or more parties to do something together.

The following are some of the characteristics of successful partnerships identified in the literature:

- clear and common goals and objectives that have been mutually agreed upon;
- shared authority and power;
- shared planning and decision-making;
- shared responsibility and accountability;
- shared risks and mutual benefits;
- shared strengths and resources;
- honesty and clear communication;
- mutual trust and respect for knowledge and skills;
- joint evaluation of progress.

Collaboration and cooperation are two types of relationships applicable to our discussion on partnerships for information literacy. A collaborative partnership between school librarians and teachers moves the parties involved to a level that surpasses the cooperation that characterizes situations where information skills are not integrated across the curriculum. Where mere cooperation exists, each individual or group retains authority and resources and can have different goals. The sharing that is critical to collaboration is absent. In collaborating, the underlying assumption is that partners and stakeholders will benefit to a greater degree than they do when they work independently of each other.

Farmer (1999) illustrates the value of such a partnership in her report of a school wide reform effort in the United States, which followed previous attempts at implementing “a scope and sequence of information literacy skills, which was passively adopted - and then ignored”. Concluding that “partnership counts”, Farmer (1999) identifies the reasons for the success of this initiative:

- it grew out of teacher-perceived need;
- the effort was student-centered;
- classroom teachers partnered with [him] taking leadership responsibility for the product and impact;
- the entire faculty was involved throughout and owned the process.

*Farmer (1999) notes:*

I worked more closely and deeply with the different departments than ever before as they took the lead in examining their practice and improving it. I also negotiated much more than usual.... I respected the community's needs and comfort zones and worked with them to own the results - and help students become information literate.

The goal of collaboration in schools is student learning. Partners no longer run parallel programs, but find common ground in seeking to effect desirable learning outcomes through collaborative planning and teaching. The teacher brings to the relationship knowledge of the students and the subject content, while the school librarian brings his/her knowledge of resources to support learning.

Loertscher (1998) as cited in Donham (1999) points to some of the specific steps that the school librarian, the teacher and the principal can take to advance the process of collaboration in schools. The school librarian “takes the initiative to learn what is taught and how information literacy can be integrated”; shares with teachers and administrators the vision of a programme taught collaboratively; conducts training sessions for teachers about national information literacy standards; and monitors students’ learning experiences by keeping records of skills and processes taught. The teacher accepts the idea of collaboration; shares his/her assignments with the school librarian; discusses with the school librarian “what students need to know about information processes to be successful”; and gives students “meaningful, challenging assignments that demand higher order thinking”. The principal encourages and monitors collaboration between teachers and the school librarian, and “expects the [school librarian] to serve as an active member on curriculum committees”. Thus, each partner has an important role to play in furthering the process of collaboration.

For those at the initial stages of developing a collaborative working style, Donham (1999) recommends the use of a form to guide them. This form, which is intended to facilitate note taking during collaborative meetings, should help to provide structure and focus to formal meetings and thus make them more effective.

## Crossing the Barriers to Collaboration with Teachers

Two experiences as a school librarian in the early 1990s illustrate the challenges librarians sometimes face when trying to act as change agents in seeking to integrate information literacy skills across the curriculum. First, a Caribbean colleague shared her feeling of frustration after attempts at initiating discussions with a teacher were rejected. (He did not seem to think they had anything to talk about.) Another colleague, in a defiant response to the resistance of teachers to her efforts to encourage greater use of the school library, announced that she had decided to forget about the teachers and concentrate on the students who were already enthusiastic users of the library. While one can empathize with the response of the latter, it must be admitted that this is not a viable solution to the negative responses of teachers if our primary focus is student learning. The focus should always be on finding ways of facilitating collaboration.

Although over the past decade in the Caribbean there have been commendable initiatives aimed at furthering the process of integrating information literacy skills across the curriculum, we are still some way from the ideals expressed in *Information Power* (1988 and 1998). An important factor that those seeking to negotiate change will need to consider is the possible impact of the perceptions that principals and teachers have of the curricular role of librarians. The perceptions of teachers are particularly important because it is with them that school librarians will have to collaborate in attempting to implement change in the way library and information skills are taught in schools.

Harris (2003) conducted a survey of the perceptions of principals, teachers and librarians of the role of a school librarian in 48 public secondary schools in Jamaica. The study showed that 98% of the teachers who responded thought teaching students how to use library resources and equipment was a role that a school librarian should perform. Indeed, 89% indicated that it was a role that he/she definitely should perform. This, of course, is not surprising given the fact that this traditional function is the primary one performed by school librarians in Jamaica.

Responses, however, to the items relating to collaboration were less positive. Although 98% thought that collaborating with subject teachers in developing students' research and study skills was a function that school librarians should perform, only 55% thought that it was a function that he/she definitely should perform. Even less positive was their response to the item relating to participation in the evaluation of units taught collaboratively with teachers. While 61% thought a school librarian should participate in the evaluation, only 14% thought he/she definitely should. Eleven percent of the respondents thought they should not participate, while 26% were undecided.

Although responses to the items relating to collaboration were less positive than those pertaining to the school librarian's traditional teaching function, they still offer a window of hope. While it is difficult to predict whether teachers' actions will be consistent with their perceptions, the findings suggest some openness to the idea of collaboration that could be explored. However, the school librarian's participation in the evaluation of units taught collaboratively could be problematic.

School librarians in Jamaica may have to take the strategic decision to avoid the term "information literacy" in seeking to promote its systematic introduction at all levels of the education system. Some educators tend to resist what they see as the addition of something new to an already crowded curriculum. There are already information literacy skills embedded in the curricula for schools as "learning skills"; and as is noted in the Final Report of the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989, p. 1), information literacy is really about learning how to learn. Efforts, therefore, may be more effectively channeled towards promoting collaboration with teachers in the teaching of these skills. Using a common language may help to break down the barriers that sometimes divide them and facilitate the pursuit of common goals.

For example, at the secondary level there are information literacy skills included in the *Curriculum Guide for Grades 7-9* (Jamaica. Ministry of Education, 1998). These are described as "learning skills which are traditionally regarded as the purview of the language teacher [and that] are shared by all subjects in the curriculum" (p. xv). Skills listed that in some cases duplicate skills normally taught in the library as "library skills" or "library and information skills" include:

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Locating information                                  | - | using encyclopedias and reference books and gathering facts from field trips and interviews               |
| 2. Organizing information                                | - | outlining and categorizing  |
| 3. Acquiring information through reading                 | - | using strategies such as skimming and scanning and understanding the importance of pre-reading strategies |
| 4. Acquiring information through listening and observing | - | setting purpose for listening and observing   |
| 5. Communicating orally and in writing                   | - | speaking with accuracy and pose, writing with clarity and exactness, using the writing process            |
| 6. Evaluating and applying information                   | - | applying problem-solving and critical thinking skills (p. xv)   |

The *Curriculum Guide* indicates that “the successful implementation of the curriculum depends largely on the teachers [sic] attitude to their subject and the methods employed in teaching” (p. xvi). It further notes that “instruction must be delivered through a wide variety of situations” with adequate opportunities for individual and group assignments; hands-on activities and project work (p. xvi). The issue raised here is very important. Much will depend on the attitude, teaching style, and instructional strategies used by both the school librarian and the classroom teacher if collaboration is to take place.

## Partnerships for Change

However, without policy and administrative support, change is not likely to take place. School librarians will have to be brought into the mainstream of curricular activities from that level.

In its White Paper, *Education: The Way Upward* (Jamaica. Ministry of Education, 2001), it is the stated commitment of the Government of Jamaica “to engage our people in the strongest possible partnership in the development of our human resources as the primary tool for personal, social and economic development” (p. 1). The Education Regulations are to be revised to reflect, inter alia, “provision for non-teaching professionals in the system to strengthen our capacity for student care and development” (p. 18). The implication is that all stakeholders (including librarians) are considered to be important to the education process.

There are some policy statements in the White Paper that are relevant to our discussion. In the section that deals with its “underpinning philosophy”, it is stated:

- Learning is a lifelong process that should build on our tradition of cooperative partnership in education (p. 5)
- The ever-changing global environment creates opportunities and makes demands for a society which actively develops a creative thinker-worker with the attitudes, skills and knowledge to be a controller of his environment not a victim of it (p. 5)

There are also two sections relating to the “implementation framework” that are relevant. First, as part of a charter that includes the rights of citizens to education, it is stated that “every citizen will have access to libraries and other information services that will provide the resources and instruction technology skills to facilitate life-long learning and to ensure that each person can function effectively in an information rich global environment” (p. 11). Secondly, there is a partnership agreement that acknowledges the policy and overall administrative responsibility of the Government for education and training, but recognizes that this responsibility must be exercised within the context of a partnership with various constituents identified.

The inclusion of “libraries and other information services” as part of the “implementation framework” followed lobbying by librarians when they observed that the Green Paper (Jamaica. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1999) that preceded this White Paper (Jamaica. Ministry of Education and Culture, 2001) made no mention of libraries. The role of the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA), like other “established national organizations” representing civil society will be “to monitor developments and respond to national needs” (p. 14). Unfortunately, the library profession is not a member of the National Council on Education (NCE) – “the body established to increase community participation in policy formulation” (p. 29). This means that LIAJA and “affiliated agencies” such as the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) will have to be proactive in addressing issues such as information literacy even while continuing to lobby for library professionals to be represented on the NCE.

It is only when there is active policy and administrative support followed by the relevant curricular changes at the level of the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education that we might begin to see sustainable system-wide change in what takes place in schools. Principals and teachers are more likely to respond to the initiatives of school librarians if the support exists at those levels.

However, even where a responsive environment exists, with the desirable support at both the national and school levels, there will not be much progress unless school librarians with the support of LIAJA provide leadership in effecting change. They will have to be proactive in:

- a) identifying the information literacy skills that are now being taught by school librarians and teachers (whether as “learning skills” or “library skills”);
- b) determining whether there are any information literacy skills that are not being taught; and
- c) promoting collaboration between school librarians and teachers in teaching the requisite information literacy skills.

Sustainable changes will have to be effected through the Curriculum Division, but without the leadership of the library profession they are not likely to take place. Activities that may be undertaken in collaboration with the Professional Development and Curriculum Divisions of the Ministry of Education as well as the Jamaica Library Service could include training for teachers and school librarians, the development of an information curriculum, and the preparation of appropriate curriculum support materials.

There are other important levels at which change can and is beginning to take place - First, at the tertiary level, in the education and training of teachers and teacher-librarians. This is necessary because, if they are to have responsibility for developing students’ information literacy skills, they must not only have knowledge of information literacy skills and how to teach them but also be information literate themselves. There are already relevant courses on information literacy being taught within the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) that are attended by students of both the DLIS and the Department of Educational Studies (DES) at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. Further, there is collaboration within the Department of Educational Studies where, through the Research Methods courses, students are introduced to information sources in education by the staff of the Documentation Centre. Students also access training through the information literacy program delivered by the University’s Main Library.

Preparation of teacher-librarians also takes place at The Mico College in Jamaica where they are trained to teach library and information skills and another subject. While their training is more limited in scope than that offered through the DLIS, and teaching another subject means that they will spend less time in the library, graduates of The Mico College potentially have the following advantages:

1. They enter the education system as teachers and therefore do not have the barrier that librarians who are not teachers may have in seeking to collaborate with teachers.
2. They are able to effect integration at least at the level of their subject.

Perhaps the time has come for more dialogue between librarians at all levels of the education system with a view to ensuring greater coordination in information literacy programs. Certainly, the ideal would be to have students reach the tertiary level with the requisite skills. The goal then would be reinforcement at that level.

## Conclusion

The introduction of courses on information literacy as part of the formal preparation of teachers and teacher-librarians has been an important development in Jamaica. In addition to formal programs, there have been several workshops for teacher-librarians organized by the JLS and LIAJA. There are a number of factors that impact on effective collaboration that could be addressed through training programs (For example, communication and leadership).

However, teachers and teacher-librarians need to have more meaningful experiences of integration as part of their training. Furthermore, when they enter the school system they need not only an environment in which they can practise what they have learnt but also the time to do so. Lack of time to practise a collaborative role is a problem frequently mentioned in the literature (For example, McCracken, 2001, Section on Lack of Time to Implement Roles, para. 1).

Critical to the creation of an appropriate environment for collaboration is the principal's support. Sensitizing principals to the role of school libraries and school librarians as part of their training should make a significant difference in what takes place in schools. This is particularly important in countries like Jamaica where the administration of school libraries falls under the public library service, and there is no Education Officer within the Ministry of Education who has direct responsibility for school libraries. Any organizational structure that places school libraries on the periphery of what takes place in schools will continue to exclude them from the mainstream of curricular activities. The interest and support of principals then become particularly important.

LIAJA, as an acknowledged stakeholder in education, must with the support of other stakeholders (including the organizations that represent teachers and principals) continue to lobby for change. One possible avenue for achieving this is through the creation of a body comparable to the National Forum on Information Literacy in the United States with wide support from various sectors regarded as important partners in education. The College Libraries Network (COLINET) has discussed the formation of a Committee on Information Literacy; however, to be successful it must not become another forum where librarians talk to each other. It must embrace individuals representing groups outside the library profession including the learners themselves.

In seeking to promote information literacy, librarians will need to assess their own local situations and formulate strategies that will best meet the needs of learners. In some countries this may include promoting information literacy as part of wider literacy initiatives. Certainly, in Jamaica there are potential opportunities for school librarians and teachers to collaborate in teaching information literacy skills for individual and national development. All that is required is the will of stakeholders to harness their creative energies in that direction.

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