

ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION Annual Report: 2004

Last year was, once again, very busy and exciting for us. This report highlights most of our activities.

Advocacy

Advocacy continues to be of utmost importance for teacher-librarians across Ontario.

Letters were written by OSLA President Roberta Henley to her local MPP Dave Levac, and forwarded to Minister Kennedy, asking for a new provincial document for school libraries and a change in the funding formula, two crucial steps needed to repair the crisis in school libraries, and to the task force for *Think Literacy: Cross Curricular Approaches Grades 7-12* and *Think Literacy Success: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* which was copied to the Minister, demonstrating the exclusion of school libraries in the documents. Councilor Susan Moroz wrote Premier McGuinty about the funding of school libraries and this was shared with Minister Kennedy. As well, Vice-President Anita Brooks-Kirkland wrote to Minister Kennedy asking him to investigate the Ministry's lack of participation in the Ontario Digital Library Project. Roberta sent an email to O.P.E.N. directly after a meeting with Minister Kennedy at Curriculum Forum, outlining the potential of teacher-librarians and the school library program in literacy intervention strategies, and then followed up with another letter, outlining the extensive correspondence from executive members of the OSLA to the Minister, and once again requesting a meeting. Correspondence from the Minister's office was, for the most part, impersonal; however, we were told that Minister Kennedy would attend a school event in support of National School Library Day. This, unfortunately, did not happen.

Vice-President Anita Brooks-Kirkland attended the Government of Ontario Budget Town Hall meeting to express our concern about both school library funding and the Ontario Digital Library. Roberta met with Dave Levac, pointing out the big disconnect between the government's literacy initiatives and the role of the school library program, the problems with the funding formula and the lack of our own document, and also managed to meet with Minister Kennedy for ten minutes about these concerns. These meetings were followed up with letters from Dave Levac and Roberta, requesting a formal meeting with OSLA.

Roberta attended the CLA/BCLA Conference in June, 2003 and gave a report about the state of school libraries in Ontario.

A survey was distributed to school boards in Ontario, asking for detailed staffing information. Data from returned surveys was compiled onto chart form for use by members, the Ontario Coalition for School Libraries, and other advocacy groups. Many boards still need to be added.

Ontario Research Study

After the Evidence-Based Practice session that many of us attended with Dr. Ross Todd of Rutgers University, OSLA Council decided to make evidence-based practice a focus in our strategic plan. To accomplish this, we have immediate plans to develop a toolkit of materials for teacher-librarians across Ontario and have applied to OSSTF for a subject association grant of \$2500.00 for support. A sub-committee to begin this work will be formed at our next council meeting. Another outcome of the Ross Todd session resulted in our biggest accomplishment, which came when a motion was passed by the **Ontario Library Association Board of Directors meeting to provide funding of up to \$100,000.00 for an Ontario Research Study** similar to those completed by Dr. Ross Todd and /or Keith Curry-Lance. Educators and parents have been alarmed by a significant decline in achievement levels of our students. The relationship between the School Library Program and student achievement has been an issue much discussed in the media over the last few years. As well, both the Canadian and Ontario Coalitions for School Libraries have talked about the need for a study to show that there is a real connection between school libraries and student achievement. Although research skills and higher-level thinking skills are increasingly in demand at the post secondary level and in the world of work in this information age, the connection between a solid school library program and the acquisition of these skills has been overlooked.

Our attempts at advocacy with the Ministry have had disappointing results; the lack of Canadian and/or local research is often cited as one of the barriers. Advocacy without local research and school level evidence has limited effectiveness. While recent Ontario Ministry of Education publications have acknowledged the importance of the school library (i.e., *Literacy for Learning: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in grades 4 to 6 in Ontario*), funding for school library programs is inconsistent across the province, and in general decline. An Ontario study is crucial to gather the evidence of the importance of school libraries and school library programs. This is a unique opportunity in Ontario to move libraries forward as one group. The Ontario Study we have planned, in partnership with others, (possibly People For Education, EQAO, OISE, and university faculties) will create and implement a research study in which evidence-based research

methodology is used to assess the benefit of school library programs and their impact on student achievement. The study will be done in large part by a Canadian researcher, which will in turn provide access to Canadian research funds, and to the creation of acknowledged Canadian experts on school libraries. The business plan for the study is well underway.

OSLA Division Review and Strategic Plan

As part of the ongoing attempt to meet the needs of its members, OSLA began a review process. A small group of past and upcoming presidents of the association met to discuss the needs of our members. Results of the review helped formulate our strategic plan for next year. Of particular importance is the need for OSLA to take the initiative to develop a plan to support our teacher-librarians in evidence based practice. Other goals include updating our mission statement, forming an editorial board to oversee web site maintenance and revision, providing ongoing listserv discussions, facilitated by an Councilor Jim Neill, and posting a feature article from *Teaching Librarian* on our OSLA web site.

Ontario Coalition for School Libraries

OSLA is represented on the Ontario Coalition for School Libraries, an advocacy group consisting of authors, parents, Canadian publishers, and other supporters of school libraries and led by Liz Kerr. The OCSL recently posted their mission statement, vision and goals on their website at <http://www.ontarioschoollibraries.ca/index.html>. As well, they are circulating a coloured 'postcard' for the public, which urges them to rate their school libraries. Liz continues to work tirelessly on behalf of OSLA and we thank her!

National School Library Day

National School Library Day was first announced by Roch Carrier, National Librarian of Canada, at the National School Library Summit in Ottawa in June, 2003. This year it was held on October 25, with the theme being Linking Libraries, Literacy and Learning. Members across the province joined colleagues across Canada and organized a wide range of activities designed to celebrate and heighten awareness of the school library program. Many held author visits, created displays, held a board-wide reading day, or organized other events that were showcased by their local media.

Word on the Street

OSLA was represented at the Canadian Coalition for School Libraries at Word on the Street in Toronto last summer, helping to advocate on behalf of our school libraries.

Initiatives

Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12

Think Literacy was written in 2003 by a writing team commissioned by the Expert Panel on Students at Risk to support teachers with approaches to teaching reading, writing and communications. Last summer, OSLA's Carol Koechlin, along with Rose Dodgson, Diana Knight, and reviewer Esther Rosenfeld wrote additional examples of instructional approaches designed for teacher-librarians working with students. Contents include Reading Strategies: Getting Ready to Read, Modeling Independent Reading and Reading Different Text Forms, and Oral Communication: Small-group Discussions. This has now been posted to our OSLA web site which has been made available to other contributing subject associations. Many thanks to Carol and team.

Super Conference

Carol Koechlin, Diana Knight and Michael Rosettis, the OSLA Conference convenors of this year's Super Conference, did an outstanding job of making the conference, once again, a most rewarding event for those in our profession.

OSLA and CASL

The Canadian School Library Association (CSLA) and the Association of Teacher-librarians of Canada (ATLC) merged to form a new association, the Canadian Association for School Libraries (CASL). OSLA looks forward to working in partnership with CASL. Marlene Turkington, from Thames Valley, has taken on the role of president of CASL for the upcoming year. Marlene will work closely with OSLA members to advocate for school libraries.

Ontario Digital Library

The vision of the Ontario Digital Library is a partnership of Ontario's libraries which will provide seamless services and resources to all the citizens of Ontario - a digital network of information resources and services that will enable access to high quality information resources. Progress on the project included communication with

stakeholders, a survey posted on the OLA website, and the formation of a business plan. The response from the library community has been very positive. In fact, the Minister of Culture has announced \$700,000 and a commitment to champion the ODL to her ministerial colleagues. Congratulations to the Ontario Digital Library! OSLA has been a part of the team, with representation from Anita Brook-Kirkland and Esther Rosenfeld.

OSAPAC Survey

Each year, the Ministry of Education provides provincial software licensing for all publicly-funded schools in Ontario. Online subscription reference databases are an essential part of our collections; however, some school cannot provide this resource because of cost. OSLA has asked members to assist in advocating for an online reference database by completing the Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee survey at <http://www.osapac.org>. A flyer designed by Anita Brooks-Kirkland has been distributed at several workshops at SuperConference.

Forest of Reading

Teacher-librarians across Ontario continue to impassion their students to read by registering them in the OLA's 'Forest of Reading' programs. The 'forest' includes, from primary up to adult: Blue Spruce, Silver Birch, Red Maple, White Pine, and Golden Oak. OSLA's senior high school program is still being offered as a pilot in some schools. Teacher-librarians continue to share ideas and strategies on how to implement various levels of the reading programs on our OSLA listserv and to celebrate student involvement at organized events across Ontario. We certainly appreciate the participation of our wonderful readers.

Awards/Nominations

At our School Library Awards Presentation and Reception we once again recognized individuals for their exemplary teacher-librarianship, leadership and commitment. We applaud these award winners for their outstanding contribution to moving school libraries forward. Thanks to Anita Brook-Kirkland for ensuring a smooth reception. Membership continues to be solid as teacher-librarians take advantage of the block membership and pro-rated fee structure.

Professional Development

Connecting School Library Programs to Student Achievement

The Education Institute offered a two-day workshop for school library leaders on November 18 and 19. The focus was on how to develop an action plan for collecting evidence of the value of school library program currently being offered in Ontario schools. The second part of this workshop was held here at Super Conference on February 2 with Dr. David Loertscher where participants learned more about strategies to assist in forming an action plan for moving forward with Evidence-based Practice.

Throughout the year, the OLA's Education Institute offered timely and stimulating online and conference call workshops for teacher-librarians, including programs related to blogs and blogging, selecting graphic novels, the research process, searching on the web, boys and reading and essay writing.

Ontario Library Association

As members of OSLA we are in a unique position in that we are a Subject Association and also a division of the OLA. Through our affiliation with the OLA we have input into and benefit from the Education Institutes, the Reading Programs, the OLA book store, and much more. We also receive a wealth of expertise and incredible support from Executive Director Larry Moore and the entire OLA staff. Congratulations to Larry on his 20 years with the OLA! On Wednesday, at the OLA AGM, a resolution was passed honouring Larry for his exceptional leadership and commitment to libraries. An endowed award has been established in his name.

Looking Ahead

We have a very exciting year coming up, as we look forward to the Ontario Research Study. Advocacy needs evidence! A business plan has recently been formulated which will now move the process forward. At the same time, OSLA Council has plans to promote evidence-based practice. We will soon be producing a toolkit of materials and strategies to assist teacher-librarians across the province in gathering evidence of the differences we make to students. To assist us, we have submitted an application to OSSTF for funding in addition to what we have allotted in our budget. We will also continue to advocate strongly for a meeting with the Minister of Education. The energy does seem to be building. The development of research skills features prominently in many Ministry Curriculum Documents. The *Literacy for Learning: The Report of the Expert panel on Literacy in grades 4 to 6* has several references to teacher-librarians and the school library. The Ministry's recent publication on boys and reading, *Me Read? No Way!* also refers to the school library. Advocacy groups such as

People for Education and the Ontario and Canadian Coalitions for School Libraries continue to affect positive change for school library programs.

Councilors

Many thanks to OSLA Councilors for their continued dedication and spirit. Our association greatly benefits from these hard-working representatives. Welcome to Sharon Armstrong who has recently accepted the position of councilor for Central West, and to Petra Smith, who is our new treasurer/secretary. Also, congratulations to Michael Rosettis who has taken on the role of Vice-President and to Anita Brooks-Kirkland, who is our 2005 President of OSLA..

OSLA Council 2004

President: Roberta Henley

Vice-President: Anita Brooks-Kirkland

Past president: Esther Rosenfeld

Secretary-Treasurer: Michael Rosettis

Northern region: Sharon Rowlandson

Southwestern region: Susan Moroz

Central West region: Sharon Armstrong

Mid-central region: Linda Girardo

Eastern region: Jim Neill

Toronto region: Peggy Thomas

The Teaching Librarian editor: Brenda Dillon