

Making a Difference: a Classroom Teacher's Perspective

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In our current climate of standardized assessment in Ontario, it is satisfying to read that "accessibility to and use of school library media centres staffed by professionals have a direct correlation with reading achievement and positive attitudes toward reading" (Routman, Regie. *Literacy at the Crossroads*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996). Classroom teachers in schools where a qualified teacher-librarian provides opportunities for interactive extensions of classroom learning in the school library setting have experienced this phenomenon first-hand. In these schools, the teacher-librarian extends the curriculum objectives identified by the classroom teacher, offering experience and expertise to augment developing literacy and research skills.

Classroom teachers know that children benefit from opportunities to discuss excellent literature in group settings and that the most valuable part of our language programs is the time spent reading and responding to literature. Teacher-librarians make valuable connections between literature and our curriculum objectives, broadening the children's perspective to include an eclectic mixture of classic tales, modern favourites, poetry and beautiful illustrations. Frequent exposure to quality literature under the leadership of the teacher-librarian enhances the learning experience for the staff as well as the students in a school.

The demands of modern society call for the introduction at an early age to methods for accessing information in a timely, organized and critical manner. The use of a well-organized library resource

centre equipped with a wealth of print and non-print resources is important to the skill set that classroom teachers must encourage students to acquire in order to achieve an edge in a quickly changing world. We must embrace and encourage those individuals in our schools who help us bridge the gap. Often this role is filled by the teacher-librarian.

For me, a planning session with our teacher-librarian is like finding a twenty dollar bill in the pocket of a jacket you haven't worn in a while. What a wonderful surprise to approach a project and find new ideas, support for implementation and a willingness to share the responsibility for evaluation right in your own school. We all benefit from taking a look at familiar objectives from a fresh viewpoint. How energizing it is to broaden our perspectives to include comparisons, dialogues, partnerships, debates and extensions we have overlooked in preparing daily lessons.

As a change agent for program enhancement, teacher-librarians assist classroom teachers by using their wide experience with various teaching and learning styles to enrich the best practice of the classroom teacher. They also can be the focus for creation of a dynamic reading component in your school through flexible scheduling and extra-curricular activities such as Free Voluntary Reading sessions, Literacy Clubs, Silver Birch Programs, story hours and other enrichment activities. They are dedicated and enthusiastic professionals.

Teacher-librarians who make a difference organize book clubs and book fairs, bringing new books into schools and homes and acting as role models for the process of acquiring books. They belong to professional organizations and use their contacts there to connect with new ideas that make learning meaningful to their colleagues and their students. They are often at the forefront of change, acting as conduits to forge a smooth transition between technological advances in the real world and their own schools. Teacher-librarians who make a difference are an integral part of the teaching and learning process in their schools. If you know of a teacher-librarian who is making a difference, tell the world about it – the success of our students depends, in part, on the support and commitment we, as classroom teachers, give to our specialists in the library resource centre in our schools. ■ ■ ■