

GETTING TO KNOW YOU:

Brenda Dillon

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more teachers understood our role as teacher-librarians? Wouldn't it be wonderful if they understood and, even better, were willing to partner with us? I know I'm not alone in this wishful thinking. Oh sure, I do a lot of advocacy and work hard to spread the word, but wouldn't it be nice if we could begin with understanding and build from there?

Of course, when I take a moment to step back and reflect on the problem, I have to admit that it's no wonder teachers find it difficult to understand our role. This is my 19th year as a teacher, so, while I'm no rookie, I'm not exactly at the end of my career either. In terms of experience, I'm at about the same place as many of my colleagues. When I reflect on my own experience with school libraries and teacher-librarians... well, as I said, the lack of understanding ceases to be puzzling. I was a high school student at the end of the 1970s. The school had a library, but I don't remember any teacher ever bringing us there to do research. I don't remember the teacher-librarian doing any teaching. I do remember sometimes signing out books for projects and I remember silent, yes, silent, study halls held in the library. I graduated from a Faculty of Education program in 1988, six years after the publication of *Partners in Action*, during what was supposed to be the golden age of school libraries in Ontario. But the words "teacher-librarian" and "school library" were never uttered, not once, at any time that year by any of the professors, nor did I see—let alone participate in—any collaborative efforts between my associate teachers and their teacher-librarians. I graduated with absolutely no idea, not a clue, about the purpose of school libraries or the role of teacher-librarians. It was only a few years later, during a chance conversation in a parking lot after a PD day, with an individual

who happened to be a teacher-librarian, that I discovered that teacher-librarians were teachers, not librarians. That conversation ultimately led me to move from the regular classroom to the school library. So, seriously, why should I be surprised when my colleagues don't understand my role?

What to do? Should I give up on hoping they'll ever understand? Nope, never, not an option—keep on advocating. I see results! Working with new teachers, before they establish habits and patterns, can be especially useful—they tend to welcome assistance.

I've also tried, over the years, to work with teacher candidates. However, far too often, associate teachers want the teacher candidates to do "real" classroom teaching, not work with the teacher-librarian to collaboratively plan and teach a unit or research assignment. While I can understand the need to develop classroom teaching skills, this does have the unfortunate effect of contributing to a mindset that says teaching isn't really teaching unless it's done by the teacher alone at the front of a classroom. I've suggested repeatedly to associate teachers and to school administrators that teacher candidates would benefit from "mini-placements" in the school library during their time at the school, a day or two to job-shadow and work with me to help them understand the purpose of a school library and the role of a teacher-librarian. But my offer has always been refused, since it's not a formal requirement for the placement—and there was always the implication that I wasn't a real teacher anyway.

So imagine my surprise and excitement when I was contacted by Corinne Laverty, the Head of the Education Library at Queen's University, about hosting a teacher candidate! Was I interested? Yes! I was on the proverbial pins and needles until the principal agreed