Diverse Roles and Challenges for Teacher Librarians: An Albanian Case Study

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Central to creating lifelong learners, supporting curriculum, and implementing reliable information access, the library media centre is the umbrella for the school's core subjects and the library media specialist is the connection between information and diffusion of that information to students. This paper examines school library media specialist roles in the United States and international schools, using the Quality Schools International (QSI) K-12 international school in Tirana, Albania, as a case study. Particular emphasis is placed on technology challenges, education requirements, and the impact of these elements on students, in particular the third culture students found in many international schools.

International School Libraries, Faculty and Administrator use of School Library Media Centre, Library Media Specialist Roles

Introduction

Exceptional school libraries are the hubs of successful educational establishments. Just as Bates (1999) distinguishes information science, education and journalism as fields that transmit human knowledge, the school library media program transmits knowledge through written, electronic, and verbal forms. The school library media program is central to creating lifelong learners, supporting curriculum, and implementing reliable information access. If the library media centre is the umbrella for the school's core subjects, then the library media specialist is the connection between information and diffusion of that information to students.

With the release of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998), librarians face new challenges integrating information literacy skills into the school curriculum and international schools are no exception. Certified colleagues with background knowledge in child development, curriculum development, and educational theory more readily achieve curriculum collaboration. This proves to be a challenge in schools where non-certified personnel are media centre administrators.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the role of the school library media specialist in the United States with international schools, using the Quality Schools International (QSI) K-12 international school in Tirana, Albania, as a case study. Particular emphasis will be placed on the library media specialist's many roles in the school, technology challenges, education requirements, and the impact of these

elements on students, in particular the third culture students found in many international schools. The IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto (IFLA section of School Libraries and Resource Centres, 1999) illuminates the need of school libraries to embrace a more multicultural outlook, which reflects the growing globalization trend. Through management, collections, services, multilingual access, and a demographically reflective staff, school media specialists can encourage students to think globally and integrate students from diverse cultures.

Through interviews and questionnaires, this case study explores administrator and faculty use of and attitude toward the school library at QSI Tirana, Albania. The results of the study indicate similarities in access and use of the library media centre and that progress is needed for school library media centers' integration with school curriculum and the teaching of 21st century skills. Continued studies should focus on whether the use of an internet housed circulation system, such as Follett's Destiny, that can be accessed with a password from any internet-connected pc will increase student and faculty information seeking skills, use of media centre, and integration of 21st century skills

International Schools

International schools as defined by Peterson (2003, p. xvi) are educational facilities "specifically established to cater to students from a wide range of different cultures who are likely to be internationally mobile as their parents move from country to country, often in the employ of UN organizations or private international companies." These schools employ teachers coming from a range of nationalities not necessarily from the host country. Furthermore, Allen (2002) states that the student bodies of international schools are "significantly different from the local community in which they operate" (p. 131). These "third culture kids", a term coined by Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem based on research in India, are defined as young people who grow up in foreign countries without feeling culturally connected to those countries. However, when they return to the country of their citizenship, they continue to not "feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others" (Useem, 1976).

U.S. sponsored international schools that employ school librarians serve American families working abroad as well as local students (Prescott, 2001; Adams, 2005, Gourley 2008). These schools use an American curriculum, English instruction, and most include English language classes for new students. However, international schools are independent institutions and vary in curriculum philosophy and working practices (Hayden and Thompson, 1995; Prescott, 2001). While each library and school is unique, most allow parents use for reading and research (Adams 2005).

Quality Schools International (QSI) is a network of schools in a multitude of countries that teach an American curriculum. The first school opened in 1971, and in 2008, QSI operated 37 schools in 26 countries. QSI utilizes a centralized library media centre (LMC) in their schools and attempts to staff those centre with qualified, trained, and certified school library media specialists. QSI Tirana opened in 1991 and during the 07-08 school term served 128 students, employed 15 teachers, and contained a laboratory of 40 computers. QSI, Tirana used the LMC for students' pleasure reading and to enhance English language acquisition through reading. QSI

Tirana's student body could fall into the category of 'third culture kids' as many of them move globally with their parents who are diplomats or employed by international organizations or companies. While exposed to various cultures and fluent in multiple languages, their transition to higher education or the workforce could be seen as a role of the library media specialist (Gourley, 2008).

Perceptions of School Library Media Specialist Roles:
A Review of the Literature

Since 1945, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has defined the role of the library media specialist. According to *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998), there are four categories of roles and responsibilities in the description of the school library media specialist (LMS): teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. Within those four categories, the LMS is viewed as a problem solver, book recommender, collaborator, trainer, and clerk. The LMS, as defined, should lead the learning environment through curriculum design, instruction, and technology, while collaborating with "all members of the learning community to create a student-centred library media program" (Shannon, 2002).

Knuth (1997) examined how theory based research, specifically innovation diffusion, might enhance understanding of how the role of school libraries and librarians may change throughout the educational and cultural environment enabling formulation and implementation of effective school library models.

Teacher Role of LMS

As a teacher, the LMS must collaborate with members of the learning community including students, faculty, administrators, and parents. A trained LMS is knowledgeable and applies methods to assist students in accessing, evaluating, and using information. Additionally, the LMS is a curricular leader and can analyze learning and information needs, use resources, and communicate that information to others (ALA and AECT, 1998). Numerous studies have examined this teaching role of the LMS and its contribution to the success of schools and students.

Mancall, Aaron, and Walker (1986) claimed the basic purpose of the LMS was educating students in how to think instead of teaching what to think. They state that focus must go beyond locating skills or finding the correct answers and move toward strategies that help students develop insight and abilities to structure approaches to solving their individual information needs because "survival skills are thinking skills" (*part two*, paragraph 1). Continuing that focus, the LMS should spend a significant amount of time helping students not only locate, but also evaluate information and therefore use information effectively. Focus on lifelong skills is developed by Humes (1999) who asserted that the LMS and teacher must prepare students to become independent thinkers and consumers of information because these skills are essential to all learning situations. Harris (2003) delineated the differences in school library media specialists as compared to their pubic and academic counterparts stating that for school library media specialists each interaction is a teaching moment. Teaching information literacy skills, not so students can find the answer, but that they learn to

think, turns information literacy into a "tool of strategy" instead of a "tool of procedure". Further Harris posits that this approach to information searching skills allows students to approach "each new type of information problem with flexibility and resourcefulness" which will enable students to navigate a variety of information systems, as well as evaluate and synthesize the information.

Shannon (2002) asserted the LMS teaching role should shift from a concern for what teachers are teaching to a focus on what students are learning through incorporating project and problem based learning which emphasize active learning. Todd (2001) expands on this focus and claims it is not the staff, collection, technology, or facilities that create a 21st century school library, but its "actions and evidences that show it makes a real difference to student learning, that it contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of human understanding, meaning making, and constructing knowledge" (*From information to knowledge*, paragraph 2).

Small (2000) answered the title question that the LMS is in fact a teacher and that a significant part of the day is filled with teaching activities whether individual instruction or group training. Simpson (1998) expanded the LMS teaching role in the electronic age including not only information literacy skills but also the ethical use of retrieved information. Zimmerman (2005) highlighted how library media specialists can contribute to comprehension instruction in their schools by going beyond teaching specific strategies, providing well designed and organized access to materials, creating a comfortable reading culture, and assist readers building background knowledge as well as modeling reading behavior. Church (2008) explored the LMS teaching role as perceived by elementary school principals. Respondents "strongly endorse" information literacy skills instruction as well as LMS collaboration with classroom teachers.

Instructional Partner Role of LMS

In this capacity, the LMS collaborates with teachers and takes a leading role in developing policies, practices, and curricula. Further, the instructional partner role allows design of authentic learning tasks and assessments that allows integration of skills for lifelong learning (ALA and AECT, 1998).

The instructional partner roll is nothing new to library research. School library literature between 1950-1959 literatures showed the LMS changing from a less passive role, such as a study hall monitor, to being more responsible for initiating library instruction integrated with class work (Craver, 1986). In a summary of LMS practice research, Haycock (1989) found higher student competence in research when the classroom teacher and LMS cooperatively planned and taught; in addition, students rated schools higher due to integrated instruction. Bingham (1994) found a significant increase in scores of students who had been taught an integrated method, and the students exposed to integrated teaching methods had a slightly better understanding of media centre usage. Oberg (2002) studied collaboration and found the classes with highest circulation and most frequent collaboration with the LMS reached 95% mastery on the reference portion of a standardized testing program and 81% mastery on the reading comprehension portion. Mancall, Aaron, and Walker (1986) posit instruction activities are most effective when based on student need, integrated to classroom units, and the LMS should help teachers plan, implement, and evaluate learning alternatives that effectively communicate meaningful content.

Hamilton-Pennell, Lance, Rodney, and Hanier (2000) explain results of Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Colorado studies of importance of libraries. These studies show student test scores are higher when the LMS plans instructional units with teachers. When the LMS is a part of a planning and teaching team with the classroom teacher, students perform better academically. These results call for the LMS to lead the change in learning environment through collaboration and recognition of the LMS as professional colleague in teaching and learning (Lance, 2001). Georges (2004) asserts the possibility of an exciting library media program through collaboration but distinguishes it from cooperation stating the former is a rigorous and more demanding activity that requires shared expectations.

Information Specialist Role of LMS

The information specialist role of the LMS is shown through leadership, expertise in acquisitions, and evaluating resources in all formats. The LMS must model information seeking and evaluating strategies for students, administrators, and teachers, as well as master current technology through keeping abreast of future trends and incorporating them judiciously in the library media program (ALA and AECT, 1998).

Collection development, organization for retrieval, guidance, production of educational materials, and instructional development contribute to development of student skills (Mancall, Aaron, and Walker, 1986). In addition to other factors, Lance (2001) shows that quality collections that support curriculum, integrated technology in the learning process, and cooperation with other libraries are common factors of successful library media programs. Gehlkin (1994) conducted a descriptive study of three South Carolina Blue Ribbon school libraries and found commonalities in building collections based on curricular needs and student interest. In these locations, students had access before, during, and after school, and students identified the help of the media specialist as the single most important service of the library media program. Because the LMS is seen as a manager of print resources, Anderson (2005) asserts that managing technology and access to that technology enables teaching and collaboration through quick access and creates the LMC as the place where students want to be.

Program Administrator Role of LMS

The program administrator role of the LMS is the focus of many educational classes; it is all too often the only focus of unsuccessful library media programs. However, this necessary role encompasses the delineation of policies, and requires the LMS to guide and direct all LMC activities. Additionally, the LMS must be an advocate of the program through involvement in a multitude of activities and committees. Finally, the LMS administrator role requires management of a budget, staff, facilities, and equipment while ensuring the day-to-day, as well as future, program quality (ALA and AECT, 1998).

Shannon (2002) and Haycock (1991) assert that the LMS should be a leader in the school's instructional program, raise awareness of the library media program, is proactive in sharing the library media program's vision, and articulate LMS roles in the school community. MacDonell (2004), a librarian at an international school, pushes that not only should the LMC have officially approved library documents concerning policies, procedures, and guides, but that they should be promoted as part of the school culture. Hamilton-Pennell, Lance, Rodney, and Hainer (2000) found when the library had a collection development policy students test scores tended to be higher. Kabashi (in publication) also asserts that the library media program's policy document is "critical and essential to success and development of the school as a whole" and should reflect the organizational culture as well as media selection, censorship, copyright, and technology plans.

Lance (2001) asserts that the LMS needs a support staff, the support of the principal, and the ability to manage technology in addition to raise funds to ensure a successful program. Higher academic achievement was linked to library media programs that were better staffed and funded, leading to a collection that included needed materials. However, Caldwell (2003) states that collection development requires more than money; a balance between adequate funding and teacher-librarian expertise is necessary. In addition, Todd (2001) cautions that the LMS needs to shift focus to "action and evidence based, learning centred practice" and not just focus on collections, position, and advocacy (*abstract*). He encourages identifying "local learning dilemmas" and determining the library media program contribution to solutions (*the research evidence*, final paragraph).

Role Conflict

Despite all the above-mentioned research, as well as ALA and AASL established roles for library media specialists, role conflict is rampant in library media programs. Person (1993) and Picard (1990) defined role conflict as the inability to maintain ideal roles in day-to-day situations. Craver (1986) found that since the launching of Sputnik in 1957, the roles of library media specialists have been debated, defined, and redefined, and role conflict has been present throughout the entire process. Jones (1997) found a significant difference between perceived theoretical roles and actual roles by library media specialists. Respondents to the survey expressed feeling that they perform roles less often than they should. McCracken (2001) found that library media specialists were unable to implement fully their roles in practice while use of flexible scheduling enhanced perceptions of role fulfilment. Frequently mentioned barriers to full implementation were "lack of time, including lack of time to plan with teachers; lack of adequate funding; lack of interest and support of classroom teachers; use of a fixed schedule; lack of clerical staff; and too many schools or students to provide for" (*abstract*).

Tirana International School Case Study

Despite its internationally diverse student and faculty population and its scenic location between mountains and sea, QSI Tirana encounters similar challenges present in small library media centred in the United States.

Time and Space Challenges. One challenge many library media specialists' encounter regardless of time zone is the lack of space. Crowded shelves, lack of teaching and learning areas, and at times a lack of its own a permanent area, the media centre specialist of a small school must frequently be creative in getting the most out of very little. Another challenge almost impossible to improve is time – there is rarely enough in a school day. As stated in the cited literature, the assistance of support staff is essential; for without help, the LMS must do all clerical work and daily tasks. This leaves little time to collaborate or teach information seeking skills or "how to think". Frequently, the library media centre of a small school is forced to use a fixed schedule to allow classroom teachers a planning or break time. While a necessity for the sanity of the classroom teachers, this use of the library does not encourage students' interaction with materials related to classroom topics, nor does it allow common time for the LMS and classroom teacher to collaborate. QSI Tirana faces both space and time challenges.

Technology Challenges. As with many small schools, QSI Tirana experiences technology challenges in two ways: lack of space to incorporate an information research lab and lack of funds. Budget constraints make it essential for the LMS to be ever more aware of future trends as well as meticulous when choosing research materials. The lack of funds inhibits the ability to access databases, access the internet, and establish an electronic card catalogue. Frequently the LMS must choose between purchasing and upgrading technology or pleasure reading and curriculum enhancement material.

Education Challenges. In the United States, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) evaluates and approves teacher preparation programs and in cooperation with ALA and AASL sets the standards for certification of library media specialists. Although state-to-state requirements for certification can vary, many certified school library media specialists were previously classroom teachers. This experience is beneficial to implementing the teaching and collaborating roles of the library media specialist. Hiring a certified LMS is another challenge of international schools. QSI Tirana faces this challenge; not only is it difficult for them to retain a qualified LMS, but access to an accredited program for those wanting to become certified is a challenge. QSI Tirana's librarian, who began as a paraprofessional, completed a training program, 54 hours were devoted to collection development, cataloguing and classification; 30 hours were devoted to information technology, and 6 hours were focused on management. There were no class offerings focused on the other three roles as delineated by ALA.

Location Challenges. Unlike small schools in the United States, QSI Tirana experiences challenges similar to other international schools; they have less immediate acquisitions of supplies and resource material. For QSI, one order is placed and gathered in a warehouse until sufficient items accumulate to justify the shipping

costs. Most of the acquisitions and purchases are not locally controlled; however, teachers at Tirana gave input on the 2009 library media centre purchases. Power shortages and sporadic internet connections, due to lack of infrastructure in Albania, also constitute challenges for QSI Tirana

Positive Moves to Face Challenges

Through support of QSI administration and work of University of North Texas School of Library and Information Science, Tirana international school upgraded the media centre electronic circulation system to Follett's *Destiny*. During two weeks in June 2008, fourteen UNT students and two professors reorganized, weeded, and catalogued books, textbooks and materials. The upgrade to Destiny allows remote access to the LMC collection from any classroom or by using a password from any pc off campus. Although not yet trained on using the new online catalogue, the faculty surveyed expressed excitement regarding the new circulation system and anticipation of the reorganization of materials that will allow them to access relevant materials without having to browse through individual items shelf by shelf. According to interviews with the faculty at QSI Tirana, the librarian met stated expectations of "administering the library" and "keeping track of books". While the librarian depended on teachers to initiate collaboration, 3 out of 5 employees mentioned a desire for more input from the librarian. Additionally, the administration is considering repurposing an upstairs room as an instructional and student work area with possible computer lab.

Discussion

Though LMS roles have been established through research and discussion, continuing focus on implementing the roles of teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator must be a priority of all LMS. Encouraging students to think globally and embrace different cultures prepares them for their information rich future.

Lessons Learned

Through working with QSI Tirana, I learned that enthusiasm for the library media program benefits the entire school population including the cooks and janitor. I learned that determination to see the program succeed begins with an individual. Finally, I learned desire to do the best with what is available, while believing more is possible, is the first step in building a successful library media program.

Conclusion

A song learned at church camp seems an appropriate mantra for any LMS regardless of nationality: They shall mount up on eagles wings, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not feint, help us Lord, help us Lord do thy work.

With that thought, an LMS should strive to soar like an eagle in the quest to teach students, run in daily tasks toward making the library media program beneficial

to students, faculty, administration, and community, and walk toward the future with the school library media center's goals in mind and a prayer to keep focused on this important work.

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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.