

Investigating the information-seeking preferences of secondary teachers

Where do teachers prefer to go for their resources?

With whom do they prefer to collaborate?

What do they love or loathe about libraries?

What motivates or demotivates teachers to exercise these preferences?

What are the implications for the future of libraries & TLs?

Background & Context to the Research

- ▶ Study of the information-seeking preferences of secondary school teachers within 3 Sydney schools, between 2001-2005
- ▶ Mixed methods: a survey, followed by 27 in-depth interviews with teachers
- ▶ Theoretical strands underpinning the research:
 - ▶ **Constructivism**, emphasising the **multiple perspectives** of the teachers
 - ▶ **Role of power and control** in the exercise of information preferences
 - ▶ **Nature of collaboration** between teachers and library staff
 - ▶ **Impact of continuity and change** on teachers' information-seeking preferences in the school workplace of the 21st century

Research Questions:

- ▶ **Where** do teachers prefer to go for their resources?
- ▶ **With whom** do they prefer to collaborate?
- ▶ What do they most or least prefer about **libraries & librarians?**
- ▶ What **motivates or demotivates** teachers to exercise these preferences?
- ▶ What are the **implications for the future** of libraries & TLs?

Where do teachers prefer to go for their information resources?

- ▶ Preference for ‘personal collections’, perceived as most reliable & accessible in a time-poor world
- ▶ These collections included a wide range of resources, encompassing both print & digital, latter increasingly via the Internet
- ▶ Favourite textbooks a key component
- ▶ Departmental “heritage” collections popular with some teachers
- ▶ Libraries seen as highly relevant by some teachers, but largely irrelevant by others
- ▶ Personality traits & perceptions of relative power & control over information selection notable
- ▶ No perceptible distinctions based on age or gender
- ▶ The Internet is “always the first source, [as it is] convenient, rapid, up to date with most recent information”.
- ▶ To use resources other than their own expertise “is time wasting. When I rely on myself this doesn’t happen”.
- ▶ “Some librarians are more efficient and helpful than others”.
- ▶ “A good librarian ... can point you in the right direction. It’s just helpful, even at a nuts and bolts level. Very important”.
- ▶ “Librarians are] much more skilled in being able to put their hands on things. I find that if they offer their services and will find something for you, it does give you that sort of warm feeling that ... [persuades you] libraries are very helpful places”.

With whom do they prefer to collaborate?

► Issue of collaboration with TLs emerged as complex:

- Understanding of this term differed widely between teachers
- Contrasted significantly to that accepted as norm by TLs (e.g. Montiel-Overall, 2005)
- Some suspicious of collaboration both with fellow teachers & TLs (**“fear of feeling stupid”** - Radford & Radford, 1997)
- Indications that higher levels of collaboration could develop over time, based on
 - **mutual interests**
 - **trust (Kinecki, 2008)**
 - **common goals for student learning**

- *“I’d feel confident emailing Miranda (L-L) or ringing Miranda and saying, ‘You know, I’m an idiot. How do you do this or how do I look up this or something like that’. There’s others here you wouldn’t [approach]. But Miranda is always ... [positive], you know. She’s not going to think you’re an idiot ... and she’ll always look out for ... [your requested resources] as well ... and she would just drop everything and come and, and same with Caroline ... You know that sort of a ... keenness to help or ... respect for you as a teacher”.*
- Amy [TA-CS]

What did they 'love' or 'loathe' about libraries?

Those who *loved* mentioned: Those who *loathed* mentioned:

▶ The concept of the **'Quiet Library'**:

- ▶ *"I think to me, a library is a quiet place, and I think that's helpful ... If I'm in my staff room working ... there are always distractions ... So I think the library for me is a positive place in that there are resources there at my fingertips. There are people who can help me if I need to be helped. But it's also a place where I can almost hide. It's almost universal, the rules of a library: that you're quiet, there's work there for you, if you need help ... [you can] get help".*
- ▶ *"I think libraries are like churches in cities. You can go there and sit quietly on your own and nobody questions that you're on your own".*

▶ **Ambient atmosphere**

- ▶ Light, bright, pleasant aromas, coffee(!)

▶ **Aesthetics:** Vistas of books, books, books (new /tactile)

- ▶ Irritation with "Shooshing" by library staff
- ▶ The "Vanishing book syndrome"
- ▶ Perception that they were under surveillance (via software)
- ▶ Noisy /offensive librarians
- ▶ Dirty, dusty, old books
- ▶ Shabby library environment
- ▶ Feeling unwelcome, "stupid" in libraries
- ▶ Computers too slow or damaged
- ▶ Lack of time: *"I can access [the Net] at home or I just find it's easier [than] the trip across [to visit the school library]. Let's face it ... I'm on a heavy [teaching] load and I just don't have much spare time and so anything that saves me time means that I tend not to use the library".*

What motivates or demotivates teachers to exercise these preferences?

- ▶ **Perceptions** of time (wasted or saved) and ease of access
- ▶ **Personality traits** of teachers; particularly their perception of relative **power & control** over the information-seeking process
- ▶ **Positive or negative affect** strongly influenced likelihood of engagement with TLs & library
- ▶ **Aesthetic factors** also emerged as strong motivators/demotivators
- ▶ With some teachers, positive or negative affect associated with their recollections of **positive or negative experiences with school libraries &/or librarians**, when they were students
- ▶ *“I suppose the thing is that I wanted resources that were my own. So I can underline them. So I can annotate them. So I can photocopy them. I mean basically if they’re my resources I can make them as user friendly for me as possible ... I mean if it’s a library resource then I can’t do that”.*
- ▶ *“What was at the back of my mind was losing control of the [research] process ... It’s the sort of handing over... [control]”. ...“a teacher likes to feel as though they have control. And yet, I’m not a control freak, like some teachers”.*
- ▶ *“I just find librarians and library staff are so protective of their books that I can’t be bothered with it. Would you?”*
- ▶ *“With the school library here ... ‘Big Brother’ was watching all the time”*

What are the implications for the future of libraries & TLs?

Opportunities exist for developing the role of the teacher-librarian as:

- ▶ ‘**Research mentor**’ to younger & ‘New Scheme’ teachers (building personal collections), especially in remote locations
- ▶ ‘**Heritage collection development mentors**’ to support teachers within their respective departments (building departmental collections)

Foster **collaborative practices** from the very start of the teaching career:

- ▶ pre-service teachers and teacher-librarians would ideally commence collaboration on student research tasks while still at university, by **sharing a school-based practicum experience** that would inculcate the benefits of collegiate partnerships based on mutual trust and professional respect : “*Pairing, sharing & caring*”

Q & A: Let's ASK the EXPERTS

1. Are your **experiences similar or different** to those described in the research?
2. How **frequently do teachers bring classes to the library** for research purposes?
3. How do you (as the 'face of' your Library) respond to **teachers' perceptions** of
 1. **Lack of time** to collaborate with the TL
 2. **Lack of easy access**, in comparison to their own collection of online &/or print resources
4. **How do you 'win hearts and minds'** & spark the interest of teachers in utilising the library and its resources?
5. To what extent is your library a **'virtual space/place'**, rather than a space that is utilised physically by staff &/or students?
6. What feature of your library attracts **the most positive comments** from teachers? From students?
7. What **changes** would you most like to make in your library?