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Library Power: An International Perspective

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The goals of the Library Power Program are generally applicable to any school library reform project aiming at increased awareness of the importance of school libraries in an educational setting. Many practical approaches to improving school libraries were tested and found effective during the Library Power program, and these approaches have international relevance. The ideas that were found to be productive and successful in the Library Power program can be imported into other types of schools and settings, even without additional or special funding. However, for this to occur, there must be a commitment from the educational authorities to make this kind of school library work possible and feasible. There also must be a commitment from school librarians to enhance their role in the educational setting through professional development.

Introduction

The Library Power program has existed in the United States for more than a decade. The program was initiated in New York City schools and has been implemented in 19 other sites across the country. The evaluation of the library power program was undertaken by a team of researchers under the leadership of Dianne McAfee Hopkins and Douglas Zweig from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Library Power has been evaluated at the building level, the community level, the district level, and the national level to assess the impact on teachers, students, and the school community as a whole. This evaluation of the relevance of Library Power for the international community is based on two questions: (a) What lessons can be learned from this national program that can be of relevance to professionals in other countries with different educational systems, and can the international school library community utilize any part of the outcome of the Library Power project? (b) Are the questions that Library Power addressed universal questions related to school librarianship?

Assessment of International Relevance of Library Power

Unlike the authors of the other articles in this special issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* on the Library Power Program Evaluation, I have not been involved with Library Power at any stage, I have not seen it in action, and I have not participated in any of the evaluation efforts. My assessment of the international relevance of the Library Power program is based on an examination of the articles prepared by members of the Library Power evalua-

tion team as well as some of the materials describing the Library Power program.

I have looked at the findings of the evaluation carried out by the Library Power evaluation team, based on and informed by my personal knowledge of school libraries and librarianship in various countries. Before taking up my current position at NORDINFO, I was a professor in Library and Information Science at the University of Iceland where I have taught since 1975, including courses in school librarianship. Before that, I worked as school library director for the city of Reykjavik, Iceland, as a reference librarian in Michigan, USA, and as a consultant in Trujillo, Peru. I have been active in the international school library scene since 1982 and have traveled to about 60 countries. I was president the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) from 1995 to 1998. I have been a longstanding member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Standing Committee of the Section of School Libraries and Resource Centers. I was Chair of the IFLA Working Group on the Education and Training of School Librarians; our work resulted in the publication *School Librarians: Guidelines for Competency Requirements*. My knowledge of school librarianship around the world has also been enhanced through my membership in other associations such as the American Library Association, the Library Association (United Kingdom), the Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada, and IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People.

This evaluation of the potential relevance of Library Power for those outside the US is a judgment based on my personal knowledge of school libraries and librarianship in various countries. In this work, I have drawn from Elliot Eisner's connoisseurship model, that is, "the expert collects information and then uses his or her expert frames and insights to integrate, interpret and judge" (Greene, 1994, p. 538). I have also been guided by the general principles of qualitative, interpretive inquiry (Schwandt, 1994).

Library Power Lessons with International Applicability

What lessons might be learned from this national program that might be of relevance to school library professionals working in locations that are totally different from that of the library power program locations?

The goals for the National Library Power Program were:

- To create a national vision and new expectations for public elementary and middle school library programs and to encourage new and innovative uses of the library's physical and human resources;
- To create model library programs that are an integral part of the educational process;
- To strengthen and create awareness of the role of the librarian as a teacher and information specialist who assists teachers and students;

- To encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators, and librarians that results in significant improvement in the teaching and learning process;
- To demonstrate the significant contributions that library programs can make to school reform and restructuring efforts;
- To encourage the creation of partnerships among leaders in school districts, public libraries, community agencies, business communities, academic institutions, and parent groups to improve and support school library programs.

At the macro-level, with the exception of the two words in the first goal referring to a *national vision*, the goals of the project could have an international applicability even at the local level. These goals are consistent with those suggested in various documents from around the world, showing the way for school library developments. Each of the goal statements refers to improved use of school libraries as a resource within the school. The goals have international relevance for educational systems that favor inquiry methods for instruction rather than prescriptive instruction centered on predetermined content and texts.

Any project aiming at increased awareness of the importance of school libraries in the educational setting could subscribe to these goals. School library developments around the world are, in one way or another, guided by one or more of these goals. Most school librarians would like to see innovative use made of the library; they would wish that it were possible to show the significant contribution that the school library makes to school reform and restructuring efforts. They would wish for more collaborative efforts and partnerships, not only in the school but also in the community where the school operates.

At the micro-level, the activities developed to achieve the goals depend on the local situation. In the Library Power program, the many ideas can be used in different locations. A kind of "idea bank" is included here that demonstrates the applicability of the project and its outcomes for other situations. These ideas have been tested through the evaluation process and by the people who participated in the program. Readers will find other ideas throughout the evaluation documents that could be of value in their situations, but here I identify a few that seem to have particular relevance for the international scene.

Local Needs Analysis

The development of strategies for each individual school was a part of the Library Power program. The lessons learned through this process of local needs analysis could well be transferred to different circumstances. By involving as many members of the teaching staff as possible in the development of an effective school library program, more ownership will be taken of the development of the program as a whole, and the likelihood of a success-

ful program is increased. For example, any school could develop its own strategies of how to incorporate instruction in information-handling skills into the curriculum. Teachers and administrators need to be involved in this development in order to create a building-level vision and different ways of integrating the teaching of information skills with subject teaching.

Through the Library Power program it has been demonstrated that, although the goals were the same for the program in all sites, the design of activities to achieve the goals was different. The same should apply to schools in different countries. They should build on the strengths of their own teaching staff and adjust the school library program to enhance the working methods of the staff. An analysis of local needs would be the first step toward reaching the goals.

Use of the Library's Physical and Human Resources

The three basic components of the school library are housing or facilities, collection, and staff to provide services and programs of activities. Library Power has shown that all three are instrumental in the success of an effective school library program.

Facilities

Design and Decoration

As part of the Library Power program, an effort was made to upgrade the school library premises. A library that is attractive and carefully designed to accommodate a variety of uses will be used more often. The design and decoration of the library have a direct influence on patterns of use. The library needs to have different set-ups for different types of use: tables and chairs for instruction and reference work, informal seating arrangements for meetings and group work, and comfortable seats for reading and browsing. When the students are involved in the decoration of the library, they take ownership of the library and create an atmosphere of personal pride in the library.

Links to the Outside

The school library has been compared to an information storehouse that bridges the gap between the school and the world of information outside the school walls. In terms of links to other community agencies, the public library was the agency most likely to be involved at a community level with the Library Power program. Some public libraries even served on the school level Library Power advisory committees. The ideal situation would be if the school and the local public library were on the same information network so that students could search for information beyond the building level. However, any type of cooperation with the local public library needs to be properly structured and defined. A cooperative committee of representatives from the community, from the public library, and from the school should agree on the best way to proceed. All over the world, public librarians are unhappy

about flocks of students that arrive, with little preparation or guidance, to find sources for a project or paper. Planned cooperation is likely to result in better service and more satisfaction for all concerned.

Collections

The way collections were improved was one factor that made the Library Power project so special and innovative. Both money and training were provided for improvement of library collections. Collections were tailored to the curriculum, and teachers were involved in selecting the new materials. Improvement of library collections can be achieved in a number of ways. Participants in Library Power used different approaches to such processes as evaluating existing collections, weeding, selecting new materials, and allocating the money provided.

Collection Mapping

The technique of collection mapping was one method used to evaluate library collections. This method, developed by David Loertscher, involves a systematic evaluation of the present collection based on the current curriculum. Collection mapping also involves the school librarian, teachers, and principals in the collection development process. The items in each part of the collection are counted, and the count is represented in visual form using graphs. This way everybody can see how strong the collection is in each field or topic area. For this visualization, it is possible to use the Dewey Decimal Classification System or any other form of classification, but the graphs must show clearly how the collection is divided. When this visual image has been created, all those concerned are in a better position to evaluate how well the collection supports the needs of the teachers and their students. It is then possible to attach rating comments such as Poor, Average, Excellent to each of the categories. The next step in collection mapping is to evaluate how well each area of the collection supports that curriculum and to decide which areas are in need of support. On the basis of this evaluation, it is easier to develop an in-house strategy for strengthening the collection where it is found to be insufficient or inadequate. A budget can then be created to estimate how much it will cost to carry out the improvements.

Another way of beginning collection mapping is to analyze the available materials in terms of their copyright dates and to set up a visual image of the age of the material in each field or topic area. Thus one can visualize differently how well the material can support the curriculum. Age is a crucial factor in fields that change rapidly, but in other fields it may not make much difference how recent the material actually is.

The teachers, librarians, and administrators need to be involved in the evaluation of the library material, because they need to look at the collection development of the library as of mutual interest. It may be of value to ask the teachers their opinion of the strength of the collection in their particular field, but then it should be kept in mind that people could have different percep-

tions when they place an evaluation on library material. They might rate material in their field as low in order to increase the possibility of extra support. They might also rate the collection highly if they need to show that their particular field is well taken care of. However, in the Library Power evaluation, analysis of the collection was found to help the librarian and teachers focus in similar ways on the library and the curriculum.

Weeding

The Library Power evaluation showed that currency of material encouraged teachers to use the library. Weeding, therefore, is as important as selection of new material. When there is little budget to purchase new material, however, the weeding of material may be unpopular and, in fact, beyond the capability of the librarian. There is a tendency to cling to each item in the hope that it may have a potential use for somebody sometime. The collection mapping approach and the involvement of the whole school community are very valuable as a basis for weeding. In this way, it becomes the responsibility of the whole school to remove outdated and useless material. Furthermore, it may be of value for those planning to weed a collection to ask for outside expertise to assist with the process. An outside expert is neutral and can evaluate the collection objectively.

Selection of New Material

As mentioned above, one of the goals of Library Power was to encourage collaboration among teachers and librarians. Selection of material for the library is an area where librarians and teachers work together collaboratively in selecting the most useful material to support the curriculum. However, this collaboration must be promoted and encouraged in different ways. Principals must promote involvement of teachers in selection and provide planning time for this activity. The Library Power evaluation reports showed that, if teachers were involved in collection development, there was a direct benefit to the students through more relevant collections that were more likely to be used in instruction.

Allocation of Budget

Schools were able to allocate the budget for collection development to fit the curriculum and other local contexts. One idea that seemed to work well was that of mini-grants. Mini-grants were small funds that were used to encourage teachers to work with librarians to develop instructional proposals with important components. Teachers and librarians had to apply for these mini-grants, which provided seed money that could be used at the micro-level where individuals judge how best to make use of the extra dollars. The idea of mini-grants is transferable into the international community, where private donors outside the school, including businesses and independent associations, as well as parent-teacher associations could contribute small sums for particular purposes. Mini-grants could be used to encourage devel-

opment of classroom libraries or to support a particular subject area or type of material for the library collection.

Staff

Increased Expectations

One of the crucial elements of the Library Power program was to involve the school librarians in teaching information skills and to enable teachers and librarians to work together to improve teaching and learning in the school. Where this collaboration was most successful, many more demands were made on the skills and instructional contributions of the school librarians. They had to demonstrate leadership skills as well as skills in teaching and in designing instructional units. Furthermore, it was expected that the school librarians would take the lead in introducing students and teachers to the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web.

Through the experiences of the Library Power program, principals became more demanding in their expectations for librarians and for teacher librarian cooperation. Several principals voiced the expectation that any new librarian hired should be expected to put instructional activities first and to seek collaborative roles with all teachers. The librarian should be as much in demand as good new books and technology.

As one of the goals of Library Power indicated, the involvement of librarians and the use of library materials in the curriculum were foundations of the Program. It is therefore necessary to design a variety of curriculum activities involving the library. It is also necessary to provide library access to teachers and students when they need it, not only at predetermined times that suit the librarian. In this development, flexibility becomes the key concept.

Flexible Scheduling

A key aspect of Library Power that encouraged the teachers to take advantage of the materials available in the library was to have flexible access to up-to-date material. Teachers could make use of the flexible timing to find extra sources when designing activities for their class. Students use the library more spontaneously when they can go there and borrow books in their free time or when they wish to visit. Teachers also can send individual students to the library. This flexible access is important for all students. It can give students with learning needs more opportunity for individual attention, and it can give gifted and talented students more access to materials for independent studies. Flexible scheduling becomes a key component in the collaboration between teachers and librarians.

Collaboration

Collaboration between teachers and librarians in planning instruction must be facilitated by the school administration. Planning requires time, and especially at first it is time-consuming to link instructional goals and library-re-

lated activities. It is clear from the Library Power evaluation that productive cooperation is a skill that must be learned. Through practice, it becomes easier, and when the librarian and the teachers cooperate, in the long run they will become more familiar with what to expect from each other. It was not only the teachers and librarians who were expected to work together. The program also expected the teachers to cooperate among themselves to obtain maximum benefit for the school and the students.

Competence Development

For this high-level collaboration to be effective, several personality traits are fundamental: willingness to cooperate, willingness to share, and willingness to search for new and better ways to do things. The quality of teachers and librarians is a critical issue here. Competence and leadership are needed to achieve collaboration that is beneficial to both partners. To achieve the desired outcomes, it is necessary to offer a variety of competence-developing opportunities, both in terms of inservice training and coursework. In order for such opportunities to be properly designed and appropriate to the needs of each school, it is imperative to identify what the players really want and need. It is also imperative to select high-calibre presenters who have experience and knowledge of the issues that the training program is expected to address.

Are There Universal Questions Related to School Librarianship?

Diverse Contexts of School Libraries

School libraries were one of the last categories of libraries to be recognized by IFLA. Even today, after 25 years of international activities, there is no universal definition of what a school library is. School libraries in many countries are considered to be such an integral part of the school that they are not considered a part of the national library system; they are a part of the school, just like the gym. School libraries adapt and adjust to their institution and have in many instances no relationship with the outside community.

National school library development depends on the educational system and on the budget that is available for staff and material. In many countries, school library collections are dependent on the availability of material in the students' language and in the language of instruction. School library development also depends on the pedagogical methods practiced in the school. In many countries, much emphasis is placed on a fixed curriculum, on textbooks, and on predetermined material that needs to be covered. There is no space for individual investigation and exploration of the world of knowledge outside the classroom. In most countries, however, there are some school libraries at all levels of education. They are formed and they function in accordance with the needs of their institution and the educational opportunities that the staff can provide.

Education of School Librarians

One factor that is crucial in the development of school libraries around the world is the education of school librarians. Much too little attention is paid to the education of librarians for them to become partners in teaching and learning. In many instances, library schools have ignored the training of school librarians because emphasis is placed on the basic training of librarians, and librarians with education from library schools often are not employed in schools because they lack teacher training. Teacher training institutions often have ignored the specific education of these members of the teaching staff because of lack of definition of the essential competences needed for the school librarian to function well in the school setting. The result is that, in many countries, the majority of librarians in schools have little or no training for their particular duties. Often they are classroom teachers, often teachers of the mother tongue, who are given responsibility for the library for a few hours a week.

Transferability of School Library Philosophy and Practice

The question that still remains is if the experience from the Library Power program has transferability to other schools and educational systems. The issue of transferability is addressed in the evaluation report, but mainly in the national context, that is, if the lessons learned in one school could or would be transferable to another school. Transferability involves the sharing of ideas and philosophy, and this can be facilitated through investment in people, not through investments in collections, buildings, or technologies. It is the person that transfers the philosophy and the ideas for action. It is the person that is likely to reverse a bad situation or maintain a good situation. Here is where inservice education could help to create and sustain change.

The person who learns the philosophy and skills of collaboration in one educational setting will continue to work this way in another setting. In this way, the ideas that were found to be productive and successful in the Library Power program can be imported into other types of schools and settings, even without the budget attachment. However, for this to happen there also must be a commitment on behalf of the educational authorities to enable this kind of work. In addition to commitment at the local level, there needs also to be commitment at the postsecondary level in teacher training institutions. Teachers have an important role to play in collaborative work, and they need the opportunity to learn to work in this way through their teacher training. Teacher training institutions must ensure that when new teachers graduate, they have already been exposed to this kind of cooperative teaching. Teachers who accept teacher trainees for practice teaching must also themselves be expert in collaborative teaching. One lesson of Library Power is that the involvement of many people-principals, teachers, librarians, and community members-is necessary for there to be real changes in teaching and learning.

School librarians have an important role to play in teaching and learning, and they need to work to increase their own value and importance in the educational setting. Their contributions to the success of the school library program, and to teaching and learning generally, can be enhanced by professional development. The continuing professional learning of school librarians should include consideration of professional practice and research findings from around the world. School librarians need to work with others in education to evaluate those ideas in terms of their own contexts and, where appropriate, adapt these ideas to their own situations. The ideas are there, but only well-qualified, dedicated, and motivated professional educators can carry them out and make them work in different settings.

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