Teacher-Librarian Preparation Programs' Curriculum: Is Universality Possible – or Beneficial?

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This paper provides an introduction the a presentation that will explore the standards and academic preparation of teacher-librarians in North America and selected countries (e.g., Brazil, Denmark, Portugal, India) to ascertain both the core competencies required for 21st century work in school libraries and the factors that predict high-quality teacher-librarianship preparation programs. In the process, the presentation will discuss ways that professional school library associations can advocate for standards that insure high-quality school library programs. The presentation will also uncover possible universal and culturally-determined curriculum.

Teacher-librarians, teacher-librarian educators, and professional school library associations have been increasingly interested in developing standards for school library programs, for teacher-librarians, and for teacher-librarian preparation programs.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 and ensuing process opened the way for European countries to examine the possibility of standardized, or at least equivalent, post-secondary education across national borders. In specific, the European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy (ENSIL), founded in 2003, has been striving to conduct research, disseminate information, provide professional development, and advocate for school librarianship (http://www.ensil.eu).

Up to this point, standards and practices have been very uneven. In England, for instance, school library program guidelines exist, but there is no mandate for school libraries. In Sweden, the opposite is true. The level of preparation for teacher librarians is likewise very uneven. Language and cultural differences make this international work challenging at best as evidenced in Helen Boelens' (the Netherlands) nearly completed dissertation data on the status of school library programs in 61 countries.

Discussion from this presentation will provide a richer picture of teacher-librarian preparation programs. The international aspect advances study on determining the universal and culture-specific standards and curriculum of these academic programs.

The fact that the American Association of School Librarians does have national standards for library programs and is revising their standards, and that IASL is

developing standards for International Baccalaureate library programs, this conference offers a timely window of opportunity to examine standards in light of universal and culturally-defined values.

This paper and the presentation will explore three main questions:

- What core competencies do teacher-librarians require to work effectively in 21st century schools and school libraries?
- What are acceptable quality standards for school libraries in primary and secondary schools throughout the world? To what extent do they reflect universal or culture-specific standards?
- To what extent do teacher-librarian preparation program curricula reflect universal or culture-specific standards? To what extent is a standardized curriculum feasible?

Some   Background   Information

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) recently published the *National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers* (NETS-T).   These standards have implications for teacher-librarians and for current and future practices in teacher-librarianship education. For example, the NETS-T encourage teachers, and by extension teacher-librarians, to "model digital-age work and learning" by demonstrating fluency in technology systems, and collaborating with and communicating information and ideas to colleagues, students, parents, and community members using different digital technologies (ISTE, 2008, para. 3). Similarly, the standards require teachers to

- design digital-age learning experiences,
- promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility,
- and, engage in professional growth and leadership.

This final standard about professional growth and leadership indicates that teacher-librarians should "continuously improve their professional practice, model lifelong learning, and exhibit leadership in their school and professional community by promoting and demonstrating the effective use of digital tools and resources" (para. 5). For teacher-librarians, participating in professional learning networks with colleagues at local, national, and international levels is made easier with the advent of online social networking sites that promote conversation and collaboration. Education for teacher-librarians should continue to promote this kind of communication and collaboration, while also focusing on "current research and professional practice…to make effective use of existing and emerging tools and resources" (para. 5).

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) also published new standards recently. The document, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner,* describes a set of common beliefs about students, including the notion that "reading is a window to the world, inquiry provides a framework for learning, ethical behavior in the use of information must be taught, technology skills are crucial for future employment needs, learning has a social context, and school libraries are essential to the development of learning skills" (AASL, 2007, pp. 2-3). These standards emphasize that students of all ages use skills, resources, and tools to

- inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge
- draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge
- share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society
- and pursue personal and aesthetic growth (p. 3).

By recognizing that the school library has an important role to play in the development of these skills, the AASL standards document highlights the importance of teacher-librarianship education programs that emphasize the teaching, technology, and leadership skills that teacher-librarians will need to facilitate this kind of learning for students and their   teachers.

In 2009, the American Library Association approved these core competencies of librarians:
1. Foundations of the Profession
2. Information Resources
3. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information
4. Technological Knowledge and Skills
5. Reference and User Services
6. Research
7. Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
8. Administration and Management (p.1)
It is useful to look at these competencies in relation to work in school libraries and to consider MLIS (ALA accredited) trained teacher-librarians and Master of Education and Diploma trained teacher-librarians who have Bachelor of Education degrees and have already been classroom teachers. Because teacher-librarians bridge two professions and two professional associations (at the minimum), there also needs to be consideration of what specific competencies need to come from both professions.

The Ontario Library Association's new study on *Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario* also provides insight into future trends for school libraries and teacher-librarians. This study found that a key characteristic of exemplary school library programs is "the exemplary teaching skills of the teacher-librarians, coupled with their enthusiasm and ingenuity…the most successful programs are characterized by teacher-librarian and classroom teacher collaboration in terms of teaching, learning, and library use" (p. 36). As well, exemplary school libraries in this study had the support of principals who "viewed the teacher-librarian as a key teacher or lead teacher in the school" (p. 8). The researchers also found that the teacher-librarians in these exemplary programs embraced innovation, were engaged with and enthusiastic about their roles in the school, and "stressed the importance of building relationships with students and staff and they created opportunities for this to happen" (p. 14). As the researchers state, "the teacher-librarians are leaders in their school and outstanding teachers" (p. 36). While many of these personality traits of teacher-librarians in exemplary school library programs are impossible to create through education alone, the findings from this study suggest that teacher-librarianship education should emphasize leadership skills and practices and

provide teachers and teacher-librarians with opportunities to design innovative programs that could be implemented within their schools.

In 1995, the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada (ATLC) and the Canadian School Library Association (CSLA) began work on the competencies for teacher-librarians in the 21st century. The document highlighted both professional and personal competencies necessary to be an effective teacher-librarian. In the area of professional competencies, the key theme emerging from this document is the development of leadership skills in a variety of areas including managing change, developing and maintaining relationships with staff and students, selecting and evaluating of resources, cooperative program planning and teaching, curriculum, learning needs of students, information technology, and the management and evaluation of programs, services and school library staff. Personal competencies include flexibility, commitment to lifelong learning, seeking challenges, building alliances and working well with others, seeing the big picture and making school library goals fit with broader school, district and provincial goals (*Competencies for teacher-librarians in the 21st century*, 1998).

Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Library Programs in Canada (CSLA & ATLC, 2003) indicated that teacher-librarians should have "the following specialized abilities:
- Expertise in a variety of instructional strategies
- Knowledge of the curriculum and the learning outcomes developed for all students
- Skill in the accessing and ethical use of traditional and electronic/digital resources
- Strong connections to a full range of human and community resources for use in school library programs
- Expertise in the collaborative planning process
- Ability to team-teach to ensure that students develop the necessary skills to access, interpret, evaluate, and communicate information while they learn subject area curriculum. (p. 57-58).

The purpose of Rosenfeld and Loertscher's (2007) *Toward a 21st-Century School Library Media Program* is to support teacher-librarians as they "move [the] school library's program forward so that it serves the needs of 21st-century students" (p. vii). This book is a compilation of articles, mostly from *Teacher Librarian*, and serves as a guide to some of the key issues/themes emerging from this respected professional journal about the role of the teacher-librarian. The book is divided into seven sections with the key theme being leadership in each area. The topics selected by the editors are: collaboration, curriculum design and assessment, technology integration, 21st-century skills, literacy and reading, partnerships, and issues and management.

In summary, the themes emerging from these documents include the need for teacher-librarians to develop both personal and professional competencies. Personal competencies include developing dispositions including a desire to engage in life long learning opportunities, an ability to communicate effectively with a wide variety of

stakeholders, an interest in building partnerships, and an ability to see the big picture and to ground your school library program in a larger school, district and regional context. Clearly, teacher-librarians are school leaders. Professional competencies include an understanding the role of technology, a willingness to continually explore emerging technologies, and the ability to think critically about their place in teacher and learning.

Teacher-librarians are called upon to collaborate with teachers and students, model instructional strategies and be curriculum leaders. Traditional roles of teacher-librarians also continue to play a central role in school library programs. Teacher-librarians are responsible for evaluating, selecting, managing and organizing a diverse collection of resources to meet the needs of their school community. They also are literacy leaders and promote both traditional and new literacies.

Presentation of Recent Research

This presentation will also explore recent research by both Lesley Farmer and Jennifer Branch. Dr. Farmer has been investigating the experiences of beginning teacher-librarians and expert teacher-librarians to ascertain the factors that predict practitioner success. The study compared southern California teacher-librarians (and their academic preparation) with the experiences of teacher-librarians in other representative countries (e.g., Australia, Brazil, Canada, European Union, Hong Kong, India, Nepal, Japan, Taiwan, and Turkey. Factors were identified that link to teacher-librarian preparation, with the intent of determining: 1) at what point in the academic-practice continuum identified skills, knowledge, and dispositions should be addressed; 2) what pre-service activities optimize learning. In the process, Farmer tried to uncover universal and culturally determined practices.

To address these issues, Farmer used a mixed methods approach to provide a rich dataset and to triangulate responses. A set of assessment instruments gathered specific data about the subjects:
- Library media program implementation and values rubric
- Library media teacher standards self-assessment
- TL challenges and support survey
- TL time management instrument
- TL satisfaction survey

IASL regional directors were contacted to identify first- and second-year teacher-librarians and expert teacher-librarians per country, and follow-up contact was make through the association's listserv, other professional associations, and library educators. The same set of assessment instruments were administered to gather specific data about the subjects via email and print. Descriptive and correlational statistics were applied to the data. Open-ended questions were coded for patterns of responses, and compared with the quantitative data to triangulate results.

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the main conclusion drawn is that librarians grow developmentally, from pre-dispositions to academic preparation and on the job. Data indicated that candidates need to understand underlying theories of librarianship as

well as apply those principles and best practices in real-life situations, with an intention of educational management and leadership. They also need to be able to explore current library technologies in order to develop valued expertise at the future work sides. Furthermore, explicitly addressing professional dispositions should constitute part of academic recruitment and socialization. Most content knowledge and practices are universal. Culturally-defined aspects tend to focus on hiring practices, job functions, and decision-making. Gender- and age-linked factors were not identified as significant.

Within the universal framework, teacher-librarians do need to recognize the context of librarianship, including cultural influences. Teacher-librarians need to work closely with their communities to assess local needs and interests as well as available resources. Part of education consists of helping learners to appreciate and express their cultures accurately and authentically Teacher-librarians need to take leadership roles in identifying what local resources need to be developed as well, and then collecting, organizing, and making available those locally-produced resources as part of the library's collection. As well as physical access to the collection, librarians need to provide intellectual access to these resources by working with users directly and also with educators to integrate literacies (reading, technology, information, cultural) into teaching and learning. This role necessitates librarianship preparation programs including educational issues into their curriculum. Finally, the need for teacher-librarian and school library standards – and professional development to support those standards – has become a strong desire among teacher-librarians.

In terms of library education (particularly pre- and in-service professional development for school librarians), the bachelor's degree is the entry point for librarians in several countries. Some programs have the same requirements for all students, and others allow students to choose from several electives (which would facilitate training for school librarianship). Specialization for school librarianship would most likely occur at the master's level, although this degree is not required for one to become a librarian in school settings in most cases. Few programs offer that specialization. As the issue of education/pedagogy emerges as a growing concern, library educators are trying how to figure out to involve and collaborate with education faculty members.

Reflecting expert teacher-librarians' high regard for continuing education, teacher-librarian preparation programs should give serious consideration to offering advanced and refresher courses for practitioners. Potentially, such programs could provide mentoring opportunities, combining pre- and in-service teacher-librarians. Another promising practice is to provide two-tiered teacher-librarian licensure: 1) a preliminary credential to enable individuals to begin work within a school setting, perhaps as a part-time intern; and 2) a "clear" credential, which would require additional academic preparation. Another way to provide a two-tiered education would be to have a core librarianship curriculum, and then a specialization for teacher-librarians. The second tier in either case could involve an induction partnership between the school system and the university.

General school library issues emerged from the Brazilian IASL forum and Nepal school librarian summit, and were reinforced or expanded in different venues:

- the need to define teacher-librarian, and differentiate them from librarians per se, teacher-librarians, librarians in schools, and teachers in school libraries
- the need to define and expand the concept of literacy; literacy is somewhat culturally defined, such as the Brazilian's oral culture and the sensitivity to language issues, and Nepal's artistic emphasis (visual and aural)
- the need to determine the teacher-librarian's role within the school, particularly in terms of literacy and instruction; educational and culture customize this issue, but the issue itself is universal
- the need for developing standards for school libraries and teacher-librarians
- the need to include curriculum and pedagogy in librarianship preparation, and to explore credentialing processes used for other educators (e.g., math teachers) that might be applicable to teacher-librarians
- the need for additional, ongoing professional development
- the need to identify/leverage key stakeholders and potential supporters of school libraries and teacher-librarians
- the need for legislation and financial support for school libraries and teacher-librarians
- the need to collaborate between teacher-librarians and public librarians, including exploring joint-use libraries
- the need for research, including action research, on school librarianship – as well as greater awareness and application of relevant research.

Dr. Branch's work (with Dr. Joanne de Groot) can be found in these proceedings. This work focused on the experiences of Master of Education students who are now practicing teacher-librarians. These findings will be shared as part of this presentation, where relevant to the dicussions. Findings from this study indicated that teacher-librarians see technology as an integral part of their schools and feel this needs to be reflecting in teacher-librarianship education. Our recent graduates identified technology in general and Web 2.0, in particular as key issues. The variety of technologies both hardware (e.g. Smartboards, data readers, ipods, and other handheld devices) and software (e.g. webpages, electronic finders, databases, and e-books) were of concern to many recent graduates. Many recognized that the changing nature of information and communication technology requires that courses need to evolve. As one student indicated, a technology course "will need to be constantly revamped as technologies change almost every year."

Recent graduates also indicated that they need more opportunities in their education to explore and discuss the issues arising from the proliferation of new technologies. These issues included digital citizenship, copyright, privacy, intellectual property and electronic publishing. While our courses can offer students the opportunities to discuss a variety of issues, this also leads us to believe that there is a need for continuing education. This may explain, in part, why professional learning networks and social networking for teachers and teacher-librarians are growing. These findings support the direction of the

Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (AASL, 2007) and the ISTE (2008) *NETS for Teachers*.

Another theme that emerged was that teacher-librarians are taking on a leadership role in schools and recent graduates felt that this needs to be reflected in teacher-librarianship education. We need to provide opportunities for teacher-librarians to explore, discuss and reflect on change, school reform, assessment, advocacy, action research and evidence-based practice. Teacher-librarians also indicated that they are taking on leadership roles in the area of literacy and need the background theory to support this role. The leadership role of teacher-librarians needs to be infused across all courses in the program. *Toward a 21st-century school library media program* (Rosenfeld and Loertscher, 2007) suggests this by focusing on learning leadership for each topic in their collection.

Recent graduates indicated that the role of the teacher-librarian in the 21st century is evolving quickly and even a Master of Education degree is not enough to keep up with the changing demands of the job. As a result, there is a need for formal and informal continuing education opportunities. As leaders in schools, teacher-librarians need to model lifelong learning and should try to seek out personal professional development that complements and expands on their graduate education. Curriculum, assessment, literacies, instructional strategies, and differentiated instruction are examples of topics that might be of interest to teacher-librarians and might not have been part of their teacher-librarianship education. As one teacher-librarian stated, "Perhaps it is our responsibility to continue with professional development from other sources." School districts and state/provincial associations also need to consider this research and develop professional learning opportunities that speak to the unique needs of teacher-librarians. All professional documents highlight the need for lifelong learning for teacher-librarians. "Teachers continuously improve their professional practice, model lifelong learning, and exhibit leadership in their school and professional community by promoting and demonstrating the effective use of digital tools and resources" (ISTE, 2008, para. 5).

This presentation will bring together the research of Dr. Farmer and Dr. Branch along with documents from a variety of countries. Participants will be encouraged to discuss and make recommendations in the hopes of developing a document for use by IASL.

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Statement of Originality

This statement certifies that the paper above is based upon original research undertaken by the author and that the paper was conceived and written by the author(s) alone and has not been published elsewhere. All information and ideas from others is referenced.