Education For Teacher-Librarians In the 21st Century

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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The first time you teach a course in our program, you "go with the flow" and that is just what Jennifer did with the technology course in the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning (TL-DL) program at the University of Alberta. The course had not been updated for several years, focused on issues in technology and gave students lots of choice about which technologies to explore in the class.

When Jennifer first started to teach the course in the Fall of 2007, she was just back from a maternity and unpaid leave and was so excited and eager to learn about the new Web 2.0 technologies that were exciting learners and teachers (and bloggers!) all over the Internet (see, for example, David Warlick's *2¢ Worth*, Will Richardson's, *Weblogge-ed* Joyce Valenza's, *Never Ending Search* and Doug Johnson's *Blue Skunk Blog*). Jennifer was surprised (and confused and disappointed) when some of the students in the class didn't share her enthusiasm. Why were some students uncomfortable about exploring these new technologies? Why were some students clinging to Powerpoint and Excel and Webquests, when everything Jennifer was reading and seeing was about the power and possibilities of blogs and blogging, podcasts, Voicethread, and wikis?

Some of the students in the course did jump in with both feet and learn about a few of the social networking tools, but many more were reticent. So quite early into the course, Jennifer sat down with Joanne, who had also taught the course and was feeling the same pull toward learning and exploring the possibilities of Web 2.0 for schools and libraries. We quickly realized that because this was the only technology course we were offering in the whole TL-DL program, we needed to make sure that our students were learning, reading and thinking critically about Web 2.0 and then considering the implications of these tools for teaching and learning.

We felt strongly that PowerPoint, web design and Webquests were not the things that were engaging students on the Internet. Kids are playing with new technologies – uploading videos to YouTube, building relationships on social

networking sites, blogging, and sharing photos using Picasa or Flickr. Our TLs needed to have those same play experiences and so we began to imagine a new course – a course that allowed teachers to play with a variety of web 2.0 tools and then to blog about the experiences.

After making the changes to the technology course, we started to talk about our other courses, the role of the teacher-librarian in the 21st century schools and what knowledge, skills and attitudes we needed to be developing in our program. This conversation continued most Tuesdays and Thursdays for a whole year.

And then the opportunity we had been waiting for arrived. We were successful in our application for a Fulbright Senior Specialist and Dr. Marcia Mardis joined our faculty for three weeks in October of 2008. Dr. Mardis has been instrumental in the writing of American Association of School Librarians' new *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and is a prolific researcher and conference presenter in the area of school libraries. This was our chance to work with a leader in the field and take a good hard look at our program. In preparation for Dr. Mardis' visit, we surveyed all of our recent Master of Education in Teacher-Librarianship graduates to find out more about what they were doing in schools and school libraries, how well prepared they felt they were based on their education, and what trends and issues they saw emerging in their work.

Our former students told us that:
- The M. Ed degree empowered them to take on greater leadership roles in their schools and districts.
- The program was transformational – both personally and professionally.
- The online format provided them with flexibility and the opportunity to succeed while managing their diverse work and home responsibilities.
- They would highly recommend the program to others.
- They developed professional contacts and friendships across the country and in several other countries around the world.
- They enjoyed focusing on global issues of teaching, learning and the school library while having the opportunity for choice in assignments that could be tailored to unique situations and professional learning needs.
- They enjoyed the thoughtful, high quality discussions.
- They appreciated the quality instruction and the support of the TL-DL administration and community.
- This program will make you a better teacher not just a teacher-librarian.
- "What is learned and discovered in TL-DL is for all teachers, not just teacher-librarians."
- The program is reasonably priced compared to similar programs in Canada and is a deal compared to programs from the US.

Using these findings and pulling all the learning outcomes from each course, we re-visioned the curriculum.

From this work, we developed seven courses which combine and re-imagine certain topics from our current program and add new ones. For example, we saw a need for a new course in multiple literacies with an emphasis on reading. We also realized, from both the survey and our own reading and thinking that the leadership role of the teacher-librarian needs to be the integral part of every course. We also recognized that allowing students' choice in assignments was making learning meaningful for our students (Barranoik, 2004) .

The seven courses that form the core of our new program are:

EDES 549   The Leadership Role of the Teacher-Librarian
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on the historical, current and potential importance of information-rich learning environments. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of the leadership, management and policy creation for facilities, programs, staffing, budgeting, technology, collections, and reporting.

EDES 544   Technology Applications
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on learning new and emerging technologies for information-rich learning environments. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of variety of technologies and demonstrations of how they might be used in teaching and learning.

EDES 546   Resource Selection and Evaluation
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on the selection and evaluation of print and digital resources for information-rich learning environments. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of fiction, reference materials, informational texts, periodicals, databases, and digital learning objects.

EDES 542   Inquiry-based Learning
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on inquiry-based learning. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of the nature and culture of inquiry, process approaches to inquiry, and demonstrations of how to incorporate inquiry in teaching and learning.

EDES 541   Resource Organization and Management
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on the organization and management of print and digital resources for information-rich learning environments. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of leadership, management and policy creation for collections and the organization of resources.

EDES 543   Multiple Literacies
Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on the cultural, social, commercial, and educational issues raised by multiple literacies. Includes an exploration of different theories of reading and practices of literacy in an era of rapid cultural and technological change.

EDES 545   Technology Integration

Explores leadership in schools with an emphasis on new and emerging technologies for information-rich learning environments. Includes an exploration and critical evaluation of leadership, management, research and policy creation for technology integration.

These seven courses along with the three required courses from the Department of Elementary Education make up the 10 courses – 30 credits -- required for the degree. Having all seven courses be required of all students in the TL-DL program is a shift. In the past we have had a much more "choose your own adventure" model, as Dr. Mardis called it. While this allowed students a lot of choice, it meant that some students had "holes" in their education.

We have also come to believe that we are committed to education for teacher-librarianship at the Master of Education level. We strongly believe that teacher-librarians are school leaders and, as such, need to have the same degree as other school leaders – the Master of Education degree. As a result, we developed a new mission for the program and have developed these guiding questions:

Mission and Values

Education for teacher-librarianship at the University of Alberta is provided at the graduate level.

The program is built on the University of Alberta's Four Commitments from *Dare to Deliver*:

- Discovery learning
- Incubating Scholarship
- Community Engagement Near and Far
- Building the Transformative Organization

Using these Four Commitments, the Master of Education in Teacher-Librarianship develops school and professional leadership in inquiry, literacies, technology, and resources through meaningful learning experiences. Study in this program focuses on curriculum, community, consultation, collaboration, coordination, and communication.

Guiding Questions

- What does it mean to be an educator?
- What knowledge, skills, and attributes are needed by learners?
- What does in mean to be a leader in your school? in your profession?
- What does it mean to be a 21st century teacher-librarian?

Our discussions also led us to imagine a cohort model for the program. As the program has grown, it has become increasingly difficult to advise and manage students in the "choose your own adventure" model. A cohort model would allow students to develop strong ties with colleagues from across the country and would allow us to build leadership skills into each course in a focused manner. It also frees up time for faculty and instructors to develop, refine and revise courses and build on shared learning experiences in previous courses. Instructors and students are able to "hit the ground running" in each successive course - all students know their classmates and understand the learning technologies involved in online courses.

The following is a tentative course plan for the first cohort into the new program.

Tentative Course Plan

Winter 2010	EDES 540 The Leadership Role of the Teacher-Librarian
Summer 2010	EDES 544 Technology Applications
Fall 2010	EDEL 567 Research Methods
Winter 2011	EDES 543 Multiple Literacies
Summer 2011	EDES 546 Resource Selection and Evaluation
Fall 2011	EDES 542 Inquiry-based Learning
Winter 2012	EDEL 561 Curriculum Foundations
Summer 2012	EDES 541 Resource Organization and Management
Fall 2012	EDES 545 Technology Integration
Winter 2013	EDEL 900 Capping Course

While we are excited about our new program, we are still committed to delivering a high quality program to those students in our diploma and MEd streams. As new courses become available, they will be offered to both cohort and non-cohort students. We are also hoping to offer some of our new and revised courses to former students who are interested in further professional development. This may take a few years to happen, but the seeds have been sown.

One former student told us that "the TL-DL program is a comprehensive, well-planned program for the preparation of teacher-librarians. The administration and teachers are committed to strong learning experiences and the

assignments are linked directly to your work in libraries." We continue to be committed to these values and believe that our new program will be better than ever. As another student told us, "You will have a very solid foundation and the skills to change your world and change the world your students are creating in the future. It is empowering!"

Consider joining us in this new and improved TL-DL program by applying to be part of the first cohort, which will start courses in January, 2010. We will be reviewing applications for the first cohort in April and October, 2009. For more information, contact Jennifer Branch at jbranch@ualberta.ca and/or check out our website at www.quasar.ualberta.ca/tl-dl.

References

Barranoik, L. K. (2004). *Meaningful research projects: Perspectives from high school students and their teacher.* Unpublished

doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Blogs Mentioned in the Article

David Warlick's *2¢ Worth*: http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/

Will Richardson's, *Weblogge-ed*: http://weblogg-ed.com/

Joyce Valenza's, *Never Ending Search:* http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/1340000334.html

Doug Johnson's *Blue Skunk Blog*: http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/