



∴ ontario school library association

January 20, 2020

Clerk of the Committee
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Room B-304, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Sent by email: comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

RE: Pre-Budget Consultations 2020 – Enhancing Accountability and Transparency to Protect Ontario's School Libraries

As you embark on the Pre-Budget Consultations ahead of Ontario's 2020 provincial budget, the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) appreciates the opportunity to bring your attention to an increasingly urgent issue impacting school libraries across the province.

OSLA's more than 1,300 members are front-line educators working in school libraries. They are essential for delivering Ontario's primary and secondary curriculum, making sure students have the digital and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in college, university or a career in the skilled trades.

Access to a properly staffed school library, no matter where you live in the province, is a proven, essential component of student success. School libraries foster students' love of reading, which research has shown has a positive impact on success in science and math, literacy scores, and students' social and civic engagement. Schools with trained library staff see better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.¹

Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and the critical resources they provide. The changes announced last spring to Ontario's class sizes further amplified this trend, as several school boards opted to close school libraries and repurpose trained teacher-librarians in anticipation of managing the expanded class sizes. For instance, this spring:

- Toronto District School Board announced a reduction in school library staffing, resulting in closure of the library throughout the instructional day or during lunch at 26 schools.
- Upper Canada District School Board reduced 160 staff positions, including 22 Learning Commons positions, with no contingency plan to keep the Learning Commons open and

¹ People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education. [School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario](#). Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006.

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staffed. This has in turn led to a significant decrease in library usage between September – December of last year, when these changes came into effect:

- Book circulation is down – a 49.5% decrease at the elementary level, and a 66.9% decrease at the secondary level.
 - Use of research databases has also fallen – a 47% decrease in use of elementary-focused databases, and a 96% decrease of secondary-focused databases.
- Halton District School Board has reduced secondary school library staffing by 50%, leading to largely unstaffed libraries and significantly less instruction for students in effective research techniques and basic skills, as well as the use of online databases and e-learning resources.

Despite the Ministry of Education’s updated direction on this matter, we’ve seen no reversal of this accelerating decline at the local level.

Ontario provides the overwhelming majority of annual operating funding to school boards through the Grants for Student Needs, or GSN. Despite a well-established, provincial per-student funding formula for school libraries through the Pupil Foundation Grant, school boards are not required to spend the funds as intended by the ministry formula. Funds earmarked for school libraries are used to fund other priorities, directly leading to fewer library staff as well as the closing of school libraries altogether. We estimate that as much as half of funds - up to \$100 million annually - for school libraries is being otherwise used by school boards to address shortfalls or other local priorities.

We have written to the Minister of Education to bring this urgent matter to his attention, and strongly urge the Ministry of Education to enhance the accountability and transparency of this provincial investment by mandating that the annual funds currently allocated by the Ministry of Education to school boards for school libraries and library staff are spent on these priorities. Enhancing transparency and accountability from school boards for the use of these allocated funds will protect and restore access for all Ontario students – no matter where they live. This can be achieved while respecting the independence of school boards and ensuring sufficient local flexibility on how best to apply this funding.

We are enclosing a copy of the September 2019 issue of our organization’s magazine, The Teaching Librarian. The feature article of this issue looks at the state of Ontario’s school libraries. It illustrates the current reality of declining school libraries, especially in Northern, Southwestern and Eastern Ontario. Even as the issue was going to print, another school board made the decision to eliminate nearly all library staff. Since publication, more boards have reduced school library learning commons programs. We are concerned that this is and will continue to have a substantial impact on achieving the province’s objectives for student success.

OSLA continues its work to ensure Ontario students receive a world-class education. As you embark on the process of developing Ontario’s next budget and look ahead to the next iteration

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of the GSN, it is crucial that accountability and transparency for existing provincial investments in school libraries are implemented. This will ensure that our students have the best chance of success, no matter where they live or what path they pursue.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Brown

OSLA President and on behalf of [2019 OSLA Council Members](#)

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THE Teaching Librarian

The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association
ISSN 1188679X

Fast Facts
for Teacher-
Librarians

PAGE 20

the state of school libraries

School Libraries by the Numbers

See how school libraries are run and staffed in each region of Ontario

PAGE 22

Why School Libraries?

Authors and booksellers give their take

PAGES 12 AND 38

Read more about

how school library funding
and OLA research

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SPECIAL EDITION: THE STATE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

TingL Fixtures

- 6** The Editor's Notebook
Caroline Freibauer
- 8** President's Report
Jenn Brown
- 10** Book Buzz
Joanne Sallay
- 12** Meet the Author Reimagined
Angela Thompson
- 14** The Role of Librarian in Today's Digital Age
Leah Kearney
- 15** We're All In This Together
Anita Brooks Kirkland
- 16** Drawn to the Form
Diana Maliszewski

TingL Features

- 18** Collaborative Team Tables Help Students Learn
Tara Zwolinski
- 19** Incubating Ideas: Secondary School Library Value in the Information Age
Marc d'Avernas
- 38** A Bookseller's View of the State of School Libraries in Ontario: An Interview With Tinlids Wholesaler Maria Martella
- 40** State of the Art: Project-Based Learning in the Library with ELL Students and A First Nations Artist
Karen Weber and Bryn Dewar
- 42** Classifying Ourselves: Library Organization in Indigenous Contexts
Kasey Whalley

Special Features

- 20** Fast Facts for Teacher-Librarians
Infographic
- 22** The State of Elementary School Libraries
Infographic
- 26** Learning Commons Northern Style
Jane Rodrigues *Northern Ontario*
- 26** Libraries in the North
Caroline Freibauer *Northern Ontario*
- 27** Teacher-Librarian Spotlight: Kate Tuff at the Bloorview School Authority
Kasey Whalley *Greater Toronto Area*
- 28** Life As A Fraction
Nancy Cheong *Central Ontario*
- 29** Peel District Libraries Change in Looks and Thinking
Trish Hurley *Central Ontario*
- 31** Friendly Competition: Celebrating Reading in New Ways at Elmwood Schools
Kimberly Senf *Eastern Ontario*
- 32** Library Transforms with its School
Kimberly Senf *Eastern Ontario*
- 33** Making Connections
Cathy MacKechnie *Eastern Ontario*
- 33** State of School Libraries at Upper Canada District School Board
Patricia Sutherland *Eastern Ontario*
- 34** Grand Erie Revitalizes Library Spaces
Cynthia Gozzard *Southwestern Ontario*
- 35** School Library Funding in Ontario
Shelagh Paterson

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Volume 27, Issue 1



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TingL Mission

The Teaching Librarian

The Teaching Librarian (TingL) is the official magazine of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA). It is published three times a year to support OSLA members in providing significant and effective library programs and services. *The Teaching Librarian* promotes library programs and curriculum development that furthers exemplary educational objectives. The magazine fosters effective collaboration within the school library community and provides a forum to share experience and expertise.

TingL References

The Teaching Librarian is a general magazine for OSLA members and not a scholarly journal. If your article does require citation of sources, please provide them within the text of your article or column with as much or as little bibliographic information as necessary for identification (e.g. book title, year). If you feel that the works you are citing require full identification, please provide a bibliography at the end of your piece, formatted according to the latest Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) or APA Style.

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TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

January Issue V. 27, Issue 2	“Quiet @ your library” Deadline: September 30, 2019
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May Issue V. 27, Issue 3	Theme to be Determined Deadline: January 31, 2020
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September Issue V. 28, Issue 1	Theme to be Determined Deadline: May 27, 2020
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Articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words are welcome. Articles, when approved, should be accompanied by high quality images and/or graphics whenever possible. Text must be sent electronically, preferably in a Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. Images or graphics must be sent separately in a digital format, such as .jpeg, .png, .tiff, or .ai. The minimum resolution must be 1000 px at 150 dpi. With photos that contain a recognized individual, please secure the individual's permission in writing for the use of the photo. Photos taken at public events or crowd shots taken in a public place do not require permission from the subjects. All submissions are subject to editing for consistency, length, content, and style. Journalistic style is preferred. *The Teaching Librarian* adheres to Canadian Press Style. Articles must include the working title, name of author, and email address in the body of the text. OSLA reserves the right to use pictures in other OSLA publications unless permission is limited or denied at the time of publishing.

When writers consent to having articles published in *The Teaching Librarian* magazine, permission is also granted to online distribution of the periodical through accessola.com and educational databases, without expectation of financial compensation. Ownership and copyright of the article is still retained by the original authors. Any questions about submissions should be directed to the Editor of *The Teaching Librarian*: teachinglibrarian@outlook.com.

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The Editor's Notebook



Caroline Freibauer

**“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...
— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859”**

These famous opening lines to Dicken’s novel about the French Revolution call to mind what is happening in school libraries across Ontario. It is the best of times in many library learning commons where students are collaborating, creating and learning thanks to qualified library staff who are able to animate spaces filled with books, technology and any number of supplies needed to fuel maker spaces. And it is the worst of times, as provincial funding restraints trigger cuts to school library staff, leaving many library learning commons spaces unsupervised. Meanwhile, technology is making it easier every day to create and disseminate “fake news,” is changing the employment landscape and is putting pressure on education to transform.

It is against this backdrop that the Ontario School Library Association, with support from the Ontario Library Association, has been championing the school library learning commons. I have been thinking about the state of school libraries in Ontario for a long time. I am amazed that each jurisdiction in the province seems to have a different interpretation of the benefits of a vibrant school library learning commons and that administrators and educators at one end of the province have no idea what is happening at the other. For example, many of my colleagues and I in the southern part of the province have no idea what is happening in the north. In some cases, even boards working side by side do not know how the other has decided to set up and staff library learning commons spaces. It became clear that *The Teaching Librarian* needed to paint a picture of the school library landscape in this province so that we at least understand what is happening.

The project seemed straight forward. Boy was I wrong. Although the volunteer editorial team worked hard to contact as many school boards as possible, many boards were reluctant to share information. It was difficult to find the right person at the board who was authorized to share information. And, just before we started, the provincial government announced increased class sizes and changed school budgets. The consequence is that school boards were reducing school library staffing as we were gathering information. It was a little like working in quicksand.

In the end, we received a huge boost from People for Education, which agreed to share data from a survey conducted in September 2018. Although not the most current information, the data provide a backdrop for the stories and news facts that we were able to unearth. Now, in one space, educators, school library staff, administrators, parents, politicians and anyone else who might be interested, will be able to see what is happening in school libraries across the province—good or bad. And, to help fill out the picture, we have included information about school library funding formulas and research on the co-relation between healthy school library programs and student success.

Looking at the People for Education data I was surprised to learn that the Southwest—where I teach—had the highest ratio of students to teacher librarians in the province.

We hope readers will learn something about the state of school libraries in Ontario and are able to use this information to prepare for the revolution that will come. ■

DON'T MISS OUT ON YOUR MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS THIS FALL

Keep your membership active! As an OLA and OSLA member, you get access to special membership benefits and perks:

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President's Report

It is such a privilege to see this issue of *The Teaching Librarian* come to life. Venturing to capture a snapshot of the diversity of school libraries across the province is at once a thrill and a challenge. I am so grateful for the incredible work of the editorial team, the contributors and the OLA staff to bring this together. This publication can serve as a resource for school staff and administrators as we work together to strengthen school libraries throughout Ontario.

For decades the changing state of school libraries has been a topic that created both tension and inspiration. Under multiple governments, funding for school libraries has remained at the discretion of each school board to distribute to best meet the needs of their students. This has resulted in a wide range of staffing, funding and philosophical models throughout the province. We know that the impact of this wide variety in library models came to a head during the OLA AGM in 2019. A long-standing tension between the predominance of our use of the term teacher-librarian and its lack of inclusion of school library staff who possess other types of qualifications and job titles reached its boiling point. A motion brought forth to change the language ultimately led to the creation of a striking committee to produce a by-law committee to review the existing language and come back to the membership prior to the 2020 AGM with recommendations for moving forward.

It would be easy to focus on the tension, the hurt feelings and the stress of this experience and the many years that led to this motion coming forth. It also would be easy to suggest that we are in a crisis in school libraries and in education. We know that we have school libraries throughout the province that are no longer staffed, or open to students during the instructional day or funded in the manner we all believe they should be. For me, this issue of *The Teaching Librarian* is not intended to fuel that fear or crisis mindset. By taking the pulse of the school library world in Ontario, *The Teaching Librarian* is providing us with yet another tool for the advocacy work we need to encourage all stakeholders to place school libraries as a priority in future funding and planning models.

Even if the tension created by the changing state of school libraries is at the forefront of our current experience, we cannot forget the inspiring work happening in our school library learning commons each day. Since its original publication in 2010, *Together For Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons, A Vision for the 21st Century* profoundly impacted the way we design school libraries and the day to day learning experiences we provide for our school communities. We know that our members continue to inspire and support students and staff each and every day with the important work they do. We must help each other hang on to the “good news” stories from our libraries even when we feel disheartened by cuts to programming and job losses.

With that in mind here are some “good news” updates from your OSLA Council:

By-Law Committee: As mentioned above, members of the By-Law Committee met virtually and in person throughout the summer, working with a representative from the Rotman iThink initiative to move their work forward. The committee represents non-teacher-librarians, teacher-librarians and OLA members outside the school library community.

OSLA Twitter Account: The account, which is run by all council members, has been extremely active this year. We are proud to be gaining followers and observing a significant increase in member engagement and interactions on this social media platform. Follow us @oslacouncil.

Member Outreach Committee: Partially in response to the discussion at the OLA AGM about member inclusion and engagement, the council created a new sub-committee focused on developing new ways of connecting with OSLA members throughout the year. The committee consists of myself, two existing council members and an OSLA member who is in a non-teacher-librarian role. Current members Johanna Lawler, Shelley Merton, and Nancy Clow have worked together to facilitate networking and communication opportunities for OSLA members, identify and respond to membership needs and communicate with members on a regular basis.



Jenn Brown

Member Outreach Initiatives: Thanks to the hard work of the Member Outreach Committee, the following initiatives are in the works for 2019-20: an online member outreach survey, a book club using 2019 Red Maple Non-Fiction nominated title *#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women* (Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale) and a casual member “meet-up” during the 2020 OLA Super Conference.

Together for Learning Update: OSLA Council is working to update the document to reflect changes in school libraries since it was launched 10 years ago.

Government Advocacy: In consultation with OLA staff, OSLA council prepared a brief for the Ministry of Education outlining the impact of funding changes on school libraries across the province.

As we reflect on the state of school libraries and the work we do, it is important that we find ways to connect and support one another. School libraries are in the midst of continual transformation, some of it involving changes in technology, some of it reflected in staffing changes and some of it reflective of changing provincial governments. All of this change has created tension at all levels in school libraries. But it is in the resolution of the greatest difficulties that we can experience the best outcomes. In the coming year we are looking forward to some spectacular developments. ■



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***The Teaching Librarian* is looking for contributors!**

Interested in writing for *The Teaching Librarian*? Here are themes and submission deadlines for upcoming issues:

**“Quiet @ your library”
Deadline: September 30, 2019**

**Theme to be Determined
Deadline: January 31, 2020**

We are looking for articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words with high-resolution images or illustrations. Please see page 5 for more detailed information on submitting articles.

The Teaching Librarian adheres to Canadian Press Style.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Book Buzz

Joanne Sallay

Welcome back! I hope everyone had a rejuvenating summer with time to take a “bookcation” to catch up on personal reading, which can be challenging during the busy school year.

This issue’s theme—The State of School Libraries—caused me to reflect on my own relationship with this space. The school library is extremely special to me, as are the teacher-librarians who manage them and instill a love of reading in students. It brings me great joy that my son, who is now in elementary school, loves spending time in the Learning Commons. I have no shortage of material to read in our home as a reviewer of children’s books, but my son always prefers the books he takes home from school (often curated with care by his TL) to read before bedtime.

This inspired me to reach out to the authors in our province who write for our children and interact with them during author visits. I wanted to gain their views on the importance of school libraries from their personal and professional perspectives.

At the same time, I wanted to share a sneak peek on their latest work:

Vikki VanSickle

“I love returning to schools as an author to give presentations in libraries, the place where it all started for me as a book-loving kid with big dreams of being a writer. To me, the library has always been the ‘kitchen’ of the school: a cozy meeting place where teachers and students can go to relax, connect, and share stories. For many children, the library is a safe space and a much-needed oasis in their hectic lives. A school without a library, staffed by a devoted librarian, is like a house without a kitchen; not something I like to imagine.”



Latest Book: Teddy Bear of the Year

Written by Vikki VanSickle, Illustrated by Sydney Hanson
Tundra

ISBN 9780735263925 (on sale January 21, 2020)

In this picture book, the teddy bears’ picnic gets a modern twist. The story follows a young teddy bear who learns about the impact of small acts of kindness. Available to pre-order online.

Kevin Sylvester

“I’m fully on record defending school libraries. They are, to me, sacred places. They are the only place where kids themselves are given some agency in their own education. It’s where they get asked what they want to read and what types of books. They are also safe and fun places where kids have the freedom to explore. Sadly, we’ve seen very public attacks on them (from governments and even school boards) and a less public clawing away of spaces and time. By time, I mean that I can’t believe how many librarians are now called on to cover prep time, recess time, etc. Study after study shows how important a library is to the future success of the students. Look to private schools. They have incredibly well-stocked shelves, often with separate full-time librarians for each level of the school. They know the school library is essential.”

Latest Book: Gargantua Jr: Defender of Earth

Written and Illustrated by Kevin Sylvester
Groundwood Books Ltd

ISBN 9781773061825 (published 2019)

Fans of Kevin Sylvester’s fun and humorous style won’t want to miss his latest picture book featuring a baby monster and his mom.



Rumeet Billan

“Growing up, I lived at the library. Looking back, I’ve come to appreciate how much this has impacted my worldview and love for learning. It was a second home for me, and continues to be for so many.

A school library can shape the future of a child, and it does by providing access to books, perspectives and adventures. The importance and impact of this can’t be emphasized enough. We know the statistics around children’s literacy and the significance of having access to books and especially for those who may not have access to them at home. A school library fills a gap for so many while enriching perspectives for all.

When my son was born, one of the first things I did was go to the public library and have a library card made for him. I was told by a staff member that he didn’t need one and could use mine, but I shared with them the significance of him having his own card. I wanted him to have access to the world of possibilities, and my hope is that he continues to have access to libraries when he is in school and beyond.”

Debut Book: *Who Do I Want to Become?*

Written by Rumeet Billan, Illustrated by Michelle Clement
Page Two Books, Inc.

ISBN 9781989025659 (published 2018)

This debut picture book from Dr. Rumeet Billan introduces both character education and career exploration in a modern story.

Jess Keating

“My school library was more than just a room. It was a place I could go to learn anything – to be anybody. It was an open door to the big world outside, and a ladder to a higher perspective. That means a lot to a kid with big dreams in a tiny town. I owe so much to my school library, and it’s an honour to write books that sit on those same shelves today.”

Latest Book: *Nikki Tesla and the Ferret-Proof Death Ray* (Elements of Genius Book #1)

Written by Jess Keating
Scholastic Press

ISBN 9781338295214 (published July 2019)

Hot off the presses, released this July, is Jess Keating’s new STEM series for middle school readers.



Marina Cohen

“School libraries have certainly evolved over the years in many wonderful and exciting ways. As both teacher and children’s author I have witnessed this metamorphosis first hand. With initiatives like Modern Learning, school libraries have transformed into vibrant hubs complete with Lego walls, maker spaces, student run cafés, and even stationary bikes. I worry, however, despite this rich learning environment, the focus of literacy and the simple enjoyment of literary works is being relegated to a small corner and the role of the librarian is being stretched so thin with many having very little actual time in the library dedicated to reading programs. I have seen a direct correlation between passionate librarians with time in the library and the number of enthusiastic readers in a school. Hopefully we will continue to see new and exciting changes, but will never lose site of the books and the readers.”

Latest Book: *A Box of Bones*

Written by Marina Cohen

Roaring Brook Press

ISBN 9781250172211 (published 2019)

Marina Cohen’s latest book follows Kallie, a scientific-minded 12-year-old, who receives a mysterious puzzle box from a faceless man inspiring a journey to unlock its secrets.

Shane Peacock

“The most important thing we can do for our children, after loving them and sheltering them, is to teach them how to read, and to read well. School libraries are at the centre of that effort, and are thus invaluable. Too often that is not understood by people who make decisions in the school system, and over the last few decades we have seen the shrinking of the number of librarians in schools. When I speak in schools, and I have done that throughout Canada, the United States and Europe, it is almost always at the invitation of a librarian, and my presentations are often done in libraries. A good author presentation can have a lasting effect on students. I have often been in schools where librarians and teachers tell me that after my sessions students have turned their academic careers around, and with that perhaps their lives, because they were inspired for the first time to read. Here’s to school libraries, librarians, and author visits!”

Latest Book: *Demon: The Dark Missions of Edgar Brim*

Written by Shane Peacock

Tundra

ISBN 9781770497047 (published 2019)

Just released this August, *Demon* is the third book in Shane Peacock’s Gothic trilogy, *The Dark Missions of Edgar Brim*, which features monsters from classic literary tales. ■

Meet the Author Reimagined

School libraries are special places. It is where many of us have had our first taste of the wealth of information and story contained on written pages.

The first teacher I looked up to was my Grade 1 teacher, Mr. Shaw, who introduced me to my “new best friend”—our school librarian. Mrs. Woodleigh spent the next six years letting me take out more books than I was technically allowed and giving me a safe space to imagine myself in the worlds and places I read about.

These sentiments are not unique, and as you read the reflections from Canadian authors that follow, I encourage you to remember your own experiences.



Leah Bobet

An Inheritance of Ashes (Clarion Books/
Scholastic Canada, October 2015)
Above (Arthur A. Levine Books, April 2012)

The neighbourhood I grew up in was not rich in libraries: farmland converting to suburbs fast; the few older municipal libraries would take years to catch up. My school library was small and anything but current, but had a school librarian who recognized a restless early reader, hungry for things she couldn't describe. To this day, I'm sure she colluded with my first grade teacher to steer me toward the third-grade books, and then seventh-grade, and then adult: Agatha Christie, L. Frank Baum, Arthur Conan Doyle. I was encouraged to try anything. Reading level and “should” didn't matter.

The beginning of supporting people is to meet them where they are. A school librarian is where their students are: seeing them day to day, chatting with teachers, already part of the shape of their lives. My school librarian, Sonia, was close enough to see me: a kid who needed to set my own pace. It's powerful, making space for a six-year-old to figure out what they want and how. It wasn't the beginning of me as a reader or writer, but it definitely began me as a person: one who could say what was right for her, try things, and move past “should” into what might be possible. The power of libraries and librarians in schools is that steady, supportive power: the kind that's stronger for being so persistent, and over the years, helps make people more.



Brian McLachlan

What Noise Do I Make (OwlKids Books, July 2016)
Draw Out the Story (OwlKids Books, September 2013)

When my kids were a bit younger, I'd get a stack of about 30-40 picture books from the city library each week. My wife and I read our kids books that taught them about our culture and about others. We read ones with characters that looked like my kids and ones where they didn't. We read funny ones and solemn ones. Scary stories and comforting favourites. Fiction and nonfiction. Graphic novels. Poetry. Everything we could get. The librarians knew me as one of their best book circulators. Yet even I am still a gatekeeper.

When my kids get books from the school library they can pick whatever they want. Sometimes they get another in a series that I introduced them to. That's cool. But they also pick books even I didn't think to get. My elder son regularly loves to get the huge heavy encyclopedias of super heroes and pore over them. I had a blind spot. When I compared the weight of getting one of those, or getting three other books for the same backpack/stroller space, I gambled the greater number of choices. And my younger one just started getting chapter books as a way to indicate his hunger to hear longer stories without having to articulate it. I say this because it's impossible to be a perfect book provider no matter how hard you try (and boy did I try). Whether a kid comes from the most or least book-friendly family, the school's shelves provide a chance to discover something that they aren't getting someplace else. That's why it's so important that the library has a dedicated curator and strong budget to stock something to meet each and every child's needs.



Regan McDonell

Black Chuck (Orca Book Publishers, 2018)

There are a handful of books that have stuck with me my entire life. They've formed the basis of the kind of books I love to read today, and also the kinds of books I like to write. S.E. Hinton, Joyce Sweeney and Judy Blume were

Angela Thompson

my childhood heroes (and they still are), and I discovered all of them at my school library. When I re-read their books now, it takes me back in time so completely, I can see the colour of the carpet in that library. I'm not sure I would have written my own book if I hadn't had the opportunity to fall utterly in love with reading at my school library as a kid!



Susan Hughes

Walking in the City with Jane: A Story of Jane Jacobs (Kids Can Press, April 2018)
What Happens Next (OwlKids Books, 2018)

I can't imagine my school days, especially elementary school, without our school library. When I think back to those days, it's often

the library I picture first. I spent sooooo much time in that space! I felt a profound connection with the rows and rows of books, the room itself—the tables and chairs, the rug, the light filtering in through the high windows, the bursts of laughter, the stillness—and, of course, the librarian. I'd take home and read literally dozens of books every week—books representing every Dewey Decimal category in the library!

Our librarian, a true educator and multi-tasker, always responded encouragingly and with individual attention to my quiet passion for stories and information. At the same time, she had organized a group of Book Worms comprised of students of various ages. We had meetings occasionally but more importantly were allowed to help out in the library—filing cards into the card catalogue, tidying the tables and shelves, re-shelving returns, sometimes blissfully reading to the younger kids ... I was a constant visitor—although “visitor” doesn't nearly express my relationship to my school library. No, it was more. I felt at home there, I belonged. And I'm smiling as I write this, because, as a children's book writer, I now see how I have continued to surround myself with children's books.



Bev Katz Rosenbaum

Who is Tanky? (Orca Book Publishers, August 2019)

I'm totally not exaggerating when I tell you I think my regular visits to my school library as a kid and teen saved my life.

I was a shy and lonely kid who had a difficult home life, and books offered glimpses into other lives, other ways to be, other kinds of families. My favourite books have always been those featuring heroines who are unseen, unheard and from straitened circumstances who somehow manage to rise above. And those are the kind of books I write now, for children and teens like my younger self.

So not only did libraries give me glimpses into other lives, they also gave me a career.

I can still call up the image of my elementary school librarian—so incredibly smart and kind and super helpful with essays and projects!

As I write this, I'm preparing for an upcoming signing of my new middle grade novel, *Who is Tanky?*, at the American Library Association conference in Washington, D.C., I'm so excited to talk about my new book to librarians.

I'm horrified that school libraries and teacher-librarians are currently considered expendable by many short-sighted politicians. Let's do everything in our power to keep these glorious learning centres the havens they are for so many—the havens they were for me (particularly at lunchtime), for which I'll be forever grateful. ■

The Role of Librarian in Today's Digital Age

“The librarian isn’t a clerk who happens to work at a library. A librarian is a data hound, a guide, a sherpa and a teacher. The librarian is the interface between reams of data and the untrained but motivated user.

— Seth Godin, “The Future of the Library”
(seths.blog/2011/05/the-future-of-the-library)

”

Libraries always have been leaders in the effort to democratize information, and their goal is to provide everyone with access to free, unbiased and quality information.



Libraries are essential to the development of engaged citizens who are thoughtful, critical, creative thinkers. In today's era of information overload, never has it been so important to be able to decipher and decode this information to make it meaningful and relevant.

How can librarians facilitate the way in which our students make sense in our digital culture?

- Increase access to online resources;
- Highlight quality information in an era of alternative facts;
- And ensure that the online resources and content are representative of all Ontarians to support equity and social justice.

As teacher-librarians, you play an integral role in developing young minds, and TVO can serve as an important partner for you.

You probably already know that TVO.org regularly shares culturally sensitive, quality journalism and video story-telling that can support your learning goals. But did you know that TVO also offers impactful and award-winning digital learning resources that support the realization of student potential?

When looking for additional ways to foster learning, understanding and engagement related to Ontario's K-12 curriculum, look no further than TVOkids.com, TVO mPower, TVO Mathify, TVO ILC.

Our resources represent all Ontarians, and many are available free for public and First Nations schools and communities across the province. ■

We're All In This Together

This edition's theme conjures a familiar queasiness cultivated over decades of crisis talk. The topic lifts the lid on internal divisions and misunderstandings. The great disparities in school library staffing and funding models across Ontario (*People for Education, 2019 Annual report on schools*) are symptomatic of the lack of a clear understanding among policy-makers of the potential that school libraries have to offer. Among ourselves, discussion frequently devolves into acrimonious debates about staffing. Our vision gets clouded and we lose sight of our mission.

"Every child in Canada deserves an excellent school library. All schools in Canada need to be able to develop and support excellent school libraries responsive to the diverse needs of learners today and into the future."

— *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*

It's not about us, it's about the students.

School library programs exist to support student learning and growth. Period. Our future depends on sharing a clear vision of the unique value of the school library in terms of student success. Our future depends on working together, respecting each other's roles and understanding our interdependence.

School districts that don't understand the role of the school library program as essential to student learning and growth cut budgets and reduce and/or de-professionalize staffing. If our reaction is to feel threatened by each other then we have completely missed the boat. We all lose when programs are devalued.

Teacher-Librarians are professional educators, and make the learning connection for students through collaboration with their teaching colleagues. With poor library technical support that teaching focus by necessity shifts to operational focus, diminishing their relevance as teachers.

Library technicians have the skills and knowledge to run the library efficiently and provide services, but the absence of a teaching focus increases the risk of the library being perceived as a frill and not at the heart of the school's success plan.

School districts without effective instructional and technical leadership for school library programs leave school-based personnel unsupported and further sidelined.

Student Success and the School Library Learning Commons



Source: canadianschoollibraries.ca/excellent-school-libraries

We need teacher-librarians. We need library technicians and all manner of library professionals. We need to work together to move forward with a unified, student-centred vision of the unique value of the school library learning commons. We need to understand how each of us contributes to that vision, and respect what others also have to contribute. We can grow in our roles with common purpose, using the *Leading Learning* framework as our guide. Our future depends on it. After all, we're all in this together. ■

"When provincial, national, or international learning assessments are analyzed, the areas of concern that emerge are frequently library-related, particularly in the realm of information literacy practices: formulating questions, identifying appropriate sources of information, locating information, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information."

— D. Oberg (2012). Ignoring the evidence: Another decade of decline for school libraries. *EdCan Network*.

DRAWN TO THE FORM

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAY ODJICK

Jay Odjick is a writer, artist and television producer from the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Algonquin Nation in Quebec.

After writing and drawing his graphic novel *KAGAGI: The Raven*, Jay co-founded a company that produced a television series called *Kagagi* based on the graphic novel.

Jay's work has been featured at Canada's National Library and Archives, the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, and at Canada's Museum of History.

Language revitalization is important to Jay, although he is not a fluent speaker of the Algonquin language. He funded Indigenous language versions of *Kagagi* to share the language and has created the Algonquin Word of The Day initiative on Twitter.

Most recently, Jay provided the artwork for the Robert Munsch books *Blackflies* and *Bear for Breakfast*, which was published in English and Algonquin.

In addition to comics, television and kids books, he writes for the *Ottawa Citizen*, mostly about contemporary Indigenous issues, and he teaches at the University of Ottawa.

You can find Jay on Facebook or on Twitter @jayodjick.

Diana: Jay, I've read that you loved to write and draw from an early age. Is it true that you received your first rejection letter from Marvel Comics at the age of ten? What authors, illustrators, and/or series inspired you back then?

That is a hundred per cent true story! My brother had subscribed to GI Joe from Marvel comics and every month we'd get a new issue of the comic. I drew some characters and

sent the art to Marvel, saying if they wanted to use them in the comic, they could! Now, as a professional, I'm like, you were just giving away intellectual property for free!

Anyway, long story short, they wrote back and said that my skills weren't at the Marvel level ... which, y' know, I have to agree with as I was ten years old!

As a kid, I don't remember writers so much who stood out or who I'd taken note of, but the two guys I remember most looking up to artistically were Todd McFarlane and John Byrne.

How important is it to have Cree authors and illustrators telling Cree stories, or Algonquin creators behind Algonquin narratives?

It's very important to have some level of inclusion or representation on creative. I'm not saying non-Natives can't tell stories with Native characters or elements—but to tell our stories is a tricky thing.

Look at it this way, Native people have had a very hard time to find purchase in these industries. You COULD choose to tell our stories but in doing so you need to understand that you are most likely taking away our ability to do so. This is a big, complex issue and I'm not sure I have time to really delve deep into it all here, but another thing to consider is that for non-Natives, especially Caucasian, you can pitch pretty much anything. However, for us, all too often we are kind of expected to do ONLY Native or Indigenous material—that's what's expected of us, or even ASKED of us.

So if those stories are already being told, what can we do? We remain on the outskirts or fringes of the entertainment industry due to this.

I've had people argue stories are stories and everything is fair game. Fair enough, but you have to understand you are contributing to the marginalization and under-representation of Indigenous people in so doing.

Diana Maliszewski

You have to decide for yourself what kind of person you are and whether or not you are cool with helping to silence groups of people.

What suggestions would you offer to settler/non-Native authors and illustrators considering creating a creative product that involves plots, characters, or settings of a particular First Nation group?

Get Native representation on your creative team. Visit Native communities if you are planning to write using them as settings. You'd be surprised how often that isn't done. Understand that you are helping to keep us on the outside of these industries otherwise. You can use Native characters—but telling our stories FOR us is the way of the past. We're here, despite the many attempts for that not to be so. Encourage and support us to use our voices, because realistically only WE know what our reality is truly like.

How supportive is your professional community of your culture? How supportive is your cultural community of your profession?

My culture doesn't tend to come up in my circle of friends who are in the same or similar fields—there may be times we've compared certain things, you know, traditions and the like, or discussed topics, such as cultural appropriation, but it's like religion. You have friends with differing belief systems, but you spend more time talking about what you have in common than what you don't.

In so far as publishers go, Scholastic has been fantastic and I could not have found a better professional home, or one more supportive of my culture and language.

My community—Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg—is one hundred per cent behind me. I can feel the energy from the people at home pushing me forward and they know that I do a lot of what I do for them, for our youth, to create opportunities, to help provide educational resources and to try to inspire and show what's possible.

This year, with *Bear For Breakfast*, we have an Indigenous language book in every major bookstore in the country—a

national bestseller at that, as the book opened at #3 nationwide. The Algonquin version is KZ dialect—dialects differ from community to community. So that's something I think we can all be proud of and hopefully use as a tool to help keep the language alive.

How can school libraries best promote comics by and about First Nations people?

What a great question! I wish I had a better answer because what I'm about to say feels weak but I think having Native writers or artists in to speak on special occasions would be cool. Having a Native or Indigenous section IN the libraries could be useful, although I don't know if long term that's an option as I feel like it could end up feeling like a sort of literary segregation of sorts. ■

INTRODUCING EI BUNDLES

Take your PD budget further with EI bundles!

The Education Institute (EI) is a professional development program, home to dozens of webinars for library staff exploring topics on teaching, research, assessment, technology, and more!

This webinar bundle offers 5 webinars for one low fee. Throughout the year, courses will be presented by experts for staff who work in elementary, middle, and high schools or school libraries.

Visit our website at educationinstitute.ca or email education@accessola.com for more information.

ei
EDUCATION INSTITUTE

Collaborative Team Tables Help Students Learn

Library Learning Commons are culturally responsive and relevant spaces that expand the learning experiences and focus on learning collaboratively.

To harness the opportunities presented by the swift advances in information and communication technology, school libraries are adding a variety of different tools. One such tool is the collaborative team table.

A recent renovation of the Library Learning Commons at Duke of Connaught Junior Public School in Toronto saw the addition of two collaborative team tables, each featuring a screen that is connected to a laptop (via HTML), as well as connection to Apple TV so that work on iPads can be mirrored.

The benefits of collaborative team tables have made an impact on student learning and providing accessible learning to all students. Below are some examples of how the tables are used.

Assistive Technology Training: Assistive technology is good for all, however, necessary for some. It also requires direct, specialized and individualized instruction. The collaborative team table provides that opportunity. Small groups often gathered in the Library Learning Commons to effectively learn assistive technology to access the curriculum.

Parent-Teacher Interviews: With many boards providing access to assistive technology as well as developing impressive virtual libraries, it is important for parents to understand where and how to access these incredible resources. Parent-teacher interviews were conducted in the library that provided parents with individualized help regarding the information and communication technology services available through the Toronto District School Board.

Guided Reading: Using websites or a board website, teachers are better able to provide choice for their students regarding guided reading selections. Providing choice in reading also gives students the opportunity to enhance the expression of their own voice with regards to comparing their expectations of the text to how they actually liked it.

Teacher-Student Conferences: Finally, with so many students having access to shared documents, a collaborative team



Photos Courtesy of T Zwolinski at Duke of Connaught Junior Public School



table allows small groups to meet with the teacher providing feedback as assessment for learning.

Collaborative team tables are tools that allow teacher-librarians to harness the opportunities beyond the library walls and build skills among students, teachers and the community. ■

Incubating Ideas: Secondary School Library Value in the Information Age

Way back in 2016, I attended a session at OLA Super Conference titled “The School Library Impact on Students Entering Post-Secondary Education.”

The goal of the session was to drum up interest for a future research project to determine the impact of a well-resourced secondary school library on students’ information literacy as they enter post-secondary education.

Being the enthusiastic supporter of cross-sectional librarianship that I am, I thought it was a brilliant idea. I submitted my name as an interested party, left the room feeling hopeful and promptly forgot all about it. The theme of that year’s OLA Super Conference was Library Lab: The Idea Incubator.

Fast forward to 2019 and the Ontario School Library Impact Project (OSLIP) is well underway! OSLIP is a collaborative research study led by academic librarians, secondary teacher-librarians, academic school library researchers and school library administrators.

The OSLIP’s mandate is to conduct a research study that investigates the impact of school libraries on the development of key information literacy skills in students entering post-secondary education.

The OSLIP strategy consists of three main elements: a literature review to determine where the current gaps exist and to inform the study design; a questionnaire for first year post-secondary students in order to gauge their information literacy skills; and focused interviews of staff and students to determine what is being taught.

Data gathering will occur over the 2019-20 school year, with a final report released thereafter. Our secondary objective is to design a reproducible research strategy that could be transferable to other student populations and in other provinces in Canada.

Budget cuts are a well-recognized threat to the well-being of

Ontario school libraries. School library staffing, in particular, has been decreasing over the past decade or so. People for Education’s 2019 report on technology in Ontario schools states that “in 2019, in schools with teacher-librarians, the average ratio per elementary school is one teacher-librarian for every 805 students. In secondary schools, that ratio increases to 1 to 1,007.” This disparity has been increasing year over year for some time.

Additionally, in 2019, only “54% of elementary schools have at least one full or part-time teacher-librarian, compared to 80% in 1998.”

A well-resourced school library, with well-trained staff, is key to teaching critical information literacy skills. Unfortunately, there is a marked lack of original research on the concrete effects of school libraries in Ontario. Return on investment becomes an important consideration when budgets are tight and tough decisions must be made. Now, more than ever, it has become essential for Ontario school library staff to demonstrate their value.

I would like to thank the OSLIP core committee members, Mary Cavanagh, Kate Johnson-McGregor, Dianne Oberg, Heather Buchansky, and Sarah Roberts, for their unwavering commitment and hard work getting this project off the ground.

Also, a special thank you to Courtney Lundrigan and the OSLIP advisory committee, whose input and feedback have been invaluable.

Great ideas usually take time and effort to incubate. We hope that the results of this study will generate further conversation and many new ideas in the months and years to come. ■

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Fast Facts for Teacher-Librarians

Who is Working in School Libraries?

/ Clerks
/ Informationists
/ Learning Commons Specialists
/ Learning Resource Assistants
/ Library Technicians
/ Master of Library and Information Science Librarians
/ Public Librarians
/ Teacher-Librarians

The Forest of Reading®

The Forest of Reading is Canada's largest recreational reading program! This initiative of the Ontario Library Association (OLA) offers ten reading programs to encourage a love of reading in people of all ages. More than 270,000 readers participate annually from their school and/or public library.

Here are some highlights from the 2018 annual report:

/ 270,000 participants
/ 4,500 sites participating in the Forest of Reading including school libraries, public libraries, homeschoolers, individuals, literacy centres and other individuals
/ 108 nominated titles for 2018
/ 145,000 books sold by official wholesaler Tinlids
/ 87 author workshops held at the Festival of Trees

Ten Top Twitter Accounts

Canadian School Libraries, @CdnSchoolLibrar

CSL is a registered non-profit charitable organization dedicated to professional research and development in the field of the school library learning commons.

Anita Brooks Kirkland, @AnitaBK

Consultant, Libraries & Learning. Chair, Canadian School Libraries. Action is Eloquence.

Ontario School Library Association, @oslacouncil

Council of the Ontario School Library Association. Keeping the school library community strong and informed.

Kate Johnson-McGregor, @TL_Kate

A past president of OSLA and current OLA conference planner, this high school teacher-librarian is actively engaged in all aspects of teacher-librarianship including political agitation, advocacy, pedagogy and mentorship.

Diana Maliszewski, @MizzMolly

An elementary teacher-librarian whose energy and enthusiasm never seems to wane. Past editor of *The Teaching Librarian*, OLA conference planner, York University AQ instructor, Association of Media Literacy board member and too many more affiliations and passions to mention, she also writes a popular blog.

If you want to learn more about what is happening in Canadian school libraries check out these Twitter handles from key organizations and leaders in the field:

Jenn Brown, @JennMacBrown

Elementary teacher-librarian, president of OSLA and eternal optimist.

@mrslyonslibrary, @LarkspurLibLC

Teacher-Librarian. Mom. Wife. Reader. Maker. Inquiry Thinker.

Melanie Mulcaster, @the_mulc

Teacher-Librarian slightly obsessed with the Hunger Games, reading, making, tech & laughter.

Rabia Knokhar1, @tdsb_IRCLibrary, @Rabia_Khokhar1

LTO Elementary teacher interested in equity and social justice education.

Jonelle St. Aubyn, @Ms_St_Aubyn

Teacher-Librarian, sports enthusiast, workout junkie, avid reader, music lover and champion for social justice.

Jennifer Casa Todd, @JCasaTodd

A mom, a wife, a teacher-librarian, a student, and the author of *Social Leadia*

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

"When schools have high-quality library programs and librarians who share their expertise with the entire school community, student achievement gets a boost," according to a paper written by Keith Lance and Debra Kachel for the *Phi Delta Kappan* education magazine.

Here are some key findings from the article which looked at research studies since 1992:



1 READING, WRITING AND MATH SCORES INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY

Reading, writing AND math scores increased significantly in schools with a full-time library program.

2 STUDENTS IN MARGINALIZED GROUPS HAD GREATER ACADEMIC GAINS

Students in marginalized groups, such as Black and Latino students, demonstrated even greater academic gains than the general school population in schools with robust library programs.

3 OVERALL HIGHER TEST SCORES

Many library impact studies suggest test scores tend to be higher where administrators, teachers, and librarians think of the school librarian as a school leader – a teacher, co-teacher, in-service professional development provider, curriculum designer, instructional resources manager, reading motivator, technology teacher and source of instructional support. (Lance & Schwarz, 2012)

4 REDUCED COSTS FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

Rethinking the teacher-librarian role would help school boards reduce costs associated with creating reading coaches, technology coaches and digital specialists.

5

CLOSING THE EQUALITY GAP

Providing equitable and adequate school library services and instruction has become an issue of social justice, especially when we see that schools in the poorest and most racially diverse communities have the least access to library services. (Pribesh, Gavigan, & Dickinson, 2011)

FURTHER CANADIAN RESEARCH

Looking for Canadian research and other resources for school libraries? Check out the Canadian School Libraries' research archive: researcharchive.canadianschoollibraries.ca.

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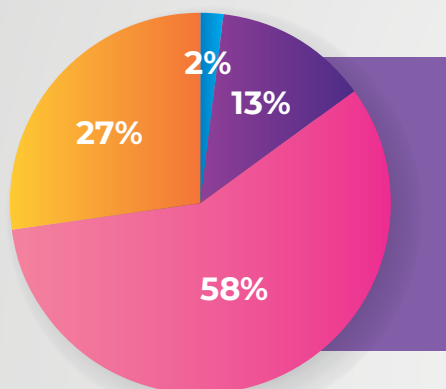
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The State of Elementary School Libraries

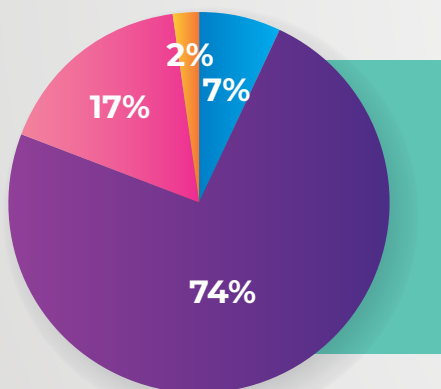
This infographic is based on data from People for Education's Annual Ontario School Survey, the 22nd annual survey of elementary schools in Ontario. The data are based on 1,042 responses from elementary schools in 70 of Ontario's 72 publicly funded school boards, representing 26% of the province's publicly funded schools.

Northern Ontario



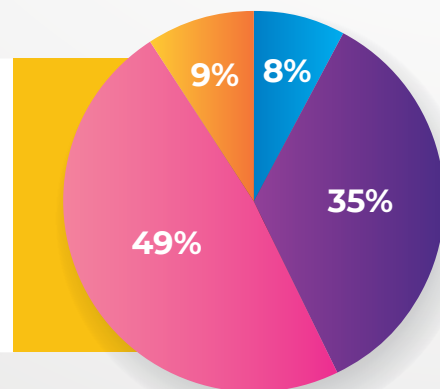
In Northern Ontario – many elementary school libraries are now closed. Elementary schools with school libraries are typically staffed part-time, with teacher-librarians or library technicians splitting their time between multiple schools (read more page 24).

Greater Toronto Area



At the Toronto District School Board, every elementary school has at least a 0.5 teacher-librarian, with six of the largest schools staffed by a full-time teacher-librarian. By contrast, the Toronto Catholic District School Board has no consistent formula for staffing the school library and has recently reduced school library hours at several Toronto high schools (read more page 24).

Southwestern Ontario



Southwestern Ontario is a study in contrasts. From the Greater Essex County District School Board – where one teacher-librarian is available for every 763 students (per the funding formula provided by the Ministry of Education), to the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, where school libraries were closed in 2012 (read more page 25).

LEGEND

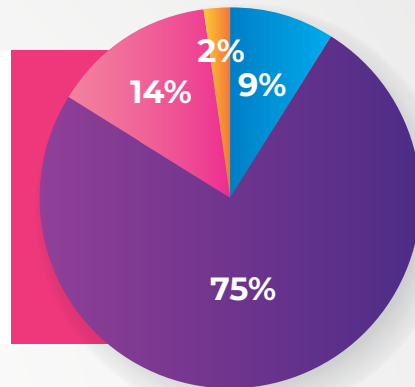
Schools staffing both teacher-librarian and library technician

Schools staffing teacher-librarians only

Schools staffing library technician only

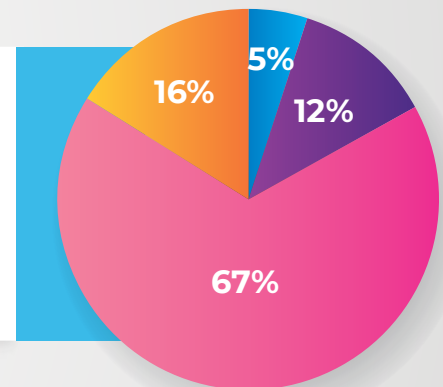
Schools staffing neither teacher-librarian nor library technician

Central Ontario



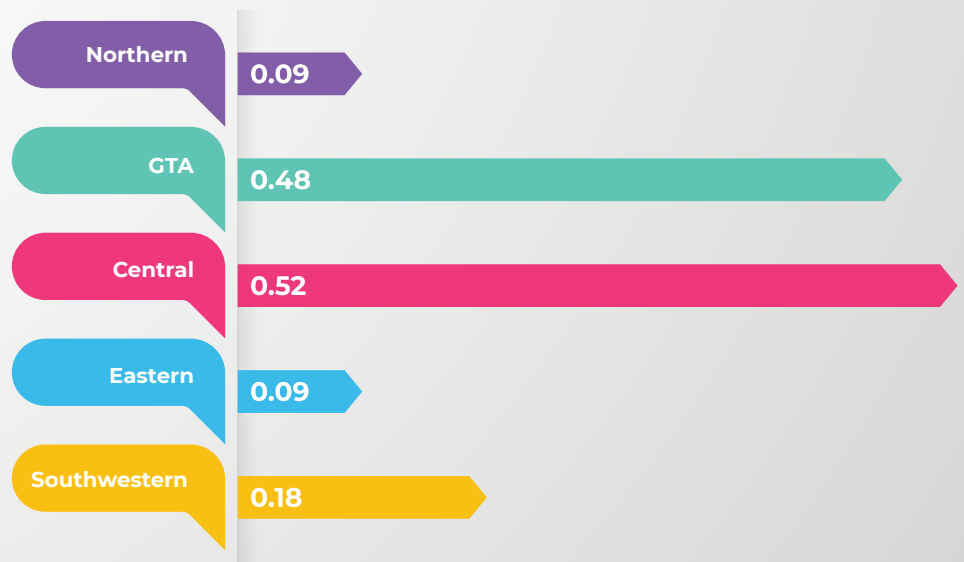
In Central Ontario, cuts to secondary school staffing have resulted in cuts to school library staffing. Prior to cuts, Halton District School Board allocated a full-time teacher-librarian at all schools with 650 students or more. This has now been cut in half – to 0.5 teacher-librarian for schools of 750 students or more (read more page 24).

Eastern Ontario



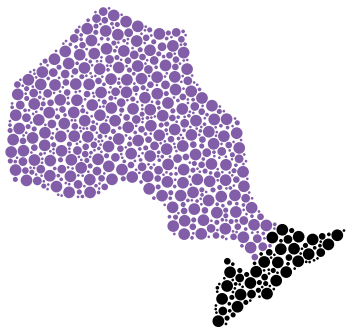
In Eastern Ontario, school boards have seen significant cuts in the past year. To cut \$11.7 million from its budget, the Upper Canada District School Board was forced to eliminate 160 positions, including 22 library staff (read more page 25).

Average Full-Time Equivalent of Teacher-Librarians Per School (among all schools in the region)



SPECIAL FEATURE: THE STATE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Northern Ontario



At the Sudbury Catholic District School Board, which has 16 elementary schools, four high schools and an alternative Grade 7-12 school, there are a total of two teacher-librarians and two library technicians, each stationed in a different high school. One library staff member will finish her day in the high school at 2:30 p.m. to head next door to tidy the books in the elementary school. This is the exception. In most elementary schools the libraries are closed, and teachers create classroom libraries. Two new elementary schools were built with library spaces and stocked with books but there is no one to look after them. Read more about Jane Rodrigues' personal experiences as a teacher-librarian at Sudbury Catholic on page 26.

In the region that stretches from Parry Sound to James Bay, there are 29 public libraries on Indigenous reserves. Five of these libraries are housed in schools. Many of the public libraries have existing partnerships with schools and provide programming for students. In this United Nations Year of Indigenous Languages, public libraries played a supporting role in promoting and teaching Indigenous languages. Once a year, Ontario Library Services – North will host the First Nations Spring Gathering, an opportunity for professional development and collaboration for Indigenous librarians across the province. To read more from Indigenous librarians working in the north, see page 26.

Greater Toronto Area

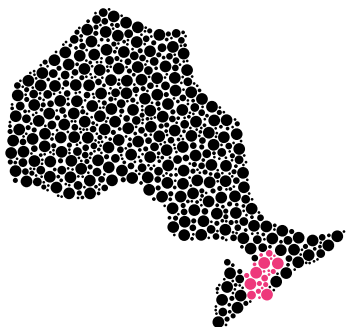


At the Toronto District School Board there is a half-time teacher-librarian in every elementary school. Six of the largest schools have full time teacher-librarians. The high schools are staffed with a full-time teacher-librarian for every 815 students. The board's nearly 600 schools including five adult day schools, 16 alternative elementary schools and 20 alternative secondary schools are supported by a resource centre which provides a professional library, central cataloguing and digital resource purchasing and pedagogical support.

Read about a TDSB teacher-librarian on secondment to an unusual school on page 27.

At the Toronto Catholic District School Board there is no central support and no apparent formula for staffing the school library. Many high schools lost sections so that a large high school will have to close the library's doors for the majority of the day next year.

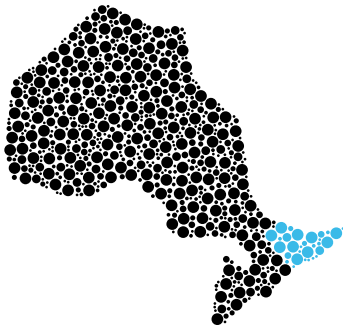
Central Ontario



The Ministry of Education's recent announcement regarding increases in class sizes – notably moving the high school cap from 22 to 28 students – has definitely caused a ripple effect in Ontario school libraries, which appear to be the easiest place to make cuts to compensate for reduced funding. One example is Halton District School Board where a full-time teacher-librarian would be placed in a school of 650 or more students. Now, schools of 750 or more will be staffed by a half-time teacher-librarian and anything smaller would mean fractions of time less than half. High school teacher-librarians had their sections cut in half, moving from six to three sections. To compensate, Halton increased the number of library technicians so that every school would see a tech once a week, instead of every two weeks.

Read about the changes happening at the Peel District School Board on page 29. And you can learn more about what life is like as a "fraction" – a teacher-librarian whose time is sliced into small increments to reduce staffing costs – on page 28.

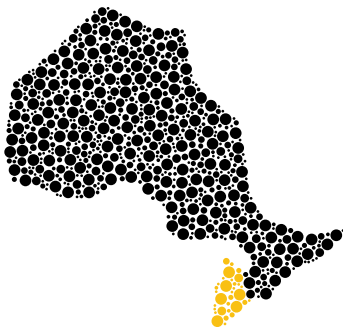
Eastern Ontario



We have some good news stories from Eastern Ontario. The Ontario School Library Association was finally able to recruit a member from the Eastern Region and Cathy McKechnie of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has been an excellent addition to Council. If you want to read some stories about excellent work happening in school libraries in the Ottawa area, see pages 31 and 32.

Unfortunately, it is in this region that we received the most shocking news. To cut \$11.7 million from its budget, the Upper Canada District School Board was forced to eliminate 160 positions, including 22 library staff. Primarily a rural board – probably the biggest geographically in the province – Upper Canada was plagued by provincial funding cuts, declining enrolment and a decision to spend more on special education. To read more about this, see Learning Commons Manager Patricia Sutherland's piece on page 33.

Southwestern Ontario

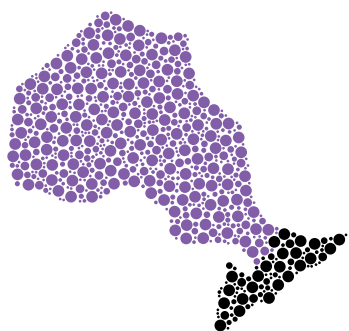


Southwestern Ontario is a study in contrasts. At the Greater Essex County District School Board, school libraries are staffed according to the funding provided by the Ministry of Education – one teacher-librarian for every 763 students. For the most part, there is a teacher-librarian in every school.

Over at Thames Valley District School Board, school libraries had been a priority with several outdated school library spaces transformed into learning commons which included space for books, technology and maker spaces. Students coming into these spaces were encouraged to collaborate and create. These spaces are staffed with a teacher-librarian in every school. At the high schools the board uses the ministry's funding formula and in elementary schools the ratio is determined by a clause in the collective agreement. School libraries also are supported by a centralized cataloguing department with four employees.

However, at the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board there are no school libraries, no teacher-librarians and a reduced number of library technicians who are called learning commons specialists. The board decided in 2012 to transform all school libraries into its version of a learning commons which meant Wi-Fi was installed and books were removed. The room was designed for students to socialize, do academic work and watch media presentations according to a CBC report written at the time. It's a digital world, one teacher said.

To read more about a board which is transforming its library spaces, read Cynthia Gozzard's account of the Grand Erie District School Board's efforts to revitalize these learning hubs on page 34. At Grand Erie there doesn't appear to be a consistent staffing model in the libraries with elementary teacher-librarians mostly providing prep coverage and a handful of library techs looking after all the schools. In secondary, one school has a full-time librarian technician and the rest are supported by a half-time tech. There is a teacher-librarian in every school based on a ratio of one to 1,050 students.



Northern Ontario

Learning Commons Northern Style

By Jane Rodrigues

I am a teacher-librarian in a Grade 7-12 high school in Sudbury. We have 20 schools in our board – four of which are high schools. Of these, three are 7-12. The libraries are staffed with two teacher-librarians and two library technicians. Over the years many of the schools have reverted to classroom libraries and have closed the actual library due to lack of personnel. The North has very few teacher-librarians. Our co-terminus board – Rainbow District School Board – has library technicians in all high schools, but no teacher-librarians.

About four years ago our board decided that our libraries would be transformed to learning commons. As library staff we were familiar with the concept but had no real experience with it. The library staff travelled to Toronto and to Ottawa to visit schools where the learning commons model had been

in place for several years. We saw the transformation and all the activities and features that students were able to take advantage of – word walls, Lego walls, colouring maps and so much more.

It took about two full years before the transformation took place in our board and the learning commons was stocked with a variety of technologies—green screens, 3D printer, white boards and projectors—and other items for the students including sewing machines and items for knitting sessions. Oh yes, we still had books, although it was suggested that we didn't need to keep any because we had technology. I am happy to report that the four libraries have plenty of books, although I had to fight for my shelving!

We have tried our best to imitate the activities we saw when we visited the learning commons a few years ago. We have been somewhat successful. But when you are miles and years behind it is very stressful. Yet we soldier on! ■

Libraries in the North

By Caroline Freibauer

Sheri Mishibinijima is the Band Librarian for the Wikwemikong First Nation Public Library located in the local high school on Wikwemikoog Unceded Territory Manitoulin Island.

She has been a public librarian for 24 years, receiving online training through the Southern Ontario Library Service EXCEL Certificate program, which provides an opportunity to acquire and develop skills in all aspects of public libraries.

As a public librarian, she receives funding from the Ministry of Culture Tourism and Sport to remain open for 37.5 hours a week. And, because the library is in a high school, the Wikwemikong Board of Education provides funding for electronic resources and books for the Forest of Reading program.

Students use the Wi-Fi in the library, the printing services or take advantage of the available book collection to do some reading. All students can access the catalogue at the library website: wikwemikong.olsn.ca.

At the Sagamok Public Library, which is 43 kilometres east of Blind River, along Highway 17, on the north shore of Lake Huron, Colleen Eshkakogan has worked for 33 years as a librarian serving the Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation.

“When I first applied, there were only four or five duties that were required of me,” Eshkakogan said in an online interview. “As the years progressed, my duties increased as the public librarian/school librarian.”

In Sagamok, the Education Department funds the library if there is collaboration with the school. “I do love working with children, so that's a plus,” said Eshkakogan.

She said she worries about library funding cuts.

“With all the funding cuts happening, First Nations librarians are constantly lobbying for sustainable funding,” she said.

“I believe all libraries will be struggling, no matter how much lobbying and hard work is put into our libraries.” ■



Greater Toronto Area

Teacher-Librarian Spotlight: Kate Tuff at the Bloorview School Authority

By Kasey Whalley

As last year's Teacher-Librarian of the Year, Kate Tuff is currently putting her passion into action to serve the community and students of Bloorview School Authority during a secondment from the Toronto District School Board.

During a recent call to talk about her library, it is clear how engaged, active and important the space is for students and the community.

Bloorview School Authority is a K-12 school for clients and patients of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.

As the full-time teacher-librarian, Tuff calls the library the hub of the school, and endeavours to ensure its programs, services and

space cater to the needs of her patrons.

In addition to visiting with every class and hosting professional development lunch sessions for staff, she has created a successful early years media program for students and developed services and programs aimed at parents.

Tuff is creating meaningful connections between the library and community at every stage. She builds her programs to link with curriculum and fosters a love of reading with each student, catering to their individual needs. She weaves disability awareness through her library programs and service. She recognizes the support of the administrative team and staff at Bloorview School Authority.

Creating an inviting, inclusive, and equity-based program is essential in a school library, and Kate Tuff exemplifies these elements as teacher-librarian at Bloorview School Authority. ■



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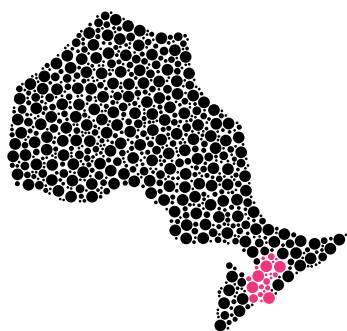
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Central Ontario

Life As A Fraction

By Nancy Cheong

8:30

I boot up my computer, do a quick scan of my day plans and never-ending to-do list, have the last bite of my breakfast, and zip to the washroom, because who knows when the opportunity will arise again.

9:05

A gentle bell rings to start the day. With a slow rumble of chatter and sneakers, the pregnant silence is broken and the building populates with students.

I wait as the first set of kids arrives for open book exchange. They come in clusters—the avid readers, the speedy readers, the ones who need an escape from class already. And they come to chat about books, ask about what to read next, ask my opinion about the books they chose and talk about what they already have read.

“Wasn’t it great?”

“Didn’t you love the part when ...?”

(Squeal) “I just couldn’t handle it!”

Kids whisper recommendations to others. Some just want to pass their books on to their friends.

“You HAVE to read this.”

It’s a busy 30 minutes.

9:40

I close down book exchange and pick up my bucket for kindergarten inquiry and head downstairs. The class has been working on the life cycle of the butterfly. They have been researching the different stages by watching video footage, looking at books, and taking nature walks. Today, I plan to show them a time lapse of the life cycle to provoke further discussion and questions.

10:25

Off to teach physical education for another kindergarten class.

We enter the gym and complete a warmup. We’re working on creative movement today, using the Chicken Dance as our main routine to achieve today. It’s heartwarming to watch all these junior and senior kindergarten students wiggle and flap their way through the song.

11:05

I rush upstairs to the library to grab washroom passes, a duty vest and coat. Yard duty!

11:20

Back in from recess, I’m off to teach physical education to another kindergarten class. Luckily, it’s the same lesson as the previous class. Take 2!

12:00

Lunch hour: I have a sit-down in the staff room to eat something before connecting with a few colleagues for a committee meeting, touching base with my principal about an upcoming event this week and dashing to the photocopy room to print a few sheets for my next class.

1:00

As the bell rings to end lunch hour, I make my way to the senior kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom for science. We are wrapping up an inquiry on how plants grow. I’ll be documenting some learning today through pictures and video.

“What have you noticed about the seeds that we germinated?”

“They grew skinny roots!”

“The seed exploded open!”

“A stem is sticking out!”

We will round up our learning by creating a video of clips about what we have learned through this inquiry.

1:50

I grab the iPad cart from the office as I head back upstairs. Up the elevator and back to the library to meet my Grade 4 students. We have been reviewing non-fiction text features and our culminating task is to create a multi-media presentation to

sum up these features. I spend time showing them key features in the app we have chosen to use. I marvel at the speed that students pick up its use. They ask important questions, want to dig deeper in the intricacies of the app. Impressive.

2:30

Recess: I run downstairs to connect with a few colleagues about tomorrow's plans and to deliver books I had gathered for another teacher that requested picture books to support their literacy focus.

Peel District Libraries Change in Looks and Thinking

By Trish Hurley

The Peel District School Board Libraries are undergoing a change in both looks and thinking.

As part of the *Empowering Modern Learners* document, which the board authored and uses as its guide for a more 21st-century approach to learning, libraries are beginning to change in Peel.

From creating more flexible and adaptable learning spaces, including moveable furniture, to providing more accessible and reliable technology for all students, librarians have a giant role to play in helping the board achieve its EML document goals.

"Teacher-Librarians wear many hats in our system and work as part of a team to foster a culture of learning," says Melanie Mulcaster, instructional co-ordinator for library at the board.

"We are facilitators of inquiry and curriculum, assessment, new literacies, evidence based practice, technology, and collaboration. We work to ensure all learners have a voice, have a choice, and that their life experiences are honoured and reflected in our learning environments."

Library Learning Commons environments provide opportunities to build "broad repertoires of strategies" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p 33) to foster deep learning and to build new learning partnerships in constructive, innovative, and inventive curriculums.

continued on page 30

2:45

I'm lucky to get some prep time at the end of the day to have a moment to breathe. It's time to organize and plan for tomorrow, respond to a few emails, check in some books, run some reports and clean off my desk. This is also the point in the day that I consider purchasing roller skates to get around the building faster. #teachergoals. **I**

Peel's New Instructional Co-ordinator

By Trish Hurley

Peel District School Board has just hired a new instructional co-ordinator for library to continue to advocate for the role of libraries in Peel.



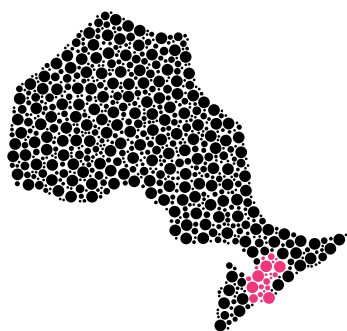
Melanie Mulcaster has been a teacher, a librarian, a modern learning resource instructor, and former instructional technology resource teacher.

She is still learning how to learn. She is passionate about Peel's *Empowering Modern Learners* document and believes "in the power of all learners to make a change."

In her new position, Mulcaster's main role is to inspire and empower modern learners, making sure all voices have the support, tools and resources they need in order to discover, connect, innovate and explore.

"Everyone has a story that needs to be told," she says.

Mulcaster will be supporting schools throughout the board, in both elementary and secondary.



Central Ontario

...continued from page 29

Many libraries across the board are also creating maker spaces allowing for tinkering and making through inquiry and design thinking. These spaces often house technological tools and resources students need to take ownership of their learning, explore interests, and develop 21st century competencies (Martinez & Stager, 2013).

“It is important to remember that no two school library makerspaces should be alike because no two school communities are alike – we build our environments in response to the needs, interest and skill sets of our learners,” says Mulcaster.

However, the maker space movement is not limited to just the library, and in many cases is making a move into classrooms.

“While school learning commons often house maker resources - the learning can not stop here. Every space is a makerspace as making is a mindset that should permeate all learning experiences,” says Mulcaster.

While integrating technology through the curriculum in more meaningful ways, libraries are turning into the tech hubs of the school, from chrome books to robots. Librarians are taking on another part of the EML document, access to technology and 21st Century learners.

Most librarians are trying to help create critical thinkers, collaborators and problem solvers through experiences like coding, making, Lego competitions, and STEM/STEAM showcases.

“One of the critical aspects of our EML learning commons vision recognizes and supports *everyone* as life-long, capable, competent and increasingly self-directed, learners: students, teachers, support staff, administrators, custodians, and parents alike,” says Mulcaster. ■

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016). *Towards defining 21st century competencies for Ontario: 21st century competencies*. Retrieved from <http://linkis.com/www.edugains.ca/reso/IHSEY>

Martinez, S. L. & Stager, G.S. (2013). *Invent to Learn: Making, tinkering and engineering in the classroom*. [Kindle DX version]. Retrieved from Amazon.ca



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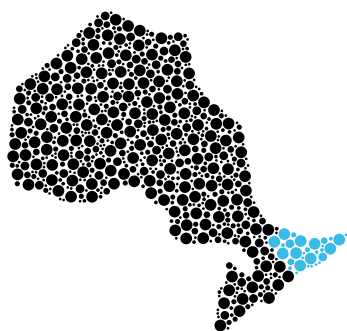
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Eastern Ontario

Friendly Competition: Celebrating Reading in New Ways at Elmwood School

By Kimberly Senf

The printer bustles with activity and the stapler on the circulation desk is a constant source of fascination (and frustration) for students who come in the door of the senior library at Elmwood School, an international baccalaureate continuum school.

Students mill about looking at the new fiction display, while others head straight to their favourite study carrel or the comfortable chair by the window to read.

There are few truly quiet moments in the library, but there is a general feeling of respect among students who use the space. When it's exam time or the library is being used as a co-teaching space, quiet reigns.

In addition to a library for the middle and senior school (Grades 6 to 12), there is one for the junior school (junior kindergarten to Grade 5).

There is a lot of enthusiasm for library use within the teaching faculty and amongst students. I have developed new library initiatives, planned and collaborated with colleagues and worked to ensure that the collection reflects the physical and digital resources that students need to excel.

Two initiatives that have taken off at the school and worked well for the all-girls environment are Elmwood Reads and our participation in Kids Lit Quiz Canada.

Elmwood Reads, our school's version of Canada Reads, has been a huge hit with students and faculty for the past four years. Modelled on the annual literary showdown on CBC, Elmwood Reads has students and teachers champion their chosen books in our weekly assembly, with the entire student population voting for their favourite book each week. The last books standing (and their champions) are crowned the Elmwood Reads winners.

Elmwood also has taken part in the Ottawa competitions for Kids' Lit Quiz Canada for the past four years, and hosted

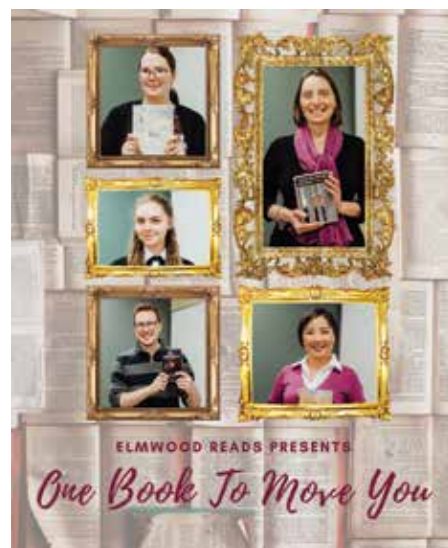
the competition twice. This event is a literary trivia competition for students in Grades 4 to 8. Schools from across Ottawa take part for the chance to head to the national final, which took place this year at McMaster University in Hamilton.

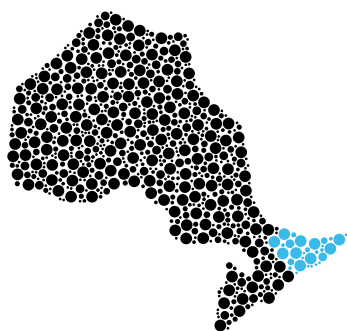
Ten questions are bundled into categories on topics such as birds, houses, magical creatures, the colour red, trains – the list goes on. The questions can be as mainstream as Harry Potter and Dork Diaries or about the publisher of Canadian children's books – everything literary is on the table.

Students relish the opportunity to train for the quiz by reading voraciously and practising with sample questions each week in our Kids' Lit Quiz club time. This event allows students the chance to represent Elmwood in the "sport of reading," just like those competing on the basketball, swimming or soccer teams.

School spirit is paramount at Elmwood, and events like Elmwood Reads and Kids' Lit Quiz allow students to take part in literary activities on behalf of their school. It's not even about winning – students sincerely enjoy the chance these opportunities give them to showcase what they know from the books they've read. The chance to share their literary knowledge with the school population in a public way does not come around often, so those that are looking for this outlet take it.

It would be ideal if more opportunities like this existed for the readers out there – but that's something we can all work on. ■





Eastern Ontario

Library Transforms with its School

By Kimberly Senf

Laura Johnstone has spent 12 years in the library at Ottawa's Earl of March Secondary School – at the reference desk (otherwise known as her office), the circulation desk or simply in the library space, assisting students and faculty as they interact with the library space.

Four years ago, she witnessed the transformation of the library space to accommodate the shifting population at Earl of March, when the school switched from a 9-12 high school to a 7-12 school.

Earl of March sits adjacent to a large public park, as well as a newly-renovated branch of the Ottawa Public Library system. It is situated in the west end of Ottawa and it is one of the largest secondary schools in the English public board, the Ottawa Carleton District School Board.

Earl of March was one of the board's first high schools to adopt the Grades 7 to 12 model. This allowed for a generous renovation budget to update aspects of the building to accommodate the incoming Grades 7 and 8 students.

The library was expanded and reorganized to meet the needs of the incoming population of about 500 students. Along with updated collaborative spaces and new shelving, the library collection also shifted to accommodate the varied interests of younger students. Not only were more middle grade novels in demand, but also juvenile non-fiction, notably narrative non-fiction.

When students began visiting the library with requests for books not in the catalogue or on the shelves, Johnstone knew that it was time to increase that part of the collection. Thankfully the library has been supported with a budget specifically for intermediate students, which allows the collection to grow based on their specific research needs.

While the library has been updated, Johnstone is the sole teacher-librarian for a school that is nearing 2,000 students. She says it would be great to run a book club for students and



to think about generalizing the collection, but there simply isn't enough time to devote to these extra tasks.

Although the staffing formula for elementary students indicates that the intermediate population should have a library technician, the school board has not added a library-technician position to Earl of March staffing since the two younger grades were added in 2015. So, Johnstone ensures she spends most Fridays with the intermediate teachers and their classes, offering collaborative research sessions in the open concept library space.

The library bustles throughout the day — from students borrowing Chromebooks and dropping in to see what new fiction books are on the shelves to classes using space for collaborative projects. It is a dynamic space that serves the student population well.

Johnstone often can be found in her office with her "Please Interrupt Me" sign on the door, which is a reminder of the nature of working in an active and well-used library.

True to her sign, she is interrupted often with questions and requests from students and faculty, and she likely would not have it any other way. ■

Making Connections

By Cathy MacKechnie

Do you know your neighbourhood teen librarian? How do they fit into your school community?

Nepean High School in Ottawa and all of its feeder schools are lucky to have Courtney Mellor, teen librarian from the Ottawa Public Library, as part of our community team.

We were introduced only four months ago, when I transferred schools, and we immediately connected over our passion for collaboration, literacy and our appreciation for adolescents.

Instantly, we planned together a few projects, which included spectacular author visits by two Canadian and one European writer.

Menno Metselaar, of the Anne Frank House museum in Amsterdam, spoke to 50 Grade 10 history students. The students were captivated by his stories, and asked amazing questions about history and the role of Anne Frank in our society today.

Local author, Nathan Burgoine, *Exit Plans for Freaks*, met with our Rainbow club and had an open discussion with the students about the importance of “seeing ourselves” in books.

Finally, White Pine winner Heather Smith, author of *The Agony of Bun O’Keefe*, came to our neighbourhood Catholic School down the road, and Courtney invited our White Pine Book Club to join this writing workshop.

Courtney is always present, whether she is introducing the authors or offering to make Ottawa Public Library cards with her portable machine on the spot!

One of her outreach goals is to touch base with students and remind them of all the wonderful resources found at their local community library. Her enthusiasm is contagious.

We have formed such a great relationship that reaching out for a quick suggestion is now our norm.

The Kitchissippi Ward is so lucky to have Courtney Mellor providing amazing literacy initiatives for all its teens, and I am so happy to be going along for the ride! ■

State of School Libraries at Upper Canada District School Board

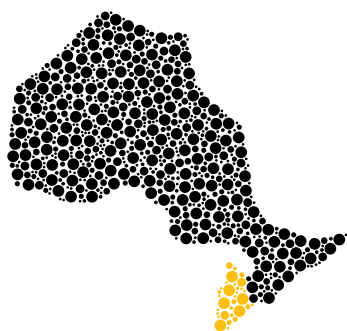
By Patricia Sutherland

The Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) is located in Eastern Ontario. Surrounding the City of Ottawa, the District maintains 78 schools – primarily rural and small urban – in a geographic area that is often described as the size of PEI.

On Wednesday, June 19, the UCDSB Board of Trustees voted to eliminate 22 of the 28 school library staff positions in the board. The decision to reduce this number of staff was difficult and not due to a lack of appreciation of the value of school library/learning commons, nor a decline in the use of print, electronic and space resources (in fact, usage has grown). The decision was made in response to other board budgetary pressures; notably, maintaining a desired level of special education resources and services.

Declining enrollment in small, rural communities, combined with increasing special education needs, has impacted the resourcing of school libraries for many years now. For example, between 2002 and 2009, teacher-librarian positions were phased out (elementary schools first, then secondary) and replaced by library technicians who were assigned between two and six schools each. The past decade has seen annual adjustments to the Learning Commons Department budget, with a staffing complement high of 33 to a low of 24.5 and then back again.

There are challenges associated with continuing to operate school libraries’ in rural, small enrolment districts. In seeking to ensure equitable opportunities for rural students, advocacy efforts that focus on ensuring that libraries are appropriately staffed and resourced in every school is a good first step. ■



Southwestern Ontario

Grand Erie Revitalizes Library Spaces

By Cynthia Gozzard

The Grand Erie District School Board in southern Ontario has been working to revitalize library spaces in both elementary and secondary schools over the last three years.

The budget has been approved for this work to continue in the 2019-20 school year.

The learning commons infrastructure committee has plans in motion to renovate another eight school libraries, embracing the learning commons model. This process encompasses both the learning in a school library, as well as the environment making connections to all areas of the board's multi-year plan.

To put student learning at the forefront of this initiative, schools are provided with a presentation to staff using the Grand Erie Learning Commons support document (bit.ly/GEDSBLC) as well as *Leading Learning* and *Together for Learning*.

These documents are used to drive learning and instruction in

the space and provide a solid foundation of success for every student.

Consistent elements throughout Grand Erie libraries include a media green screen area, Lego Wall (elementary), powered booth seating (secondary), lounge area, mobile technology, mobile accessible shelving, mobile whiteboard tables and a circulation area. Each space is designed with its own elements embracing differences in student population.

The committee supporting these projects comprises senior administration, ed tech and facilities teams and the program department.

Committee members feel honoured to support schools in their goals for a beautiful library space and every project ends in a celebration with a grand opening event inviting superintendents, community members and dignitaries.

The community support that these projects are receiving is a testament to how much local residents value school libraries and how they support students. ■

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Shelagh Paterson

School Library Funding in Ontario

We know that trained library staff and access to properly resourced school libraries foster students' love of reading, which research has shown has a positive impact on success in science and math, literacy scores, and students' social and civic engagement. School libraries contribute to better EQAO scores, post-secondary readiness and digital citizenship.

Funding for school libraries comes from the Ministry of Education's Pupil Foundation Grant. The ministry has an established funding formula that recommends a ratio of 1 elementary teacher-librarian per 763 elementary pupils, and 1 teacher-librarian per 909 secondary pupils.

Funding for library staff is based strictly on the number of students enrolled in the school. While ministry funding documents refer to teacher-librarians, school boards that do have school libraries will have varying staffing models in place that may include a mix of or exclusively any of the following roles: teacher-librarians, library technicians, or librarians with a Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS).

Because the funding received from the ministry is not currently prescribed ("sweatered"), a number of school boards are not allocating the funding to school libraries,

as set out in the ministry's funding formula. Over the past 20 years, students across Ontario have been steadily losing access to school libraries and library-based resources. For example, in 2017 only 52 per cent of elementary schools had a teacher-librarian – either full- or part-time – down from 80 per cent only 20 years ago. The situation in Northern Ontario is especially dire: only 11 per cent of elementary schools have these specialized staff.

As noted in the 2017 Auditor General's annual report, not all school boards report to the Ministry of Education how funds allocated to school libraries are being spent. The ongoing cuts to teacher-librarians and library resources show that across the province this funding is not being spent where it should be and where the ministry has intended. We estimate that as much as half of funds – up to \$100 million annually – earmarked by the Ministry of Education for teacher-librarians are being otherwise allocated by school boards.

Local needs and conditions vary widely across Ontario. It is important that local school boards continue to have flexibility in how they adapt their school library programming and make the needed investments. It is essential for student success that boards spend annual funding allocated by the Ministry of Education for school libraries on its intended purpose. ■

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SPECIAL FEATURE: THE STATE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Glenn Turner, a now retired teacher-librarian from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, was recognized by the Ontario School Library Association as Teacher-Librarian of the Year in 2019. Here is his acceptance speech, a rousing call to action for all teacher-librarians, especially in light of the many changes we face in the months to come.

Thank you very much. Of course, this whole thing, as many of you here know, is a terrible, terrible mistake, and I offer my apologies. The people responsible have been identified and will be forced to buy everyone drinks later.

But since I'm here, I will accept the award on behalf of my colleagues in the Library Subject Council of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. For those of you who are not familiar with them, subject councils are creations of the Ontario Secondary School Federation. They group together all the secondary teachers in a school district who have an interest in a particular subject area. So, in a medium-sized school district like mine, there could be hundreds of English teachers in the English Subject Council, for instance. But in the Library Subject Council – not so many. We have 25 secondary schools in our board. Even with the teacher-librarian position split between two people in some cases, we still only have 34 people on our mailing list.

The thing about Subject Councils is that OSSTF gives them money to organize professional development activities. Some Subject Councils frankly don't take advantage of that. They're too big, they're too disorganized, they're too apathetic. Some Subject Councils don't do anything. But not us.

In our board, there is no centralized authority that looks after school libraries. Technically we are under the jurisdiction of Curriculum Services, but no Superintendent of Curriculum is likely to be thinking about libraries more than once or twice a year. This means that we have had to fight and argue for everything that many other school libraries in the province have always taken for granted.

Things like centralized purchase of online resources, for example. Before Knowledge Ontario, we had to organize our own consortium of schools to buy database subscriptions. And when Knowledge Ontario died, we had to convince the board that it was essential to purchase online resources for all schools. We had to persuade them that equity of access was important.

More importantly, the absence of a central library authority means that we have had to encourage and support one another in our struggle against misinformation, short-sightedness and simple meanness on the part of some administrators and the odd senior staff member, not to mention the random weirdness of the universe.

The Library Subject Council has proved to be a good structure for us. It has given us a voice at the table when the interests of school libraries are at stake; it has allowed us to build relationships with colleagues and mentors in other systems like the Catholic board, the Ottawa Public Library and universities. And we have used it – a lot – to provide professional development and to deepen our understanding of what we do every day. Had the Library Subject Council not existed, we would have had to invent something like it.

I was surprised to learn recently that not every public school district has subject councils. I think that this is a mistake, and I urge you to talk to your union about setting them up, if they don't already exist in your district. A subject council – particularly an activist subject council – gives you a disproportionate voice in contract negotiations, for example. Even though teacher-librarians represent less than one per cent of teachers in our district and in the province as a whole, subject councils put us on a level playing field with teachers from other subject areas.

Your union and your board will listen. In the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, a 1.0 full-time teacher-librarian position in every high school is written into the contract. This is no accident. It's the work of our predecessors in the Library Subject Council, and largely the work of that amazing generation of women teacher-librarians who fought so hard for school libraries in the Harris and McGuinty years. These are names that you may not recognize, but we owe a lot to them: Allison Craig, Linsey Hammond, Diane Clipsham, Beth Price, and many others.

So my message today is – get organized. If it's not through the union, then do it on your own. Get closer to OSLA. Make sure everyone's signed up with OLA. I don't think you have the choice. All the indicators are that hard times are coming.

But what my experiences as a teacher, as a teacher-librarian, as a Buddhist have taught me, is that you can win, whatever the odds. So long as you can support your teacher-librarians, so long as you can keep them focused on the importance and the value of what they do every day, so long as you can speak with a united voice, you can win. ■

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A Bookseller's View of the State of School Libraries in Ontario

An Interview With Tinlids Wholesaler Maria Martella



TingL: Maria, you have been involved with children's literature for a very long time. Can you share your background as a bookseller?

I moved to Toronto in the 80s after working in social work for eight years. I was looking for a job and thinking about leaving social services, when I first walked into The Children's Book Store, which was then located in Toronto, in Mirvish Village. I couldn't believe there was a bookstore dedicated to just selling children and teen books! I put in an application, was hired on the spot and started the next day. I wasn't planning to stay forever, but I did. It was a retail store but we also sold to schools and libraries. In those days, we saw teacher-librarians every day. Sometimes if they didn't finish their buying (because book buying should not be rushed) they would come back the next day or the next week. I was very fortunate to have amazing mentors like Celia Lottridge, Judy Sarick, Hy Sarick and Marion Seary. They came from teaching and library backgrounds and created such a strong literacy community that drew people like Larry Swartz, Bob Barton, David Booth and many other educators into the store regularly. I can still

recall how powerful some of the conversations were around books. They truly shaped and nurtured my bookselling skills, and I wouldn't be here today without those people.

When the Saricks retired, they sold the educational division of The Children's Book Store to Pegasus, which was then the distribution centre for Chapters. I was hired to set up an educational division for Pegasus, and, although I tried to keep a positive outlook, it was clear that this huge corporation wasn't going to agree with my vision at all. A year later, they closed and I, along with Scott Millar, was hired to set up an educational division for a smaller library wholesaler. Two years later, I decided to leave and start Tinlids. Scott also joined me. That was 16 years ago.

You have been working with teacher-librarians and other school library staff for many years. Do any stand out for you? Can you tell us about them?

I couldn't possibly name them all. As a bookseller, I am in contact with TLs every day, from school boards/districts across the country. The ones that stand out are the ones who can talk to me for hours about the books their students love, and who tell me stories about all the amazing things they are doing in their library. They make me wish I was a TL! I could name several TLs in every board in Ontario and tell you why each one of them is so amazing, but then this article would turn into a book. Generally I would say the TLs that stand out are the ones who bring me to tears with their stories about how a particular book affected a student, or the projects and clubs they run on their own time, or promote and share their ideas and libraries on social media. I am truly in awe of those TLs and their endless enthusiasm and passion for story and their literacy environment.

From your perspective, what role have school libraries played in education?

I can't help but feel that the school library, like the public library, is an extension of the home. Families benefit tremendously by having access to books that can be taken home. Many parents don't have the means or finances to purchase books, and in some communities, access to a public library is also not easy, due to time restraints or travel challenges. But children are at school every day and the library provides equitable resources for all families. This is the best place for them to be exposed to the love of reading, with the guidance of a committed and qualified TL. If we want children to be real readers, they must be exposed to physical books. That's not to say we shouldn't pay attention to digital learning materials, but I believe kids who don't see a wide range of books in front of them, are less likely to develop a love of reading.

From my perspective the library supports learning across the whole curriculum, it's a safe and neutral space for students in need, it plays a role in the outcome of student success and it promotes lifelong learning. I remember a high school TL telling me how she found a student in the corner of her library. A tough guy, who never came to the library. And he was crying. She asked him if he was okay and he said: "Can I just sit here?" Again, it's a safe space for students.

In sports, not everyone wins. Some kids are great athletes and are happy to compete or play a sport. I'm all for supporting sports in schools. But for some kids, reading is their sport. And they can't lose on that team. The library is a place where everyone is equal.

What is your experience with school libraries in the north? Do you have any good stories to tell?

I grew up in Sault Ste. Marie and moved away in my late 20s. I remember my high school librarian, because she had such a huge impact on me. But, sadly, Northern Ontario seems poorly funded for school libraries. I can name seven women who have made a difference in the north, as library leaders for their school boards. Most of them were TLs and I witnessed lots of progress in their library collection development while they held these positions. But five of the seven have been moved out of these leadership roles, with no replacement. There is such disparity between Southern Ontario and the major hubs in the north – Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, North Bay, Timmins and Thunder Bay. Everywhere I go, I hear stories of libraries not being open, or being a mess, or principals making statements about not needing a library because they have computers. I know principals must find efficiencies and manage their budgets wisely, but how can they justify an outdated or non-existent library?

Of course, there are many principals who play an important role in the shared leadership for literacy. A good example of this is Sylvia Bertholet (library maintenance worker) and her principal Stephane Provost. They are from St Mary's School in Blind River, Ont., and every year they ask me to select books for their book fair. This is by no means a huge sale, compared to most book fairs, but their determination and passion for continuing this yearly event is admirable. The school population is approximately 100 and we have seen an increase in sales over the past couple of years. This school really stands out for me, because I know the area and the challenges they face. And it's proof that a love of reading increases when kids get to make choices, and are exposed to new books. The point is that we need someone who is dedicated to literacy in every school, but they need to be supported. And, when that happens, everyone benefits.

Have you noticed a change in the school library landscape over the years? Can you tell us about it?

Yes, there have been some devastating changes to school libraries. When I first started bookselling, there were many more teacher-librarians, they had release time to shop often during the year, and they had control of their library budget. Now there are fewer librarians, they don't get time to shop in person (they mostly purchase during school board book display days or by ordering online, by fax, or by phone). I always think it's better to shop in person, but many of our competitors have closed their showrooms, due to a decrease in onsite shopping. I think Tinlids is the only educational wholesaler showroom in Toronto that is open for shopping every day from September to the end of June. Another change is the budget is now controlled by the principal, and in some school boards, the purchasing department places the order with the vendor of their choice (usually based on price).

I speak to many customers who I have known for years, and lately there is such low morale. I'm alarmed at how many of the best TLs I know have decided to retire earlier than they need to.

Over the years, you probably have had some very interesting experiences. Are there any stories you can share?

The most interesting experience I have had as a bookseller is the time I spent up in James Bay, Ont. For three consecutive years, I was asked to go up to three small First Nations communities to run book fairs. The mining company (De Beers) was running a "Books in Home" program and gave every student a coupon to buy approximately two to three books to take home. It was winter and the only way there (besides a very expensive flight) was by train and ice road (which I did, but it terrified me!). I shipped two skids of books to Fort Albany, Kashechewan, and Attiwapiskat, and spent many days doing book talks to their students and teachers. I was especially happy about the reaction from the teen students (who I was told would be indifferent). They spent lots of time looking at the books and did buy their share. In Fort Albany I did a 30-minute book talk to each class and then they had time to spend their coupon. At the end of the first day, the principal told me the kids just wanted to read as soon as they returned to their class. So, he let the whole school spend the rest of the day reading! This was such a moment of affirmation for me. And a reminder that kids need an adult who is passionate and knowledgeable about books, to turn them into readers. That's what a TL does! It was a beautiful space, but there was no one dedicated to taking care of it, and eventually they turned half of it into a classroom. And the "Books in Home" program was cancelled after my third year. De Beers decided they would do something else. But I will never forget how excited the teachers and students were, and how much I learned from them.

How do you see school libraries evolving in the next few years?

This is a tough question. I don't know when government funding will change to support school libraries and invest in literacy in a more equitable way. We all have read numerous reports and statistics about the importance of the school library, and yet there seems to be little movement from government. I know there are strong advocates for school libraries, working hard to be heard and making a difference, but we need more principals, teachers, parents, booksellers, publishers — everyone in the book industry to be supportive. Even as I write this, it sounds so obvious, and I imagine that anyone reading this already will be part of the solution. And they will be more aware than I am, of what needs to happen or how to make it happen. Maybe we just need librarians to become politicians. ■

tinlids
best books for schools and libraries

Karen Weber and Bryn Dewar

State of the Art

Project-Based Learning in the Library with ELL Students and A First Nations Artist

The Aldershot High School Experience Karen Weber, Teacher-Librarian

In the spring of 2018, a group of teachers at Aldershot High School in Burlington considered how we could, in a real and meaningful way, honour the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, specifically, those related to Education for Reconciliation (articles 62 and 63).

We also wanted to provide a rich project-based component to our English Language Learning program that would foster student resilience, community and positive self-concept.

Serendipitously, an application for a Burlington Foundation Community Fund grant landed on our desks and, from there, our idea for “art in the library” developed. The fund’s goal – to “promote greater collaboration and partnerships within the Burlington community, and showcase our collective impact through personal storytelling” – seemed to be a perfect fit for our project, particularly when we reviewed certain areas of priority for the fund, including newcomers and social inclusion and youth and young adults.

Using the criteria from above, we developed our grant application, *Developing a Sense of Belonging: Community and Creativity with Aldershot English-language learners: This grant [will] allow newcomer students at Aldershot to co-create a mural in the school library with a First Nations artist. By co-creating this mural, newcomer students have an opportunity to “look back” and learn about our local First Nations communities; they are also encouraged to see themselves in the present at Aldershot as valued current and future agents of positive change within the school.*

With the generous support of Tammy Hardwick, our equity and inclusive education instructional program lead First Nation, Métis, Inuit Education, we arranged for Aura, an Oneida artist (moniqueaura.com), to work with colleague Lindsay Moar’s small ELL class in the library in the fall of 2018.

Aura spent considerable time on the first day encouraging students to reflect on their birth countries, their experiences with language/learning a language and their experience with losing a language, which she likened to her own experience of losing her Indigenous language. She also shared her personal



and the more communal challenges of being First Nations in Canada today. In a short time, she built “student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect,” one of the key goals of article 63 of *Education for Reconciliation* in the Calls to Action.

From Oct. 15 to 17, the students, guided by Aura, co-constructed both the questions and the response to our challenge: How do we create an artistic piece that accurately reflects and celebrates the students and their “stories” or pasts, a First Nations point of view, and our present at Aldershot?

The result was an incredible piece of art that now hangs in the main space of our library. It is every teacher’s dream to ensure that students see themselves reflected in the work that they read, see and do. This artwork contains images, symbols and words from the “home” countries of all of the ELL students, including Iran, Egypt, Ukraine, China, Afghanistan, India and Swaziland, alongside First Nations/local connections: a Haudenosaunee woman (e.g. her facial features, Skydome details on her dress), the Grand River, tobacco flowers, Aura’s signature florals, a turtle shell for Turtle Island, six diamonds for Six Nations. And there is even a lion, the Aldershot school mascot.

Our ELL students felt this was a positive experience. They will be always reminded of their hard work and the relationships they formed every time they come into the library and see their mural. It has become a symbol of their cherished place in our Aldershot community and the kind of collaborative spirit that is possible when different groups of people decide to learn and listen and create together.

The Hayden Secondary School Experience

Bryn Dewar, Teacher-Librarian

After hearing about Karen Weber's project at Aldershot High School at a PD session for teacher-librarians in the Halton District School in November, 2018, I decided to undertake a similar project at Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School.

Our library is a bit different from Aldershot's in that it is a partnership library with the City of Burlington. Our integrated facility functions as a school and public library. I had to secure permission for the project both from our administration and the public library staff.

Because of the project's expense, I applied, at Karen's suggestion, for a grant from the Halton Learning Foundation in December, 2018. The foundation provides grants for schools across our board. I applied for funding from the arts and music stream and was fortunate to receive \$1,000.

The plan was for a group of Hayden's English Language Learning students and newcomers to co-create a mural over the course of three days with Aura – the same artist who created the project at Aldershot. We planned to complete the mural from March 5 to 7, 2019.

Laura Sgambelluri, our ESL teacher and program lead for French, ESL and the arts, was enthusiastic about bringing this opportunity to her students. We had fewer students taking ESL courses in second semester, so we signed out the students from the first semester classes to participate in it as an in-school field trip. In total we had eight students involved, although some were unable to attend all three days.

The ESL classes were a perfect fit for this project because they are small, which allowed each of the students to participate fully in the project, and their classes are scheduled daily in our library.

Some students involved had never before picked up a paint brush, and yet all contributed to the mural, both in its design and execution. Similar to the Aldershot project, cultural details from each student were incorporated throughout the piece: a yellow Vietnamese basket, the mountains of Spain, an Italian-inspired rose tattoo, and a Syrian sword. We even had a husky incorporated as a nod to our school's mascot.

In addition, over the course of the three days, students experienced smudging ceremonies and found commonalities with Aura in their discussions of the preservation and championing of their first languages.

With the creation of the mural, we now have a strong visual representation of the diverse cultures that our ELL and newcomer students contribute to our school permanently housed in the library – a cross-curricular space that is used by a variety of students and staff. They have an increased positive sense of belonging and community through this visual representation of themselves and their unique cultural identities.



In addition to visually demonstrating an ongoing commitment to valuing our ELL students and newcomers' cultural diversity, the mural also recognizes our ongoing learning as students and staff about FNMI cultures and honouring the land.

Here are some of the ELL and newcomer student reflections from both Aldershot and Hayden:

"My favourite part was how we used a part of everybody's culture and things that made them feel like home into one beautiful painting ... that meant a lot to us."

"It has parts in it that show peace and safety. As a newcomer to Canada I feel really safe and welcome to Canada ... without having to lose my culture or my language."

"Represent[ing] things through art that people couldn't talk about while trying to explain their culture. That was really ... helpful to me because I couldn't express things by saying or writing...[and] it was fun."

"I learned what smudging is and the story behind it, I learned Indigenous traditions and stories and I learned some things about the past of Indigenous people."

"My favourite part was learning the new painting techniques and adding something that reflects me in the mural."

"The mountain in the back of the mural is a place in Spain where I used to go camping every weekend and it really reminds me of that." ■



Aura's work has been published in *(Don't) Call Me Crazy* by Kelly Jensen, *#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women* by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale, and *The Talking Stick is for Indigenous Women; They Take The Quill to Share Their Visions of Sustainable Development*.

Classifying Ourselves: Library Organization in Indigenous Contexts

If you were to write a book about your life or culture, where would it sit on a library shelf?

How we think about something, and the words we use to describe that thing, influences our information seeking behaviours. It's how many of our students use libraries – car books with car books, horse books with horse books.

Except the classification schemes we use don't always reflect the way our students think about topics and/or contextualize new knowledge. The question becomes: *Is how we organize our resources reflective of our students' needs and equitable to all peoples?*

Arguably, the most prolific classification system used in Ontario school libraries is the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Unfortunately, DDC has a distinctly colonial Western perspective. Knowledge organization and classification should be questioned in school library spaces, especially when we are serving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations.

Using DDC has forced many school libraries to adopt an underlying colonized perspective, which can make it incredibly difficult to reflect the culture, personal identification practices, and knowledge organization practices of Indigenous populations. DDC fails to be reflective of many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, and slots them into generalized or colonized categories.

Through their research with First Nations elders in a variety of communities, in a paper published in 2012, C.K. Maina explains that “traditional knowledge is more than the sum of its parts; it is the community's way of life comprised of relationships with one another, the creator, and the environment” (19).

Dividing a holistic knowledge system into colonized and generalized classification schemes is detrimental to Indigenous communities, which many northern and rural school libraries serve. Representation for distinct communities and groups is not equitable within DDC, and material pertaining to the knowledge organization culture of Indigenous groups becomes conspicuously situated in a colonized perspective. DDC standardizes and generalizes

“Is how we organize our resources reflective of our students' needs and equitable to all peoples?”

specific aspects of Indigenous customs and cultures under only a few distinct headings; naming is a powerful act, and DDC fails to acknowledge that Canadian First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities are diverse groups made up of diverse individuals, with their own identities and cultures.

In response to colonized classification systems, Indigenous librarian Brian Deer created the Brian Deer Classification system specifically for the Xwi7xwa library at the University of British Columbia. Adaption of the system also has taken place at several other Indigenous knowledge organizations.

With greater accuracy and representation, Deer's system is reflective of the creator's deep personal knowledge of Indigenous communities and culture. Perhaps it's time our school libraries start looking outside of DDC to classify and label our Indigenous resource collections. We may not need to throw out DDC, but using multiple headings will certainly help towards reconciling the colonizing nature of DDC.

By not being part of a First Nations, Inuit or Métis community, I know that I have an outsider's perspective on the needs and knowledge organizational practices of these communities. It is not my intent to speak for these communities, but I want to start the conversation on ways our school libraries could find respectful and equitable ways to accurately reflect these communities and peoples. ■

Maina, C. K. (2012). Traditional knowledge management and preservation: Intersections with library and information science. *International Information and Library Review*, 44(1), 13-27. doi:10.1016/j.iilr.2012.01.004

TREATIES RECOGNITION WEEK

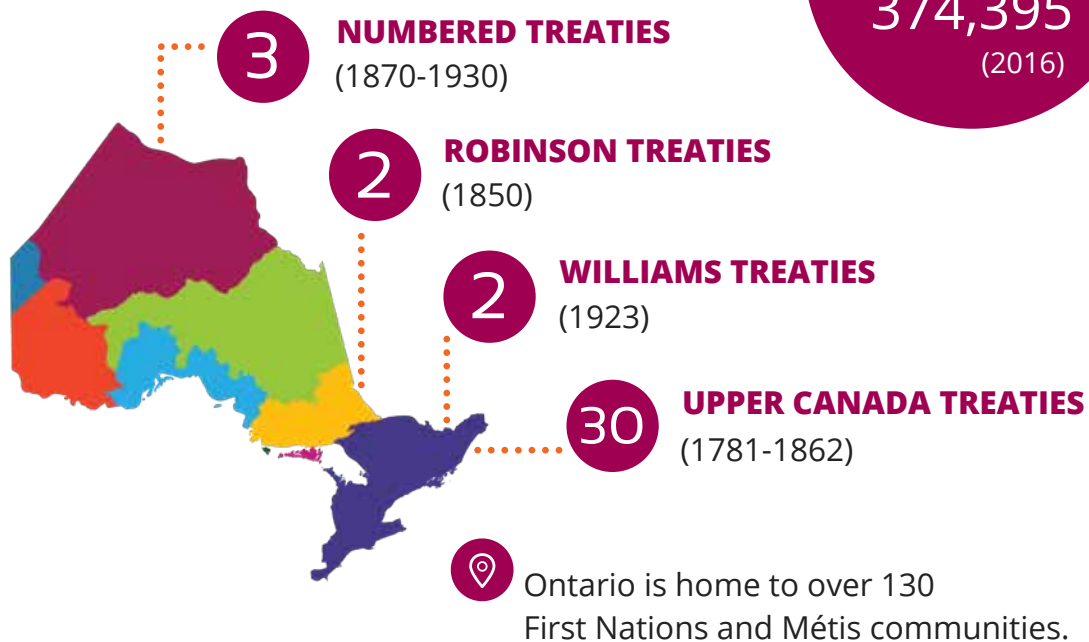
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