



Photos : Julie Millan

Student perceptions of the library

We also surveyed a number of students in each of the schools, typically those in Grades 4 to 6. Our student sample consisted of 57% girls and the average age of the students was 10.4 years. Just under three quarters of the students were born in Canada, but only 50% listed English as their first language, with Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) being the most commonly reported other language. Based on provincially available information, this sample generally represents the diversity of the student population found in these schools.

These students were very positive about their school libraries with over 60 % stating they would like to be able to use the school library more often—“It has SO MANY BOOKS!” Students were also very positive about the school librarian and the services provided by the school librarian, “We have a great librarian that is smart, nice, and is always a happy person!” Overall, 80% of the students believe they learned a lot from the librarian, and 90% of students believed their teacher-librarian to be knowledgeable and helpful.

“The single best thing about our library is our librarian, because she is always there to help us find books and always encourages us to learn with books.”

In terms of the librarians’ roles and responsibilities, the students responded that the librarian taught students how to do research (92%), and use the computer (65% to 80%). Interestingly, over 60% of the students reported that teacher-librarians came to their classrooms. Most surprisingly, only 40% of the students thought the teacher-librarian knew what kinds of books they liked to read! This may reflect students’ perceptions about the limitations of a particular school library

collection. When asked about how the library could be improved, the responses varied widely depending upon students’ interests, from “get more NEW novels” to “some teen books” to “more graphic novels and comics.”

There are many exemplary school library programs in Ontario; each of these programs has unique features, reflecting the situations of the specific schools. A key attribute of these exemplary library programs was the outstanding teaching skills and dedication of the teacher-librarians, who worked to maximize teaching and learning opportunities for students. They were strategic and resourceful in creating opportunities to alter the context within which the library program operated, in order to advance and enhance the library program. Under uncertain conditions these teacher-librarians have developed exemplary programs that support the learning of students. Imagine what could happen if sustained support was available for all libraries.

