

Chapter 89

The Roles of Professional Organizations in School Library Education

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ABSTRACT

International guidelines for school libraries and school librarians exist. However, the role of professional library associations in school librarian education has been largely overlooked. This exploratory study examines the role of professional library associations in Brazil, Honduras, Nepal, and the United States (specifically California) relative to school librarian pre-service education and in-service professional development. The associations are analyzed in light of communities of practice and the contingency theory of socialization. The findings demonstrate how professional library associations provide culturally relevant professional development that melds professional expertise and socialization.

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Tomorrow's societies require a highly literate workforce. To that end, governments around the world are investing money and developing policies that support and expand education beyond its prior status. Particularly in societies where intellectual capital is valued as much as material capital, the workforce needs to learn to apply several literacies: reading, technology or digital, and information literacies.

One of the chief mechanisms to ensure these literacies is school libraries, consisting of resources and services by trained school librarians. As with education in general, several countries are mandating such services and staff. In other countries, the picture is less sanguine. In most cases, though, training is uneven: from on-the-job induction to master's degree pre-service preparation. Continuing education is even more problematic.

The need for high-quality school libraries is apparent in order to support student learning. The means to insure high-quality school librarians is less clear. This exploratory study examines

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the role of professional library associations in Brazil, Honduras, Nepal, and the United States (specifically California) relative to school librarian pre- and in-service professional development. The associations are analyzed in light of communities of practice and the contingency theory of socialization. The findings demonstrate how professional library associations provide culturally relevant support that melds professional expertise and socialization that can insure an effective and influential workforce within education.

INTRODUCTION

The need for critical use of information is more important than ever. The 1991 SCANS report notes information location and manipulation as vital skills for today's employees. In a digital world where the amount of information doubles every two years, individuals need to evaluate resources carefully and determine how to use relevant information to solve problems and make wise decisions. During the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society, governments and world leaders "made a strong commitment towards building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society for all, where everyone can access, utilise and share information and knowledge" (United Nations, 2006, p. 6). What constitutes an information society? Fundamentally, an information society is one in which information replaces material goods as the chief driver of socio-economics. Human intellectual capital has higher currency than material capital, or at least intellect is needed to optimize the use of material resources.

Within that framework, UNESCO (2005) Bangkok identified communication and information as a major program, with information literacy constituting a major thread within that initiative. This international organization asserts: "Information literacy enhances the pursuit of knowledge by equipping individuals with the skills and abili-

ties for critical reception, assessment and use of information in their professional and personal lives. "For the society to have information literate adults, information literacy education needs to start as early as possible" (§1).

Particularly since most populations do not pursue post-secondary education, school libraries constitute a key factor in the education of future workers within society, with focused attention on information literacy. In 1999 the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved a School Library Manifesto. Titled *The School Library in Teaching and Learning for All*, the document asserts that "The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens" (p. 1). The manifesto states that the mission of the school library is to "offer learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media" (p. 1). To that end, school library resources complement textbooks, and include a variety of formats. School library programs aim to provide services equally – and free -- to all school community members, and accommodate individuals with special needs. The manifesto concludes that collaboration between teachers and librarians, as well as partnerships with outside entities, result in improved student literacy and communication.

Trained staff must be provided to achieve the goals of the manifesto. However, the definition of trained is left unsaid, as are the provisions of such training. In an ongoing study of experiences of beginning school librarians (SL) and expert SLs to ascertain the factors that predict practitioner success, the author has compared southern California SLs (and their academic preparation)

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