Information Literacy and Education Policy: A Canadian Case Study

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This Canadian research explored a single education jurisdiction's information literacy curriculum policy development. Using the province of Ontario's Ministry of Education as a case study, a rhetorical analysis of relevant policy documents and semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 12 policy contributors constituted the methodological framework of the study. This research found that the teacher-librarian community's advocacy network, the diminished state of school libraries in Canada, and the Ministry's emphasis on traditional literacy priorities have had significant effects on the development of information literacy policy.

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to understand how information literacy is situated in education curriculum policy. In their paper "Canada: An Information Literacy Case Study," Whitehead and Quinlan (2003) outlined recent information literacy developments and discussed initiatives presently underway in Canada. According to Whitehead and Quinlan, the information literacy situation in Canada is bleak.

Information literacy initiatives in Canada remain on the margins of the education process, from elementary school through to post-secondary institutions much to the detriment of Canada's workforce and economic potential. (p. 1)

In Canada, students start schooling in kindergarten at approximately age 5 and progress through grades 1 to 12. The two broad levels of mandatory schooling are elementary (from approximately 5 to 12 years of age) and secondary (from approximately 13 to 17 years of age). Optional university or college schooling is considered postsecondary education. This research focused on curriculum for both elementary and secondary education.

The Canadian Constitution Act (Government of Canada, 2005) gives provincial ministries of education the responsibility for administering all laws relating to education and skills training such as:

- Developing curriculum policy;
- Determining provincial standards for student achievement;
- Distributing funds allocated by the provincial legislature to assist school boards with the operation of schools.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) is the authoritative institution that supervises education for all students in Ontario schools. Ontario is Canada's most populated province with 11,410,046 of the country's
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inevitably affects. There is a policy actor network (Pal, 2002), and each actor has a separate agenda. The competing actors' agendas and how policymakers and implementers negotiate these agendas are at the heart of policy analysis. The actor network of information literacy policy development comprises a long list of stakeholders that includes students, teacher-librarians, classroom teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, local school boards, Ministry curriculum committees, governing political parties, libraries, parent and teacher interest groups, and institutional stakeholders such as the Ministry, schools, and school libraries. Although policy issues such as efficiency, consistency, coherence, and instruments such as accountability measures are important, it is the roles and interests of policy stakeholders that most reveal the policy analysis process. Pal refers to policy entrepreneurship as one's fluency with policy and its application, specifically one's ability to recognize a policy's political environment and mobilize effectively around the issue. Policy entrepreneurship is an important concept for understanding the role of teacher-librarians in the OME's development of information literacy policy. A final policy analysis concept considered when discussing the findings is Howlett and Ramesh's (1995) five policy cycle stages. These include agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation.

Research Questions and Methodology
This research examined how the OME has framed information literacy policy in its curriculum design. The study consisted of a policy analysis approach using a rhetorical analysis of relevant OME information literacy policy documents (or sponsored draft documents) and semistructured, open-ended interviews with individuals involved in the development of these documents. The research objectives were to understand:
1. The history and development of information literacy as depicted by the OME;
2. The underlying values and motives of the Ministry in its information literacy curriculum expectations; and
3. The sources and influences that inform the Ministry's information literacy curriculum approach.

A Case Study Approach
A case study aims to understand the bounded system of the case such as processes, activities, events, or programs (Creswell, 1997). Creswell (2003) notes three types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. This particular study is instrumental as it involves developing an understanding of an issue through an analysis of the Ministry and key information literacy players and their actions. As applied to this project's research objectives, information literacy is explored by its relevant processes, activities, events, and programs in the bounded system of the Ministry. The Ministry's
response to this case becomes a *de facto* definition of its policy. In other words, this case study is an analysis of policymaking through practice.

**The Chosen Methodological Approach**

Creswell (1997) suggests that the ideal data sources for the instrumental case study tradition are documents, archival records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts in order to achieve the case study’s focus of “developing an in-depth analysis of a single case” (p. 22). As the OME’s information literacy approach has been recorded in one public way, namely, curriculum or sponsored draft documents, it is these sources that form the basis for the data collection methodology of this research. Such documents are authoritative qua official government sources and speak to an evidential history of information literacy policy (research objective 1). However, their weakness is in their one-sided perspective. These documents do little to reveal the sources and influences of the Ministry’s approach to information literacy (research objective 3) and only vaguely tell of the values and motives of information literacy policy (research objective 2). In order to satisfy all the research objectives and to complete the methodological approach, an additional source for data collection is required. This source needs to dig deeper into these documents, a source that thoroughly examines all policy cycle stages, the policy actor network, and policy politics. People who have knowledge of the formation of these documents are an excellent source of the information required to address these questions. Therefore, the two sources of data collection used in this research are a rhetorical analysis of key government documents related to information literacy and semistructured, open-ended interviews with individuals with knowledge of the making of these documents.

**Selection of the Documents**

Information literacy policy has received spotty attention over the past 30 years from the OME’s curriculum development committees. After consulting with teachers and teacher-librarians, meeting with members of the Ontario Library Association (OLA), particularly the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA), and reviewing contemporary education and library literature specific to Ontario, the following three documents were selected for analysis.

- *Program Planning and Assessment: The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-12*. Ontario Ministry of Education (2000);

The criteria for selecting these documents were that they be written by the OME and deal to some extent with the concept of information literacy.
Information Literacy and Equitable Access (ILEA) is the first ministry document to discuss information literacy explicitly. A committee of school board trustees, principals, teachers, OME staff, and teacher-librarians wrote this 17-page document “to generate discussion and comments about the role of the school information centre in the development of integrated information skills programs” (p. 3). However, this document never made it past the draft stage for reasons discussed below. Program Planning and Assessment (PPA) is a brief policy document that “provides essential information on aspects of policy relating to program planning and the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement that pertain to all disciplines in the Ontario curriculum” (p. 3). In its 16 pages, information literacy is for the first time officially included in curriculum documentation, but is discussed in only three paragraphs. Interdisciplinary Studies is a guide for elective curriculum available at the grades 11 and 12 levels. It attempts to fill a curriculum gap that recognizes more than one subject lens through which to learn. Information literacy concepts that are given extensive coverage in this 54-page document as an approach by which to explore interdisciplinary learning.

The exclusion from the analysis of the document Partners in Action: The Library Resource Centre in the School Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982) is worthy of note. Partners in Action is a seminal guideline document for school libraries and was so successful that it was modeled by other education systems across North America. However, this document is out of date. It does not include the term information literacy, and it does not include the information and communication technologies (ICTs) and contemporary information context that are included in the chosen documents. However, Partners in Action is considered throughout this research because it provides an excellent historical perspective.

A final related document not included, although still important to mention, is the grades 11 and 12 English curriculum for university- and college-streamed students (OME, 2000a). Although the words information literacy do not appear in the document, a close reading of this curriculum reveals that information literacy-related concepts such as “devising research needs, identifying information needs … developing research plans to acquire information … and … review library serials index[es]” (p. 43) are persistent learning goals. How these concepts arrived in this curriculum is thought-provoking and deserves a deeper discussion.

Selection of the Interview Respondents
Twelve people with knowledge of the development of the documents were interviewed for this research and were selected to be respondents for adherence to the following criteria.
1. First-hand involvement with writing or contributing ideas to one or more of the above-mentioned documents;
2. Knowledge of policy development in the context of the Ontario Ministry of Education;

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3. Knowledge of information literacy in general; and
4. Knowledge of pedagogical principles and methods.

Respondents included teacher-librarians, classroom teachers, school principals, university professors, school board curriculum coordinators, and education policymakers both in the government of Ontario and working in not-for-profit library organizations. The interview had a semistructured and open-ended format. An interview guide was compiled and tested in a pilot study in October and November 2003 and involved talking to four respondents about issues of information literacy in Ontario. The 12 interviews were conducted from March to May 2004 and took place either in person or over the telephone and took approximately 45 minutes each. All 12 interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

N6 qualitative analysis software facilitated reporting for both the rhetorical analysis and the interviews. N6, formerly NUD*IST, created by Qualitative Research Software (QRS) allows for coding and modeling qualitative data. The interviews and documents were coded using Creswell’s (1997) conceptual coding framework and input into N6 where they were organized according to their nodes to determine text and node ratios. The coding scheme consisted of 60 nodes or topics, and these were further thematized into 12 categories. Topics and categories were determined by considering the issues that arose from pilot interviews, the research questions, and observed recurring themes from the rhetorical analysis and interviews.

Findings and Discussion
The rhetorical analysis and interviews indicated two major findings: (a) that information literacy policy in Ontario public schools has developed largely by the influence of advocates from the teacher-librarian community; and (b) the underlying values and motives of the Ministry’s information literacy policy is refusal to commit to information literacy programs, school libraries, and teacher-librarian positions. This is mainly due to the Ministry’s maintenance of traditional educational values such as standardized testing, a focus on the classroom, retaining narrow definitions of literacy, and emphasizing content-based teaching delivery. The rhetorical analysis of the documents exposed factors influential in determining the development of information literacy policy (research question 1), while the interpretation of themes in the interviews provided valuable insight into determining the motives and influences of information literacy policy (research questions 2 and 3).

Rhetorical Analysis Findings
The concept of information literacy gained modest authority throughout the development of the OME’s documents Information Literacy and Equitable Access (ILEA), Program Planning and Assessment (PPA), and Interdisciplinary Studies. ILEA (1995) defines information literacy as “the ability to acquire,
critically evaluate, select, use, create and communicate information in ways that lead to knowledge and wisdom ... and using and sharing information in respectful ways" (p. 8). Conversely, Program Planning and Assessment (PPA, 2000) defines information literacy as the ability "to critically evaluate the accuracy, validity, currency, comprehensiveness, and depth of the information they access using information technology, particularly the Internet" (p. 10). Interdisciplinary Studies (2002) defines information literacy as "the ability to access, select, gather, critically evaluate, and communicate information in all disciplines, and to use the information obtained to solve problems, make decisions, develop knowledge and create new ideas and personal meaning" (p. 9). The definitions share common aspects such as the ability to evaluate, use, and communicate information. However, the intended contexts are quite different. PPA describes information literacy as applicable only to technological contexts, particularly the Internet. Interdisciplinary Studies defines information literacy similar to ILEA, but includes broader cognitive abilities and higher moral values such as "developing personal meaning."

ILEA’s policy focus is on the network of actors that implement information literacy policy. It outlines key responsibilities for each educator involved. PPA, on the other hand, assumes that the classroom teacher is the sole facilitator of information literacy skills. Interdisciplinary Studies considers the classroom teacher as instrumental, though not alone, in implementing information literacy skills. Interdisciplinary Studies suggests that collaboration may include other teachers and even a teacher-librarian, but the Ministry uses vague language to include teacher-librarians: “collaborative approaches may involve collaborative planning and implementation by teachers and teacher-librarians” (p. 9). The Ministry’s ambiguous position on the role of the teacher-librarian in information literacy curriculum is further complicated by the inclusion of the school library programs, but the exclusion of responsibility for these programs.

Howlett and Ramesh’s (1995) five policy cycle stages are useful analytic frameworks for understanding the contribution of the documents to the research objectives. They identify the following: agenda-setting (problem recognition); policy formulation (proposal of solution); decision-making (choice of solution); policy implementation (putting solution into effect); and policy evaluation (monitoring results). First, it is clear from all three documents that the Ministry has recognized the inclusion of information literacy curriculum as an issue worth tackling. Therefore, the Ministry has certainly set the information literacy agenda (policy cycle stage 1). Second, a policy has started to form: a solution (policy cycle stage 2) has been proposed in the form of the three documents. However, the Ministry’s actions cease here and are not represented by any subsequent stages in Howlett and Ramesh’s policy stage cycle model. Third, the attempt at a province-wide solution is weak because information literacy instruction is only an elective course. Fourth, the policy has not been adequately implemented,
and the Ministry identifies no comprehensive plan. Although *Interdisciplinary Studies* is curriculum, it is a fairly new optional course and not extensively taught across the province. The implementation plan in *PPA* is cursory and has unclear assumptions that teachers possess information literacy teaching skills *a priori* and that the infrastructure already exists for teacher-librarians to work collaboratively with classroom teachers. Fifth and finally, information literacy policy evaluation is nonexistent beyond the evaluation of students who are taking *Interdisciplinary Studies* courses. Furthermore, the Ministry has no explicit plan for monitoring information literacy, policy cycle 5, as its information literacy policy approach is inconsistent, vague, and arguably incomplete, resulting in a quasi-policy policy at best.

Although literacy is a top priority of the Ministry, and the Ministry mandates that all grade 10 students take a standardized literacy test, no defined information literacy skills are identified as content on this test. Therefore, using Howlett and Ramesh’s (1995) policy cycle model as applied to the OME’s information literacy policy, it is clear that the Ministry is still only in the early stages of developing its information literacy policy.

**Interview Findings**

In order to respect the privacy of interview respondents, their identities are not revealed and their responses are instead assigned a random letter in an effort to indicate the breadth of responses.

**Information literacy and equitable access**

Seven of 12 interview respondents had significant insights into the creation of *ILEA*. Two leading concepts that arose from the interviews about information literacy development were perspectives on the forces that led to *ILEA*’s formation and eventual breakdown. Three respondents identified that the reason behind *ILEA* was to replace *Partners in Action*; respondent B said that “it was intended to be a successor document.” Respondent H said that the need for a replacement was initiated by the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA).

The actual movement came from the OSLA ... they felt it was time to update *Partners in Action*. They were concerned that their ... visibility in the Ministry was disappearing. The person responsible for libraries was gone. OSLA approached the [Ministry’s] curriculum director.

Respondent G reported, “The other thing that the [Ministry] did as part of developing *ILEA* was the committee that did it was that the minority were librarians. It was superintendents and principals.”

It would appear that although the advocacy association for school libraries, the OSLA, largely proposed that a document be formed, they were not substantially consulted about its formation. The Ministry recognized the OSLA’s request for a document, but did not recognize teacher-librarians as instrumental in bringing this forward. Respondent H
noted, “first it was how [Partners] could be updated. Then it became more, not how it was just an update, but an extension.” Respondent A saw the purpose of the document quite differently than as a successor to Partners in Action; rather ILEA was to include the idea of equitable access.

The equitable access was to be a lever so all kids would have equal access in the workplace and college. Those foundational skills that were required to succeed and contribute. And the whole notion that we should all be contributors to society and the information literacy curriculum would give you that. It’s not merely about skills.

It seems that there is a tension between what ILEA was originally intended to be and what it became, and this tension has much to do with the Ministry’s vague recognition of school libraries and teacher-librarians in general.

After the committee’s deliberations, the Ministry writer compiled the committee’s work, and ILEA was issued as a draft document for discussion. Here the role of teacher-librarians is central to an understanding of how ILEA did not move beyond a draft document. Because it was largely teacher-librarians who initiated ILEA, they were consulted in hearings organized mainly by the Ontario Library Association (OLA). Respondent G was knowledgeable of the process and said, “we had nine different hearings across the province and ended up with 500 briefs coming out of these hearings and that really was an overwhelming response which on one level was great.” What these hearings would reveal, however, was not so great for ILEA. Three respondents outlined the cause for ILEA’s failure as the overwhelmingly negative response by teacher-librarians who “slammed it” (respondent H). The major objection teacher-librarians were said to have had was the role they were given as support staff to classroom teachers. Respondent G explains:

The Ministry felt that the librarian’s role was to facilitate teachers providing the information literacy skills. Where up to that point or coming out of Partners the territory had been more or less taken by the librarians … the librarian’s role was to help teachers do it and give them the support they would need for school wide programs of information literacy. Which was a real change for librarians and unfortunately there was a really negative reaction to it by the library community. [Teacher-librarians] probably facilitated its downfall.

It is ironic that although the teacher-librarian community proposed the idea of ILEA in the first place, they did not want what the Ministry provided them with. Respondent J states:

Now years later the government says they are going to put a literacy teacher into every school because no one filled the void. And the void was there being offered to school librarians. Admittedly it was offered not to point where it was happening but to a point where it was proposed and that was the end of ILEA … for me that was a watershed moment about how information literacy might have been approached in this province.

After the hearings, ILEA did not move forward, and the new provincial government that came into power shortly after the hearings did not adopt it. Respondent E said,
It was the NDP [the left-wing New Democratic Party], but not for long and the Harris [right-wing Progressive Conservative Party lead by Premier Mike Harris in 1995] government moving in. [ILEA] saw one government and was sort of buried by the next one.

The installation of the Progressive Conservatives led by Premier Harris’ government dramatically changed the climate of education in Ontario, and this had strong effects on school libraries and the potential for information literacy programming; respondent H commented on this.

The attitude of the Ministry in the 1980s was one of encouragement and support one of progress and the Ministry of the 1990s was one of evaluation and accountability and prove it to me. A complete tone change. And another thing, there were more educational oriented people in administrative offices and now there are administrative people in administrative oriented people in educational offices. Testing and improving is the focus.

It was not until 2000, five years later, with PPA that the Ministry again took up the concept of information literacy. The failure of ILEA cannot be attributed solely to the response of the teacher-librarian community. This was undoubtedly a significant factor, but other respondents outlined financial obstacles. “It was a situation where there was so much change, a reduction of resources and a lack of appreciation” (respondent E). Yet the observation has to be made that information literacy policy in Ontario is intrinsically connected to the role of teacher-librarians. Either as advocates for it or opponents to the Ministry’s interpretation of it, teacher-librarians appear to be the catalysts for the development of information literacy policy in Ontario. Respondent A sums up the Ministry’s development of information literacy policy after ILEA.

I think that ILEA was an absolute waste of money and waste of time. It had no impact, it was being misread and that was a political document ... there was pressure that something was needed since Partners ... [the Ministry] rushed it through and it got really watered down by the time it was published. The Ministry refused to give it any teeth. It was useless because it was rejected by the library community, rejected by schools, by administrators, and it was absolutely worthless. I know a couple of people who were involved in creating it, and they weren’t given the voice at the end in terms of the decisions that were made. When it went to the final edit, things were taken out that shouldn’t have been and nobody was told.

Program planning and assessment
Only three respondents could provide any substantial perspective on PPA. This noticeable difference between the number involved in PPA versus the number involved in ILEA is not surprising considering the brief treatment given to information literacy in PPA. Despite the lack of comprehensive awareness, the teacher-librarian community certainly did notice the new, although slight, treatment given to information literacy: “PPA is the closest thing for the Ministry to discuss information literacy” (respondent J). Respondent J continues and succinctly notes the treatment of information literacy’s in PPA.
I don’t believe [the technology section] is the place [information literacy] should have been. It was the place [the Ministry] was most comfortable with for information literacy to be defined and for the word school library program to be inserted for the very first time in the entire curriculum. It’s in the context of technology. It’s a sad context in one way but better than nothing and the best that could be done. Rightly so, the teacher-librarian community saw it as a step but certainly not as an end.

Interdisciplinary studies
It is surprising that more respondents did not bring up an extensive course that addresses such thorough information literacy content. Although all respondents knew about ILEA and a good number knew of PPA, it appears that Interdisciplinary Studies is not nearly as relevant to most respondents. Only two had anything substantial to contribute to the development of information literacy policy by the Ministry in conjunction with Interdisciplinary Studies.

A key source identified by respondents as influential in the Interdisciplinary Studies document was the OSLA’s (1999) document Information Studies (1999). This was written by teacher-librarian advocates who were concerned with the lack of information skills being taught in public schools. This community was so disillusioned by the process of ILEA that they took it upon themselves to create a document that modeled standard Ontario curriculum. Respondent D stated,

[teacher-librarians] decided ... to play that game as well ... So created a sequence of information literacy skills all the way from kindergarten to grade 12, made it look like a policy document [to] get [a] foot in the door and talk to them.

Respondent J said that these teacher-librarian advocates,

Dissected [the new English and math curriculum at the elementary level] and looked for the thinking and organizing in them that they were lacking and designed something better. So what Information Studies was really trying to do was go into everyone’s curriculum.

Respondent D said. “[Information Studies advocates] met with the Ministry on several occasions when ... creating this document and they were supportive at the time.” Later curriculum writing teams in the Ministry were impressed by Information Studies, but it was never officially adopted in its entirety. However, the work of Information Studies was not in vain, as respondent J noted, “we know that [Information Studies] impacted the secondary curriculum but people will not honor that.” It is quite possible that the grades 11 and 12 English curriculum mentioned above that was published in 2000 and contained a surprising amount of information literacy-related content was influenced in some way by the information literacy concepts outlined in the OSLA’s Information Studies document.

Information Literacy and the OME’s Literacy Agenda
Teacher-librarians consistently appear as sources who work to influence the Ministry with respect to education policy on information literacy. However,
the rhetorical analysis of information literacy curriculum documents and interviews with information literacy policymakers reveal that teacher-librarians are often unable to sustain their influence on developing such policy beyond the proposal stages. Their policy actor network and policy entrepreneurship (Pal, 2002) are insular and rarely go beyond their professional circle. Haycock (2003) and Whitehead and Quinlan (2003) relate poor information literacy policy in Canada to the deteriorating state of school libraries nationwide. This problem appears to have precluded discussions about the growth of school libraries and information literacy programming and forced teacher-librarians into a perpetual state of damage control, diverting much of their energy into vital advocacy measures and away from pedagogical praxis of which literacy is a keystone. The irony of this situation is that the Ministry’s vague and inconsistent education policy on information literacy appears to contradict its own literacy priority.

The Ontario government recognizes that strong literacy skills are the foundation for success in school and life. Every Ontario student needs to read, write, do math and comprehend at a high level by age 12. The government’s goal is that 75 per cent of 12-year-olds reach the provincial standard on province-wide testing by 2008. Currently, less than 60 percent are reaching the provincial standards. (OME, 2005a)

Since the mid-1990s, the OME has embraced a culture of education assessment, and literacy has been the leading issue. Participating in literacy testing initiatives such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada’s School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP), the OME has become preoccupied with educational accountability through assessment initiatives. The OME has fixated on understanding literacy in a most basic form as simply reading and writing. In 1987, literacy theorist Graff identified the debate of a so-called international literacy crisis preoccupied with competence testing and perceived declining literacy levels; today little seems to have changed in Ontario. The recently introduced Ontario standardized literacy test given to all grade 10 students since 2001 is currently one of the most controversial education topics in Ontario. Although it fulfills OECD literacy objectives, a growing number of education theorists and practitioners consider the test challenging and even incapacitating for students (People for Education, 2005).

The discussion of a “literacy crisis” is predominantly a preoccupation of literacy policymakers, notably ministries of education and local school boards where literacy levels are benchmarks that can often factor into funding allocations. The OME has shown its understanding of information literacy with varying degrees of support throughout several governments over the past 15 years (the New Democratic Party, 1990-1995; the Progressive Conservatives, 1995-2003; and the Liberal party from 2003 to

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the present). However, information literacy as an information policy and as an education policy has been largely marginalized with each recent government and has most often been relegated to the lower levels of the OME’s priorities alongside school libraries and school librarianship.

With the advances of literacy theory since the advent of digital technology, the emergence of what some would call an information age, and the inclusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs), an array of literacies has appeared. In the 1990s, the New London Group coined the term *multiple literacies* (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, et al., 1996). Some literacies such as functional literacy began in the 1960s. Others like Internet literacy had their beginnings in the 1990s. Regardless, each has its own approaches to literacy that expand on the traditional reading and writing usage. Most surprisingly perhaps is that these multiliteracies compete for recognition in what Tyner (1998) calls the “War of the Literacies.” Of the six leading multiliteracies identified by Tyner (computer, network, technology, information, visual, and media), she positions the first three in the category of “tool literacies” and the final three as “literacies of representation.” She goes on to state that proponents of literacies of representation rarely promote their own brand of literacy beyond their profession and that this can also be said of information literacy. Information literacy is still largely confined to library praxis.

Why the Ministry fails to integrate school libraries and information literacy programming despite evidence of the benefits of such initiatives is paradoxical (International Reading Association, 2005; Haycock, 2004; Loertcher & Woolls, 2002). Instead of reinvesting in school libraries, a literacy support infrastructure that already exists albeit in an impoverished form, the Ministry’s (OME, 2005d) literacy secretariat is in the process of implementing an extensive literacy initiative. This includes standardized literacy testing and hiring up to 2,000 specialist teachers, many so-called literacy experts, over the next four years, 600 of whom will be in place by September 2005. These literacy experts will be given the task of assisting students, particularly those with lower literacy levels, to improve their literacy test scores. This renewed government interest in, and financial support for, literacy raises the question of how the teacher-librarian community can reenter this current literacy initiative and debate? The Ministry’s literacy actions raise three fundamental questions about information literacy, school libraries, and teacher-librarians.

1. Does the perceived lack of literacy skills of Ontario students relate to the drastic and prolonged cutbacks to school libraries (Haycock, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2005b)?

2. Why does the Ministry not identify teacher-librarians as being able in some capacity to push their literacy initiatives forward as they hope the “literacy experts” will?

3. Why is the school library and teacher-librarian community left out of the current literacy debate?
Conclusion
The most significant limitation of this study is a lack of perspective from students. For information literacy to gain momentum, the information literacy needs of students in Ontario should to be explored rather than assumed. Following the description of this research of the circumstances that inform information literacy policy development in Ontario, a logical next step would be to understand the implementation effects of this inconsistent and vague policy and how it affects student learning.

Information literacy policy in Ontario appears to be at a crucial point. It has developed to the stage of an elective curriculum, and the next step would be its adoption as core curriculum. The most startling effect of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s present information literacy policy is how inconsistent and contradictory it is to the OME’s own literacy initiatives. The ramifications of this inconsistent and vague information policy leave students at the mercy of school boards, principals, teacher-librarians, and classroom teachers to recognize the value of information literacy programming and to implement such programs on their own initiative. Not all students in Ontario are so fortunate that such initiatives are integrated into their learning environments. Some students will graduate from Ontario high schools and move to the workforce or postsecondary institutions prepared with a solid set of critical information competences, and others will not. For these unprepared students, deciphering critical meaning from the profusion of information that surrounds them will be a burden they will have to endure alone. It is my sincerest hope that literacy policy decision-makers in Ontario realize this before many students leave high school with antiquated literacy skills and before school libraries are in an irreparable state. Information literacy advocates in Ontario, namely, teacher-librarians, appear to have their greatest advocacy battle still ahead of them.

Epilogue
On May 26, 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced that it would be adding “$11 million for new resource materials for elementary school libraries” and “$6 million for new resource materials for secondary school libraries” (OME, 2005b). The new allocation is certainly welcome news for teacher-librarians and school library advocates in Ontario who have long awaited a reinvestment in school libraries. Yet the funding is reserved mainly for library collections. Key issues that arose from the data collected in the research informing this article such as school librarian positions and information literacy programming are not addressed in this recent announcement.

The Ministry’s (2005c) 2003-2004 data report that there are 4,010 elementary schools and 870 secondary schools in Ontario. Each school board will divide this funding to schools depending on school size and need; however, this equals approximately an average of Can$2,743 for each elementary school library and an average of Can$6,897 for each secondary school
library. The ministry’s May 26, 2005 press release uses the example that “St. Pius X Catholic School will receive almost $3,500 for new library resources and will receive a further allocation for textbooks.” Few would argue that new funds for school libraries are an excellent start to reinvesting in school libraries in Ontario; however, with years of underfunding, it will take substantially more than the amounts announced in May. Many school libraries will need to update their most heavily used reference materials such as encyclopedias and atlases. With Encyclopedia Britannica advertising its 2005 Print Set Suite for approximately Can$1,964, little money will remain for further improved collections. Library staffing and information literacy programming are the next issues needing urgent attention if the current Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy is serious when he says, “Libraries play an essential role in stimulating students to improve their own achievement and foster a love of reading and learning” (OME, 2005b).

References

Author Note

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