

Implementation Thoughts at the District Level: Achieving Information Literacy – Standards for School Library Programs in Canada



Judith Sykes

The document Achieving Information Literacy – Standards for School Library Programs in Canada (2003) will soon arrive in your district.

It will have been purchased or brought to the attention of the department in your district that oversees school libraries. The vision and outcomes for student learning potential are vast and awe-inspiring for the twenty-first century learner and Canada as a learning society. The standards required to achieve the vision and outcomes in an exemplary manner range from the “low financial cost but labor inducing development of a common belief system around school libraries in your district” to the “costly means to support it” with human and non-human resources.

In this article I will share thoughts that will serve both areas of working towards exemplary standards achievement for a Canadian school district. The first thought is relatively cost neutral and suggests action research methodology as a means to build shared understanding and ownership of the educational dimensions of the vision and learner outcomes for twenty-first century school libraries. Keeping in mind the diversity of school districts across Canada, the unfolding of the work could take on a variety of appearances around these suggestions.

First of all, for any district of any size to move forward and develop exemplary standard school libraries an emerging consensus of understanding around the vision and outcomes presented in the standards, of information literacy, and of the research that supports it, are vital. Action research begins with establishing context. How does the district wish to proceed? Is there district leadership to carry the initiative? Does the district wish to start with implementation at the elementary school level? At the high school? Or to establish a variety of exemplary “lighthouse” programs to begin the standards implementation?

The district must then focus on the major issues facing school libraries in their jurisdiction and develop a hypothesis or premise to guide implementation. An example of this might be: “In our school district we will strive to implement exemplary school libraries in all elementary schools by the year 2005”.

Taking such a premise, the district department head, superintendent, or person responsible for school libraries/information literacy are well advised to strike a working committee that will represent and network with a variety of stakeholders in response to the hypothesis. This person may have a budget for committees or they may simply begin by inviting stakeholder representatives to a meeting in a local school gymnasium. Whom to invite? What to say?

It is critical to bring together key educational stakeholders in the implementation of a powerful initiative where you will strive for excellence. It should be possible for any school district to use system-wide email or other common communication method to invite representation from district teacher librarians, library assistants/technicians, teachers, students, parents, principals, and senior administration. Other stakeholders will be connecting with this group as the process unfolds – at this stage it is vital to connect with the stakeholders closest to the work in schools, the “grass-roots”, to build momentum and ownership. This group must examine the current literature and research in the field of school libraries as noted in the standards to be able to grasp the significance of the field and be prepared to espouse it.

Exemplary school libraries appeal to students and connect with teachers into changing ways that teachers teach. As momentum builds, others will need to be involved to support initiatives. Your teacher representatives may contact their union. Your senior administrator may contact the local university. Your parent representative may come up with a partnership connection. These will develop over time as the initiative becomes integral to learning and teaching in the school and the larger population identifies with long-term studies available on school libraries, learner achievement, and work force requirements.

Depending on the size of your district, ask those interested to respond as to why they would like to be involved, in case you need to select. Your initial working

committee should stay at about 15 to 30 individuals. As district library head or superintendent, you may choose at this point to select two-three individuals from the group to co-chair the implementation committee and report to you, or you may choose to champion it yourself.

The first time your working group meets you will need to let representatives know what is expected of them. You will need to establish goals, outcomes, and plans. Committee representatives should be expected to:

- attend several sessions to read, review and study the standards document and other related documents
- join and participate in a listserv for timely updates and sharing of the work in progress
- precis the document to the groups they are representing
- create guiding questions to obtain input from others into the implementation plan; e.g., arrange two meetings or an email to work with a selected group of teachers or students for input into the implementation plan

Suggestions for guiding questions might be:

- *What ideas can you provide us with to enable schools to have exemplary school libraries?*
- *How can our schools meet the national standards for exemplary school libraries?*
- *What policies/structures/resources are needed to help our school libraries meet national exemplary standards?*
- *What support might you be able to provide for the steps to exemplary school libraries in our district?*

Once this data has been collected the next step is to analyze it to prioritize implementation strategies. What might these look like? It is now time to move into building a **district** plan. Identify strengths and weaknesses to get to the vision. Common goals, activities, and strategies need to be mapped out with timelines and areas of responsibility. With a new vision and standards for



Canadian school libraries, it is essential to take away where we are now in order to initiate change and improvement. A simple equation, VISION – MISSION (where we are now) = CHANGE, is needed in Canadian schools to embrace an information literate future and escape from the lure of standardized tests and agrarian curriculum.

Once a district has understood and studied the new vision for twenty-first century school libraries it must begin to resource it. Districts must not be afraid to start small with purchasing “things” and start big by purchasing/mentoring “people.” If just one person in each of the district’s schools strives to implement the vision on-site, it will develop. This person might be an administrator, a teacher-librarian, a teacher with interest. They may not have an hour a week to begin or they may have more time but they need to start to work with district support to move the school into a twenty-first century learning environment. How can this be done with no money?

Creating:

- Districts need encourage risk-taking and experimentation; sending out the current research, shared ideas in the school library field
- Districts must explore new models of staff development by:
 - sharing/visiting exemplary school libraries in the district or beyond
 - exploring other environments: other libraries and agencies such as the public library, university or college libraries, the Internet
 - focusing on learning and teaching: share projects, units, collaborations
 - job-shadowing personnel in exemplary situations to understand the complexity of the school library program

Sustaining

- Districts must develop and/or update board policy to reflect current school library standards
- Each school needs to write a sound business plan to resource the vision and outcomes as the work unfolds over time
- The district committee would be well advised to create a clear and direct implementation manual for school sites
- Districts could add requirement to each school’s improvement plan for school library improvement aligned with district and school goals
- Districts need to employ the use of “scanning tools”: annual reports, constant revisiting, ongoing dialogue, examining the “big picture” around on-site school library development
- Corporate or community partnerships and grant writing need to be accessed to help with the resourcing of school library programs
- Professional development networks need to be established to support the on-site personnel in the implementation.

For an example of what a “low-cost, high impact” network can look like, a “School Library Network” was formed in the fall of 1998 in an area of twenty-five schools in the Calgary Board of Education for the purpose of establishing dialogue groups for teacher-librarians or designates, library assistants and technicians. We met six times in a school year; in various host school libraries exploring topics requested by the group such as district news, conference/in-service information, and sharing of new professional books. Often district personnel attended for updates; we had been delighted to host Directors, Technology Specialists, and others. The network subscribed to two journals for articles, ideas, and book reviews: *Teacher-librarian Today* and *Resource Links*. Dialogue groups and a

listserv discussed technology and the school library, roles and responsibilities of school library staff, involving parents in the library, celebrating our successes, early literacy/new language arts curriculum, cooperative units/work with teachers, creating a school library web page, information literacy, our wellness. The “host” school provided us with a glimpse of their library and great snacks!

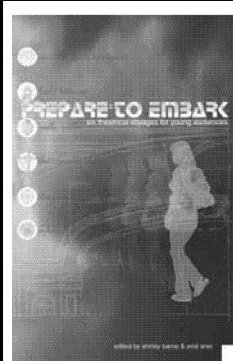
National Associations such as *The Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada* and *The Canadian School Library Association* can both provide support to a district’s implementation plan through such avenues as: professional membership; encouraging your district to join in national work, encouraging your district to nominate and be nominated for awards, providing opportunities for professional growth such as conference attendance and presenting, listserv, virtual discussion groups, university courses, research studies information, programs, services, and publications, and through a national calendar of events share district work with other provinces through journal, links on web site, conferences.

There is simply no excuse for school boards in a country such as ours to not work towards having exemplary school libraries. Starting small, taking time to build collections, to build understanding around a new educational vision. With exemplary school libraries, our children will be the educated elite of this century.



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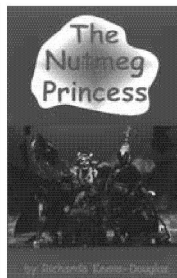


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