

President's Message

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SSLA President



SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

I chose this quote to begin my first 'editorial' for *The Medium* – well, the first since 1993 during my first experience as the President of the *Saskatchewan School Library Association* – because it seems to illustrate so well the current situation of school libraries and teacher-librarians in the province of Saskatchewan.

Let me explain...

It is the best of times because the Ministry of Education has created and distributed a new set of guidelines, *Connections*, which provides schools and school divisions a working document with which they can begin to assess, analyze and plan for the development of school libraries to meet the 21st Century learning needs of their students.

It is the worst of times because the Ministry of Education first eliminated the position of Curriculum Actualization Consultant and then eliminated the Instructional Resources Branch along with the personnel who provided support for school libraries. Schools, school divisions, and teacher-librarians are left to flounder not knowing where to turn for advice, support, and resources as they try to meet the expectations of the new guidelines.

It is the best of times because the new, soon to be released curricula focus on *Inquiry* across all grades and all subject areas. Teacher-librarians will no longer have to advocate about the importance of information literacy skills as they are explicitly stated at grade appropriate levels in each curriculum.

It is the worst of times because across the province there is a lack of teacher-librarians, well-stocked school libraries and clearly articulated school library programs which are required to effectively implement a school-wide, inquiry-based program.

It is the best of times because in 2008 the internet not only enables information at our fingertips, but allow for anyone to connect, to communicate, to create and to make contributions at a global level.

It is the worst of times because there are still school library programs designed for teaching in the 20th Century. School libraries and teacher-librarians continue to deliver programs based on print resources with little knowledge or ability on how to engage students with the very technology they use at home. As well, often teacher-librarians who attempt to use the new technologies find themselves thwarted by school-division filtering policies.

It is the best of times because members of the SSLA Executive are committed using a wide variety of tools to deliver professional development to its membership and to other educators who want to know and understand how teacher-librarians can be a part of the instructional team meeting the needs of their 21st Century learner.

It was the worst of times because several school-divisions policies prevent access to the technologies that enable participation in virtual meetings and workshops.

It is the best of times because the SSLA has a dynamic, committed executive determined to lobby and advocate for school libraries at all political levels.

It is the worst of times because SSLA is prevented by its parent organization from on its membership to take specific action. Any call for action must take place within the bureaucracy of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

Next year and in years to come we may indeed say, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." But I also hope that we will be able to talk about how we met our challenges; that we persisted in creating 21st libraries, that we worked with teachers to effectively integrate inquiry-based learning, that we lobbied against the censorship and filtering of the tools our students require to be 21st learners, that we found ways to participate in the learning opportunities provided by SSLA and that the executive successfully advocated for school libraries within the political constraints of the STF.

I look forward to meeting many of you during our first virtual workshop with Sharon Grimes, the author of *Reading is Our Business: How Libraries Can Foster Reading Comprehension*.

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