

Ontario's Faculty of Education Librarians:
A (Still) Untapped Resource for School Library Advocacy

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Abstract

The intention of this project is to contribute to the body of scholarly literature regarding School Libraries in Canada. The project will examine the role Academic Librarians working in Faculties of Education in Ontario play – currently and potentially - fostering awareness of school libraries in pre-service teachers. It will : i) identify the inherent logic of targeting this group of library professionals for school library advocacy outreach, ii) explore the level of awareness among librarians currently working in Ontario Faculties of Education about school libraries and teacher librarianship, ii) attempt to gauge the amount of advocacy currently being done by librarians in Faculties of Education to teacher candidates, iii) identify barriers specific to this group in building their awareness about school libraries and teacher librarians, and iv) recommend ways that the School Library Community of Learners could strategically target Librarians in Ontario’s Faculties of Education to become more active advocates for school libraries within their professional practice.

**Keywords: Academic Librarians, Education Librarians, Advocacy, Ontario, OSLA, OTELA
School libraries, Teacher Candidates**

The Ontario Context

Within the Canadian Library Association's (CLA) National Standards for School Libraries draft document, *Leading Learning Framework; Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, one of the identified 5 core standards of practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada is: *Facilitating Collaborative Engagement to Cultivate and Empower a Community of Learners* (CLA, 2014). Like other professional communities, the School Library Community of Learners is multifaceted. Identified groups within this community include: K-12 students, Teachers, School Administrators, Teacher Librarians, and other designated School Library staff. While this community is indeed one of common interest, it is not one of common power, and the decision making power structure that exists within this community of learners is both exclusive and hierarchical. And, while a funding model does exist for elementary school library staffing, and the Ontario Ministry of Education has a specified fund for Library staffing at the elementary level in place since 2009, District School Boards ultimately define their respective school Library staffing allocations, and principals determine the specifics of staffing assignments.

The directive states,

- While the ministry has specified that the funding be used for the remuneration of the additional library staff in elementary schools, boards will determine the work that the teacher librarians and/or library technicians do to enhance current library services for elementary students.
- These funds must be used only to support this project, that is, for staffing only. Other expenditures such as the purchase of technology, other resources and equipment cannot be supported through this funding.

(Ministry of Education, 2012).

The lack of designated funding for collections, the stark variations in staffing models throughout the Province has been well documented, and arguably, contributes to the sense of urgency in the current work towards national standards for school libraries. (Libraries: a report from People for Education, 2012)

The power given at district level for this staffing model makes understanding and awareness amongst key decision makers about the importance of strong school library programs imperative. However, a lack of awareness amongst school administrators and teachers about the role and impact of school library programs and teacher librarians on school success has been noted repeatedly; both anecdotally throughout the school library community, and with empirical evidence. (Asselin and Doiron, 2003 and Lee, Laverty, and Reed, 2012). It is not a large leap to identify this lack of awareness amongst classroom teachers and school administrators about the roles and contributions of teacher librarians and school library programs as a potential barrier to school libraries receiving greater support for professional staffing models as well as for other fund commitments for the technology and collection pieces that are excluded from the directive. The voices for school library support in Ontario continues to, largely, come from teacher librarians and not from the other parties identified as part of the School Library Community of Learners.

In 2003, Asselin and Doiran presented this statement when they examined the inclusion of School Library Program in pre-service teacher preparation in 17 Canadian Universities,

“Without a new generation of teachers knowledgeable about school libraries, how teacher-librarians support the development of information literacy, how school libraries

pass on our cultural heritage, how information technologies help us learn, and how school libraries act as community access points for teachers and students, it will be impossible for schools to have fully integrated school library programs in the future “(Wither they go... 21).

In the Ontario context, a recognition of the need to actively work to heighten and deepen awareness in order to facilitate buy-in at the budget allocation level has occurred. The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) has strategically targeted school administrators and Board superintendents for school library advocacy efforts. In recent years, OSLA has issued invitations and waived registration fees in order to increase attendance of these groups at the annual OLA Superconference. But as well as convincing senior board administrators- most in their mid or late career stage - about supporting school libraries in REAL ways, it also makes strong sense to target new teaching professionals long before they ascend to the ranks of administrator. As Asselin and Doiron note, it is imperative to have new teachers entering their careers, “... with an understanding of the integral role that strong School Libraries can play in supporting teaching and learning in their future places of work” (2003, 26). Before this, Asselin and Lee (2002) created a project at the teacher education level specifically designed to introduce pre-service teachers to teacher librarians to target the development of teaching skills in the area of information literacy. In a context that sounds very much like the previously referred to pillar of *Facilitating Collaborative Engagement ...* from the national standards document, they stated that, “Teacher librarian organizations need to collaborate with teacher educators ... (17). But outside of major population centres where there is a University with a Faculty of Education and an active, action-research oriented Teacher Librarian community, it appears to be difficult for these different sectors of Educators to find opportunities to interact.

University of Ottawa education librarian Michelle Brown alluded to a relative quiet amongst the academic community about school libraries in recent years, “Although there is currently a wide gap between Faculties of Education and school libraries, many possibilities exist for both parties to highlight their roles and to collaborate with each other’ (Brown, 2013). But where exactly are these many possibilities? And whose mandate is it to take a leadership role to facilitate this collaboration?

While a clear strategy of targeted outreach appears to have been established towards school administrators with the power to define school library staffing models, targeting pre-service teachers for school library advocacy has not yet attained the same status as a defined objective amongst the OSLA. A strong argument can be made that OSLA has the clearest mandate to take the lead here, and that like the targeted invitations proffered to school administrators and district board consultants and superintendents, the annual OLA Superconference offers a highly tenable, sustainable mechanism to enable ongoing collaboration between more groups within the School Library Community of Learners.

A logical next target group

Another group that falls within the boundaries of the School Library Community of Learners appears to exist just enough outside community’s margins that they are not yet a designated group to receive the call to become more active school library advocates. This group, academic librarians that work within faculties of education, may provide an ideal bridge to send direct messaging to emerging educators about school libraries and teacher librarianship.

Like teaching Faculty identified by Asselin and Lee (2002), this group has in fact also already been identified in School Library literature as one to target for a greater role. In the *Finding and*

Directions section of Asselin and Doiron 2003, they state as finding #5, “The Staff working in education libraries in these Faculties of Education ... could identify many areas where the need for information literacy was essential in the teacher education program and they were excited by some of the collaborative program ideas we shared during the interviews “ (29).

What makes them perhaps even a more logical choice for direct OSLA Advocacy efforts, is that while curriculum subject area instructors have many different areas of subject area foci, information literacy is a prime area of interest of education librarians. Momentum is also present; the recognition of teacher information literacy as a necessary competency has advanced considerably since that recommendation by Asselin and Doiron in 2003. Proposed in 2006, and most recently approved in 2011 by the American Library Association’s (ALA) Association of College and Research Libraries division(ACRL) Board of Directors, there exists *Information Literacy Standards for Teacher Education*; standards for which Education Librarians play a significant role in achieving.

The approved document states,

“While the intended audience of the standards are primarily the Education Librarians and [other instructing] faculty members, the Teacher Education candidates themselves are the secondary audience. The Standards aim to, “... communicate to teacher education students expectations for information literacy knowledge and skills they need to develop and apply in their academic work and pre-service teaching. The Standards also aim to lead teacher education students to consider how they might integrate information literacy into their future curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities once a member of the teaching profession” (ALA, 2011).

The direction suggested by Asselin and Doiron in 2003, would thus appear to have become adopted by the ACRL. This does not necessarily mean, however, that individual Faculties of Education have or will adopt these standards into their graduate expectations and an

immediate and consistent presence in curriculum course content will occur. It does immediately allow, however, for school library advocates to access common literature and language shared amongst education librarians. A small, cohesive professional contingency, hearing the language of shared priorities is far more likely to readily receive and act upon a specific message from OSLA than the much larger in number and multi-subject area faculty instructors.

Standardizing into the professional practice of education librarians the early introduction to teacher candidates about information literacy as both a personal and professional competency, AND to the linkage between information literacy, inquiry process, school libraries and school success, will allow this knowledge to become part of the core content knowledge of new teachers. This has the potential to have many more of Ontario's emerging educators – and future decision makers - much more likely to support the School Library Program.

An integrated program of information literacy with Bachelor of Education graduate expectations dovetails seamlessly with the goal of graduating new teachers, again; who later become school administrators, more aware of what information literacy IS, and the importance of including its respective skill set in their classroom delivery model. i.e.) the inquiry wheel process, critical text selection, as well as successful and ethical use of ICT for independent research.

But while education librarians may be addressing the information literacy skills *of* teacher candidates, what about advocacy *for* the Ontario School Library Program, or about teacher librarianship as a career choice? And, are these library professionals as ideally positioned to

discuss the issues surrounding school libraries with teacher candidates as they are to instruct information literacy for post – secondary academic purposes? If not, how could they be?

As recently as 2012, Queen’s University education librarians Corinne Laverty and Brenda Reed, together with Queen’s Faculty of Education Associate Professor of Language and Literacy Education Elizabeth Lee (Lee et al 2012) acknowledged the findings and direction suggestions of Asselin and Lee (2002), Asselin and Doiron (2003) as well as Hurray (2000) in their investigation of several questions related to information literacy and perceptions about the School Library program held by teacher candidates in their affiliated Faculty of Education.

Their results confirmed that 80% of pre-service teachers at Queen’s in the 2008-2009 academic year reported they had NOT learned about the role of the teacher librarian in any course. Other results of note, “6 % indicated that the teacher librarian had a role in teaching the curriculum” (Lee et al, 2012, 12).

In the discussion, Lee et al stated, “Pre-service teachers had not had the opportunity to learn how to teach their students the information literacy concepts and skills described in curriculum and library documents... felt inadequately prepared to incorporate information literacy into their teaching... and... their understanding of the role of the teacher librarian is narrow... “(16).

Although the Queen’s Education Library Head, Laverty, had already created *Partners in Learning: Teachers & Teacher-Librarians* (Laverty 2006) and *Explore an Alternative Practicum @ your Library* (Laverty 2006) The Library’s response to the project’s findings was to further undertake, “... a revision and reorientation of the library’s instructional program for pre-service teachers. A five-part series offered over four sessions... “(Lee et al, 18). To indicate a continued

commitment to the area of study the Queen's group states in their paper, "We continue to seek ways to address the information literacy needs of our pre-service teachers as they were identified by this study "(Lee et al, 20).

NB: In the author's own practice since joining Queen's in 2011, and at the prompting of Laverty to take on this role, a workshop entitled *Classroom Teachers and Teacher Librarians: Partner Professionals* is offered to both Primary /Junior and Intermediate/Senior stream teacher candidates several times throughout the academic year. This workshop assesses held perceptions, introduces TCs to the Together for Learning document and the Learning Commons movement as well as highlighting the role of the School Library program in Ontario curriculum documents and providing a hands on exercise for participants on material selection for a School Library.

Gauging current levels of awareness & advocacy

Queen's, however, is only one Education Faculty annually graduating Ontario College of Teachers certified teachers. How are other Academic Librarians in Ontario purposefully choosing to incorporate School library Advocacy into their programs? A survey was circulated to the Ontario Teacher Education Library Association (OTELA) membership to answer this question about current levels of advocacy, awareness, and perhaps identify both barriers and potential approaches to becoming a larger part of the School Library Community of Learners.

OTELA is a professional association with a mandate to provide, "... a forum where librarians can discuss issues, communicate on a province-wide scale, and cooperatively develop projects that will enhance teacher education libraries for their constituents "(OTELA, 2014). Its members include the academic librarians from the 13 Universities throughout Ontario with

undergraduate and graduate programs in Education. The survey revealed significant information regarding the current practices of education librarians in Ontario Faculties of Education regarding their awareness level of School Libraries:

60 % of respondents stated that they DO include discussion and/or instruction about School Libraries into their professional practice but the nature and extent of this varies. Anecdotal remarks contained explanatory statements like, “I mention ways in which school librarians can support teacher-candidates during their placements...”and “.... mentioned nominally as a resource for practica andalso when discussing challenged books, but not a large part of what I do”.

So, while this presumably natural partner in School Library advocacy is, ideally positioned to champion school libraries and teacher librarianship (Asselin and Doiron, 2003) and as Lee et al revealed that the gap in teacher candidate knowledge is still evident, this survey reveals that, in Ontario, while there is an awareness of the larger struggles in School Libraries and a willingness to participate more in advocacy, (see Appendix, Figure 1) there is a perception that too many competing priorities and time restrictions are contributing to an inability to stay more consistently aware of School Library issues. Further, that a resultant lack of expertise in the area contributes to an inability to incorporate advocacy work into their professional practice (see Appendix, Figure 2).

Targeted advocacy of Education Librarians

An approach to changing this level of awareness and expertise may also be revealed in survey results. The majority of respondents (60 %) stated they do NOT regularly interact with teacher librarians, nor do they actively follow or seek out OSLA materials (80%). This is not surprising given the streamed nature of library professional communities in Ontario. While all OTELA members are holders of MLIS or equivalent degrees, they may or may not have a background specifically in education - 60% of respondents are B. Ed or M.Ed. holders - and only 2 of 20 of the surveyed report also holding Ontario College of Teachers Additional Qualifications in Librarianship. Despite the overlap in information literacy as a shared content area of professional interest, academic librarians in Ontario are much likely to belong to OCULA than OSLA division of OLA, and only 10% of respondents stated that they recall being solicited by OSLA about school library issues in their current position as education librarian.

Without an ongoing professional affiliation with OSLA, and with evidence that there is minimal engagement in action research with other faculty or the teacher librarian community, this group will not have opportunities within their immediate professional environment to become more acutely aware of the issues surrounding School Libraries. And as the ACRL guidelines for Information Literacy expectations are still relatively new, individuals may have not yet made the intellectual linkage that advocacy for school libraries – stated as secondary – does directly exist within the goals of contributing to ARCL graduate information literacy standards.

A hopeful theme of willingness, however, exists within these survey results. Responses to questions surrounding interest in regular attendance at OLA's annual Superconference, and an existence of interest in attending sessions relevant to school libraries at Superconference may contain a blueprint for approach to getting this well positioned sub-group of the School Library Community of Learners deeper into the advocacy fold. Beyond inviting sessions from interested practitioners through list-serves, perhaps the school library advocacy community can go further and seek out potential teacher librarian collaborators to partner with OTELA member librarians and encourage them to discover commonalities in their work. Perhaps facilitate meet ups, either in person or through electronic conferencing. By 'actively advocating for advocacy', OSLA can more concretely provide more intra-professional opportunities for academic and school librarians to co-create and deliver learning sessions. With a larger base of participants, and a more concrete connection made between the ACRL standards and school library advocacy, Ontario may see an increase in School Library Program awareness amongst emerging educators.

OSLA school library advocates would do well to take full advantage of the already available, annually embedded mechanism of OLA Superconference. With the principle of intra-professional collaboration in mind, let's tap into the shared professional goals that exist between OSLA and Ontario's academic librarians working in Faculty of Education libraries. Let's put into practice the '5th pillar' of the *Leading Learning Framework* and facilitate collaborative engagement between teacher librarians and education librarians to work together as colleagues within the School Library Community of Learners.

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Appendix

Figure 1.

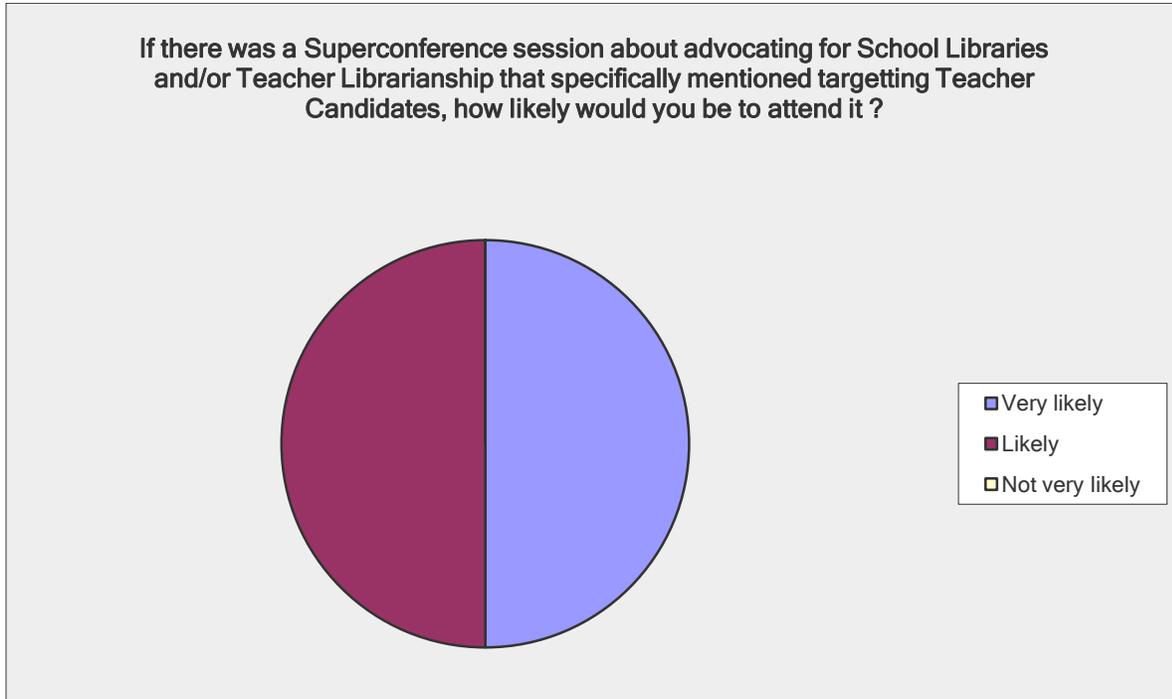


Figure 2.

