Whither teacher-librarian training?

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Whilst teacher-librarians have professional skills in common with librarians in others sectors, they are unique in that their role demands direct involvement with the core function of the educational organisation by which they are employed. The teacher-librarian's role encompasses curriculum planning, delivery and evaluation in partnership with other members of the teaching profession. This requires expertise in curriculum, information literacy and information technology. Teacher-librarians also have a role to play in professional development and staff training. To accommodate this, along with developing professional librarianship skills, courses should make the connection between general teaching skills and their application to the teaching of information skills.

In the face of a decline in the availability of courses, there is also a general feeling that many teacher-librarianship courses do not adequately consider or cater for the reality in schools. While it is important that the teacher-librarian have general library skills the teaching element must be paramount to ensure positive learning outcomes for students. There needs to be a greater emphasis on curriculum links and policies within courses to provide students with a firm context for their training. The wide reaching impact of technology needs also to be adequately covered. The curriculum context must include areas such as resource-based learning, information skills and critical literacies. The library also has a role in training in the use of electronic resources for information retrieval. Change management and theories of information management need to provide a context for school library staff, as does a sound knowledge of current educational theory and practice.

A review of teacher-librarianship courses reveals that there is no consistent location of courses within particular faculties: very few are within education faculties. In some states it is difficult to study teacher-librarian courses on campus. And there is often too little attention given to the teaching section of the courses. Where trainees have a base teaching qualification this is less of a problem. The shortfall in currently available courses would seem to be primarily in equipping teacher-librarians in the information technology and curriculum areas — the areas which demand most emphasis. The widespread use of technology in schools places library staff on a very steep learning curve. Assisting the teacher-librarian to navigate the competing demands and to find a position within these developments is essential.

Along with the core knowledge, skills and attitudes for the library and information sector the following are particular skills which apply to the role of the teacher-librarian.

Broad context
- overview of the curriculum;
- detailed knowledge of the information process and the steps needed in sequential skill development;
- constant monitoring of technological developments, and skills in planning how these can be incorporated into classroom programs;
- classroom management techniques;
- student behaviour management;
- knowledge of group processes, collaborative learning and cross-age tutoring; and
- knowledge of assessment and evaluation.

Analysis
- awareness of individual differences and learning styles;
- ability to match students with appropriate resources; and
- skills in how to organise and implement training and development activities associated with resource-based learning.

Strategy
- knowledge of curriculum design;
- knowledge of learning and teaching strategies;
- knowledge of learning processes including adult learning; and
- negotiation skills.

Infrastructure
- effective management strategies;
- effective personnel management; and
- skills in establishing team-based management structures.

Information sources
- knowledge of resources available within and outside the school;
- information technology skills;
- knowledge of the range of information technology available and their applications; and
- up-to-date knowledge of children's literature.

Processing
- consultation with other teaching staff to ascertain resource needs.

Product and service delivery
Leadership, communication, and organisational skills.

While the teacher-librarian needs to be trained in skills common to the field there are many areas which have a particular school emphasis — it is these that should provide the focus for training. It is these that warrant a turnaround in the decline in the number of training courses. ∎