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Getting to first base: Developing support from school principals

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Getting to First Base

Developing Support from School Principals

Ken Haycock

Provisioning an adequate number and variety of materials is essential to the success of the program. Too often, teacher-librarians attempt to purchase a wide range of materials on a wide range of topics without sufficient depth and scope to those units where the library is used for resource-based learning.

Be Professional

Is it always necessary to ask for permission? Certainly involve the principal in the definition of your priorities, but you have to make final decisions as to what will be done for a particular group of clients in a particular situation. Recognize your limits and exercise your professional judgment.

Involve the Administrator

Does the principal understand the function of the library and the role of the teacher-librarian? Have you discussed your role in cooperative program planning and teaching, and your varying successes with different subject areas and grade levels? How has the administrator been implicated in the establishment of objectives and thus committed to their attainment? Has the administrator been invited to observe the program in the library? Has the administrator been encouraged to question prospective new teachers as to how they might involve the teacher-librarian in their program, and to question teachers currently on staff as to how they are using the library and its services in their teaching programs?

Most teacher-librarians have been faced with the challenge of stating the aims and objectives of the school library program to a school administrator and translating them into solid educational terms that are easy to understand and accept. There is no question that the principal is the key to the success of any school library program. Communicating with principals thus becomes a cornerstone for building support for new programs, as well as for accounting for existing levels of support. In order to develop an environment for support and assistance, a few guidelines are useful.

Plan a Strategy

Full information is crucial. Does the principal know and understand the role of the school library as fundamental to learning, as much a "concept of teaching" as a place in the school? Does he/she feel that the library is essential to the success of the school and to student achievement? At the very least, does he/she expect good service? If not, it is critical that a plan be prepared to explain the program. After all, where would this knowledge come from? It would certainly not come from the training institutions or professional literature, and it will rarely come from the school district. It must come from the teacher-librarian. It is also important to observe the communication links and patterns within the school to determine who most frequently has the principal’s ear, and why this is so.

Center Regularly

Every teacher-librarian should meet regularly with the school principal. These meetings are essential to ensure that time is available for communication, and that the administrator is routinely involved in program appraisal and improvement.

Communicate Effectively

Avoid library jargon and discuss goals and directions in the common language of education. What are your short and long range objectives? What is it specifically that you would like to accomplish this month, this year, this term? The library will not be perceived as an essential component of the school program unless it is viewed as integral to both teaching and learning.

Be Specific

What are the areas requiring attention? Where do you need assistance? Does the principal understand why a professional substitute is essential during the teacher-librarian’s absence? There may be a requirement for additional clerical help, or a need for release time for a planning with teachers or for in-service. Be specific in your request and be sure to include the benefits that will accrue directly to the school program. Translate your budget into program terms. How much money is required to purchase book and non-book materials for each particular unit that you plan to team teach with a classroom teacher?
President’s Memo

As noted in my last column, CSLA members will be receiving a membership questionnaire. The results of which will allow the executive board to determine each member’s place of residence, employment status and background, conditions of work, and access to support personnel. A specific question will cover the degree of freedom members have to attend conferences and workshops, the nature of funding such activities, and the level of involvement in other organizations. One value of this information is that it will permit the board to respond more specifically to members’ concerns, and improve communication within the CSLA.

I also pointed out in my previous column the executive board’s efforts to restructure its organization in order to be more responsive to the membership. Numerous plans have been studied, some of which appear in this issue of School Libraries in Canada and at the annual conference in April. The CSLA would be wise to keep these ideas in mind, as they may be beneficial for our organization in the future.

Adoption of the recommended curriculum will place the term “teacher-librarian” in the framework of an educational philosophy and training program. The term will then have a clear meaning for all CSLA members, and will be the intention of the motion to adopt “teacher-librarian” passed at the 1986 CSLA AGM. As it stands now, there are many meanings for the term, and the CSLA will be forced to adopt a new definition. A new definition for the term “teacher-librarian” would be useful for our organization.

The paper on newsworthy, “Similar Futures: School Libraries and Networks,” appears in this issue. It is a long awaited document and will be a focus of discussion at the provincial level as well as at the CSLA annual conference.

Ted Monkhouse

This January I represented CSLA at the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) biennial forum “Education for Life and Work” in Ottawa. I also attended the CTF forum on “Multiculturalism in Schools” in April. It is gratifying to have this association with CTF a natural affiliation considering our primary allegiance to education.

I hope that you are pleased with the new journal that the editorial board has worked hard to develop. Our problem has been CSLA’s commitment to make School Libraries in Canada financially independent. A scheme for this has just been approved by the CSLA board that involves licensing through subscription sales, advertising, and other fund raising methods that we feel we can sell to the public. It is important that the executive board will be “under the gun” from now on to keep School Libraries in Canada alive.

This column outlines some of the issues dealt with at the CSLA executive meeting in February Committee reports. The selection of award winners, promotion of membership concerns, and professional development programming were some of the issues discussed at the provincial level as well as at the CSLA annual conference.

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