

Capitalizing on Knowledge: Mentorship among Teacher-Librarians in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Mentoring dates back to Greek mythology with reference to the sharing of wisdom of knowledge and experience. In Hong Kong, mentorship has been a hallmark of the professional development of the teacher-librarians.

Following a literature review on mentoring in librarianship, this paper provides an overview highlighting the mentorship development among teacher-librarians in Hong Kong. A discussion on how mentorship shaped the preparation of teacher-librarians leads to an analysis of four issues: (1) a formalized mentoring framework; (2) a systematical approach to observe and assess the impact; (3) training to enhance the competency of teacher-librarians; and (4) re-thinking the commitment to evidence-based practice.

While there are complex issues facing the teacher-librarian profession, the author invites the teacher-training institutes to explore their role and participation in facilitating the advancement of teacher-librarianship in Hong Kong which is a pivotal component to nurture information-literate learners for the purpose of knowledge building.

Introduction

Families, schools and industries are no longer separate entities in the development of knowledgeable and creative citizens. The dynamic growth of cultural, social and economic activities in the last century and the advancement of technologies have germinated an active information environment, which presents a new challenge to the educational culture.

The challenge calls for a different approach in educational planning to facilitate a new learning structure and a communal support system that is conducive to nurture citizens who possess the fundamental knowledge, appropriate skills and attitude necessary to make meaningful use of information and technology for the building of new knowledge.

The School Library in the Information Age

The plethora of information, its exponential growth rate, and how humans interact with the information, moved the locus of the educational concern from the product of learning to

the process of learning. As Cheng Kai Ming put it (程介明, 2000) "Information is yet the knowledge which takes human thinking to process information into its applicable stage". This posts a formidable challenge in the development of the 'knowledge society': how to nurture effective learners who not only possess knowledge, but are able to evaluate and use information to produce knowledge.

The synergy behind the education reforms in Hong Kong aimed at the challenge by levying dynamic changes in the learning environment. The vision statement adopted for the school library service in the year 2000, gave one of the potential answers to the challenge:

"Empowering each student to attain information literacy through collaborative teaching and resource-based learning." (香港教育署、學校圖書館組, 2000)

The leadership role of teacher-librarians in promoting information literate learners is concisely spelt out. Preparing information literate, adaptable and socially responsible learners, emerged at the forefront of the school library's agenda. Teachers-librarians are expected to work collaboratively with teachers to look into students' information needs, within the curriculum context, and help them achieve meaningful learning by:

- focusing on the process of learning;
- making meaningful connections with a variety of information resources and a technology-rich environment for active learning;
- succeeding as independent and life-long learners within an empowerment model towards intellectual inquiry and knowledge construction.

Some fellow teachers, principals and even teacher-librarians had since raised the issue of whether the teacher-librarians in Hong Kong have sufficiently prepared themselves to face up to this challenge.

Following a literature review on mentorship in librarianship, this paper provides an overview highlighting the mentorship development among teacher-librarians in Hong Kong. It traces how the evolution of informal and formal mentoring experiences, encouraged and enhanced the growth of teacher-librarianship. In the absence of formal initial training for the profession, mentorship has had invaluable impact, on developing the skills, knowledge and professionalism of teacher-librarians in Hong Kong.

What is a mentor?

In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word mentor is defined as "a person who acts as a guide and an adviser to another person", "a person who offers support and guidance to another" and "an experienced and trusted counselor or friend". In the story of Homer, the

character of Ulysses' friend, Mentor, guided and supported Telemachus, Ulysses' son, on a journey in search of his father and on an ultimate quest for his life goals. Mentoring refers to activities, often in formal and structured arrangements, to share the wisdom of knowledge and experience in professional fields.

Shea (1994) defined mentoring as “a developmental, caring, sharing, and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how, and effort in enhancing another person’s growth, knowledge, and skills and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future.”

Mentoring has become a very popular leadership development movement in business and industrial organizations. The purpose is to ensure recruitment, retention and the nourishment of committed, talented, employees. There is much literature on mentoring in medical and educational settings; however, there is very little written about formal mentorship in the library field, and even less on mentoring programs in school libraries.

Literature Review: Mentorship in Librarianship

Informal mentoring is widely practiced in most libraries among all levels of staff because the practice of traditional librarianship is an art of apprenticeship. Librarians, especially those who do not work in a one-man-band-library, usually receive some informal mentoring from supervisors; tenure and promotion, research and welcome committees; and intensive staff development programs. The following literature review focuses on reporting formal mentoring programs in different types of library organizations.

In Library Schools

Graduate schools in library and information studies are active sponsors of mentorship programs. Both of the mentoring programs at the UCLA's Graduate School of Library and Information Science (Kaplowitz, 1992) and the University of Technology, Sydney (Kallenberger, 2000) paired experienced informational professionals from libraries, of a different nature with library school students, to nurture their competence and performance.

As Brundin put it (1995) "Educators for the professions have long recognized that conceptual instruction that fails to incorporate examples from practice risks producing graduates not fully competent to apply their conceptual knowledge to such practice". In the mentoring programs of most other professional-education fields, such as law, medicine, nursing and engineering, the practical component remains strong in order to achieve a balance between the theory and practice. (Abriam-Yago, 2003; Duffy, 2000; Mauriella, 2000; Case,

2001; Riley, 1997)

In Academic Institutes:

Academic libraries have also documented a long history of employing mentoring programs to provide professional development to librarians with varying levels of experience and in different specializations. The common ones are programs developed for preparing junior professionals, such as tenure-track librarians, to meet tenure or promotion requirements (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001; Wojewodzki, 1998; Colley, 1990; Roberts, 1986). For experienced professionals, mentorship is often used to provide first-hand leadership perspectives to senior librarians, in order to enhance their understanding of the complexities in managing research and academic libraries (Brice, 2002; Nichols, 2002; Jones-Quartey, 2000; Hardesty, 1997).

One prominent example was the College Library Directors Mentor Program under the Academic Research and College Libraries Division, the American Library Association. According to Hardesty (1997), the positive response and accumulative success of the Program was rooted in the active participation from the new directors and the committed leadership of the experienced directors. He reinstated that the key to the ultimate success was largely attributed to the financial and administrative support yielded by the institutions involved.

On planning and designing of a formal mentoring program, Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) suggested that the objective of the framework should “place the learner at the top of the agenda.” They emphasized three key points:

- mentees should be allowed to select mentors
- the initial issue(s) or goal(s) should be discussed and
- mentors must be provided with necessary coaching on skills.

Van Avery (1992) provided a thorough “Checklist for Developing, Implementing, and Assessing a Mentoring Program” derived from the mentoring program instituted in the State University of New York at Albany University Libraries.

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Within Professional Associations:

Several major library associations in the United States have established formal mentorship programs, such as the American Library Association (ALA), the Medical Library Association (MLA), the Special Library Association (SLA), Academic Research and College Libraries (ACRL) of the ALA, and a number of state-wide library associations, such as the Connecticut Educational Media Association. In Australia, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) sponsors mentoring programs across the continent; though some states have more active programs than the others do.

The goals of all these mentorship programs are similar -- to offer their members emotional and intellectual encouragement, sustain growth in perspectives and knowledge in their professional practices, and facilitate regular exchange and mutual support among their members. They also emphasize grooming the leadership skills (Burruss-Ballard, 1990) and innovative perspectives (Hartzell, 1993) in successive members to develop and implement the goals of the association and enrich the organizational culture.

In the School Setting:

In United States, Canada and Australia, field experience, which includes fieldwork, practicum, internship and mentoring, is a basic certification requirement for school library media specialist (SLMS, an equivalent term to school librarian or teacher-librarian used in the U.K or Hong Kong). According to Perritt's regular survey on "School Library Media Certification" (2000), thirty-five out of fifty states in the United States require some form of field experience. The duration ranges from fifty to over two hundred hours within six weeks to two years time period under the supervision of a professional practitioner.

The shortage of school library media specialists (SLMSs), like the shortage of teachers, has accentuated the need for establishing and promoting mentoring programs, in school systems in Australia and the United States (Kaye, 2000; IMLS, 2002). While most of the SLMSs came into their position with formal training varying in levels and professional credentials, the focus of mentoring programs in both countries is to support and retain new SLMSs.

Complementing to the majority of works that described the formats, purposes and benefits of mentorship, Van Deusen (1995) and Bankhead (2002) have documented two cases on how the mentoring program was designed, implemented and evaluated in Iowa and Colorado respectively. Buddy and Williams (2001) have written in full details the development of two mentoring programs at the Atlanta Public Schools and the Dekalb County

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School System (Georgia State) implemented since 1997. They highlighted, with great emphasis, on three core concerns of their mentees, when they planned and revised their mentoring programs -- confidence, technical knowledge and the local school culture. To address the challenges, they devised their mentoring programs with much effort placed to:

- address the concepts and techniques needed to become a capable mentor;
- help new SLMSs to evolve into a mature professional that would embrace the mission of the school system and capable in supporting the instruction program.

Buddy (2001) also provided interesting ideas on using a variety of support measures to encourage the mentors and mentees to share collective concerns and successful endeavors, including group meetings, shared luncheons, visitations, telementoring and supplemented with communications via email, snail mail and telephone calls. Although the formal mentoring program covered only one school year of activities, their advocacy on a "Three Year Philosophy" is a legendary view. According to Buddy and Williams, the first year is a period of adjustment. The second year is to strengthen interpersonal relationships and extend efforts to work collaboratively with teachers. By the end of the third year, the SLMS is familiar with the school culture, acclimates to the school community, actively participates and contributes to the learning and teaching programs.

Nankivell and Shoolbred (1997) pointed out two distinctive characteristics about mentoring: the focus on the process as well as the mentee's input which made mentoring a preferred strategy of staff development in a variety of educational organizations. They emphasized, "It is very important that mentoring is recognized as a process rather than event". One mentor's reflection stated that his responsibility was "suggesting avenues for continuous learning".

They also highlighted that a successful mentoring relationship, usually requires high input from both ends. Mentors serve as a listener, sponsor, guide, teacher and counselor. Mentees must be an active learner and contributor with a high level of commitment. In many other cases, similar observations were yielded that the mentors gained as much as the mentees, including new ideas in professional practices, skills in communication, renewed enthusiasm for one's career and satisfaction from enabling the maturity of the colleagues (Nichols, 2002; Wojewodzki, 1998; Burruss-Ballard, 1990).

Lyders' thorough study (1991) on the field experience requirements for the school library media specialists in the United States gave the following insights:

- Theoretical and practical learning are equally important to all new librarians;
- Field experience is a substantial component of education for school librarians;
- An analysis of the model of administering these internship or mentoring programs

revealed that they shared some successful common structural components, including:

- a. the use of some form of syllabus or guideline;
- b. careful matching and placement mechanics;
- c. the professional experience and commitment of the field supervisors or mentors; and
- d. the cooperative partnership between parties: the intern/mentee, the field supervisor/mentor and the university professor.

Mentorship among Teacher-librarians in Hong Kong

The "real world" benefits of mentoring programs are widely recognized in the library profession (Ganser, 1992; Genoni, 1996). The support and encouragement from a role model provides important intrinsic motivation to a librarian who will be ascertained to work on his goals. Mentorship also challenges both the mentors and mentees to go beyond knowledge per se, to apply their aspirations and creative talents, and to transform their original performance. It is a powerful means to transcend individual performance and to enhance commitment to the profession.

Mentorship has been a hallmark of the professional development of teacher-librarians, in the absence of a formal initial training program for the profession in Hong Kong. Many teacher-librarians have taken their mission seriously, despite of the minimal induction received on how to manage a school library. In the last twenty years, teacher-librarians have organized numerous informal occasions or established alliances to share proven practices on transforming the daily library routines into meaningful library services, that impact learning and teaching. When computers were non-existent in school libraries, they often arranged after school-hour meetings for experience sharing. Librarians from the same educational sponsoring bodies or at the same regional areas also made regular school visits to learn from seeing what and how each other manage different library programs. In addition to all these informal exchange and sharing, two incidents marked the formalization and wide acceptance of mentorship among the teacher-librarians.

Case one: mentorship under organizational leadership

The establishment of the Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians' Association in 1982 created a solid platform for formal exchanges among the practitioners. The experienced members of the Association, who acted as mentors as well as critical friends to the novice librarians, have conducted a wide range of programs, such as:

- survival skills in managing a school library for the new teacher-librarians;

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- workshops on designated topics such as strategic plan in building new libraries, tips on tendering non-standard items including book tenders, leadership skills in coordinating reading schemes, copyright issues discussion, etc.;
- how to plan training of student-librarians;
- visits to overseas school libraries;
- seminars for teachers or student-teachers to find out what is involved in teacher-librarianship.

Many of these programs have been repeatedly conducted for years to help newly appointed teacher-librarians cope with the complexities of managing an existing library operation, when they come to the new job without any training. Much genuine friendship and a strong sense of mutual trust were established between the experienced and new librarians, who maintained good professional exchanges among themselves throughout their career.

In the recent years, the Association has made use of outside resources to provide more systematical professional development for the members. Firstly, through obtaining government project grants, the Association brought in experts to provide training and/or mentoring support to develop the professional performance of the members, and to enhance the infrastructure capacity of the libraries involved. The shared cataloguing database (香港學校圖書館主任協會, 2000) and the online self-learning platform (香港學校圖書館主任協會, 2003) were two successful initiatives to nurture cooperation and reflective practice among the participants. The "Information Ambassadors" (香港學校圖書館主任協會, 2000) was a unique project to experiment on librarian-librarian and librarian-student mentorship in parallel at the same time.

The mentoring experience of these projects focused on encouraging members to converse with peers and experts, to act and reflect on a common agenda, and to share the common results of an innovation. One example is the promotion of information literacy and cooperative learning among themselves and the students in the "Information Ambassadors" project. The most significant outcome of these projects is the professional maturity of a group of librarian-mentors, who are committed to share their experiences and aspirations through continuous mentoring programs.

Secondly, the Association collaborated with the University of Hong Kong to facilitate a formal mentorship experience for participants of a credit-bearing training program for teacher-librarians in the year 2000. Similar to other formal field experience practice, a network of schools, each with a supporting-librarian, has been lined up to receive the librarian-mentee(s). The mentor-librarian guided the mentee(s) to observe and participate in

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library and subject-teaching activities in his/her school according to a pre-agreed plan. In the last two annual mentoring exercises, the majority of the mentees expressed solid gains and genuine reflections on the mentoring experience in their reports.

The successful implementation of this formal mentorship program was a milestone to the professional development of teacher-librarians. The mentoring program created concrete opportunities for the practitioners to apply the theoretical underpinnings in information sciences. They facilitate the capitalization on the knowledge of practice by encouraging purposeful observations, focused exchanges and reflection.

Case Two: Mentorship on Demand

The second incident happened when computers found their ways to schools in the late 1980's. A few teacher-librarians who made pioneering attempts in developing automation software became very popular “mentors” to their peers who had little knowledge of technological applications. At the beginning, they were called by friends, in a personal capacity, to provide quick solutions to technical problems. Gradually they were visited and approached by more and more teacher-librarians and teachers for advice on all sorts of computer applications issues. As more schools saw the need to implement large-scale networks and Internet applications, they were invited by the Education Department, professional organizations and individual schools to conduct training, workshops and demonstrations.

The high demand on technical support in library automation, finally contributed to the establishment of a mentoring group, under the Hong Kong Professional Teacher's Union, on library automation in the year of 1991. These techno-mentors have provided advice to the peers, not only on the selection and the implementation of different library systems, but also given support to numerous school libraries to establish computer networks and develop applications to maximize information access on the Internet.

Technological advancement had not only shaped a new fashion of mentoring among teacher-librarians in the 1990's but also extended the means of mentoring through the use of the latest technologies. One example is the "Schoollibrary.net" (熊銘, 2001) which is a well-received website, set up by an experienced librarian-mentor to provide a one-stop information support to his peers in a range of library practices. The popularity of peer communications via an open forum also reflects a wide acceptance of teacher-librarians in seeking advice, from a peer-mentor, to be a part of the personal and professional development.

Through the virtual networks, teacher-librarians have widened the connectivity and

communication with the global information village, for the students and the school. In parallel, teacher-librarians have broken the isolation in which they were bounded in the traditional one-man-band environment. They have broadened their interactions, with their peers, through the networks they created among themselves.

Enthusiastic references about the positive mentor-mentee relationships and the impact of formal mentoring programs are found in the librarianship literature and in local cases. Mentoring has been touted as constructive, not only for mentees but also for their mentors, as well as the organizations in which they work or associate with. The majority of the cases quoted in this paper highlighted a tripartite benefit. The mentees benefit from support and guidance in many dimensions, the mentors enjoy being recognized as leaders, and the organizations are enhanced through the development of capable individuals, who assume a leadership role and promote organizational advancement.

Mentoring and the Role of Teacher-Librarian

Despite the apparent benefits from the mentoring culture, many teacher-librarians have constantly expressed concerns (香港學校圖書館主任協會，1998; 1999; 2000) related to:

- other's perceptions of the image of teacher-librarians;
- the lack of understanding by others of the role;
- preparation and training to promote information literacy; and
- perceived low status of the position.

They detested being used in classrooms as supply teachers to fill gaps in staffing levels. Some complained that they were not given sufficient chance for professional development by the principal, who considered that training was unnecessary for performing school library works. It is not incidental that there was a time, before the year 1997, a general shortage of teacher-librarians, when teaching was not regarded as an economically high-rewarding job.

Hartzell (1993) gave the following reasons, which contributed to the “misconception” about the traditional role of the teacher-librarian:

- librarians tended to be rather isolated within the library;
- teacher-librarians had little day-to-day contact with teachers and parents related to student's learning;
- teachers tended to view librarians as support resources rather than a teaching partner.

The many mentoring activities developed among the one thousand teacher-librarians in Hong Kong, echoed a clarion call from the teacher-librarians, to conceptualize their role as a key partner in learning and teaching. However, mentoring will not provide a full address to these concerns, in terms of status, role and training. The answer to acknowledge the role requires more than just professional capacity building through mentoring. It requires, rather, a shift of thinking: to focus on how to achieve an empowerment model towards intellectual inquiry and knowledge construction in a learning community.

What should teacher-librarians do to position a paradigm shift?

From Information to Knowledge

The information environment of the 21st century is complex and fast-changing. As Bill Gates said, “If the 1980s were about quality and the 1990s were about reengineering, then the 2000s will be about velocity.” He refers to the “velocity” as the speed of an organization to stay up with and anticipate changes, to make the best use of information to develop the right processes and strategies for making precise business decisions (Gates, 2003).

The sense of business decision-making is similar to the act of knowledge building. Knowledge building is achieved through building deep understanding and connectivity with information, in an inquiry-based framework and grounded in an environment with appropriate scaffolding and communal supports (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2002). School libraries are in the best position to provide abundant information opportunities and to ensure the interactions are dynamic and constructive within the school learning community.

The key to the shift of thinking lies in what the teacher-librarians do to engage the students to connect and interact with information under a thoughtful purpose; and how to instill the students to utilize information with a clear goal in knowledge building. The urgent needs in engaging students in knowledge building, through inquiry-centered instructions, indicated a clear direction in terms of where the evidence-based focus of a school library might lie. The concluding part of this paper is devoted to reflective ideas on charting a

value-adding process in mentoring programs on teacher-librarianship.

Charting a Preferred Future: from Mentoring to Evidence-based Practice

1. A formalized and Dynamic Framework for Mentoring

The art of mentoring is about to connect and to interact. A thoughtfully planned mentoring program entails the mentors to utilize appropriate information and relevant experience to create a sense-making sharing with the mentees (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995). An effectively formalized mentoring program builds strong connectivity and interactivity and creates a committed and dynamic community.

As most of the local mentoring programs for teacher-librarians are provided on a voluntary basis, some have a more structural framework than the others. In order to enhance the exiting mentoring programs, mentorship organizing bodies and librarian-mentors should consider deriving a clear guideline for each mentoring program, stating:

- the goal(s);
- criteria for training and matching mentors;
- responsibilities of mentors and mentees;
- the process of mentoring; and
- the evaluation mechanism

The guideline will be a useful tool to facilitate agreement in expectations and interactions between the mentors and the meetees (Nankivell & Shoolbred, 1997; Lyders, 1991). With a formalized framework, mentoring programs will help elucidate a share-learning culture to intensify the articulation of effective practice in capacity building.

2. Approach to Assess the Impact of Mentorship

According to Wunsch (1994), "If mentoring is to become more systematic, so must its assessment." As most of the local mentoring programs were conducted under limited resources, the quality assurance mechanism was often compromised. For example, mentorship organizing bodies may not have resource to provide training to the mentors or to conduct a systematic review of the mentees' response and performance. Among the local mentoring programs, no formal assessment exercise has been conducted by mentoring expert or external mentor. The assessment, if any, remains in a peer-to-peer capacity. Thus, the gap in formalized assessment is obviously significant in the local programs.

Secondly, professional associations and mentoring organizing bodies may not be aware

of the differences in the mentoring style, including the approach in goal setting and process management, of each mentor involved. To achieve fair assessment at individual and group level requires fine adjustments and variations in the evaluation approach.

In the mentoring program offered to the students of the Diploma in Teacher-Librarianship, a few basic elements are presence to facilitate evaluation:

1. identification of an explicit goal;
2. clarification on the roles of mentors and mentees;
3. clearly defined tasks and observations in a focused process;
4. specification of the objective and expected outcomes.

Again, limited resource hindered the work to gather and study the evidence of the mentoring program's affect on individual participants, such as the growth in individual confidence and on the professional capacity. Thus it becomes impossible to assess the institutional impact of mentoring programs, including the retention of experienced staff and the effective use of resource on mentoring.

The few evaluation analysis documented in the overseas literature (such as through questionnaires, interviews, and longitudinal studies) will only provide initial ideas on how to measure the impact of mentorship activities (Bankhead, 2002; Buddy and Williams, 2001; Van Deusen, 1995; Wunsch, 1994). In order to bridge up the original purpose(s) of the mentoring programs with a systematical evaluation on the impact received, Hong Kong teacher-librarians will have to further examine critically, adapt, test and evaluate their mentoring practices. Mentorship organizing bodies may consider borrowing the successful experience in the overseas institutes (Hardesty, 1997; Lyders, 1991); networking with schools and cooperating with the higher educational institutes may also draw in a different perspective, and external support and expertise to the programs.

3. Enhancing the Competency of Teacher-Librarians

According to a first generation teacher-librarian, teacher-librarians in Hong Kong have always regarded the appointment of the teacher-librarians from the redundant teachers being a humble position. The same mind-set prevails today (熊銘及優質圖書館網絡, 2003). The lack of pre-service training in teacher librarianship has caused a lot of anxiety among the practitioners and suspicion to the professional aspects of the post. The lack of professional pride and confidence in their works, among some teacher-librarians underpinned a long-term limiting factor into the profession. All the misconceptions led to the claim that lacking a clear vision and a systematic framework for the development of school library in the educational authority are the major impediments.

Mentoring programs will help new practitioners to survive and enjoy the job when they embrace a positive attitude towards the mission of library services. Mentees may find collegiality and enhancement when they are committed to the profession. The literature review indicates that mentoring is a widely adopted practice for tenure and promotion in the United States (Kuyper-Rushing, 2001; Wojewodzki, 1998; Colley, 1990; Roberts, 1986); however, it is not the case in Hong Kong. Secondly, mentorship will never fill the missing gap of initial training. As Lam put it (林德成, 2002), teacher competency cannot be achieved by a one time initial teacher-training program, or through an induction or an in-service training program. It takes the combination of the three: initial, induction and in-service training.

Here we also found two gaps, which might have caused implications to the development of school libraries and possibly influenced stakeholders' and school administrators' recognition of teacher-librarians:

1. the absence of a local academic program dedicated to the study of information and library sciences in Hong Kong;
2. the lack of formal research on assessing the extent to which a teacher-librarian has contributed ideas, resources and services to student achievement.

If the preparation of capable and knowledgeable citizens requires the collaborations of families, schools, industries, and the educational authorities, the same analogy applies to the preparation of teacher-librarians. Comprehensive preparation of the teacher-librarians relies on the cooperation of the educational authority, teacher-training institutes and the practitioners.

If the bigger goal of our schools was to nurture information literate learners, the cases in Australia and the United States (Kallenberger, 2000; Kaye, 2000; IMLS, 2002) could be borrowed by our stake-holders and administrators on reviewing the current librarian-training policy. The educational authority, teacher-training institutes and teacher-librarians should explore jointly on a viable strategy to enhance the professionalism and commitment of teacher-librarians in Hong Kong.

4. Commitment to Evidence-based Practice

The overview on the overseas literature illustrated that teacher-librarians had effectively employed mentoring to facilitate professional advancement and knowledge building in librarianship. In order to chart a future for empowering learning, teacher-librarians in Hong Kong must focus on evidence-based practices to help articulate student competency and potential. According to Todd (2001), effective learning intervention strategy must build on

sound reasoning of research evidence and effective evaluation. It is only when the mentoring of the teacher-librarians make a fundamental difference in student's learning, they substantiates the evidence-based practices.

It is time for the mentorship organizing bodies to examine whether the current mentoring programs yield evidences in the promotion of competency and good practice among teacher-librarians, by:

- addressing the objectives and needs;
- deciding how the process will begin and being organized;
- defining the roles of mentors, mentees and other institutional partners;
- considering how it will complement the existing training programs;
- establishing an evaluation framework.

At personal level, every mentor and mentee should critically meditate on whether the participation in the mentorship has renewed one's professional practices. More fruitful returns may be yielded, if the vibrancy is sent to some 'real' issues, such as:

- reviewing the day-to-day practice in school library services;
- refining the service to enable the learning outcome of the students;
- reconsolidating the tangible power and contribute to the school goals;
- renewing one's competency to strive for the best practice;
- re-affirming one's commitment in deliver evidence-based action.

Capacity building is essential in retrenching the role of teacher-librarians in schools, but it is not an end to itself. The traditional role of the school library in providing teaching and learning resources, and coordinating reading activities is no longer meeting the challenge of this knowledge society. As Todd (2001) claimed, "action and evidence-based, learning-centered practice, rather than position and advocacy" will bring achievement in learning. After two decades of advocacy and role seeking in the school paradigm, teacher-librarians should find it more productive to shift the thinking out of the self-driven deficiency dilemma to evidence-based practice.

The British expert mountain climber John Oxenham once said:

*"To every man there openeth
A way and ways and a way....
And every man decideth
The way his soul should go."*

In a time of overwhelming changes in the educational and social climate, only leaders, who have the true commitment to evidence-based practices, will be able to walk through all

the challenges.

The Role of Teacher-Training Institutes in Teacher-Librarianship

In this knowledge-based society, an emphasis on information transformations, learning communities and interdisciplinary collaborations is evident. Student learning needs are no longer defined within the school syllabus nor restricted to the factual knowledge. School libraries must demonstrate its function in extending the students' learning outcomes by promoting information literacy, inquiry-centered learning and collaborative teaching.

Todd (2001) identified eight generalizations about how school libraries impact learning from the latest researches:

1. A "shared philosophy of learning" underpins a shared vision for learning outcomes, and a commitment to a shared collaborative process;
2. A process approach to enable students' abilities to connect with and utilize information to construct understanding and personal meaning;
3. Positive student engagement in active inquiry-centered learning;
4. A flexible instructional approach to tailor individual needs;
5. Active reading programs;
6. School-public library cooperation;
7. School library programs that set clear expectations, manageable objectives and realistic time lines, with a systematic feedback between the teachers and the students;
8. School leaders supportive to integrating library programs with the learning process.

These generalizations, in a larger extend, should be the concerns of every teacher and educator because they conceptualize a new learning structure and a unique communal support system, conducive to the nurturing of information-literate learners. According to Moore (2002), a few developing countries have made modifications in educational policy, teacher-education and school management, in order to implement these findings with the least perceived barriers.

Here quotes a few examples. In the case of Singapore, a coherent information policy backed by an action plan and budget commitment has been produced (Butterworth, 2000). In Malaysia, the implementation was profiled in the "Smart Schools" projects highlighting an integration of ITC learning with the concept of resource-based learning (Chan, 2002). Similarly, the implementation guidelines, developed in New Zealand and Australia on school library services, may provide a viable model to implement findings summarized by Todd.

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While there are complex issues facing the professional development of the teacher-librarians in Hong Kong, the involvement of teacher-training institutes becomes imperative because:

1. pre-service training provides the theoretical basis and a formal framework to the shaping of committed and competent practitioners;
2. leadership in formal research in school library development is urgently needed;
3. expertise in guiding formal mentorship and action research is a high demand;
4. a variety of professional development options is desired; and
5. the development of evidence-based practices, in school library services, is fundamental to the nurturing of information-literate learners.

Developing competent and committed teacher-librarians becomes a challenging task under this new learning paradigm; as they require new skills and competencies across disparities in technological and intellectual disciplines. The strategy in teacher-librarian training and the overall policy on school library development must become fluid and responsive to the situation. As Josiah Holland said, “A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands!” Today, I present the case to all the teacher-librarians, teacher-training institutes and the education authorities. I invite you to go for it, hand-in-hand.

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