Vol. 3, 2000 Apr 2000
ISSN: 1523-4320 www.ala.org/aasl/slr

The Role of the Principal in an Information Literate School Community: Cross-Country Comparisons from an International Research Project

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Abstract

This article describes the development of an international research project that has investigated the role of the principal in relation to school library programs and services. The research has its roots in qualitative work done in Canada and Australia. The international research project was conducted in seven countries: Australia, Canada, Scotland, Finland, France, Japan, and South Korea. Because of the international context of this research, the authors have chosen to use the terminology most frequently used in the participating countries and in the research instruments used for the study, that is, "principal," "teacher-librarian," and "school library." However, where appropriate, other local terminology has been used, for direct quotes and in reference to specific local contexts.

Background

Oberg, Hay, and Henri describe the development of an international research project that has investigated the role of the principal in relation to school library programs and services (forthcoming). The research has its roots in qualitative work done in Canada and Australia (see for example, LaRocque and Oberg, 1990, 1991; Oberg 1996; Hay and Henri, 1995; Henri and Hay 1996). The international research project was conducted in seven countries: Australia, Canada, Scotland, Finland, France, Japan, and South Korea. Because of the international context of this research, the authors have chosen to use the terminology most frequently used in the participating countries and in the research instruments used for the study, that is, "principal," "teacher-librarian," and "school library." However, where appropriate, other local terminology has been used, for direct quotes and in reference to specific local contexts.

Principals and teacher-librarians completed a three-part questionnaire. Instrument 1 asked for information about the school context of the respondents, their education, and experience. Instrument 2 examined the participants' perceptions and beliefs about their current and future roles. Instrument 3 explored the participants' views on such concerns as the strengths and challenges of the school library, the contributions of teacher-librarians to teaching and learning, the nature of information literacy, and barriers to integration of information skills. A report home

In Japan the study was conducted in 40 high schools serving students aged 15–18 in Tokyo, an urban context, and in 60 primary and junior high schools serving students aged 6–14 in northern and central Japan, a rather rural area.

In South Korea the study was conducted across the 11 high school districts of Seoul, in the 141 high schools that have teacher librarians. All of the high schools in Seoul do not have teacher librarians; in all of Korea there are 252 teacher librarians, 175 of whom are in high schools.

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Figure 1. CrossCountry Comparisons of Teacher-Librarians by Age

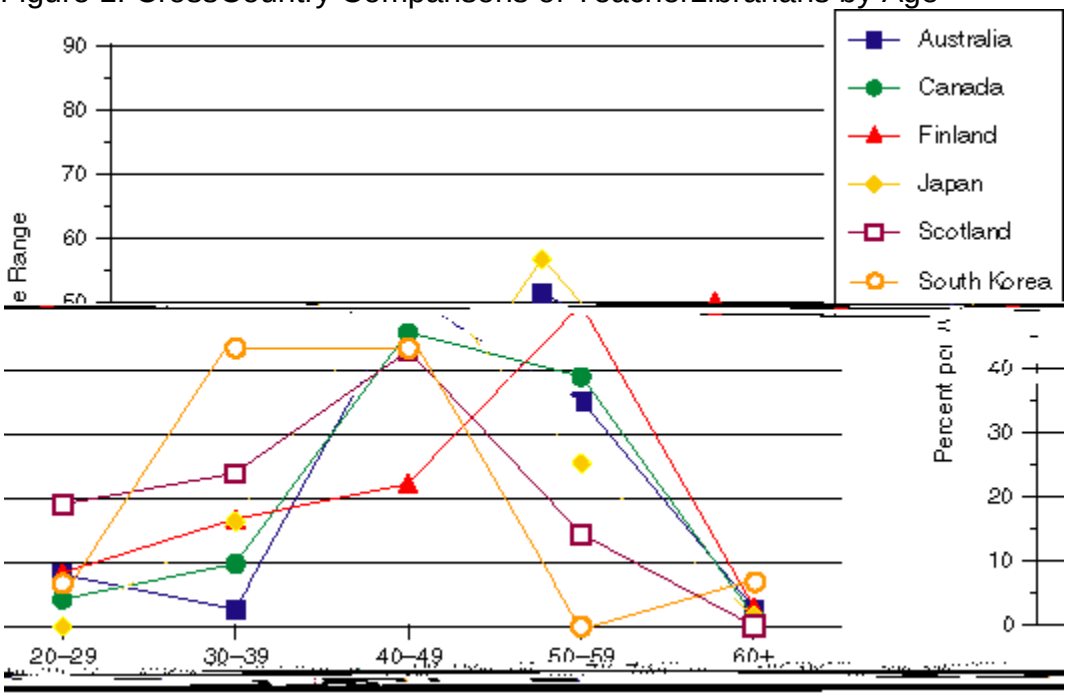
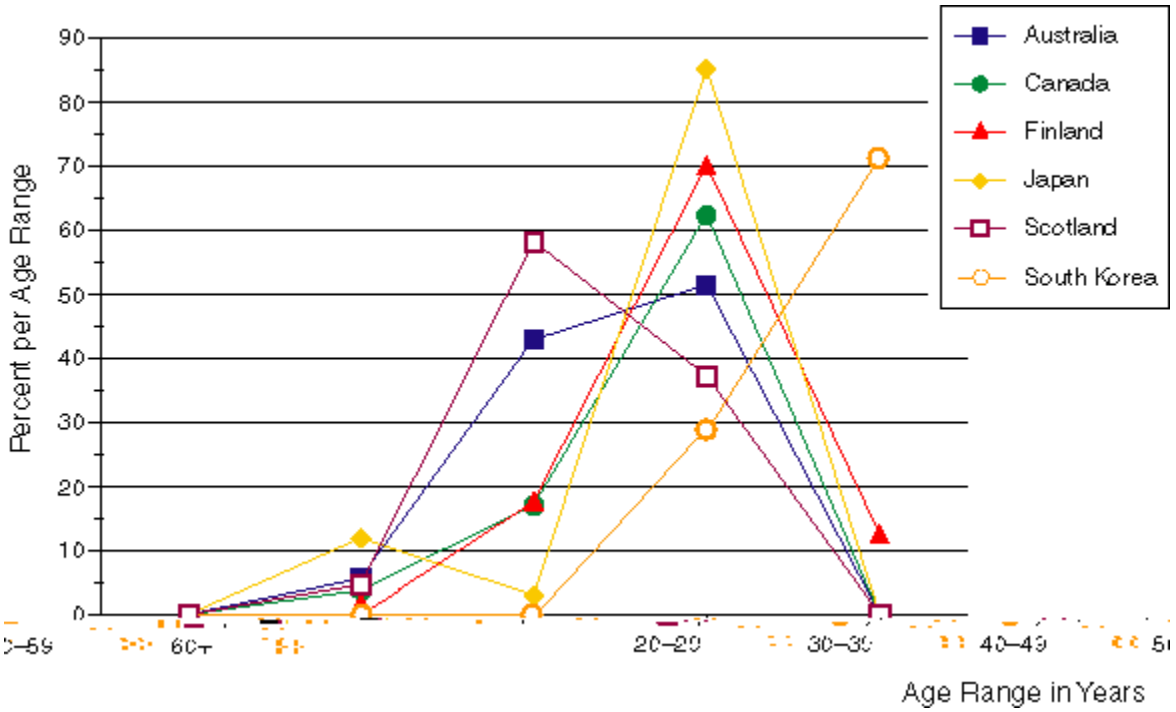


Figure 2. CrossCountry Comparisons of Principals by Age



- Encouraging the teaching staff to invest time in cooperatively planning and teaching with the teacher-librarian (Q.10) (9/12)
- Actively seeking outside school funding possibilities that can be used to supplement the library resource center budget (Q.16) (9/12)
- Seeking feedback from staff about their impressions of the quality of library resource centre services (Q.31) (9/12)
- Working with the teacher-librarian to develop the teacher-librarian's personal professional development plan (Q.26) (8/12)

Top Ten Present and Future Percep..004 Tw iontrth the teacherLBody <</MCID 14 >>BDPT5 1 Tf -08

4	Advocate TL role in school curriculum	4	1	1	3	10	8	7	6	5	5	4	8	8	5				6	8		3	8	5		105	5.53
11	Facilitate staff PD in understanding and use of IT	8	2			2																					

	schools information literacy programs														
33	TL ought to have education and librarianship qualification	2	1	9	7	6	4	8	9		9	1	2	58	5.273

It is interesting to note that only South Korea did not rate Internet access in its top ten beliefs; instead the principals and teacher-librarian showed significant alignment in their top two beliefs, the merit selection process for teacher-librarians (Q.34) and the need for dual qualifications in education and librarianship for the teacher-librarian (Q.33). In Scotland, by contrast, both school librarians and principals strongly agreed that Internet access should be available in the school library (ranked number 1 by both groups) but they disagreed on the importance of dual qualifications for school librarians. In fact, the school librarians in Scotland were the only respondent group who did not rank the dual qualification belief in their top ten list. On the other hand, both principals and teacher-librarians in Australia strongly agreed on dual qualifications for teacher-librarians and they exhibited alignment in viewing the teacher-librarian as a key player in the school's information literacy programs (Q.32). As this discussion illustrates, the overall top beliefs may give a sense of the nature of the school library program and the role of the teacher-librarian and principal as key players in that program, but each country has unique educational and political frameworks that influence beliefs within individual countries.

Cross-

In all five countries, two key strengths of the library are an emphasis on supporting staff and students in teaching and learning and the provision of resources and equipment. With the exception of South Korea, there are frequent mentions of trained and qualified staff as a key strength. In Canada and Finland it is important that the library be an environment that is open, inviting, well-organized, and connected to other libraries.

Funding is a challenge high on the list in all five countries. In some countries this reflected the low levels of funding to education as a whole; in others, more specific issues were identified such as low salaries for library staff or competition from IT for a piece of the budget. In all but South Korea, IT represented an important challenge, in terms of the need for constant upgrading of technology and in terms of the demands for staff training and for user education. Support for the library from school administrators and from teachers also is seen as a key challenge in Canada, Scotland, and Finland.

Participants mentioned the provision and organization of information and resources as one of the critical functions of teacher-librarians. All but South Korea identified in-service staff and cooperative planning and teaching as the other two critical contributions that teacher-librarians made to the teaching and learning in schools. Principals and teacher-librarians in Canada and Australia differed in the emphasis they placed on these two functions: principals tended to focus on the teacher-librarians' role in professional development, in enabling things to happen, while teacher-librarians tended to focus on the front-line responsibilities of planning, teaching, and evaluating learning as equal partners with other teachers. In Scotland and Australia, the role of the teacher-librarian in IT—both IT management and IT user education—is also seen a very critical.

When asked about the effect of the library being closed for more than two weeks, participants in all of the five countries agreed that there would be losses in access to resources and in the teaching of information skills. They suggested that instructional strategies might become less varied and student-centered and that teachers might rely more on the textbook approach.

The next question asked about the impact of the teacher-librarian being absent for more than two weeks. Participants in three out of four countries (no responses were available from South Korea) agreed that there would be serious declines in the instructional program related to information skills. The majority of the participants from Finland suggested that there would be little impact on teaching and learning. In order to ensure access to the library when the teacher-librarian is absent, participants in Canada and Australia reported that efforts would be made in some schools to hire a replacement with at least teacher qualifications but in Scotland and

available for teachers and teacher-librarians to work together was seen a barrier by principals and teacher-librarians in Australia, Scotland, and Finland and by teacher-librarians in Canada. Lack of "top-down support"—limitations in the principal's understanding and leadership and lack of a school information skills policy or curriculum—was seen as a barrier by all teacher-librarians except in Finland. Educational practices such as compulsory courses with rigid content requirements, university entrance examinations, and government testing programs were seen as barriers by teacher

> and need to be used for the benefit of Finnish learners and teachers. (Niinikangas 1998, 13)
>
> The Australian findings demonstrate that there is a significant affinity between principals and teacher librarians with respect to information literacy issues. This will allow a concentration on those issues that are seen as contentious and will facilitate the development of a short instrument that could be used to generate data on these key issues. (Henri 1998, 6)

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge with thanks the contributions of: Geoff Fellows of the Internet Special Project Group (ISPG) at Charles Sturt University for his programming knowledge and general technical know-how; Natasha Wood, psychology honors graduate from Charles Sturt University, for her data analysis and reporting of instruments 1 and 2; Heather Empey, MLIS graduate, University of Alberta, for her work with NUDIST*QSR on the data from instrument 3; and Jennifer Branch, Ph.D. candidate, University of Alberta, for her work on the cross country analysis of the data from instrument 3.

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Appendix: Findings from Instrument 3

Findings from Instrument 3 for Canada

Question 1 asked participants to identify the strengths of the library. Principals in Canada emphasized the qualified and cooperative staff, the resources and equipment, and a focus on learning and curriculum; teacher-librarians emphasized the resources and equipment, a focus on learning and curriculum, and an open, inviting, well-organized environment.

Question 2 asked participants to identify the challenges the library faces. Principals and teacher librarians mentioned financial resources most frequently. Teacher-librarians frequently mentioned two other challenges: lack of support for the library from other educators and difficulties in dealing with constantly changing technology.

Question 3 asked the participants to identify the things that the teacher-librarian does that are critical to the quality of teaching and learning. The three critical functions of the teacher-librarian are inservicing staff, cooperative planning and teaching, and collection development. Overall, the principals and teacher-librarians are in agreement as to the nature of teacher-librarians' contributions to teaching and learning. However, the principals put the strongest emphasis on the inservicing role while the teacher-librarians put the strongest emphasis on the cooperative planning and teaching role.

Question 4 asked how the form and quality of teaching and learning in the school would be affected if the library were to be closed for more than two weeks. Principals most frequently responded that students and teachers would be unable to access the resources that they needed and that this would have a major school-wide impact. Teacher-librarians also mentioned the school-wide impact but were more likely to focus on specific impacts such as students and teachers being unable to access the resources that they needed, less collaboration among staff, reductions in the variety of instructional strategies being used, and decreased recreational reading by students.

Question 5 asked how the form and quality of teaching and learning would be affected if the teacher-librarian were to be absent for more than two weeks. Both principals and teacher-librarians believed, first, that there would be less collaboration among staff and, second, that the instructional program related to the research process would suffer.

Question 6 asked about the arrangements that are made to ensure access to the library when the teacher-librarian is absent. Slightly more than 50% of both principals and teacher-librarians reported that support staff (aide or technician) are left in charge to do the best that they can while the others reported that a substitute teacher (not necessarily a qualified teacher-librarian) supervises the learning resources centre.

Question 7 asked respondents to give their ideas about information literacy. The principals responded to this question with fewer ideas and with less consistency than did teacher-librarians. The most frequent responses from both groups centered around being able to access information from a variety of sources and knowing how to analyze, evaluate and use information. Only teacher-librarians mentioned being able to share knowledge effectively and being able to find answers to questions relevant to one's life as important aspects of information literacy.

qualified, energetic, and very proactive, resources might be shifted from library. When librarians are part-time or underqualified, their influence is greatly reduced.

The critical functions of the librarian, according to both principals and librarians, are: professional development of teaching staff; collegiality; collection management; process orientation; and IT expertise. While the IT focus could be seen as a part of each of the preceding categories, there is a sense that it also stands alone. Both principals and librarians suggest that the librarian's role as an IT expert—even as the IT manager—is critical to the quality of teaching and learning. The differences between principals and librarian comes down to a difference in emphasis. Principals in the main tend to see the librarian as a key support, resource, and facilitator—but largely as a professional who enables things to happen. The librarians tend to emphasize the front-line responsibility of planning, teaching, and eval0(e)4(r)3(e)4(i).oTd [(l)- are:o rias

the discussion of information literacy to students but some noted the need for teachers to understand the process.

There is strong agreement between principals and librarians about what barriers hinder the integration of information skills across the curriculum. The barriers can be grouped under five major headings: funding; teacher knowledge and beliefs; teacher desire to change; planning time; and librarian credentials. Librarians identified a further category: lack of top-down support. Librarians saw the lack of top-down support as a major impediment to their ability to influence the curriculum. While the principals and librarians tended to identify the same type of barriers, the principals tended to be more concerned by the bigger picture and the librarians by more prosaic matters.

Both principals and librarians were asked how they promoted the role of the library through

services, but this factor was not mentioned by principals who were unlikely to be directly involved in the provision of external services. Principals and school librarians clearly identified the school librarian's role in the provision of information and resources and in the development of information skills as the most important contributions to learning and teaching in the school. Principals cited cooperation with teaching staff as the third most important role and the development of the Internet and IT in general as the fourth key role. For school librarians, these issues were citeh76(eh7(cin0(r)e5(ol)-2(r)3(.oT)1(i)-2(n)-10(g)10(ew T*-3(d ( )Tj 0e1tio-2(n w(a)4(c)4e

Principals and school librarians were asked how they promoted the school library through committees in the school and there was general agreement that having the school librarian as a member of committees (such as the IT committee, the resources committee, and the information skills committee) was the best way to promote the library. Principals stressed promoting the library through a range of committees; a number of school librarians emphasized the importance of attending head of department meetings although it was clear that not all school librarians were entitled to attend such meetings. School librarians also stressed the importance of written and verbal communication with committee members.

Both principals and school librarians were asked for final comments on their role in developing and supporting an information literate school community. While a significant percentage chose not to comment, principals identified leadership and commitment to the development of information skills as the key issues, closely followed by the adequate provision of funding and resources. Other issues identified were the crucial role of the principal in this area, the need to promote the role of the school librarian, and the development of the library as a whole school resource. School librarians were more willing to comment on this and identified the development of information skills across the curriculum as their main role, followed by the need for them to encourage support for information literacy among teachers and emphasize the need for schools to develop a whole school policy on information skills. Other issues cited were the improvement of library stock, the promotion of the school librarian as the school information professional, and the need to seek better funding for the library. It should be noted here that a number of school librarians used this question to restate problems faced by them in the school and did not answer the question directly.

School librarians in the Scotland study were asked two additional questions. The first related to how the school librarian maintained credibility as a school librarian. The key elements in achieving credibility were identified as taking a professional approach and promoting the library and their own role within the school. Professional development was also seen as very important and the provision of a professional service and involvement in school wide policy development were emphasized.

School librarians were then asked what support the principal could provide. The key needs identified were additional finance, more clerical support, and the inclusion of the library in the school's curriculum plan. Other key issues were more support for professional development and more promotion of the library by the principal.

Findings from Instrument 3 for South Korea

A traditional library in South Korea is like a warehouse of old books; there is no information technology in most schools. The school librarian's main task is to order books, and the main focus of the library is in supporting reading and student independent learning.

Both principals and school librarians saw the strengths of the library as promoting reading and providing books or information for teaching and learning. However, the principals put the strongest emphasis on reading while the school librarians put the emphasis on providing information or helping teachers teach and students learn.

Both principals and school librarians stated the challenges that face the library are budget and information literacy.

The school librarian's critical functions are providing information and reading guidance. The function of providing information was seen as circulation of books.

If the library were closed or a school librarian were absent for more than two weeks, the majority of the principals and school librarians said that the main effect would be in the use of information materials. Thus the participants emphasized that the student aides have to be trained well in order to ensure access to the library when the school librarian was absent.

Both school librarians and principals saw information literacy mostly as the ability to get information through computer network. Mentioned by school librarians, but with less frequency, was the provision of teaching-learning materials.

The major barriers to the integration of information skills across the curriculum were software and budget, according to the seven principals who answered this question are. The nineteen school librarians who answered this question emphasized student-teaching methods (i.e., to textbooks), the principal and teacher's lack of understanding, the system of university entrance exams, and the school librarian's ability.

Principals stated that their role with school committees is to provide a supporting budget and insist upon the library's importance. But the majority of school librarians thought they could promote the role of the library through school committees and cooperative planning and teaching or through collection development.

The school librarians held quite diverse opinions about how a principal could provide additional support to a school librarian. They insist the principal should show support by providing an adequate budget and encouraging a school librarian to participate in cooperative program planning and teaching. Others supports mentioned included paying attention to the library, believing in the school librarian's role or ability, and giving the school librarian a chance to attend professional seminars or training courses.

In summary, the South Korean principals saw the library as a whole: for them it must be a performance tool serving everybody, managed by an efficient and friendly school librarian who opens the library as long as possible. Despite the principal's interest in the library, his support and cooperation with the school librarian is minimal. The South Korean school librarians appeared to have a clear understanding of what principal support entails and of the need to gain this critical support. However, they appeared to have less knowledge of the strategies that they might employ to gain principal support and little assertiveness in using the strategies of which they were aware.

Findings from Instrument 3 for Finland

emphasized the library's open access, nearness to the users, resources and equipment, qualified and cooperative staff, and focus on learning or curriculum.

Principals saw IT and acquisition of both printed and electronic material as the biggest challenges in the library. More room, professional staff, and cooperation between teachers, students, and the library were also important. School librarians considered adequate library space and the acquisition of modern basic materials most important. After these followed IT- and IT user education, teaching information skills, and weeding out old material. The low salary compared to teachers' wages and low status of qualified school librarians were also mentioned: "To get the appointment, status and salary of a real school librarian. The other challenges, e.g., integration into curriculum etc., follow long behind." Overall, principals emphasized the importance of IT more than school librarians. School librarians sometimes saw IT as an enemy to reading.

Principals considered the school librarian's task to teach information skills/user education and to inspire and encourage students and staff most important. Traditional library tasks such as cataloging or converting the card catalog to a database, selecting and acquiring materials, and organizing the library were next. School librarians saw their most important tasks the acquisition of material, the guidance of students to the right sources of information, and the development of a quality library collection. School librarians saw their most important task as the acquisition of the materials, while according to principals' opinions it was the teaching of information skills.

If the library were closed for more than two weeks, the majority of the principals considered that the students' independent work would become more difficult, but a few thought that it would not affect schoolwork at all. There were also opinions that students would have to go elsewhere and the teaching strategies could not vary during the closure. The school librarians emphasized that students could not work independently at school or they could not complete their assignments or essays. Some teachers would have access to the library but in some cases students would not. Overall principals saw the effects of closure less important than did school librarians.

The principals responded in different ways to the question about what would happen if the school librarian were absent from school more than two weeks. Some principals reported that the

Most principals saw information literacy as a critical skill to be able to look for information; a few saw this in terms of being able to find essential information or to be able to use information for the right purpose. It was also mentioned that information literacy is the skill to distinguish between truth and fiction or the skill to "understand the whole picture." The majority of the