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The Role of a Library Facilitator: At the Buffet with Nancy Dalrymple

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Nancy Dalrymple leads a busy life. As the mother of a precocious four-year old, and the Facilitator of Libraries for the Durham District School board, she has a lot of responsibilities on her plate, literally. (As I write this, she is sliding fresh, hot cookies onto a plate to cool, some of several dozen cookies she is baking for an event at her church tomorrow.)

Her teacher-librarian position is unique as teacher-librarian positions go. Instead of being in a school library teaching students information literacy skills and running reading programs for her students, she works out of the board office teaching teachers (and teacher-librarians) information literacy skills, and running reading programs for the entire school board. She facilitates library programs for 105 elementary schools and 20 high schools and supports nearly that many teacher-librarians. It is a full plate.

Still, with all of her responsibilities, she generously took the time to meet with me, a stranger to her, for a two-hour buffet lunch and interview on December 4, 2003 .

Dalrymple has been in her current position as Facilitator of Libraries and Computers for 3 ½ years, having first covered the maternity leave of her predecessor, and later taking the post permanently. She brings to the position 10 years of experience as an elementary school teacher-librarian and almost as many as a teacher.

Originally, Dalrymple taught core French combined with, as she put it, “something different every year” (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2003). Eventually, she was asked to consider becoming the teacher-librarian for her dual-track French immersion school, a position that had previously belonged to two part-time teacher-librarians, one French and one English. After some consideration, Dalrymple accepted the position, and has never looked back. Since then, she has held teacher-librarian positions in several other schools. Just prior to moving into the facilitator position, Dalrymple spent close to two years in a brand new school, where she opened the library.

In her current position, Dalrymple is responsible for both libraries and computers. She feels that the library responsibility is about 60% of her time but says it is difficult for her to judge because a lot of her library-related responsibilities are also technology-related, and also because the responsibilities come in waves. Part of her computer portfolio is providing training for teacher-librarians and teachers in new software programs, but her main computer-related role is supporting the pilot Kindergarten report card. Understandably, in the weeks leading up to the three reporting periods, her time will be taken up with that responsibility. Dalrymple's other technology-related responsibilities include training primary teachers on using computers in their language program and helping to support the Curriculum Unit Planner software.

When she has her library hat on, Dalrymple supports the teacher-librarians, particularly the new teacher-librarians (of which there were 25 last year – nearly 1/5 of those in the board) in using the library automation software and implementing the library curriculum. She tries to visit each new teacher-librarian at least once in their first year, and will also go out to visit experienced teacher-librarians, and even teach a class or two, on an as requested basis. For example, she might demonstrate a lesson that integrates the *Information Studies* curriculum (OSLA, 1999) with the curriculum expectations of a particular grade or she might model collaborative planning with a teacher for a new teacher-librarian.

One thing Dalrymple is particularly pleased about is the implementation of a mentorship program for new teacher-librarians within the board. This is something she says would likely not have happened without someone in her position because the “average out-in-the-field teacher-librarian doesn't have the time or the contacts to set up that sort of a program” (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2003).

Dalrymple supports the collection development responsibilities of the board's teacher-librarians in several ways. She organizes bus trips to library suppliers, and if there is a resource that can be more cheaply obtained through bulk ordering, she facilitates that opportunity for teacher-librarians. The individual teacher-librarians make all purchasing decisions at the school library level. Dalrymple does not create recommended buying lists. She feels that the teacher-librarians support each other by going together to the suppliers. She does, however, make resource recommendations for the board's Professional Library.

Dalrymple doesn't work alone at the board level. There is a librarian who runs the board Professional Library which includes videos, audio-visual equipment, novels, kits, and other teacher-resources. This colleague also organizes the board courier system and looks after the contracts for library automation software and online databases. Dalrymple works closely with the professional librarian, as Dalrymple's duties include the ongoing support of those electronic resources.

Working partnerships exist with various other facilitators on a project-by-project basis. Dalrymple and the English Facilitator prepared a professional development in-service for teacher-librarians and teachers on how to create technology-based assignments that minimize plagiarism. Dalrymple has also been part of several committees, such as one to

secure funding for a 'Books and Breakfast' program. With another facilitator, Dalrymple created an online literature discussion forum as part of their implementation of the Ontario Library Association's Red Maple reading program. Because the board has a lot of French Immersion schools, Dalrymple also works closely with the French consultant to support the teacher-librarians in these schools.

Dalrymple is particularly proud of the partnerships that exist in the board between the Early Literacy reading initiative and the library program. She has heard of problems in other boards, but the natural fit between these two programs is being taken advantage of in Durham District. Teacher-librarians and the itinerant Early Literacy Resource Teachers work together to support kindergarten and primary reading.

Keeping informed on library initiatives appearing throughout the province is a personal priority of Dalrymple. She is a member of OLA (Ontario Library Association) and participates in its listservs. She is also a member of TALCO (The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario), which is an organization of persons in similar library leadership positions in school boards across Ontario. She brings the information she learns back to the two teacher-librarian associations she belongs to in her board, 'Four to Six', the secondary teacher-librarians group, and the Durham Elementary Teacher-Librarians Association.

While the support of teachers-librarians is an important role of Dalrymple's, she feels her most valuable role is advocacy. Her board has a strong history of providing teacher-librarians. Last year every school in her board had at least a half-time teacher-librarian, hired by the principal, with occasional interview question input from the library facilitator. Elementary schools with over 650 students qualified for a full-time teacher-librarian, and some of the largest high schools had two full time teacher-librarians and a library technician. Put that beside a local board where many schools did have a teacher-librarian at all and you can see that Durham district has a lot to potentially lose if the role is not continually advocated for.

Dalrymple produces a monthly newsletter that is sent to the board superintendents, federation officers, and teacher-librarians. She has also invited the director to teacher-librarian association meetings. She takes every opportunity to advocate for the teacher-librarian role in her daily interactions with the Administrative Officers, and the Program Superintendent she works under in the board hierarchy. But, Dalrymple stresses that hers is but one voice. Alone, one voice isn't that powerful.

The most important thing she does as far as advocacy is to encourage the other teacher-librarians to add their own voices. And they do. Teacher-librarians in Durham board are very inspirational. They produce school and staff newsletters, organize reading programs, and speak at conferences. You can find the Durham teacher-librarians involved in many aspects of the Ontario Library Association, including at least ten who presented at the 2004 OLA Super-Conference. Because of strong teacher-librarians who support literacy initiatives, in some schools principals have chosen to increase teacher-librarian staffing above the allocated levels.

Being a leader and providing support for over one hundred such dynamic teacher-librarians would be a daunting task for anyone, but Dalrymple rises to the challenge with quiet grace. Juggling the demanding roles of supporting libraries and computers seems effortless for her. There is a buffet of possible responsibilities that someone in a district library leadership role can choose from. From consultation, to communication, to coordination, to administration, to leadership (ALA , 1998), Dalrymple samples them all. While her plate may be loaded with personal, library, and computer-related responsibilities, you can bet that Dalrymple will efficiently polish them off and go up for more.

References:

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