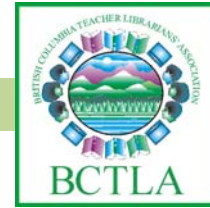


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## British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association

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It is the position of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association that every public school, and therefore every student and every teacher, benefits from the services of a fully-staffed, fully-funded school library program.

### **Why do schools need library programs?**

Once parents could teach their child absolutely everything they would ever need to know because generation to generation, things stayed more or less the same. Since the Industrial Revolution, children have needed to know more than their parents could teach them, and universal education evolved to meet that need.

Today's students are awash in a sea of information, not all of which is reliable. Prior to the advent of the Internet, students may sometimes have had difficulty gathering facts but what they could locate was from reliable sources. Now they are drowning in information but unsure of its reliability. This places different demands on the skills of both the learner and the classroom teacher. Teachers need to move past projects that demand simple information retrieval because that part of the research process is no longer a challenge. Students need to move past blind acceptance of anything they see in print because authorship no longer requires an editor. Critical thinking is required every step of the way through the research process; inquiry-based instruction must become an instructional norm.

In many cases, our students will be vying for jobs that don't even exist yet. Very little of the content of our curricula will be relevant to our students in their adult lives. As a result, content-driven curricula no longer serve the needs of our learners. Schools need to be teaching students *how* to learn, how to ask their own questions, find their own information, construct their own meaning from that information, and apply that meaning to new situations. The more exposures to constructivist learning, the better equipped our students will be to face the demands of their work lives.

### **Why are teacher-librarians needed to create and run those programs?**

Today's school library is a thinking laboratory that if properly funded, staffed and supported develops exactly these sorts of skills. Teacher-librarians are skilled at finding and evaluating information from print, digital and electronic sources and are skilled in communicating. They work directly with students and collaborate with teachers in planning, delivering and assessing units of study that integrate information literacy skills with curricula. Their combined knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum and information management makes them leaders in their learning communities, assisting with curriculum and staff development (Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada, 1997).

Teacher-librarians are most often the only people in a school with the training and experience necessary to teach these skills. Classroom teachers are experts on their curricula and on their students. Teacher-librarians are experts in information literacy, educational technology and collaboration. Teacher-librarians know how to access information from a wide variety of sources – print, digital, electronic. They are experts in assessing that information for currency, accuracy, authority, relevance and bias. They are experts at integrating technology into units of study and on incorporating critical thinking and deep questioning into lesson plans (Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association, 1997). As a result, the collaboration of teacher-librarians and classroom teachers enhances the teaching and learning environment. Over forty years of studies across dozens of jurisdictions have demonstrated that the synergy of classroom teachers working with qualified teacher-librarians significantly improves student achievement (Queen's University and People for Education, 2006).

### **What qualifications are necessary for successful teacher-librarians?**

The demands on a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century teacher-librarian are high. To meet them, teacher-librarians must be good teachers who are well versed in library management, information literacy skills and emerging technologies. At a minimum, a teacher-librarian must have successfully completed four specialized courses in the field, and preferably will hold a Masters degree in teacher-librarianship (Kaplan, 2008). Because of the high rate of change in the field, supplementary professional learning, formal or informal, is required to keep the teacher-librarian current.

## **What do schools need in order to allow vibrant school library programs to flourish?**

In order for the teacher-librarian to create and to continually improve school library programs and services, several factors are required.

**Budget** – Acceptable Canadian national standards are as follows: elementary \$26-35 per FTE, middle and junior \$31-42 per FTE and secondary \$36-45 per FTE (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003).

**Staffing** – Schools of up to 299 students should have at least a 0.6 teacher-librarian. Schools with up to 699 students require a full-time teacher-librarian. Those with up to 999 students should be staffed with 1.5 teacher-librarian time. Schools with populations up to 1400 require two full-time teacher-librarians and those over 1500 need three (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003).

**Clerical Assistance** – Teacher-librarian time must be complemented by a school-based trained library clerk or library technician in order to free the teacher-librarian for planning and teaching (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003).

**Facility** – The library in a bricks-and-mortar public school needs flexible shelving and furniture that can be moved easily, comfortable seating, and good lighting. It should have both large and small group instruction areas, a media production area, places for quiet study, a reading area, good storage, a teacher professional workspace, display equipment, current technology, and of course a current, robust collection of print, digital and electronic resources (Asselin, Branch & Oberg, 2003).

**Access** – The digital resources of all school libraries, and the library of a distributed learning or virtual school, should be accessible to patrons 24/7. The library should have a wireless network, an online accessible catalogue, databases and other digital learning resources, and specialized software for ESL learners and non-visual learners.

**Culture** - A school library program requires a collaborative school culture in order to thrive. The support of the principal is key to creating that culture (Oberg, 1995).

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