

Teacher-Librarians – There are many ways to lead

Teacher-Librarians are leaders in their schools, in their school boards and in their province.

When I moved from the classroom teacher role into the teacher-librarian one I realized that my perspective also changed. I was no longer using the lens of a specific grade or division to guide my decisions. Instead, I developed a whole-school outlook to guide my decisions in the school library. This school wide focus helps me to provide valuable feedback to teachers and students to improve achievement in our schools.

I see the role of a teacher-librarian as the in-school consultant. We have the chance to show our leadership by being resourceful and to solve pedagogical questions. I answer many resource and pedagogical questions each day. When I don't know the answer to a great question then I spend time searching for the best solution by accessing school board resource people and fellow teacher-librarians. Sometimes I can bring new resources to a class. At other times I bring a "tried and true" resource to a new class. I have read many of the professional books in our professional library so I can often help to point a teacher in the right direction if they want to explore an idea further.

We also show our leadership skills when we are teaching with our colleagues. As a full-time teacher-librarian I have the opportunity to co-teach with all of my teachers in my school and this improves our teaching practices. I see this as the coaching aspect of my role to support student achievement. Since there are two teachers working with a class we can make meaningful observations about the students' learning and we can give more timely feedback than a single teacher could. I also learn great teaching ideas from my colleagues and I encourage the integration of new technologies into lessons. We then are able to work together to assess the students' work to see if more teaching is required. I tend to lead other teachers into the world of technology at my school. I don't often know the answers before jumping into a task but I reassure my colleagues that it's okay to learn along with the students. I get to teach the teachers at the same time as we teach the students when it comes to new technology. I also make sure that students are choosing appropriate technology apps or software choices when completing an academic task. Students and teacher engagement is very high when this is successful.

As teacher-librarian, I can make help create a positive digital profile for our school. As webmaster I have helped colleagues select appropriate content management systems to enhance their communication with our school's online community. I created a school library blog to highlight our collaboration in the school library. This virtual library helps promote the "Together for Learning" (Ontario document) objectives. I continue to organize and maintain a large selection of relevant sites for students and staff to use for educational purposes. As a teacher-librarian I feel that resource selection for the physical school library and virtual library site is very important.

The leadership skills employed in my school also extend beyond its walls. Often the teacher-librarian is asked to represent his/her school in board-wide training sessions. After I have completed the training I bring back the new resources and concepts to my colleagues. I am sometimes consulted when there is a change in the systems' organization to help streamline the delivery of an initiative. For example, I represented elementary teacher-librarians at an ICT planning meeting, to provide feedback to board consultants. This year our teacher-librarians

and literacy coaches were trained together to create teams within our schools and to continue to build capacity. Our school board recognized that teacher-librarians are knowledgeable in the area of literacy. This acknowledgement of our expertise was well received. Thus we are included in several decisions made at the school board level.

Another way that we lead as teacher-librarians is through the advocacy for our teacher-librarian positions in our elementary schools. Our list serve and wiki are the main ways that we share information and initiate collaborative activities. This professional learning network is highly valued and used extensively to ask questions, gather suggestions and bring up issues. I contribute regularly to the list serve and I am one of many that will host after school meetings to continue learning more about our teacher-librarian role. This ability to feel connected to colleagues in other schools has created a strong team among our teacher-librarians that is known among school administrators.

Another opportunity to highlight the value role of the teacher-librarian is to participate in the instruction of the Librarianship Additional Qualification courses. As an instructor for Nipissing University I get the chance to teach teachers about the role. My enthusiasm rubs off and more team minded teacher-librarians are created in our area.

Finally I feel that as a teacher-librarian I also have the chance to make a small impact at the provincial level. I have participated in many online and face to face conferences to learn more about the role of teacher-librarians in other school boards. I have presented at the Ontario Library Conference a few times to share what I have done in my school with others in the province. I now follow a number of key individuals on Twitter to gain more insight into the teacher-librarian role in the province and in a few parts of the United States as well. I learn a great deal from others and consider Twitter as my personal learning network.

Another way to show leadership as a teacher-librarian is to participate in the T.L.L.P. (Teacher Leadership Learning Program) project. This is a jointly funded program with the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers Federation. I led our team of five teacher-librarians from the Simcoe County District School Board in a self-directed project to learn effective ways to integrate technology and critical thinking skills into our teaching. I was able to learn from peers outside of my school with this project. The T.L.L.P. process worked well because we were able to tailor our experience to our knowledge and our specific schools. We gained valuable experience and leadership skills that each of us took back to our five respective schools.

Only three of the two hundred T.L.L.P. projects in 2011 had teacher-librarians as team members. I feel that there are many opportunities available for teacher-librarians to demonstrate and further develop their leadership skills. Through my participation in this provincial initiative I learned a great deal about a teacher-librarians' role and how it varies among schools, across school boards and within the province. It has given me more motivation to continue to promote the value of teacher-librarians in our schools.

Melissa Jensen
Teacher-Librarian
Simcoe County District School Board