Editorial
A Framework for Understanding the “State of the Art” for School Libraries
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This issue of School Libraries Worldwide focuses on the “State of the Art” for school libraries in a number of countries around the world. There are reports from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in Asia, from Botswana and Ghana in Africa, from Iceland and Greece in Europe, and from St. Lucia and the United States in the Americas. The theme for this issue was inspired by the work of Jean E. Lowrie and Mieko Nagakura who edited a monograph in 1991 entitled School Libraries: International Developments. It was the second edition of a monograph with the same title published in 1971.

Electronic communications around the globe were involved in the production of this issue of School Libraries Worldwide. For example, each of the reports was sent by the authors to the editors, reviewed by members of the SLW Editorial Board, and then revised and edited—all by electronic communications. It did seem that we were, for a little while, very much part of a “global village.” However, it is much easier to be globally connected through our faxes and e-mails than it is to be globally connected through our minds and hearts. This is a challenge for us and for our readers—to be connected in meaningful way through the reports published here. The diverse conceptualizations of school library services and the inequities of support for school library services in our global village are clearly revealed in the reports. From these reports, however, we can see common themes, and we can use those themes to build our understandings of others’ struggles and achievements and then use those understandings to deepen our understandings of our own struggles and achievements.

As Editor, and on behalf of the many people involved in this issue, I invite you to listen with your minds and hearts to the stories told by those who have lived both struggles and achievements, and to find in their stories ways to understand our own experiences more deeply. As you read each report and try to make sense of the state of the art for school libraries in that country, it may be useful to have in mind an analytical framework. I find the framework developed by Dr. Rebecca Knuth particularly useful. In an article comparing the development of school libraries in two industrialized regions (the United States and Great Britain), Knuth (1995) identified five major variables affecting school library development: “how standards shape pro-
grams, how staffing and certification patterns influence services, how government support and funding results in more and better school libraries, how an educational rationale legitimizes school libraries, and how professionalism allows greater unity and impact” (p. 270).

This framework has been useful for me in making sense of the state of the art of school libraries in my country, Canada, as the following discussion will, I hope, demonstrate.

**Standards**
The standards that shape a country’s school library programs may be set by professional associations, or by central national governments, or by some combination of the two. In Canada, there is no national legislation directly concerning elementary and secondary education; therefore, there can be no national legislation concerning the development of school libraries. The ministries of education in most of Canada’s 10 provinces and two territories have in place “clearly defined policies or guidelines for the school library within the overall goal of developing students as independent, lifelong learners” (Doiron, 1998, p. 2), and these policies reflect a shared vision for school libraries. The policies have been developed as a result of lobbying by provincial and territorial school library associations, although they have been shaped to by the work of professional associations, in particular the Canadian School Library Association (CSLA). The CSLA issued school library standards in 1967 and 1977. This influence has lessened somewhat in recent years by the splitting of the national professional organization into two competing organizations. After the split, CSLA embarked on the development of new standards, and the first paper in the standards series was issued in 1988. However, the discord created through the split had weakened the resolve of CSLA, and the standards were never completed. Today, the two associations (CSLA and the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada) have attempted some reconciliation and have worked together on several projects including a Students’ Bill of Information Rights and Competencies for Teacher-Librarians. However, having two competing national associations has weakened the possibility of having one clear voice for school libraries in the country and of developing the consensus needed for spearheading the development of new standards.

**Staffing and Certification**
Professional associations in Canada have long advocated the staffing of school libraries with personnel with education in teaching and in librarianship. However, the school library policies and guidelines set by provincial and territorial ministries of education do not mandate staffing of school libraries by teachers with library training. Many school libraries across the country are staffed by library technicians, other school support staff, or volunteers. Education for teacher-librarianship is not easily available across
the country, nor is continuing education or inservice education. Distance education holds some promise, but no complete program is yet available at the Diploma (one year of post-baccalaureate study) level or master’s level in Canada.

**Government Support and Funding**

Government support and funding are crucial to the development of viable school libraries but, with few exceptions, school libraries are not provided with earmarked funding by provincial and territorial ministries, the education funders for elementary and secondary education in Canada. There have been special initiatives such as the Alberta Learning Resources Grant in the 1980s, but not the kind of sustained regular funding that is necessary to build useful collections and to attract and maintain professional staffing. Private funding from foundations has not generally been available to school libraries, but many are supported by the fundraising efforts of local parent groups. This, unfortunately, has often had the effect of increasing inequities in the financial support for school libraries because wealthy communities are more able to raise funds for their schools.

**Rationale for School Libraries**

The rationale for school libraries usually emphasizes one of two mandates: the stimulation of and support for recreational reading (the cultural mandate) or the support of curriculum and of pedagogical change (the educational mandate). In Canada, those interested in school libraries have supported the concept of school libraries as “material resource centers supporting active learning, resource-based teaching, and integrated instructional planning” (Knuth, 1995, p. 277). This has ensured that education for teacher-librarianship builds upon teacher education and emphasizes the instructional roles of the teacher-librarian. However, because education in teacher-librarianship is not mandated by ministries of education, many people filling the teacher-librarian role in Canada’s schools are uneducated in librarianship and have little understanding of or commitment to the educational mandate of the school library.

**Professionalization**

As Knuth (1995) points out, a professional association can help or hinder in the development of a rationale for school libraries, in the effective promotion of school libraries, and in the increasing professionalism of its members. She uses a three-stage model of association development to analyze the evolution of school library associations: (a) the incipient phase when there is collective excitement but diffuse activities; (b) the organizational phase when groups try to be recognized as representing the field; and (c) the stable phase when a strong organization is developed and becomes an instrument for achieving its goals. In Canada, no one organization has been able to become the
dominant voice for teacher-librarianship (the stable phase), and this has limited the effective promotion of school libraries. There are many individuals in teacher-librarianship in Canada without the basic credentials advocated by the professional organizations, and none of the school library organizations in Canada limits membership (or leadership) to those who have such credentials.

Using this framework, I can identify the strengths and weaknesses in school library development in Canada. The greatest strength is our clear commitment to the educational rationale for school libraries, within the profession and in the policies of provincial and territorial ministries of education. However, the understanding of the need for school library standards and for professionally trained staff, although long recognized by the profession, is not being actively promoted by the profession at present, nor is it being supported by mandates from the ministries of education. The lack of government support and funding specifically for school libraries results in considerable inequity in school library services across the country and even within school districts. The lack of a unified professional voice for school libraries limits the effectiveness of advocacy efforts in support of school libraries. Examining the current state of school libraries in Canada with Knuth’s framework reveals some serious concerns about their future. Because educational decision-making in Canada is increasingly being devolved to the local school district, there will be few opportunities for establishing mandates for school library funding and staffing. This points toward the need for the profession to develop a unified voice and to become more active in creating and promoting standards for school libraries in Canada.

References

