“Fear and loathing in the library”:
Teachers, librarians and collaborative mythologies

a research perspective by
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School libraries: adding value

*Literature / research supports hypotheses that:*

- A systematic approach to the research process will enhance outcomes for users
- School libraries add value to the research outcomes of students
- Collaboration between teachers and Teacher Librarians enhances students’ research experience
- The most effective TLs are dual trained & qualified both as Teachers & as Librarians

**BUT ALSO PROSELYTISES FOLLOWING ‘MYTHS’:**

- Librarians are ‘well placed’ to provide leadership
- Collaboration will naturally / inevitably occur
Research questions
(based on > 2 decades of professional experience both in business & secondary education)

• We are familiar with the info. seeking habits of our users - but what about the non-users of our library or information professional services?
• Where do these clients prefer to go to seek out information, when they are not utilising our services or apparently using our resources?
• What motivates or demotivates teachers - or any clients - to exercise specific preferences when seeking information for research purposes?
• Can we detect patterns of information preference among different groups of users?
• What factors encourage/ discourage collaboration?
PhD research project: 
*Information Seeking Preferences* 
of secondary school teachers

Survey Participation 
: 75 secondary teachers from 3 independent Sydney schools

- 'Gamma' (co-ed, low tech) - 13%
- 'Beta' (co-ed, medium tech) - 24%
- 'Alpha' (single sex, high tech) - 63%

Mixed methods approach:-
- **Survey** of preferred people, places & formats
- Plus 27 in depth **interviews**
# Profile of research population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School identifier</strong></th>
<th><strong>Alpha</strong></th>
<th><strong>Beta</strong></th>
<th><strong>Gamma</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location in Sydney</td>
<td>North Shore</td>
<td>Northern Beaches</td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student population (secondary school)</td>
<td>c. 1400 students – single sex (female)</td>
<td>c. 500 students – co-educational</td>
<td>c. 350 students – co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of teachers (secondary)</td>
<td>c. 131 (both full &amp; part time)</td>
<td>c. 90 (both full &amp; part time)</td>
<td>c. 35 (both full &amp; part time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of qualified librarians employed by school in survey year</td>
<td>4 F/T (2 fully qualified TLs, 1 teacher commencing library training, 1 library trained only)</td>
<td>2 F/T (1 library trained only, 1 TL functioning as ICT coordinator)</td>
<td>.5 F/T, fully qualified TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. number of computers available for patron use, in library area</td>
<td>‘High tech’ school: &gt;150 laptop connection points</td>
<td>‘Medium tech’ school: 14 computers</td>
<td>‘Lower tech’ school: 3 computers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results snapshot: MOST preferred:

- Information sources most preferred - all respondents:
  - Experts: 9%
  - Info profs: 12%
  - Web sites: 15%
  - Books by experts: 23%
  - Other: 4%
  - Own expertise: 28%
  - Colleagues at school: 8%
  - Colleagues outside school: 1%

- Information sources MOST preferred - b:
  - Own expertise
  - Colleagues at school
  - Colleagues outside school
  - Books by experts
  - Web sites
  - Info profs
  - Experts
  - Other
Results snapshot: LEAST preferred

Information sources LEAST preferred - respondents

- Experts: 17%
- Info prof: 7%
- Web site: 7%
- Books by expert: 3%
- Own expertise: 4%
- Other: 7%
- Colleagues a school: 5%
- Colleagues outside school: 50%

Information sources LEAST preferred - by age

- Own expertise
- Colleagues at school
- Colleagues outside school
- Books by experts
- Web sites
- Info profs
- Experts
- Other
### Where do other information users obtain their information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Formats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Own resources</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colleagues - peers</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mediators - specialists</td>
<td>Texts /print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Own collection</td>
<td>Electronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians - Spain</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians - Oregon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oncologists - Pittsburgh</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior executives</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal officers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch university students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>English adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary students - Canada</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

• Some teachers prefer librarians as a first preference when seeking information, but the vast majority (88%) do not.

• Patterns of preference are influenced by:-
  – perception of situational and cognitive aspects of service / mediation available
  – habituation: familiarity / frequency of positive &/or negative interactions with various resources & services

• Affect (i.e. associated emotions) features strongly in exercise of above preferences

• Different subject specialisation may influence exercise of preference for various groups
Conclusions

Info preferences &/or collaboration:-

Appear to be dependent on 3 sets of factors:

• Situational
  – E.g. availability of TIME, ease of access to resources or services, physical environment, the collection, etc.

• Cognitive
  – E.g. perception of usefulness, value (real or potential) and/or authority of collaborator, if seen as a peer, etc.

• Affective (positive or negative ‘feelings’)
  – E.g. personality issues, emotive issues, personal / political agendas, prior experiences with libraries / librarians, etc.

NB. Assume nothing - evaluate / assess everything!
Situational factors influencing collaboration

**Motivators**
- Sufficient TIME
  - For client to visit
  - For TL to listen / chat / bond with client
  - Fast response time for requests
- Physical / virtual access
  - Ease of access
  - Convenience of access
  - Ambient surroundings
  - Attractive, clean, orderly
  - Rich collection of appropriate resources
  - Desirable facilities

**Demotivators**
- Insufficient TIME
  - Client too busy
  - TL too busy for all but superficial requests
  - Unacceptable delay in filling requests
- Physical / virtual access
  - Impediments to access (times, modes of access)
  - Unappealing surroundings
  - Dusty, dirty, verminous, untidy, disorganised, gloomy
  - Inadequate, dated collection
  - Lacking helpful facilities
## Cognitive factors influencing collaboration

### Motivators

- **Status**
  - Accepted as peer by teachers (talk the talk)
  - Accepted as ‘expert’ in Info strategies / literacies

- **Role**
  - Recognised as partner
  - Recognised ROI for user

- **Function**
  - Involved in all stages, from planning to evaluation
  - Perceived as critical to success of venture
  - Perceived as multi-talented / flexible

### Demotivators

- **Status**
  - Considered as menial / paraprofessional
  - Limited knowledge of ‘real’ teaching activities

- **Role**
  - Occupy valuable computer room space?
  - Something to do with ‘books’?

- **Function**
  - “Delicatessen librarian”
  - Childminding, ‘ssshhhing’, videotaping, photocopying
  - Order/ cover/ tidy ‘books’
  - Computer wizard / ‘fixit’
Affective
factors influencing collaboration

**Motivators**
- Users associate library / librarian interactions with positive emotions (confidence, competence, ‘in control’)
- Interactions enhance users’ sense of self esteem
- Using / exploring the collection seen as richly rewarding
- Using the facilities conveys positive emotions (useful, valuable, time saving)
- Library staff appear to welcome & have time for valued clients
- Library seen as a rewarding place in which to spend time

**Demotivators**
- Users associate library / librarian interactions with negative emotions (lack of confidence, failure, futility)
- Interactions lower users’ sense of self esteem
- Visit to library/librarian seen as waste of time - “Only books there - nothing useful” / “prefer the internet at home”
- Library staff inept, brusque, rude or unwelcoming
- Librarian trespasses on teachers’ ‘patch’ - usurps teaching role when in library!
- Library seen as bolt hole for the neurotic, obsessive or paranoid
The predominance of Affect

Fear & loathing in the library

• My research findings
  – Most preferred options -----→ positive emotions
  – Least preferred options -----→ negative emotions

• Literature
  – “Library anxiety” phenomenon (Mellon 1986)
  – The “fear of feeling stupid” (Radford & Radford 1997)
  – The library as “panopticon” - Foucauldian avatars of power & control (Foucault 1986)

• Observation -----→ conflict, power & control
  – ‘Discourse groups’ within school community
    • disparate jargon, educational agendas, ‘Weltanschauungen’
  – Competition for resources
    • Budgets & contested spaces - the power of the pur$e
    • Technology debate - information, technology & power
7 Significant Implications
for Information Professionals & their services

1. Non-users will always outnumber users
2. Human communication &/or print still important
3. Personal resources & the internet are popular substitutes for library resources / services of TLs
4. Prior positive / negative experiences with libraries &/or librarians will strongly influence preferences
5. Strong indication in my interviews that such prior experiences can bias / predicate any potential collaboration with TLs or planned library use
6. Situational, cognitive & affective factors must all be considered (situational easiest to rectify / improve)
7. ‘Assumed’ collaboration is part of library mythology

NB. Assume nothing - you have to work for it
Isn’t it lucky that we all enjoy a challenge!

J. Bale, 2007