EXEMPLARY SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN ONTARIO

The Ontario
Library Association

*a study by Queen's University
and People for Education*

2009

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exemplary school libraries

the schools in the study

The elementary schools in this study were drawn from a diverse set of communities in Southern Ontario, including large urban and more rural settings. The school communities represented various levels of socioeconomic status and served both immigrant and non-immigrant students. Each of the schools had at least 200 students, although the average school population was larger.

The study involved 8 elementary school libraries selected by the Ontario School Library Association based on input from regional contacts in the association. These libraries were chosen because they had been previously identified as having exemplary library programs.

In order to obtain rich information about these programs and identify the stories, relationships, policies, and practices surrounding a exemplary library program, we obtained:

❑ relevant school and library documents related to literacy initiatives that involve the school library
❑ a summary of extra-curricular library practices and procedures as well as those that are integrated with classroom activities and programs;
❑ interviews with the school administration, teachers, and librarians;
❑ student and teacher surveys, and
❑ observations of the operation of the elementary school library and teacher librarian.

introduction

Exemplary School libraries are a central hub of the school. They are prominently placed and a centre of activity and learning. The teacher librarians in such programs commonly collaborate with other teachers in the school, and they find ways to engage the community to best support children's learning.

> "The best thing about our school library is the librarian. She is kind and helpful.
> Without her there is no library."
>
> ### *A student in one of the case studies*

The purpose of this project was to identify the characteristics of an exemplary elementary school library. We asked the questions: What are the characteristics that exemplary libraries have in common? and What are the things that make them unique?

What we discovered is that the vision of the library as a classroom and a welcoming place of learning are the key facets of exemplary school libraries. When the

school library and teacher-librarian are recognized as playing a critical role in supporting the educational outcomes of the school, the term "exemplary" can be attached to the school library.

This work is a continuation of a study funded by the Ontario Library Association. It was conducted in a unique partnership between researchers from Queen's University and the non-profit organization, People for Education.

We wanted to begin to understand the characteristics and procedures that enable a school library to be an integral part of a school's literacy initiatives and overall success.

What we found will provide a foundation for identifying the procedures and practices that are most associated with exemplary library programs. We believe this information will be of value for the broader community of teacher librarians, classroom teachers, and administrators responsible for increasing and/or maintaining student literacy achievement, as well as parents who share the role of supporting children's literacy development.

The school library, located beside the school entrance and kitty corner from the school office, colourfully reflects the energy and enthusiasm with which Ms. V. embraces her role as a teacher librarian. The front window looks onto the school's courtyard entrance, and beside one of the many "cozy corners," complete with comfortable chairs and a round table, stands Sir Bob, a knight in full armour. At least ten big stuffed animals can be found flopped out on top of shelves filled with books – at an easy to reach height for those tempted to read them. Walls are plastered with posters of the latest publications for the Forest of Reading. There is a computer lab, a piano, and, of course, a nice bit of floor space furnished with a cushioned wooden rocking chair.

libraries and literacy

Research has shown that a well-stocked library, staffed by a credentialed library media specialist, has a positive impact on student achievement, regardless of the student's socio-economic status.

Accountability, data and education polity

"Accountability" and "data driven decision making" have become operational mantras in public education.

> Our findings identified an association between school library staffing and student achievement on large-scale measures of reading achievement. Of even more interest was the finding of associations between school library staffing and students' attitudes towards reading. Children in schools with a professionally staffed teacher librarian had more positive attitudes towards reading.
>
> **Blackett/Klinger, OLA report 2006**

In Ontario, literacy has been the most prevalent issue raised in this accountability framework, with the goal to have a greater proportion of students obtaining expected standards.

Data driven decision-making is used not only to ascertain whether students and schools are meeting achievement standards, but also to find ways to address issues and concerns. Curriculum reform, changing educational practices, and program implementation have been the dominant mechanisms by which these "accountability" issues have been addressed.

School libraries and fiscal restraint

Interestingly, these wide-ranging accountability initiatives are being implemented at a time when financial constraints require the majority of schools to find ways to reduce operational costs. Due to the fixed costs associated with classroom teachers and building operations, the most common method to address issues of cost reduction has been through student support services.

School libraries have been particularly vulnerable to such funding cuts, and declines in educational funding directed toward the school library have been well documented throughout North America (American Library Association, 2005; Coish, 2005; Learning Resources Council, 2005). Deteriorating collections and declining levels of staffing in Canadian and American schools are common (American Library Association, 2005; Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick, 2005; People for Education, 2005, Statistics Canada, 2005). It is not unusual to see school libraries staffed by parent volunteers or students, with limited hours of operation.

Are such cuts undermining our attempts to meet the increasingly stringent expectations for student achievement in literacy? The Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario (2004) identified several supports shown or believed to be important for student literacy success. Along with school leadership, teaching and classroom activities, and home literacy environment, school resources and support were identified as being

important to student achievement. In particular, "a well-equipped and professionally staffed school library" (p. 38) was identified as an invaluable school-wide resource for promoting literacy. Research dating back to the 1960's supports the link between school libraries (School Literacy and Media Centre, SLMC) and increased student achievement (e.g., Haycock, 1989; Lance, 2002, 2005).

Research on student success and libraries

Since 1999, over a dozen studies conducted in the United States have demonstrated the importance of school libraries to students' education (e.g. Lance, 2002, 2004).

More recently, the results of our research in Ontario (Blackett & Klinger, 2006) examined the relationship between school library resources, support and staffing, and student literacy achievement and student attitudes towards reading.

Our findings identified an association between school library staffing and student achievement on large-scale measures of reading achievement. Of even more interest was the finding of associations between school library staffing and students' attitudes towards reading. Children in schools with a professionally staffed teacher librarian had more positive attitudes towards reading.

While our initial findings detected significant associations between the school library and students' literacy outcomes, we were unable to identify specific practices or aspects of the school library that could account for these differences in students' literacy achievement. Hence the present study used a qualitative approach to obtain a deeper understanding of the functioning of the school library. Further, we focused on school library programs that had been identified as being exemplary, since such programs would best illustrate those aspects of the school library that support student literacy achievement.

Given our previous findings and the general lack of such school library research in Canada, we believe this research is both timely and important.

> It has been demonstrated that when librarians and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills.
>
> *FLA / UNESCO School Library Manifesto*[3]

libraries as "hubs"

Key to an exemplary library program is the teacher-librarian's ability to be an effective teacher, providing educational support and leadership through partnering and collaboration, while finding opportunities for integration and cross-curricular connections.

Staff attitudes key for exemplary school libraries

In the two schools in the initial case studies, the teacher-librarians, classroom teachers and the school administrators all considered the library as a classroom and an important place for learning.

The teacher-librarians in the two initial case studies endeavoured to create a school library that was welcoming to both teachers and students. They believed their primary role was the promotion of student learning and saw the library as the centre of the school. These librarians made the library the heart of the school and seized on every opportunity to teach in an engaging fashion, bringing an enthusiasm that drew students and staff into the library.

Similarly, principals in the schools considered the school library *as the core place for the school for the success of learning and teaching.* They recognized the critical role they played in supporting the teacher-librarian as a key teaching member of their staff.

In part because of the leadership of the principals, classroom teachers in the schools took every opportunity they could to work collaboratively with the teacher-librarians, often sharing in lesson planning and delivery.

Student satisfaction

Students reported high levels of satisfaction and engagement with the school library. They were active readers and the majority also wanted to have more opportunities to use the school library

Libraries with multiple roles

Clearly, we found both of these programs to be exemplary in the practices of the teacher librarian and the educational support provided by the school library.

We also found that even within these two schools, the library has multiple roles, extending beyond those of book selection, or as a place for reading and research.

The teacher-librarians went far beyond simply managing books and resources or providing preparation time coverage.

There was a qualitative difference between the two schools in terms of activities within the libraries. These activities varied in terms of the amount of teacher collaboration, library use, and ongoing library programs.

Students in the first school library case study reported a much wider variety of activities. As an example, there was a substantial difference between schools with respect to the impact of the "Forest of Reading" program.

The Forest of Reading program had a relatively strong impact on students in one of the schools, where the school administration and many of the teachers in the school supported it, while it had a relatively weak impact in the other school. These preliminary results suggested there might be different stages or levels, based on school context, that exist along a continuum of exemplary school library programs.

Given the detailed focus on the two initial school library programs, the following results highlight the key findings of our interviews and observations in both of these schools.

These findings help to frame the subsequent results and the continuum of exemplary practice that we have created. The student survey results from these two schools will be reported later along with the students' survey results from the other school library programs we studied.

These findings were critical in developing the Continuum of Exemplary School Library Programs, especially as related to Level 3 on the continuum.

"The best thing about our library is that it always has interesting books on display and the librarian is always helping us with stuff we need to do."

"You can feel like you're in a magical place when you read. Since the library is covered with fairy tales."

students from one of the case studies

principals and libraries

The support of the elementary school principal was found to be vital to both the existence of the exemplary school library and to its continued success.

As one principal put it, "*we consider the library as the core place for the school for the success of learning and teaching*". This notion of the library as central to teaching and learning within schools was a key perception held by both principals.

"If you come to my school, you will see every recess or after school, kids are in the library. They are in the library and they don't want to leave." "It's important for me to have a staff who have expertise in that area, who like to promote a joy of reading".

"I do all the work for the general partnership timetable, but then I give the teacher-librarian a blank timetable and leave it up to her. She knows best how to organize herself. Next year I will also give her one period of admin on top of her prep."

Principals of schools with exemplary school libraries

Principal role critical to success

Principals recognized their own role: "*I have a critical role to play too—it is to be supportive in whatever way I can.*"

In one school, the principal, having recognized the teacher-librarian wanted to have more partnerships with other staff., told the staff at the first meeting of the year, that she expected each of them to undertake at least one partnership per year. In general, principal support was demonstrated by dedicating sufficient operating, maintenance and renewal funds to the library, allotting teaching/partnership time to the teacher-librarian, protecting the teacher-librarian

from delivering excessive amounts of preparation time and, perhaps most significantly, by clearly acknowledging the teacher-librarian's leadership role among the teachers in the school.

Libraries and teacher-librarians—leaders and partners

The notion of the library as an alternate classroom, a welcoming place of learning, is a driving force which enables the exemplary library to both flourish and thrive. Supporting this belief, principals said "*the library is the biggest room in the school, the largest budget in the school*" and "*the librarian has a bigger view of the school – what the needs are, what the strengths are*".

Further, the principals viewed the teacher-librarian as a key teacher or lead teacher in the school. A priority was placed on ensuring a high proportion of the teacher-librarian's time was allocated to partnering/collaboration with other teachers on staff, shared teaching, integration and cross-curricular support. In one school the teacher-librarian had an additional responsibility as chairperson of the primary division, providing guidance to the staff in her division, and to the rest of the school.

In one school, the school-wide focus on literacy and the arts was strengthened by the integration of literacy and arts taking place in the library. Principals were also willing to delegate responsibilities to their teacher-librarians.

Both schools were also working towards greater consistency of assessments and evaluation for students. This work was supported and sometimes led by the teacher-librarian.

Staff and funding issues

In both schools, funding the library was of primary importance. Each allocated the full school board allotment for books, where possible taking advantage of additional grants (e.g., Quest for Excellence). One school doubled their library budget one year to fund renovations, re-organization of space and shelving, because the physical space itself was recognized as needing to be "*well organized, very comfortable and inviting*".

Managing human resources is also a challenge for principals. Labour agreements with elementary teachers have included increasing amounts of preparation time each year over three years, and both principals identified the use of the teacher-librarian to cover preparation time as an increasing pressure.

Another human resources issue was the allocation of a full-time teacher librarian. Boards tend to base their teacher-librarian allocations on the funding provided by the province; as a result a school of approximately 400 students would receive only a .6 teacher-librarian staff allocation.

One school principal felt she was not likely to apportion a full-time teacher-librarian to the library next year. She had made up the difference in funding this year by "*taking it out of different programs*" acknowledging that it is a very hard decision and that it would be impossible for a half time position to do all the work currently accomplished by the full-time teacher-librarian.

Parents as a library resource

The principals concurred on the importance of engaging parents within the library program. One of the principals noted that she "*believes very strongly in a parent partnership because I think we can only do half of the job*". Further, she "*encourages parents who want their children to do well to take them to the library and read with them daily.*"

The other principal asked her teacher-librarian to be part of the Junior Kindergarten Orientation in an effort to connect parents with the school library, "*the teacher-librarian will be doing a ten minute presentation to encourage the new parents to start reading to their children at a young age and to show them how to handle book talk.*"

In her hopes for the future, one principal said "*I think parents, especially immigrant parents should be able to come to the school library even just one evening, as just one of the places they can go after school, instead of, you know, only during parent interview time.*"

Valuing the school library as these principals do carries over to all aspects of their students' lives. Their support of the teacher-librarian as a key teaching member of their staff, the allocation of adequate resources, and the protection from excessive preparation time coverage are all important components.

This administrative support is vital to both the existence of the exemplary school library and its continued success.

"I'd really like to use the library as the library, but because of the way the collective agreement works, I use the library for prep time. But as much as possible I'm slotting more partnership time to the teacher librarian."

"She does prep coverage because we have to have prep covered, and I also have her work with teachers. Partnership time takes up a big chunk of the library time which is very expensive, but we managed to do it this year."

Principals of schools with exemplary school libraries

teachers and libraries

Key to a truly exemplary library program was that the teacher-librarian took on a broader educational role within the school, providing support for classroom teachers through partnering and collaboration, supporting all students through shared teaching and cross-curricular support or integration of curriculum.

> "The other Grade 6 teacher, myself and the teacher-librarian, use the pronoun 'we' when we talk so the students know we are a team. It's not her library, it's our library."
>
> "We sit together and we decide where in the curriculum there are holes in terms of time restraints for a classroom teacher, and how she (the teacher-librarian) can be there to help us. One of the things we did was we planned a program where she [the teacher-librarian] could take half my class and do a hands-on activity while I take half my class and do an activity on the computer during computer lab."
>
> ***Teachers in schools with exemplary libraries***

The traditional use of the school library for book selection and exchange remained a core component of the library program, but the teachers we interviewed clearly articulated the other qualities of an exemplary library program. What emerged from the interviews were the discernable stages or levels that define exemplary.

The exemplary library is a classroom and a welcoming place of learning for students in the school, in sharp contrast to a separate place to "visit."

Developing partnerships

Teachers in the school did book partnering time with their teacher-librarian, though the students' primary use of the library was still book exchange in one school. This appeared to be due largely to time constraints outside of the control of the teacher librarian, "*students mainly use the school library for book exchange. Fifteen minutes is all we are allocated as a class, so strictly, the librarian is not there, because it's during her prep time. Kids very quickly flock to return their books and sign another one out.*"

Difference in both expectations and availability for partnering time existed. In one school, the principal expected every teacher to partner with the teacher-librarian at least once per year. Partnerships appeared to happen on a first come, first served basis in the other school. "*There are so many other teachers in the school, and she (the teacher-librarian) has just a very limited amount of partner's time, so I'm lucky to get this block because I spoke up first.*"

Partnerships often involved shared planning and teaching, where the classroom teacher and the teacher-librarian planned the lessons and activities to meet the curriculum together.

One teacher described a science unit on soils: "*We had the curriculum guidelines and we looked at the expectations, and which expectations were on the report card for this term, and then we thought about the things that we could do to meet those expectations.*"

Reaching beyond expectations

Partnering incorporated a vast range of activities, many not traditionally associated with libraries, primarily in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Sciences.

Examples of collaborations included drama, including a formal dramatic presentation, a variety of field trips initiated by the teacher-librarian (in one school only), a visit from a politician for classes studying levels and roles of

government, and the creation of a film from the novel *Charlotte's Web* where students made models, wrote the script, and directed and videotaped the story.

Benefits for other teachers

One of the benefits of partnering cited by the teachers was that each teacher could bring his or her own strengths to the partnership. Similarly, teachers assisted each other in building skills in areas where they themselves may be less knowledgeable.

The teacher-librarian was considered a key teacher who was knowledgeable in many fields, could see the big picture and was capable of tapping into many resources inside and outside the school.

In one case, a classroom-teacher explained how partnering with the teacher-librarian had taught her how to tackle teaching drama, a subject she was not comfortable with.

From field trips to projects—multiple uses for libraries and librarians

Flexibility was an important and appreciated quality.

"*When we're doing an inquiry-based project where we want to have all the teachers and students involved together in groups once a week, we were able to find one period here and there and the teacher-librarian would change around her prep periods to accommodate us.*"

The teacher-librarians in the case studies seemed to consistently go above and beyond expectations.

One teacher described a field trip to a book warehouse organized by the teacher-librarian using funding from the Boys' Literacy Project. "*We took the junior classes and each student had a set amount to spend, using*

both the students' criteria and the board criteria for selecting books. It was amazing. They loved it. In the front it looked like a mini bookstore, but in the back it was just like a warehouse. Their eyes nearly popped out of their heads - all these books!"

Exemplary library programs possess a range of qualities

When teachers were asked to describe the most important features of an exemplary library program, apparent differences emerged, supporting the premise there are a number of stages or levels in the continuum of what can be identified as exemplary. In one school partnering and collaboration were acknowledged as important features, along with adequate resources in the library, open communication, an organized teacher-librarian, and even the benefit of simply having a teacher-librarian. In the other school, partnering seemed to be the key feature. It was the first thing the teachers mentioned and they continually referred to it throughout their interviews.

All teachers valued a well-stocked library which included plenty of current and regularly updated books and materials as well as computers or a computer lab. They felt the physical space was important, that it should be comfortable, big and welcoming.

"Something else I've done with the teacher-librarian, and I'm working on right now, is drama. She is strong in drama and I'm not comfortable with it, so she offered to assist me by working out different activities that we could do. She gave me a big binder with lots of activities. I always do the warm up, and then she has been doing the other activities so that I can observe and see how they work so I'll be more comfortable when I go to do them on my own."

Teacher in case study

Challenges

Teachers identified a number of barriers inhibiting the use of these libraries. Lack of time and scheduling issues were the foremost concerns. In particular, insufficient time with the teacher-librarian was an issue, both currently and potentially in the future.

"Ideally the partner's time is incorporated into the schedule and is blocked off solid, just like it is untouchable so to speak. I wish that we could multiply our teacher-librarian because she's involved in so many things so that sometimes she has to be away for conferences and whatnot, and the day that she's away you can't do partnering".

A classroom teacher in one of the case studies

"*If we go down to a .5 staffing allocation for our Teacher-Librarian, partners' time will be decreased 50-70%.*"

"*Time and scheduling, even though we have quite a few partnering periods, there is not always a lot of room open.*"

"*Not having enough adults in the library to cater to the students. It would be great to have a reward system where if the kids are finished their work early they can walk down to the library knowing that there is an adult there who will supervise them.*"

"*Time. Time is everything. Money. We don't have the money [for a teacher-librarian] we don't get the money from the board. We don't get the money from the government. Every school should have a librarian, a library, a full-day librarian to work with the kids.*"

Clearly, the teacher-librarians in these schools did much more than managing books and resources or providing prep coverage from classroom teachers. Key to an exemplary library program is the teacher-librarian's ability to be an effective teacher, providing educational support and leadership through partnering and collaboration, while finding opportunities for integration and cross-curricular connections.

Classroom teachers described these teacher-librarians as competent, knowledgeable, reliable, enthusiastic, talented, incredibly organized and professional. The teacher-librarians were leaders in the school and outstanding teachers.

the teacher-librarian

An exemplary library program is a hub from which learning branches out into all areas of the school.

This vision of the library as a place for learning and teaching emerged again and again in response to a range of questions.

Innovation and challenge

The librarians in the case studies continually worked to move beyond their current success, challenging themselves and their program, rather than simply repeating what they had done. This is in contrast to a more traditional approach where, once a lesson, an activity, or an event is successful, it is repeated, becoming a routine. The repetition is understandable, but it does not address important nuances that require adaptation.

These teacher-librarians did not turn successes into routines. For example, one described a successful parent initiative that in many good library programs would be repeated again; however, in her program she consciously changed it every year *"staff, and students and parents all come together, and every year we change it to keep it fresh but still supporting the whole theme of literacy."* It was not change for novelty's sake but rather the outcome of reflection and evaluation.

From partner collaboration, linking to school initiatives, parent programs and book exchange the librarians set themselves high expectations, and sought out challenges for themselves and for the program.

"I really enjoy my job, I enjoy the kids. It's never boring, always challenging. I'm always able to find a new creative twist that I didn't know existed."

This striving for improvement was employed as a deliberate strategy. The teacher-librarians individually modeled life-long learning by seeking out learning opportunities in areas that were new to them and then transferred it back to the library to enhance their program.

Engaged and enthusiastic

The teacher-librarians in these school libraries were enthusiastic about their jobs, with one stating *"I tell everybody I have the best job in the entire school…because you get to see it all."*

Although they had different personalities and expressed this enthusiasm with distinct styles, there was a high level of engagement in the job. This was apparent from the range of programs each had developed for their libraries and their wider involvement in their schools, serving on grade level and administrative teams.

They each had a positive outlook towards the staff and spoke with real appreciation of the students. They recognized the challenges faced by their schools but interpreted these as opportunities; they weren't discouraged but relished the challenges.

"Forest of Reading"

In two of the initial case studies, the teacher-librarians not only ran very successful Forest of Reading programs but

We are "the centre of all action…where teachers and students start their day and travel to the library during the day and end their day…all the resources are used endlessly."
A teacher-librarian in one of the case studies

they had given them twists to infuse more learning objectives.

"I think that one of the important qualities that my school library program has that makes it successful is that a lot of it is open flexible partner time. We all bring different strengths so that when we plan a unit, or when we are teaching it or marking it that we all bring different perspectives."

"I wanted to show the staff that there was some value in my job and one of our school initiatives is literacy so I coupled those two things together and created a program that would support both, what I call a literacy based drama program. I took a full year of drama training offered through the drama department after school...previous to that I had no experience with drama. I taught lessons and I reported on drama expectations that I gave to teachers for the report cards and that was a huge success. I was able to tie it to our school initiatives and I was able to support our lower level students and engage them and I was giving teachers something of value to them, which is covering a piece of the curriculum."

A teacher-librarian in one of the case studies

Going beyond expectations

Each of the teacher-librarians in the initial case studies had designed instructional units or extra clubs that were out of the ordinary. Moreover they were intended to address a variety of issues and had learning objectives seamlessly embedded within them.

To meet the language needs of English language learners one teacher-librarian created a story telling club in the library to provide extra language practice.

And one ran a Tamagochi club after school for a defined block of time in which children were able to bring in their own Tamagochi and play with them in the club.

"I saw the educational potential of them, but in many schools they are banned. I spoke with my principal before forming this club. And we worked out that we would have a baby-sitting office. My office was the Tamagochi daycare…And then we would play. …. the kids did not think they were learning anything. When I asked them, they said, "Oh, I learned some new cheat codes. Oh I learned how to play this game really well and earn more points." In terms of content learning, it was as much about the learning skills and the collaborative skills; that is where I found the Tamagochi club made a benefit."

This librarian had turned a problem in the school into an opportunity for learning.

These exemplary librarians stressed the importance of building relationships with students and staff and they created opportunities for this to happen. Referring to the Tamagochi club, the teacher-librarian saw it as *"a way to reach those kids that are really hard to reach. And a way that is not always manageable when it is only just curriculum, or just about learning. It is about building relationships."*

They also recognized that they needed to work with different staff members in a flexible manner to fit each teacher's comfort level. …[one teacher] *"is not as comfortable with the collaborative piece. And when she and I tried partnering in one way it did not work very well so we worked it out in slightly different way."*

Time makes all the difference

Funding was named as the biggest challenge as it determined the librarian's appointment and thus the amount of time that could be devoted to teaching. In two of the case studies the teacher-librarians reported that their library had benefited from their principals' support through extra funding. This took two forms: funding additional librarian time beyond the minimum prep allocation, and extra funding for library resources.

In those cases, the librarians had a full time position though the size of the schools required only a .5 position. Both librarians expressed the view that this additional time allowed them to teach rather than simply manage the collection and cover other teacher's preparation time.

Working collaboratively with teachers in a substantive manner was not possible with only the amount of time available in a prep coverage allocation.

The larger amount of time resulted in higher quality instruction for students because meaningful learning units that integrated knowledge and skills across the curriculum were possible, with students benefiting from more than one teacher.

Additional library funding from the principal helped to validate the important role of the library program. But the teachers were concerned about the negative impact if this funding was lost.

"My value as a teacher librarian and the value of the library will start to be diminished (if the time

is cut back to .5)." As this librarian concluded *"if I'm only deemed worthy of half time partnering period that sends a pretty strong message to the staff that it's not a worthy enough program."*

Volunteer support posed another challenge. When they were fortunate enough to have help, they utilized it to maximize their teaching since these volunteers would help with book fairs or library material management.

Flexible time/flexible role

The teacher-librarians recognized the importance of flexibility within the program and in how they worked with teachers as contributing factors to success. The flexibility of an open timetable allowed for collaborative teaching with depth. This was attributed to the principal's support in the assignment of load and through the extra funding for her position.

"We get passports. The teachers read the titles as well. At the back of the library there are charts that show which teacher had read which book. The kids come to read the chart which helps them in terms of chart reading. And then on their own time they chat with the teacher to earn a signature on their passport. The Red Maple group, have different options as to how they can chat. They can do it individually, or as a group. So, because they are very social animals, they'll decide they read the book or they share it among themselves and they say, "okay, there are 3 of us who want to do a group chat" and they call it chocolate chat. We have these electronic buzzers, sit around and we quiz each other. For every right answer they get they get a chocolate. The third option the Red Maple group has is to do it online. So they can go onto our teleconferences, and they can post a review."*

A teacher-librarian in one of the case studies

They also demonstrated an awareness of the need to be flexible in their work with staff. This allowed them to maximize the teaching of students. In essence they saw both selling the benefits of the library program and teaching the staff through education and support as part of their role. They sought to provide ever-changing support to teachers that gradually shifted the librarian's role in teaching students in stages from independent teaching, to parallel teaching, cooperative teaching to true collaborative teaching.

"Because each classroom teacher approaches partnering in a slightly different way. I always call myself a role chameleon because I need to change or alter depending on the comfort level of the teacher and their expectations."
A teacher-librarian in one of the case studies

Bringing the outside in

In exemplary school libraries, the teacher-librarians also brought outside resources into the library to improve learning opportunities for the students.

In one school there was a partnership with the local theatre company that was linked to the curriculum. Authors and outside experts and professionals were brought in to provide additional resources.

Initiatives such as these require a lot of planning and organization if they are to run successfully. The librarians saw this as part of their responsibility as they could squeeze it in more easily than a classroom teacher.

Teacher-librarians as teacher

It was clear that one of the attributes that contributed to the programs was the skill these teacher-librarians had in teaching.

They had excellent classroom management techniques, with the consequence that not a moment was wasted; students were actively engaged in learning and the lessons flowed efficiently. The lessons were a joy to watch. This was due in part to the careful planning that had gone into the lessons and the advance preparation.

The teachers cited the TLP from the Library Learning Resource Department as a support that has had an impact upon their teaching.

"It is a fabulous program that really helps me keep myself organized, it uses a lot less paperwork which I like and having that hardcopy is a fabulous asset for me."

These librarians had made the library the heart of the school through the activities and characteristics described above. They seized on every opportunity to teach in an engaging fashion and brought an enthusiasm to this that drew students and staff into the library.

"We practice our dance groups in the library and I go there to exchange books I took out from the library."

"In the school library, I would go on the computer for research and read Silver Birch books every single day to get my passport signed."

Students from the case studies

the continuum of exemplary school library practice

Our research has found the school context is a vital component to understand the functioning of school library programs.

Several contextual factors contribute towards a successful school library program, including Board-level policies and supports, funding and staffing models, administrative support, demographic characteristics of the school population, principal and teacher knowledge, teacher-librarian experience and skills, physical features of the library, history of the school library, and community and parent involvement.

Contributing factors for successful school libraries

- board-level policies
- board-level supports
- funding models
- staffing models
- administrative support
- demographics
- principal knowledge
- teacher knowledge
- teacher-librarian experience
- teacher-librarian skills
- physical features of the library
- history of the library
- community and parent involvement

Many of these factors are interconnected.

For example, administrative support structures and funding models function to provide teacher-librarians with the resources to enact their programs. Board-level policies are often linked with school library history and teachers' experiences in working with librarians. School boards with a history of cutting teacher-librarian positions have created a context in which principals and teachers have less experience using school libraries.

Prior experience affects current practice

Unless teachers have had the opportunity to work in an active library context, their knowledge of the extent to which school library programs can contribute to teaching and learning may be limited.

Staffing models and use of teacher librarians also have an impact on the success of a library program. A school in which the major role of teacher-librarian is to provide prep coverage will differ from a school in which the teacher-librarian is funded and expected to work closely with teachers to provide diverse educational experiences for students.

Two features stand out in exemplary school libraries

Exemplary school library programs take on many forms given these diverse school contexts, and the interaction between the program and context has an impact on the operation and potential operation of a school library program. Hence when judging school library programs, it is necessary to consider how contextual factors facilitate or hinder implementation of library programming. One cannot simply identify a simple set of desirable school library attributes. Nevertheless, we have identified at least two common features that exist across contexts.

First, exemplary school library programs are characterized by teacher-librarians who maximize teaching time. Second, exemplary teacher-librarians continually strive to enhance their library programs and modify the existing contexts. These teacher- librarians are active agents of change, working to build connections with classroom teachers, school administrators, and the broader

community. They actively "advertise" the benefits of the school library on student learning and school effectiveness. However, enhancing programming and modifying school contexts is a process that requires time and energy. Thus the knowledge, expertise, experience, and communication skills of the teacher librarian are vitally important in creating the conditions for this evolution to occur.

The teachers' and principal's understanding of the role of the school library program and the teacher-librarian are equally important. A teacher-librarian will have to devote more time and energy in selling the benefits of the school library program to those having a limited understanding of the teacher-librarian's instructional role. Such "promotional" efforts on the part of the teacher librarian will eventually alter the context through changing expectations over time; however, in the short term, these efforts interfere with the time available for teaching. Ultimately, the degree and the rate of change is the result of the interaction between the current context and the efforts of the librarian. These findings also help to explain our observations of the substantial differences in the amount and type of teaching occurring in the various exemplary programs that we studied.

Our findings also enabled us to place school library programs along a continuum of operation based on the interaction of the school library program and the school context. The four discrete levels of the continuum described below help to explain the variability of exemplary school library programs we observed. While these levels help to describe such variation, we also recognize that there is variation within each level and that the distinctions between levels are provided for the purposes of description rather than clear delineation.

Levels of Exemplary Library Programs

Given diverse school contexts, exemplary school library programs exist along a continuum.

We have created four levels of exemplary school library programs to describe this continuum.

These levels represent programmatic shifts across library characteristics. Higher levels are characterized by a greater emphasis on student instruction and a deeper integration of the library program into all aspects of the school.

Throughout the continuum, an exemplary school library program requires a teacher-

"How it is always abuzz it always helpful and welcoming with a teacher/librarian that makes us feel right at home."

"Our class gets together with [the teacher-librarian] and we do reader's theatre, literature circles, independent study units, heritage fair and other things. We have a great time with her. I also volunteer in library."

Student in one of the case studies

librarian who is a change agent, striving to alter both the context and the program.

Programs at Level 1 face the greatest number of limitations due to context and the greatest school resistance to accepting the educational role of the school library. Subsequent levels have fewer contextual limitations.

A school library operating at Level 3 will differ from one in Level 2 because there is greater support the educational role of school library program. However, it is important to recognize that a school library program may be at different levels for different library characteristics. For example, a school may be at a Level 2 with respect to its financial supports but be functioning at a Level 3 in its ability to integrate within the school culture (**See Table 1**).

The teacher-librarians in exemplary school libraries sought to provide ever-changing support to teachers that gradually shifted the librarian's role in teaching students in stages from independent teaching, to parallel teaching, cooperative teaching to true collaborative teaching.

Table 1: Exemplary School Library Program Continuum

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Library's role in school	Operates within school culture	Partnerships are building	Library is central to learning	Level 3 features plus systematic support
Teacher-librarian's role in school	Seen as a secondary resource	Library is an important resource	Equal partner	
Instruction	Library has peripheral support role Parallel or independent teaching Librarian capitalizes on administrative and teacher decisions	Opportunities for teaching (but viewed as add-ons) Cooperative teaching Actively changing culture	Central role in instruction Collaborative teaching Established a new culture in school	
Program	Library "skills" some teaching is unconnected to classroom instruction	Curriculum and library instruction coordinated	Integration of classroom and library instruction Innovative, opportunistic: Finds solutions to barriers	
Administration	Library viewed as peripheral	Library valued but not seen as central to school's purpose Decision making about the library may not involve the librarian	Seen as central to school's purpose Pro-active in support of the library Shared decision making Librarian involved in school leadership Understands & values the instructional role of librarian Scheduling supports instructional role of librarian	Shared understanding across staff and system (board) of library role (as defined in level 3) System wide valuing and support for library programs (e.g., board level consultant) PD support for librarians, Librarians are required to have specialization
Finance	Library finance decided by administration. Regular allocation	Administration provides additional funding on occasion	Methods to address financial constraints as a regular part of school planning	Finances on a firm foundation

level 1

Exemplary school library programs at Level 1 operate within a context that places several constraints on the teacher librarian and the school library program.

Such a context may be due to financial or budgetary constraints and is marked by a general lack of teacher and administrator support. Often, these programs have partial (i.e., part-time) teacher librarian positions resulting in limited programming.

> Sometimes I have to go out and hunt people down.
>
> *Teacher librarian*

This may result in the teacher-librarian having to work in more than one school or more than one position within a school, decreasing the connection between the teacher-librarian and classroom teachers and students.

Such part-time positions make the role of the teacher-librarian more difficult. It especially makes flexible open scheduling difficult or even impossible to maintain and severely limits instructional time. The librarian is used for prep coverage and basic library functions rather than instructional purposes. In addition, librarians within this context have limited ability to offer open flexible schedules to accommodate students' learning needs.

The current or historical school board policies and library support may also contribute to a disabling context where there is little expectation for the school library to be staffed by a trained teacher-librarian. In addition, librarians operating within this context may have little consultant support or professional development opportunities. PD support for school library programs is unavailable at the board level.

Teachers working within a Level 1 school context may have limited experience with a teacher-librarian or with developing teacher partnerships with the teacher-librarian. Ultimately, a lack of experience makes integration of the library program more difficult as teachers are reluctant to use the library and partner with the teacher-librarian.

The principals and teachers in the schools we classified as having Level 1 exemplary school libraries spoke enthusiastically about the teacher-librarian and the school library. However, they tended to describe a traditional view of the school library, demonstrating a limited understanding of the possibilities the school library offered for teaching.

The exemplary school library programs at Level 1 are those in which the teacher-librarian works within a school context that views the library program as an important source for resources and information. The teacher-librarian's primary role is one of support, providing prep coverage or other specific services, for example, information technology or research skills instruction.

The instruction the teacher-librarian does provide is completed independently, and in addition to that provided by the classroom teacher. In order to be effective, these teacher-librarians help create exemplary library programs through their ongoing efforts to build a richer library program for teachers and students. These teacher-librarians must continually work to develop partnerships that enable the librarian to be more

directly involved in instruction.

While primarily working in a support role, teacher-librarians in exemplary Level 1 library programs continue to work to enhance the instructional opportunities provided by the school library. They teach their own program consistently and attempt to coordinate this with classroom instruction. They build their program through their skills to provide resources that meet teachers' requirements.

At the same time, these effective teacher-librarians encourage teachers to coordinate library instruction with classroom plans, deepening students' learning. The teacher-librarian also initiates procedures that free more of their time to provide instruction and begin to work more directly with teachers.

As one teacher librarian, working part time in a school, commented, *"the kids are all trained on book exchange so when I'm not here the classes come in."*

The success of such efforts requires the willingness of teachers to move beyond their current instructional patterns and roles. These efforts to implement change are often difficult and may encounter resistance. Teachers with little experience coordinating their teaching with another teacher, in this case the teacher-librarian, may perceive partnerships with the teacher-librarian as additional, time consuming work.

The teacher-librarian must therefore look for ways to engage the teachers with the library program, highlighting the various roles the school library can serve in support of their instruction.

When classroom teachers and teacher librarians partner for instruction, the resulting interactions help build an ongoing supportive working relationship. Sarah, a Grade 5 teacher admitted, *I'm not as computer literate as I'd like to be, I'm very grateful to have a librarian that is computer literate."*

Another example of this developing working relationship was observed in an OFIP school. While speaking of new initiatives to support literacy instruction, one of the teachers noted that the teacher librarian demonstrated a *"willingness to learn along with us because it's been a whole new way of looking at things for all of us teachers."*

Effective teacher-librarians working within a Level 1 context may also look for opportunities to establish ongoing library programs and enhance the profile of the school library. For example, the teacher-librarian may work to promote the Forest of Reading program in the school. Initially, these programs may be used only in one division or restricted to the library because other teachers may be unaware of these programs.

Throughout their efforts to maintain and build their library program, these teacher-librarians need to be positive and accommodating. Teachers and principals commented on the librarian's willingness to accommodate teachers and school programs. The teacher-librarian will always look for opportunities to be a positive influence in the school, for example, helping teachers grapple with curriculum changes.

[The teacher librarian in the school] "does a good job of keeping up-to-date with the new initiatives we're getting from the Board or Ministry...he'll find us books for us to use, mentor text for us to use in the classroom and then any way he can help us with assistive technology."

A classroom teacher

level 2

A distinguishing characteristic of Level 2 school libraries is an increased emphasis on integrating instruction.

Library programs functioning at a Level 2 have fewer constraining school contexts than those at Level 1 and play an important and ongoing role, supporting classroom teachers and students' learning; but they are not viewed as central to achieving the school's purpose.

"I think that people are starting to see how well it's working."

Teacher Librarian

Exemplary Level 2 library programs benefit from greater administrative support. Principals in these schools typically held a broader view of the role of the library within the school culture and their active support of the library influences how the library is viewed and used by other teachers.

"But it's a process. If you'd have come the first year it would have been different…one of the things the principal and I talked about as a strategy was finding the teachers you know would be on board like that."

Funding is often unstable from year-to-year with administrators providing partial funding, at least for a period of time. This funding is used to provide prep coverage so that the librarian can focus more time on instruction and planning. These efforts allow librarians working within a Level 2 context to begin to make meaningful connections with classroom teachers and encourage greater use of the library and its services alongside a focus on instruction.

Similar to exemplary Level 1 school library programs, effective teacher-librarians working at Level 2 actively try to modify their context to enhance the role of the library within the school.

The increased emphasis on integrating instruction in Level 2 libraries is the result of many factors within the context. For instance, teachers were more open to working cooperatively with the teacher-librarian. Given the increased funding support, librarians within this context have developed partnerships with classroom teachers and take on a larger instructional role.

Teachers are not only more willing to work collaboratively, but the instructional cooperation between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians is more apparent than observed in Level 1. Again, this is an ongoing process that takes time and effort.

As one teacher librarian commented, *"With total support from the administration my biggest challenge was changing the way the library was used."*

Certainly, time is an important factor that helps teachers and administrators understand how the school library program can contribute to learning. It shifts the ways in which the school library is used, and changes the working relationships between teachers and the teacher-librarian. However, successful collaborations also help to develop the role of the school library and the teacher-librarian.

Teacher-librarians in exemplary Level 2 school library programs focus on promoting the library program by encouraging teachers to use the library and partner with the librarian for

instructional purposes. Through such a proactive approach, teachers within the school become more confident in using the school library and become more willing to share teaching with the librarian.

The resulting shift enables the teacher librarian to have greater teaching responsibilities within a developing integrative instructional approach.

"I have really seen a different attitude because initially the teachers who were reluctant, it was yeah this was great but when can we book out research skills and book exchange, but I haven't had anyone ask me this year."

The teacher-librarian is actively changing the school culture and teachers generally acknowledge the important educative role of the teacher librarian.

"I can't even imagine a literacy program without the support of your library and your librarian because the two can't ever be separated."

This was in part due to the teacher librarian's flexibility in supporting teachers' instructional needs *"I think she's the key, she'll come in and do anything; she's teaching in Math right now."*

"She's constantly bringing the library to us…it's a very proactive type of relationship and that makes it much easier for us to make better use of the library."
A classroom teacher

level 3

Key to a Level 3 exemplary library program is the teacher-librarian's ability to be an effective teacher, providing educational support and leadership through partnering and collaboration, while finding opportunities for integration and cross-curricular connections.

"I think it is empowering staff and students. It is not my library, it is not my computer, it is not my collection, it is ours."

Teacher-librarian

Exemplary Level 3 school library programs are able to have a primary focus on student learning.

A review of the cases illustrate that in Level 3 programs, the library is a central part of the school with links throughout the school. The library extends well beyond a site for book selection or as a place for reading and research.

The teacher-librarian serves many roles, beyond managing the library resources or providing prep coverage for teachers. Librarians in Level 3 programs have opportunities to teach in an engaging fashion. The staffs in these schools share a vision of the library as a place for learning and teaching, and the library has a critical role supporting students, staff, and each school's mandate.

Level 3 school library programs exist in a context having strong administrative support. Principals considered the library to be integral to the schools' mission.

These school library programs are highly supported, often through extra funding. This funding took on two forms:

(a) funding additional librarian time beyond the minimum prep allocation, and

(b) extra funding for resources.

Principals would prioritize funding for library services, finding extra internal funds to increase the library allocation. Short of board level cuts, the teacher-librarian's position was secure. The increased librarian time allowed teacher-librarians to be much more involved in teaching, rather than simply being a mechanism to manage the library or provide preparation coverage. Not surprisingly, such a model provides higher quality instruction for students and opportunities for teacher collaboration and curricular integration.

Collaboration between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians was seen as a critical activity within Level 3 programs.

Librarians worked very hard over time to build teachers' awareness of the benefits collaboration with the teacher-librarian, and had successfully demonstrated these benefits to the staff.

They sought to provide ever-changing support to teachers and had successfully reached the point where they were participating in true collaborative teaching with classroom teachers in the school.

Exemplary level 3 programs had teacher-librarians who seized on every opportunity to teach in an engaging fashion and brought an enthusiasm to this that drew students and staff into the library. Hence the teacher-librarian was considered a key provider of instruction in the school and the school community.

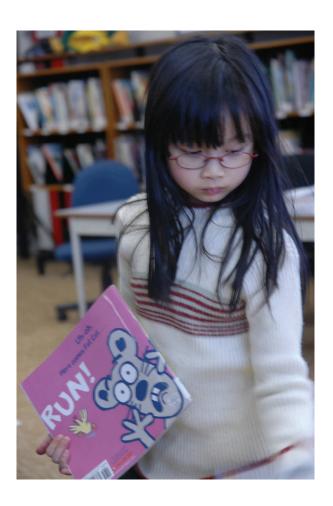Examples of initiatives in Level 3 exemplary school libraries included:

- ❑ accessing outside resources such as authors and theatre companies,
- ❑ bringing more parents into the library, and
- ❑ creating book clubs.

The librarians in the Level 3 programs we observed were continuing to strive to improve their library program, through self-evaluation and critical retrospections of library related instructional activities.

These librarians modeled life-long learning, seeking out learning opportunities in areas that were new to them and then transferring it back to the library to enhance their program.

Successful teaching, from partner collaboration, linking to school initiatives, parent programs, and book exchanges, was an ever-moving target that they were continually working to hit.

This high level of engagement resulted in a variety of intriguing and unique library programs, and extensive school involvement. The examples provided in the case studies above, including unique clubs and innovative uses of the Forest of Reading program, highlight methods by which these programs are embedded within the broader school community.

level 4

We were unable to categorize any programs as level 4, as unfortunately, school libraries in Ontario receive intermittent support.

What differentiates Level 4 programs from Level 3, is that they have systematic administrative support at the school, school board, and provincial levels, both in funding and policy.

My value as a teacher librarian and the value of the library will start to be diminished (if the time is cut back to .5)

Teacher-librarian in a Level 3
exemplary school library

Exemplary Level 4 school library programs represent the most effective library programs.

In many of the previous levels, we witnessed outstanding librarians with models programs of instructional integration; however, these librarians continually faced the possibility that the library position could be cut. Their current support was at the discretion of the principal and board policy.

This ongoing funding concern for library programs prevented the library programs we observed from being considered Level 4. This lack of systematic support hinders the development of exemplary library programs and it is only due to the outstanding professionalism of librarians that we were able to observe a number of Level 3 programs.

Similarly, lack of systemic support at the provincial level means that having a school librarian, much less an exemplary

program, is largely based on good fortune, rather than systematic efforts. School library programs that are supported may suddenly disappear and then have to be recreated years later.

The ad hoc approach to the role of school libraries in education from the three levels of administration (school, board and provincial) results in hard won expertise and knowledge vanishing from the educational system. The quote from the case study above highlights this continual challenge for school library programs, challenges that currently prevent the school libraries we observed from being considered Level 4.

Principals in these schools considered the school library *as the core place for the school for the success of learning and teaching*. They recognized the critical role they played in supporting the teacher-librarian as a key teaching member of their staff.

The Students' Perspectives

The students who completed surveys were very positive about their school libraries.

When we initiated this study, it was our intention to use student surveys to examine the consistency of exemplary school library programs in terms of the services provided to students.

In these schools with exemplary school libraries the students were very positive about their libraries, with over 60 % stating they would like to be able to use the library even more often. Similarly, the students were very positive about the teacher-librarian and the services she/he provided.

These students also generally reported they liked reading and thought they were good readers.

We collected student data on the changing use of school libraries from samples of students in each of the schools we observed. The survey was organized into five major sections: (a) student demographics and school attitudes; (b) library activities during class time and during students' own time; (c) items used in the library and factors that help students choose books; (d) librarian characteristics and perceptions; and (e) students' reading attitudes and perceptions **(See Appendix "A").**

The survey was completed by a sample of 331 students from seven of the eight schools. A higher proportion of girls completed the survey (57%). Students completing the surveys were in Grades 3 to 8, with the majority being in Grades 4 to 6. The average age of the students was 10.4 years of age.

Just under three-quarters of the students were born in Canada but only 50% listed English as their first language, with Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) being the most commonly reported other language. Thus the sample generally represents the diversity of the student population found in these schools, although the proportions were not fully congruent with the actual student population.

Students appreciate exemplary libraries

The students generally reported they liked reading and thought they were good readers. All but 6% of the students had read a book over the past month for pleasure and all but 17% reported they had used books to help with their schoolwork. Generally, students reported reading between 1 and 12 books for pleasure (median = 5) and using 1 to 10 books (median = 3) to help with schoolwork.

These students were very positive about their school libraries with over 60 % stating they would like to be able to use the school library more often. Similarly, the students were very positive about the school librarian and the services provided by the school librarian.

Figure 1 contains the results from nine survey items examining students' perceptions of the teacher-librarian. The proportions of students who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement are reported in Figure 1, representing positive perceptions for each attribute. Not surprisingly, students were less likely to turn to the school librarian for help with homework. There was variability in the perceived amount of the teacher-librarians' computer and the internet expertise. This is not surprising given that these school libraries differed in terms of computer access. Overall, 80% of the students believe they learned a lot from the librarian, and 90% of students believed their teacher-librarian to be knowledgeable and helpful.

"The best thing about our school library is that the librarian gets us involved in a lot of programs like the Historica fair."

"We have a great librarian that is smart, nice and is always a happy person!"

"We have 2 pets in the library: Fudge the Rabbit and Huolio the reptile. The best thing is that there is a comfy couch for us to read on."

"The librarian is the best thing about our school library. She is kind and helpful. Without her there is no library."
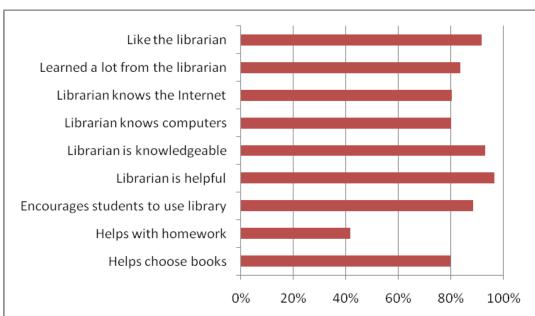
Students in one of the case studies

Figure 1: Students' Perceptions of the Teacher Librarian.

Figure 2 contains our findings regarding students' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher-librarian.

These findings help illustrate the ways that students view the function of the school library. Students responded to these items with a "Yes" or "No" response, and the Figure contains the proportion of students responding "Yes" to the specific item.

As presented on Figure 2, these exemplary teacher-librarians were considered an important resource in the school, teaching students how to do research (92%), and use the computer (65% to 80%), among other visible responsibilities.

Interestingly, over 60% of the students reported that these teacher-librarians came to their classrooms.

The findings also illustrate areas for further examination. For example, the students generally did not believe that the teacher-librarian knew the kinds of books they like to read.

Wide variations in perceptions

The students' perceptions of the library were as varied as the programs we observed.

We had intended to use the student data to examine the similarities across exemplary school library programs in terms of the services provided to students. But, because the responses were so varied, we had to revise our original intention. (See Appendix "B")

The students spoke consistently highly of the school library, but their reasoning for their views varied. Similarly, students used the school library in very different ways.
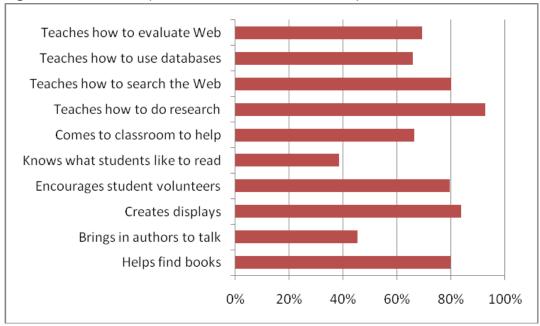
Figure 2: Students' Perceptions of the Teacher Librarian's Responsibilities

Some of these differences were due to the physical structure of the library. For example, the increasing demand for Instructional Technology has resulted in changes to several school library programs so that now their key purpose includes elements of instructional technology and they have attached computer labs. The teacher librarian is expected to manage and incorporate this technology into his or her library program, and students in these schools commonly use the library for this purpose. However, other school library programs do not serve this purpose.

Hence the school context plays an important role in understanding the students' perceptions of the teacher librarian and more importantly, the role of the school library. The Profile Graphs highlight the variability in school library programs.

Figure 3 contains the same results provided in Figure 1 on the previous page separating the average proportions for each school.

The proportions of students across the schools who reported they used the library at least a couple of times are reported in this first graph, representing frequent library use. The following information is provided for each item:

- The line shows the range between the highest and lowest average proportions from each of the schools surveyed.
- The cross hair shows the weighted average from all schools surveyed. This means that each school is given equal weight in the calculations, regardless of the number of students surveyed in each school.
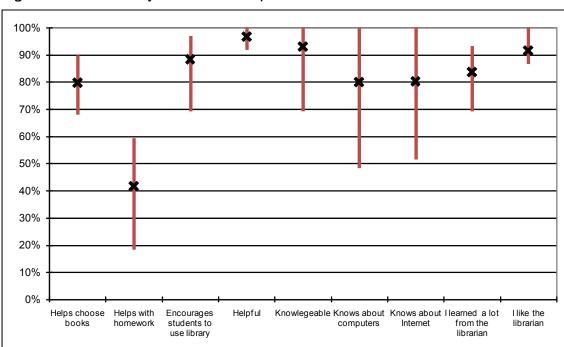
Figure 3: School Variability in Students' Perceptions of the Teacher Librarian's Role

ongoing challenges

The challenges facing school libraries are part of the context in which the school library operates, and are important factors in determining the current effectiveness of the school library and the teacher librarian.

Funding is the biggest challenge across the continuum. It has an impact on the ability of the school library to provide a program that is focused on teaching students.

On the other hand, the challenges also illustrate opportunities and directions that can help library programs become more effective, regardless of their current status.

1. Funding

Not surprisingly, funding is the biggest challenge across the continuum. It impacts the ability of a school library program to provide a school library program that is focused on teaching students. It determines the librarian's appointment and thus the amount of a teacher-librarian's time that is devoted to teaching.

Financial constraints require the majority of schools to find ways to reduce operational costs. Due to the fixed costs associated with classroom teachers and building operations, the most common method to address issues of cost reduction has been through student support services. School libraries have been particularly vulnerable to such funding cuts.

2. Policy

There is presently no provincial policy to ensure all schools have fully-functioning libraries, and because funding for librarians is provided on a per pupil basis, small schools are much less likely to have teacher-librarians.

Some school boards make decisions to support school libraries, while others leave decisions to principals. Many boards with a history of cutting teacher-librarian positions have created a context in which principals and teachers have less experience using school libraries. One third of the elementary schools in Ontario have no teacher-librarian (People for Education 2008). Qualified teacher-librarians in these boards may have returned to classroom teaching, taken other leadership roles, or retired.

The province currently spends approximately $76 million on Literacy and Numeracy initiatives, but none of that funding is targeted at school libraries. This is surprising in light of the evidence from large-scale studies that have clearly linked the presence of a trained teacher librarian who collaborates instructionally with teachers to higher student performance on standardized measures of literacy, and content knowledge across grade levels (Haycock, 2001; Jones & Zambone, 2007; Lance, 2002; Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000).

3. Securing principal support

The support of the elementary school principal was vital to both the existence of the exemplary school library and to its continued success.

The support of the principal was demonstrated by dedicating sufficient operating, maintenance and renewal funds to the library, allotting teaching/partnership time to the teacher-librarian, protecting the teacher-librarian

from delivering excessive amounts of preparation time and, perhaps most significantly, by clearly acknowledging the teacher-librarian's leadership role among the teachers in the school.

Principals who understand the impact of exemplary school library programs on student learning are vital, yet in the context of Ontario where less than 15% (People for Education, 2008) of elementary schools have a full-time teacher-librarian, principals tend to lack sufficient experience with library programs to have an understanding of how well-supported library programs can contribute to the school's educational goals.

The low level of comprehensive library programs in elementary schools also creates a situation in which teachers have not had the experience of collaborating for student instruction with a teacher-librarian. These two factors result in teacher librarians being under-utilized instructionally and needing to justify their place in education. Without the support of elementary school principals exemplary school libraries cannot exist.

4. Delivering preparation time

Principals in this study identified the use of the teacher-librarian to cover preparation time as an increasing pressure.

One of the biggest obstacles elementary school principals face is human resources. Labour agreements with elementary teachers have included increasing amounts of preparation time each year, over three years. Preparation time must be covered by other qualified teachers in the school, and teacher-librarians are frequently assigned this role. The greater amount of time that a teacher-librarian

must devote to prep coverage the more restraints there are on instructional collaboration with teachers and the more restrictions on open scheduling.

5. Lack of knowledge

School libraries are often in difficult situations. A lack of experience and an unawareness of how school library programs can contribute to education prevents teachers, administrators and policy makers from considering the school library programs as an essential component of education.

There is less support for libraries when libraries are considered an adjunct to education, further perpetuating a narrow role for school libraries. Teacher-librarians must constantly advocate for the presence of a school library program, unlike teachers and administrators who are more of a given within the educational system. Leadership at the provincial level from the Ministry of Education is essential to alter this view of the role of school libraries.

6. Lack of systemic policy

As long a school libraries are not an integral part of the educational system at the provincial level through provincial funding, and staffing policy the school library cannot realize its full potential in contributing to the education of Ontario's students.

While some students may be fortunate enough to encounter a board or principal who, through effective policy, fosters the development of an exemplary library program, other students may never have that opportunity.

All students throughout all of their schooling deserve more.

conclusion

There *are* exemplary school library programs in Ontario, but there is not a unitary conception of an exemplary school program, nor is there is a single approach that creates an exemplary library program.

These programs are unique but they all provide a valued educational service to the students fortunate enough to be in these schools.

There is presently no provincial policy to ensure all schools have fully-functioning libraries, and because funding for librarians is provided on a per pupil basis, small schools are much less likely to have teacher-librarians.

A key attribute of these exemplary library programs is the exemplary teaching skills of the teacher librarians, coupled with their enthusiasm and ingenuity. These teacher librarians are excellent teachers, maximizing teaching and learning opportunities for students.

Our findings highlight the need for teacher librarians to be highly adaptable, changing their manner of approach to suit the styles of the teachers with whom they work and their current school context. The most successful programs are characterized by teacher-librarian and classroom teacher collaborations in terms of teaching, learning, and library use.

Libraries as school hubs

Exemplary School libraries are a central hub of the school, prominently placed and a central place of activity and learning.

Vitally important is the vision of the library as a classroom and a welcoming place of learning. The teacher-librarians are leaders in their school and outstanding teachers. Both the library and the teacher librarian are recognized as playing a critical role in supporting the educational outcomes of the school.

In schools with these types of libraries, students reported high levels of satisfaction and engagement with their libraries, and they were active readers. The majority wanted to have more opportunities to use the school library.

Principal and system support essential

School libraries such as these can only flourish and thrive with support from principals who:

- ❑ regard the teacher-librarian as a key teaching member of their staff,
- ❑ allocate adequate resources to the library,
- ❑ and protect the librarian from excessive preparation time coverage.

Inadequate school library and teacher librarian support from principals, school boards and the Ministry of Education present difficult barriers to overcome. Despite the evidence from numerous

studies demonstrating the importance of school libraries to students' education, there exists no provincial policy to ensure all schools have a fully functioning school library.

Our findings provide a foundation for identifying relevant procedures and practices that are most associated with exemplary library programs.

We hope this information will be of value for the broader community of teacher librarians, classroom teachers, and administrators responsible for increasing and/or maintaining student literacy achievement, as well as parents who share the role of supporting children's literacy development.

By identifying those characteristics and procedures that enable a school library to be an integral part of a school's initiatives for student learning and success, our research shines a light on the largely untapped potential in school libraries and teacher librarians in Ontario for enhancing student learning.

"If I could change one thing about the library I would have more authors come in."

"If I could change one thing about the library I would have more room for people to read and a separate room for people that are doing things for school projects where it's loud."

"If I could change one thing about the library I would keep library period everyday."

Students from the case studies

methodology

Our inquiry focused on elementary schools with exemplary library programs, as identified by the regional coordinators of the Ontario Library Association (OLA).

Given the complex nature of the phenomena, a multi-staged Case Study methodology was used. Our research began with two intensive case studies during the 2006/2007 school year.

The story of two school libraries

These two cases enabled us to not only refine our research methods, but also provided us with detailed information about the operation of these two identified exemplary library programs. In order to obtain rich information about these programs and identify the stories, relationships, policies, and practices surrounding a exemplary library program, we obtained:

1. relevant school and library documents related to literacy initiatives that involve the school library;

2. a summary of extra-curricular library practices and procedures as well as those that are integrated with classroom activities and programs;

3. interviews with the school administration, teachers, and librarians;

4. student and teacher surveys, and

5. observations of the operation of the school library and teacher librarian.

We conducted one 45-minute interview with each school principal, 60-minute individual interviews with four teachers (Grades 3- 6) from each school, and two 60-minute interviews with the teacher librarian. We also observed the teacher librarian for 1-2 days, as (s)he completed her(his) responsibilities as the school's teacher librarian. These observations were supplemented by field notes and library documents. Classroom teachers were chosen based on their ability to provide rich information about the current library programs and class use of the library.

The student surveys examined Grades 3 to 6 students' perceptions about the role of the library and the librarian, their use of library resources, and their experiences in the library. Each survey required approximately 20 minutes to complete. In order to minimize the impact on the classroom teacher, the surveys were sent home with the students to complete. Parents signed the Letter of Consent and the students returned the completed survey to the classroom teacher. We sampled at least four classes in each school (between 100 and 120 students per school) and had a completion rate of approximately 50%.

We had less success with the teacher surveys, which attempted to obtain a better understanding of how the staff of teachers made use of the school library. Teachers not completing the interviews generally did not complete the survey and those teachers who completed the interview felt the survey

did not provide any new information not covered in the interviews. It also appears there were some concerns that completing the survey would be viewed as an attempt to evaluate a peer, a practice not allowed under the collective agreement for teachers.

Expanding the study and adapting the method

Once the two initial Case Studies were completed, we expanded the study to include 6 more cases.

These new cases enabled us to further explore our findings in the initial two cases and to also identify other aspects of exemplary school library programs not previously identified. The interview protocols and survey instruments were slightly revised for these cases. Principal interviews were shorter and the teacher surveys were not used. All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and the students' surveys were analyzed using SPSS 16.0. Our analyses included thematic analyses of the qualitative data and descriptive statistics and appropriate inferential statistics.

Appendix "A"

School library profiles

Figure 4 contains the 13 items from the student survey related to how frequently students use the school library during class time (the first 4 items) and during their own time (the last 9 items).

For example, the results presented on Figure 3 demonstrate that there was relatively large variability in students' perceptions regarding their teacher librarian's knowledge of the internet (48% to 100%), while there was little variability across the schools in terms of students' perceptions that the teacher librarian was helpful (92% to 100%).

There was greater variability in students' use of the school library (see Figure 4).

As highlighted on Figure 4, frequent class use (at least 2 times per week) of the school library for computers (item 1) varied between 5% and 88% across the schools, with the average being 40%. Not surprisingly, there was much less variability in the use of the library to find books, ranging between 38 and 100%, with the average being 75%.

Using student results to evaluate libraries

After reviewing these results, we discovered these students' perceptions could also provide a valuable internal evaluation tool for school libraries. An individual School Profile could be created and compared to the range of profiles that are found across schools. Examples of these
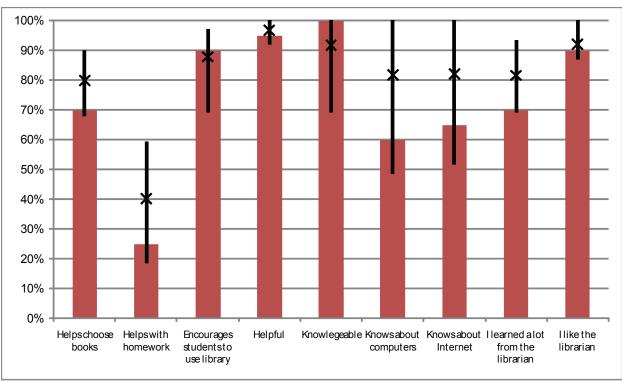
Figure 4: School Variability in Students' Use of the School Library

Individual Profiles are presented on **Figure 5** and **Figure 6,** using hypothetical results to illustrate the potential use of such profiles.

These Figures provide similar data as presented on Figure 3 and Figure 4, with the addition of the average results for a school, as represented by each bar. The Individual School Profile is a useful mechanism for teacher librarians to examine their school library program, and set their own priorities based on these findings.

As an example, the librarian at this hypothetical school is considered knowledgeable and encourages students to use the school library (**see Figure 5**).

The majority of students reported that the librarian helped them choose books (75%) but only 30% agreed that the school librarian helped with homework. Overall, the librarian at this school is average for most items relating to students' perceptions.

In contrast, students' perceptions of the librarian were below average for computer and Internet knowledge. According to the surveys, 55% of students agreed that the librarian was knowledgeable about computers, and 60% agreed that the librarian was knowledgeable about the Internet, compared to the across school average of approximately 80%.

This appears to be a school in which the teacher librarian is not used to provide

Figure 5: Individual School Profile of Students' Perceptions of the Teacher Librarian's Role

Instructional Technology instruction.

The results from Figure 5 can be better understood when placed in the context of the results on Figure 6.

From this Figure, the use of the library during class (e.g., the first four items of the survey) is below the average of all schools. Of the uses during class time, students at this school generally use it to find books to read. Seventy percent of students indicated that they find books during class visits to the library, while 25% report using computers, a frequency well below the average computer use

across schools.

Students use the library during their own time in (the final 9 items) highlights the across school variability we observed. At this hypothetical school, there are relatively low frequencies of library use for the internet or to complete homework, average use of the library for computer use or to find a quiet place to read, and relatively high frequency of student use to find materials or to be part of a library club. This school library has a important role in providing students the opportunity to find print materials to support their learning.

Figure 6: Individual School Profile for Library Use

Such findings can be used to set school library priorities and examine the effectiveness of the current programs.

For example, if the current library program endeavours to provide students a place to go after school or at lunch to quietly read or do homework, the results suggest the school library is being somewhat underused for these purposes. In contrast, if the primary function of the school library is to provide resource materials for students, it is fulfilling its mandate.

Appendix "B"

About Me	Introduce yourself!

1. I am a   O girl.   O boy.

2. I am _____ years old.

3. I am in Grade _____.

4. I was born in _____ (country).

5. I have lived in Canada for _____ years.

6. I have lived in Ontario for _____ years.

7. I have _____ sisters and _____ brothers.

8. The first language I learned to speak was _____.

9. The language I speak most often at home is _____.

10. During this school year, which of the following activities did you do with members of your family? We went

a)	to places like a museum or Science Centre	O Yes	O No
b)	to things like music concerts, plays, or the art gallery	O Yes	O No
c)	to watch professional sports games like baseball, hockey, soccer, or football	O Yes	O No
d)	on a holiday in another part of Canada	O Yes	O No
e)	on a holiday in the United States	O Yes	O No
f)	on a holiday in another country other than the United States	O Yes	O No

	True	Mostly True	Sometimes True/ Sometimes False	Mostly False	False
11. For me, schoolwork is easy	O	O	O	O	O
12. I think school is boring	O	O	O	O	O
13. I enjoy learning new things at school	O	O	O	O	O
14. I like school very much.	O	O	O	O	O
15. I try hard to get good marks.	O	O	O	O	O

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Moving Right Along...

16. We are interested in learning about your use of the school library. Since school started in September this year, what things did you do? Select the circle that best describes how often you did the activity in the school library.

	Every day	A couple of times a week	Once a week	Several times a month	At least once this year	Never
a) My class goes to the school library to use a computer	O	O	O	O	O	O
b) My class goes to the school library to use the internet.	O	O	O	O	O	O
c) My class goes to the school library to work on projects or assignments.	O	O	O	O	O	O
d) My class goes to the school library to find books to read.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Which of the following do you do on your own time						
e) I go to the school library at lunch time.	O	O	O	O	O	O
f) I go to the school library before or after school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
g) I go to the school library to use a computer.	O	O	O	O	O	O
h) I go to the school library to use the internet.	O	O	O	O	O	O
i) I go to the school library to find materials for a school project or assignment.	O	O	O	O	O	O
j) I go to the school library to do homework.	O	O	O	O	O	O
k) I go to the school library to find books to read for fun.	O	O	O	O	O	O
l) I go to the school library to find a quiet place to be.	O	O	O	O	O	O
m) I go to the school library for a library club (Silver Birch, Boys Read, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O

17. If I could, I would use the school library:

    O More Often   O The same amount   O Less often

18. Please tell us any other activities you did in the school library this year?

_____

_____

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19. Right now, I have _____ books or magazines from the school library at home.
        Insert number of books

20. Right now, I have _____ books or magazines from the school library at school.
        Insert number of books

21. Please select **Yes** for each item you used this school year in the school library. Please select **No** for each item you did not use this year in the library.

   a) Encyclopedia _____ O Yes   O No

   b) Dictionary or thesaurus _____ O Yes   O No

   c) Other Reference Books _____ O Yes   O No

   d) Fiction Books _____ O Yes   O No

   e) Non-fiction Books _____ O Yes   O No

   f) Newspaper _____ O Yes   O No

   g) Magazines _____ O Yes   O No

   h) Graphic Novels _____ O Yes   O No

   i) Computer _____ O Yes   O No

   j) The internet _____ O Yes   O No

   k) Online Encyclopedia (e.g., Grolier Online) _____ O Yes   O No

   l) Online Information Database (e.g., EBSCO, Infotrac) __ O Yes   O No

22. What helps you decide the books to borrow? Please fill in the **Yes** circle for each item that helps you decide and the **No** circle for each item that does not help.

   a) Books on special display in the library_____ O Yes   O No

   b) Books the librarian has talked about_____ O Yes   O No

   c) Books written by an author I already know I like_____ O Yes   O No

   d) Books my teacher has talked about_____ O Yes   O No

   e) Books my friends have talked about_____ O Yes   O No

   f) Books on interesting topics_____ O Yes   O No

   g) Books that are non-fiction _____ O Yes   O No

   h) Books in the Forest of Reading Program _____ O Yes   O No

   i) Books I found on the internet _____ O Yes   O No

23. We also would like to learn more about your school librarian. What things does your librarian do? Check the **Yes** circle if the librarian does the activity, and the **No** circle if the librarian did not do the activity. The school librarian:

a) Helps me find books to read .... O Yes   O No

b) Brings in authors to talk to students .... O Yes   O No

c) Creates library related displays in the school or library ...... O Yes   O No

d) Encourages students to volunteer in the library .... O Yes   O No

e) Knows what I like to read .... O Yes   O No

f) Comes to our classroom to help us .... O Yes   O No

g) Teaches us how to do research .... O Yes   O No

h) Teaches us how to search the internet .... O Yes   O No

i) Teaches us how to properly use databases .... O Yes   O No

j) Teaches us how to know if internet information is accurate .. O Yes   O No

Select the circle that best describes how much you agree with each of the following.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. I can approach the librarian if I want help choosing a book	O	O	O	O	O
25. I can approach the librarian if I want help with school work.	O	O	O	O	O
26. The school librarian encourages students to use the library.	O	O	O	O	O
27. The school librarian is helpful.	O	O	O	O	O
28. The school librarian has lots of knowledge.	O	O	O	O	O
29. The school librarian knows a lot about using computers.	O	O	O	O	O
30. The school librarian knows a lot about using the internet	O	O	O	O	O
31. I have learned a lot from the school librarian.	O	O	O	O	O
32. I like the school librarian.	O	O	O	O	O

33. Now tell us about your school library.
Select the circle that best describes how much you agree with each of the following

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) The school library is an interesting place to be.	O	O	O	O	O
b) The school library has lots of room to work or read.	O	O	O	O	O
c) I can usually find what I need in the school library.	O	O	O	O	O
d) I like going to the school library.	O	O	O	O	O
e) The school library is a busy place in the school.	O	O	O	O	O
f) The school library has a good selection of fiction materials.	O	O	O	O	O
g) The school library has a good selection of non-fiction materials.	O	O	O	O	O

34. The single best thing about our school library is:

35. If I could, the one thing I would do to improve our school library would be to:

36. The best way to encourage students to use the library is to:

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About Me and Reading

Lastly, we want to know more your thoughts about reading. For each question below, please fill in the circle for the answer that **Best** describes your thoughts on reading.

	True	Mostly True	Sometimes True/ Sometimes False	Mostly False	False
37. I am a great reader.	O	O	O	O	O
38. I read more than my friends.	O	O	O	O	O
39. I enjoy reading in school.	O	O	O	O	O
40. I enjoy reading at home.	O	O	O	O	O
41. For me, reading is interesting.	O	O	O	O	O
42. I like to receive books as presents	O	O	O	O	O

43. I have a library card for the public library   O Yes   O No

44. In the past 30 days, I have gone to the public library   O Yes   O No

45. In the past 30 days, I have read _____ book(s) for pleasure.
   Insert number of books

46. In the past 30 days, I have used _____ book(s) for school work.
   Insert number of books

47. My favourite book is: _____

48. The kinds of things I like to read include:

_____

_____

49. Which of these activities do you think help encourage students to read?

O Reading groups or literature circles	O Talking about favourite books
O Reading games	O Choosing books for the library
O Writing stories	O Playing games on the computer
O Writing book reviews	O Helping younger children read
O Designing displays for the library	O Reading for charity/sponsorship
O Designing website/magazines	O Rating books for friends
O Reading for a competition or prizes	O Meeting authors
O Other (please explain) _____	

Thank you. You did a great job!

Websites

Ontario School Library Association:

http://www.accessola.com/osla/

People for Education:

http://www.peopleforeducation.ca