



## Union-Active School Librarians and School Library Advocacy: A Modified Case Study of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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### Abstract

*This modified case study examines how the members of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association (BCTLA), a Provincial Specialist Association (PSA) of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), work together to advocate for strong school library programs headed by a credentialed school librarian. Since 2002, despite nullification of a collective bargaining agreement that mandated a ratio of school librarians to students, the province has maintained 70 percent of its school librarian positions. The researcher found that the BCTF provides the structure and megaphone for advocacy, while the members of BCTLA are responsible for the "boots on the ground" advocacy. Members of BCTLA are passionate about the role of school librarians despite significant challenges. Two-way communication between BCTF and BCTLA is vital. Additionally, a strong personal connection exists among BCTLA members. However, despite consistent advocacy efforts made by BCTLA and BCTF, the organizations face an uphill battle in terms of having their efforts impact policy. Librarian interest groups can use the structure of the union to promote school library issues. If a union is not available, school librarians can use influence-building techniques and professional associations to effectively advocate for strong school libraries. Union activity in support of school libraries offers a promising opportunity for library advocates.*

### Introduction

#### De-Professionalization of School Libraries

School libraries play a vital, pivotal role in K–12 education (Todd, Gordon, and Liu 2015). They offer access to information that aligns with the curriculum, promote literacy and technology, and are central to the inquiry process that is now manifested in K–12 curriculum (AASL 2009). The school librarian (sometimes referred to as a “teacher-librarian”) is a teacher (Vandergrift 1979) who is trained to partner with classroom teachers in integrating inquiry into the curriculum, promoting a love of reading, and incorporating digital tools into the learning process (AASL 2009; Moreillon and Ballard 2013). However, in the digital age, school libraries are often marginalized. A de-professionalization of school libraries has occurred as credentialed school librarians (that is, certified teachers with a library credential) are replaced with aides or parent volunteers who manage and operate the library (Achterman 2008). In the press and educational circles, one often hears the refrain, “Why do we need libraries when we have the Internet?” For example, in a recent column in *Forbes*, the author argued for closing all libraries and buying everyone a Kindle (Worstall 2014). It is for this reason that teacher unions advocate for strong school library programs, each headed by a school librarian.

## Purpose of Study

This modified case study examines how the members of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association (BCTLA), a Provincial Specialist Association (PSA) of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), work together to advocate for strong school library programs headed by a credentialed school librarian. The study aims to explore the phenomenon of advocacy for the school librarian profession, situated in the history and context of the teachers’ union in British Columbia. The following research question guides the study:

*How do the teacher-librarian [school librarian] members of the BCTLA work with the BCTF to advocate for a credentialed teacher-librarian in every provincial school?*

The purpose of this study is to better understand a specific case where school librarians are involved in union activity. A dearth of literature exists regarding the role of teachers’ unions in education (Winzer and Mazurek 2011), and no articles were found that specifically address the role of school librarians or specialist associations in teachers’ unions. Therefore, this study addresses a gap in the research literature on teachers’ unions and school library advocacy.

## Background

### Teachers’ Unions

The primary objective of teachers’ unions is to secure benefits for the profession (Manzer 1969). However, teachers’ unions have evolved from an industrial orientation, concerned with workers’ rights and benefits, to a professional orientation (Poole 1997), taking up the improvement of education for all students. Accordingly, teachers’ unions believe that they play a genuine role in shaping state/provincial and national policy (Poole 1999). When teachers find their career prospects, working conditions, or compensation problematic, union involvement is one form of recourse (Bascia 1998). Teachers who are the most involved in unions report that union activities are essential in carrying out their day-to-day work (Bascia 1998). Union effectiveness depends primarily on member support (Chaison and Bigelow 2002). However, union-active teachers are not common (Bascia 2005). The majority of teachers do not participate in union activities.

Nevertheless, teachers involved in unions tend to be clustered in specific departments or among those in similar roles across school districts (Bascia 1998). Nina Bascia explains, “Teacher unions have had a strongly powerful influence in the work lives of a small subset of the teaching force who, often working alone or in small groups, have been savvy enough to recognize the potential benefits of union involvement for improving the learning conditions of their own students and/or the lot of other teachers” (2001, 68). In the case of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, the union has a strong and vocal cadre of school librarians who are active in the larger union, their local affiliate unions, and the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association.

## School Library Advocacy

Advocacy can be defined as “a kind of political action addressed to a governing body with the aim of influencing public policy outputs” (Von Winter 2011, 29). The American Association of School Librarians (2014) expands the definition of advocacy as the “on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library program. It begins with a vision and a plan for the library program that is then matched to the agenda and priorities of stakeholders.” While research on school library advocacy is limited (Burns 2013; Ewbank 2011a), there is a considerable body of practitioner literature about school library advocacy (Ewbank and Kwon 2013).

Ja Youn Kwon and I conducted a content analysis of the published school library advocacy literature. We found that the literature on school library advocacy published between 2001 and 2011 was primarily intended for practitioners and consisted of strategies and techniques for advocacy, evidence-based practice as an advocacy tool, dispositions of school librarians, advocacy by non-librarians and administrators, advocacy by professional associations, localized reports of advocacy initiatives, and descriptions of legislative or political advocacy. We also found that more than 80 percent of advocacy activities described in the literature were undertaken by school librarians or an individual in the school library field (Ewbank and Kwon 2013).

For her PhD dissertation Elizabeth Burns (2013) conducted research on perceptions of how school librarians build influence. She found that study participants had difficulty in distinguishing the difference between public relations, marketing, and advocacy. Additionally, common strategies were used for the purpose of changing the perception of school library stakeholders. These strategies included emphasizing the teaching role of the school librarian, revitalizing the school librarian position, focusing on innovation, and ensuring relevance of the school library program. Deborah Detenbeck Levitov (2009), when conducting research for her dissertation, studied perceptions of school administrators after they took an online course in school library advocacy. The course filled a gap in a university-level educational administration program. She found that the online course provided motivation for administrators to change their perception about the school library and the role of the school librarian. Furthermore, the course allowed for exploration of how administrators might change their school library programs to accommodate today’s learners.

A U.S. national survey I conducted on school librarian advocacy behaviors revealed that more than half of the respondents faced funding challenges or threat of having their jobs eliminated. While an overwhelming majority of school librarians felt that advocacy was important to the future of the profession, only half of the respondents reported engaging in advocacy activities due to obstacles such as lack of time and lack of awareness (Ewbank 2011a). A case study of

factors leading to retention of school librarian positions in a mid-size urban school district that had suffered a major economic crisis revealed that factors leading to retention of school librarian positions included employee involvement in the decision-making process, transparency in communication, trust between the district leadership and the governing board, commitment to the district's values, and stakeholders' perception of the value of the school library program (Ewbank 2011b). More recently, Nancy Everhart and Marcia M. Mardis conducted an evaluation of a project designed to bolster stakeholders' understanding of school libraries and the profession. These researchers found that reaching out to stakeholders in an organized and thoughtful fashion while not in a crisis mode allowed stakeholders to reflect on the value of school library programs and built support for both school librarians and school library programs (2014).

## **School Librarian Staffing in Canada and British Columbia**

In Canada school librarian staffing in school libraries varies widely from province to province. In 2005 a one-time national survey commissioned by Statistics Canada revealed that while 93.3 percent of schools had libraries, each school had, on average, only a 0.25 full time equivalent (FTE) school librarian (Coish 2005). Prince Edward Island and British Columbia had the highest number of school librarians with 0.56 FTE and 0.48 FTE respectively, while Quebec had the lowest number of school librarians at 0.03 FTE (Coish 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the school librarian FTE per school in each province.

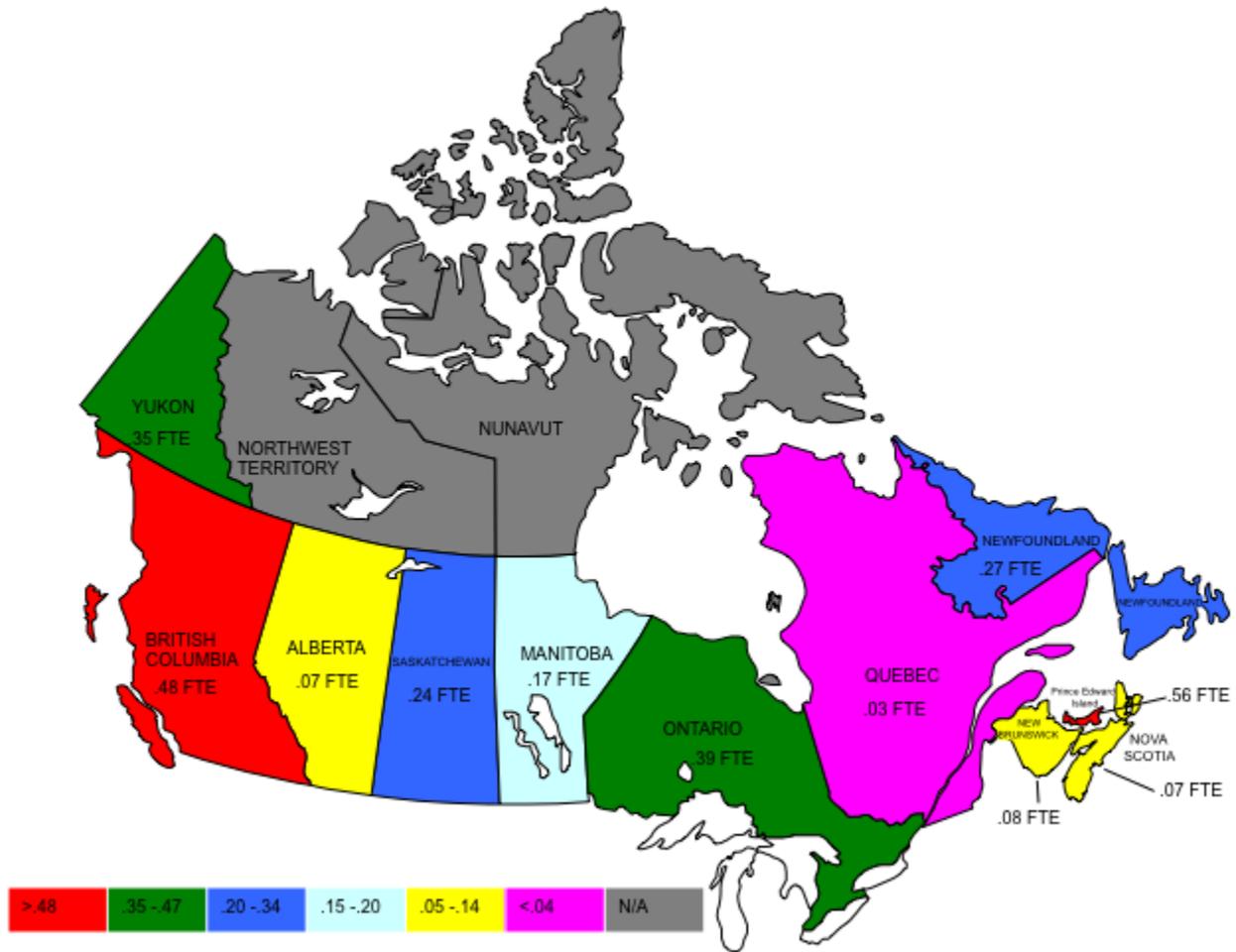


Figure 1. School librarian FTE per province (Coish 2005).

Between 2001 and 2012, there was a 30 percent decline in school librarian positions in British Columbia. However, between the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years, there was an increase of 2 percent (10.8 FTE), the first gain in eleven years. Figure 2 illustrates school librarian staffing in British Columbia.

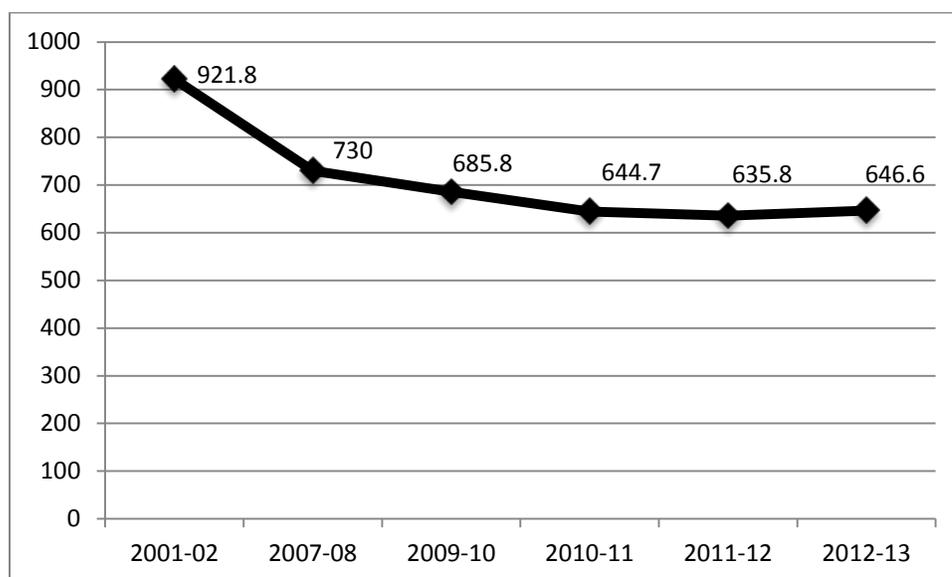


Figure 2. School librarian positions in British Columbia, 2001–2013 (BCTF 2013).

Since 2002, despite the nullification of a collective bargaining agreement that mandated a specific ratio of school librarians in British Columbia's public schools, the province has maintained approximately 70 percent of its school librarian positions (BCTF 2013).

### History of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association

In Canadian provinces library organizations are typically standalone professional associations. That is, each may be incorporated as a nonprofit organization. In British Columbia the school library association is a part of the teachers' union, rather than a standalone professional association. Only two other provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, have this configuration. This arrangement has implications for advocacy. A union pursues collective bargaining agreements and can strike, lobby, and endorse political candidates for office. Therefore, the British Columbia situation brings up some interesting questions vis-à-vis the amount and types of advocacy in which school librarians can and do participate.

### History of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation

The BCTF was formed in 1917 and incorporated in 1919. The BCTF was born out of a concern that teachers were underpaid, and working conditions were poor (BCTF 2002). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the cost of living in British Columbia rose at a rate five times faster than the increase in teacher compensation. Tenure was another early concern of teacher members. Prior to the establishment of the union, teachers could be dismissed without cause at the end of any school term. The BCTF successfully negotiated for tenure requirements across the province (BCTF 2002). Another early concern was the awarding of pensions to teachers based on many years of service. Prior to the incorporation of the union, pensions could be awarded only by a special act of the British Columbia Legislature. Due to the BCTF's lobbying, the union was able to secure mandatory pensions for its members (BCTF 2002).

In the 1940s and 1950s the BCTF turned its attention to matters of developing teaching as a profession. This goal was achieved by advocating for teacher involvement in the curriculum decisions made by the province. The union was successful in establishing curriculum advisory committees that worked with the provincial ministry of education on curriculum matters (BCTF 2002). Additionally, in the 1950s the union was successful in achieving parity in salary schedules between male and female teachers (BCTF 2002).

In the 1970s and 1980s the provincial government attempted to dismantle public sector unions in the province. In 1971 and again in 1987 the province's government eliminated the provision for compulsory membership in the union. The BCTF mounted successful campaigns to restore compulsory membership, in both instances including the right to collective bargain and strike in the campaigns (BCTF 2002).

In the modern era, working conditions declined in British Columbia schools as a result of a bargaining agreement in 1994 that included a number of concessions, one of which was allowing the replacement of school librarians by technicians (Poole 2000). However, the BCTF negotiated a collective bargaining agreement in the late 1990s that required a ratio of 1.0 school librarian FTE to 702 student FTE. The BC Legislative Assembly nullified the agreement on January 28, 2002, and school districts were then able to decide whether to eliminate school librarians. For the next nine years the BCTF was involved in a long and costly litigation battle against this provision (BCTF 2014g).

In April 2011 the British Columbia Supreme Court declared the nullification unconstitutional and invalid. However, the restoration of the unconstitutionally removed collective agreement language (including provisions related to school librarians) did not occur, and in early 2012 the provincial government enacted legislation similar to the previously enacted legislation.

As a result, the BCTF initiated new litigation that made its way through the court system. In January 2014 the BC Supreme Court again concluded that the government had acted counter to the constitution, and ordered that all collective agreement language removed in 2002 be restored retroactively back to 2002. During this time, the BCTF advocated for school districts to make decisions locally about retaining or eliminating school librarians while simultaneously advocating for the restoration of the province-wide ratio of school librarians to students (BCTF 2014g). On January 27, 2014, the British Columbia Supreme Court restored the collective bargaining agreement provisions taken away in 2002, including the mandatory ratio of school librarians to student FTE. The province was ordered to pay \$2 million in damages plus court costs (BCTF 2014a). This most recent decision, however, was appealed by the government, and the BC Court of Appeal granted a stay of the January 2014 decision. Consequently, the January 2014 decision is not enforceable at the time of this writing.

The situation in British Columbia continues to evolve. To apply pressure to the government in bargaining for the restoration of the provisions outlined in the 2002 collective bargaining agreement, including the restoration of a province-wide ratio of school librarians to students, on March 6, 2014 the BCTF membership voted overwhelmingly to conduct a job action (strike vote) within the next ninety days. The BCTF president, Jim Iker, remarked, "BC teachers are committed to negotiating a deal at the table. That is our goal. The vote is about putting pressure on both sides to get an agreement. We will work very hard to get that negotiated settlement without any job action. A strike vote is a normal process in labour relations and helps apply pressure to both parties during negotiations" (BCTF 2014d).

On April 23, 2014, the members of the BCTF commenced the job action, a work slowdown. Teachers would not:

- Undertake any mandated supervision of students outside of regularly scheduled classes, except as set out by an essential services order.
- Attend any meetings with management other than meetings of the worksite Joint Health and Safety Committee.
- Provide principals or administrators with any routine printed, written, or electronic communication.
- Receive any printed, written, or electronic communication from an administrator.
- Be at a worksite prior to one hour before commencement of instructional time and one hour after the end of instructional time, other than for prearranged voluntary activities. (BCTF 2014e)

Despite the job action, negotiations between the BCTF and the government remained icy, and on May 28, 2014, the job action escalated to a rotating strike (a strike during which only certain districts are closed at any given time, and only one day per week). The rotating strikes continued until June 17, 2014, when a full-scale strike commenced (BCTF 2014f).

The strike continued until September 18, 2014, when members ratified the collective bargaining agreement with 86 percent voting in favor (BCTF 2014b). The agreement, BCTF President Jim Iker stated, “will provide new support for students, ensure there are more specialist and classroom teachers in schools working with children, and protect teachers’ constitutional rights as the court case continues” (BCTF 2014c). Time will tell whether more school librarian positions will be added as a result of the agreement.

## History of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association

The British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association is a Provincial Specialist Association of the BCTF. Currently, thirty-two Provincial Specialist Associations represent a variety of teacher specialist interests, all under the umbrella of the BCTF. (For a list of all PSAs, see [www.bctf.ca/PSAwebsites.aspx](http://www.bctf.ca/PSAwebsites.aspx).) The goals of PSAs are to be key providers of ongoing professional development for teachers, to promote the profile of teachers as professionals, and to involve members in collective bargaining and advocacy for the teachers working in the specialization area (BCTF 2012a).

In 1939 in Vancouver, the BCTLA began as the British Columbia School Librarians’ Association (BCSLA). At that time, all forty-nine Vancouver schools had libraries, making it the only city in the province with that level of service (Daly 2012). This movement was bolstered in the 1960s when teaching methods began to emphasize inquiry learning and individualized instruction (Haycock 2008). The BCSLA officially became a Provincial Specialist Association of the BCTF in 1967. In 1983 the name of the association was changed to the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association, a reflection of the affirmation that school librarians are indeed teachers (Daly 2012). Some of the advocacy activities of the BCTLA include:

- A year-round professional development program featuring an annual conference, webinars, and a summer institute.
- The annual Drop Everything and Read Day, which in 2011 had more than sixty thousand participants, and other events, including Love Your School Library Day.

- Social media options, including seven blogs, three wikis, two Twitter accounts, a Ning, and a Facebook group.
- Professional publications such as *The Bookmark* journal, school library position statements, and BCTLA book reviews.
- Guides and tools for all BC educators, including *The Points of Inquiry: A Framework for Information Literacy and the 21st Century Learner* and *The 21st-Century Learner and Ethics of Information Use: A Guide for Teachers*.
- Fourteen awards and grants, including one to support school librarian professional inquiry.
- Resources and statistics to support school library and school librarian advocacy efforts, including the results from BCTLA's nearly thirty years of annual BC school library *Working and Learning Conditions Surveys* (Daly 2012).

As demonstrated above, the BCTLA engages in many advocacy activities and has a strong presence in the BCTF. The president of BCTLA stated, "Given the global economic situation and related financial challenges, school librarians could have been completely eliminated. Without the union and its predominance in education matters, that 70 percent-30 percent statistic would probably be reversed" (H. Daly, personal communication, January 30, 2012).

## Method

A modified descriptive case study approach was used. The word "modified" signals that data were collected over an abbreviated period of time (Frioni 2013). Robert E. Stake (1995) explained that researchers can be restricted in the data they collect by access to the data site. In this modified descriptive case study, due to limited funding and time allotted at the data site, my access to the site was restricted to two meetings of the BCTLA and three interviews of BCTF officials. This restriction of time and access is a limitation of the study, and future studies should provide for a more in-depth data collection.

Robert K. Yin (2009) outlined four purposes of a descriptive case study. First, the method can explain real-life decisions including complex causal links. Second, a case study can describe the real-life context of the situation and any decisions made. Third, the case study can describe the decision being made. Finally, descriptive case studies can explore those contexts in which the event being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes. The modified descriptive case study method was appropriate for examining the multiple perspectives of the BCTLA Executive Board, table officers (people with elected positions), and BCTF senior staff members.

Two meetings of the BCTLA were attended. The first meeting was of the BCTLA Executive Board (approximately fifteen members), and the second meeting was of the BCTLA Council, comprised of table officers and the executive board (approximately thirty members). During these meetings, I led a one-hour group discussion on the topic of advocacy and how the BCTLA and BCTF work together to advocate for a school librarian in every school. Additionally, three individual thirty-minute interviews of senior BCTF staff members were conducted. The staff members were the second vice president, a policy analyst, and the director of research (also a former president of the BCTF). Each discussion and interview used a semi-structured format that allowed exploration of unexpected aspects of the context. Guiding questions for the interviews and meetings are provided in Appendix A. The meetings and interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Assisted by a graduate student, I used constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to analyze the data. First, the recorded interviews were compared against the transcripts. The graduate student and I then independently read through the transcripts for understanding and clarity. During a second read-through, both of us independently open-coded the data, line by line, using emic and *in vivo* codes (Creswell 1998). An Excel spreadsheet was used to record the codes and excerpts. We then compared our coding line by line, reaching a rate of 70 percent inter-rater reliability. Elisabet Hagelin (1999) has noted that initially low agreement between coders can be common due to the high degree of inference needed to code data. Furthermore, Rosaline S. Barbour has stated, “What is ultimately of value is the content of disagreements and the insights that discussion can provide for refining coding frames” (2001, 1116). We followed this process by having a rich discussion that resulted in a reconciled coding scheme. Codes were then organized into categories, and the categories were compared against the data to identify confirming and disconfirming evidence. Categories were then organized into themes, and themes were then interpreted into findings.

A report of the findings was created and presented to the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians’ Association Executive Board six months after the initial data collection. The resulting discussion served as a member check (Maxwell 2005) to ensure that I accurately understood the participants’ words and their meanings. Additionally, three members of the BCTF reviewed the report manuscript prior to submission and provided changes to improve accuracy.

## Findings

### Introduction

In this section the six findings of the study are presented. These findings are supported by representative comments from the data.

#### ***Finding 1: BCTF Is Committed to Supporting All PSAs Including the BCTLA.***

According to the BCTF *PSA Guidebook*, “PSAs are channels for members to exchange ideas on research, teaching strategies, curriculum development, and other shared interests” (2014.). The BCTF officials interviewed see their primary role as supporting all Provincial Specialist Associations, including BCTLA. The PSAs provide an important conduit through which specialist members can provide input to the BCTF about collective bargaining, policy, and negotiations with the Ministry of Education in British Columbia.

Phillip M. Marcus (1966) outlined two channels through which members can influence the leadership of a union: subgroup representation on executive boards and conventions. BCTF employs both channels, and the PSA structure appears to be an effective medium through which members can provide input on the direction of the union. The BCTF policy analyst remarked, “We expect them [PSA officers and board members] to come back to us with advice and then we add things when they expect us to support that through communications, through meetings between the table officers here and the Minister [of Education].” A BCTLA executive board member corroborated this sentiment by stating: “The BCTF is supportive of us [BCTLA] as long as we are here and as long as we make representations and ask for things that they have to respond to that because that’s part of [their] mandate.”

The BCTF leadership takes this input and elevates it to the level of collective bargaining agreements. This BCTF response to PSA members’ concerns is evidenced by the most recent

vote to conduct a strike taken in June 2014. The BCTF President, Jim Iker, remarked, “Teachers voted so overwhelmingly in favour because the government has tabled [placed on the agenda] unfair and unreasonable proposals that would undo the class size, class composition, and specialist teacher staffing levels we just won back in a BC Supreme Court ruling” (BCTF 2014d).

The BCTF works for BCTLA through advocating for a minimum ratio of school librarians to students, as well as against elimination of school librarians’ positions. The BCTF Second Vice President stated, “Every child...every school should have a school library that should be staffed by a qualified teacher-librarian. So it’s not just a technical job of putting books on shelves. It’s a position that needs to be a teacher working collaboratively with classroom teachers and other teachers in the school to do literacy and all [its] wide-ranging forms. And that’s something that we’ve been fighting to preserve all this time.”

Most members of the BCTLA Executive Board agreed with this sentiment. One executive board member remarked, “I’m seeing more support from the BCTF for those specialist teachers...[BCTF officers are] realizing that a teacher is a teacher, but some teachers are more vulnerable, I think, to...the whims of government than the average classroom teacher. And, they’ve come to recognize that.” However, not every BCTLA executive board member agreed that the BCTF is committed to supporting BCTLA. A chapter councilor stated, “Because often the greater teachers’ union has no understanding of what school librarians do, so we’re [BCTLA] that voice. And we’re out there to give the teacher-librarian a sense of belonging and a sense knowing that they fit into something.”

It is yet to be determined whether the strike and ratified collective bargaining agreement will restore the ratio between school librarians and students in the province. Based on the data, it appears that the BCTF is receptive to the concerns of the Provincial Specialist Associations and pushes forward an agenda in support of learning-specialist teachers such as school librarians, although not all BCTLA members who participated in the study agree that the union is receptive to BCTLA members’ concerns.

### ***Finding 2: BCTF Provides the Structure and Megaphone for Advocacy While BCTLA Conducts the “Boots on the Ground” Advocacy.***

The BCTF, as a larger umbrella organization with collective bargaining power, provides the structure and megaphone for BCTLA. The BCTF Second Vice President stated, “So one [avenue of support] is always the political fronts, [BCTF] doing the lobbying, doing the advertising, doing the public advocacy, making sure that whenever we’re making reports to the provincial [government], the standing committee on finance, that [we] are making reference to loss of teacher-librarians.” BCTF employs multiple strategies to ensure that its members’ concerns are elevated to the provincial level. For example, in addition to lobbying and collective bargaining efforts, the BCTF produced a public service announcement about the loss of school librarian positions that was aired on television province-wide (BCTF 2012b).

As members of a PSA of BCTF, active BCTLA members provide “boots on the ground” advocacy. One BCTLA executive board member stated, “I also say that I’m always so proud when we go out for our protests—So, we’re in front of the art gallery or in front of a[n] office doing our little protests, [I’m proud about] how many other school librarians I see there.” Moreover, a BCTLA executive board member stated, “I think advocacy is part of...BCTLA.” This willingness to advocate at the grassroots level is aided by the structure of the teachers’ union. A participant at the BCTLA Council meeting remarked, “We’ve been talking about

transforming school libraries. I'm thinking about how we have been transformed and how we transform the BCTF. What powerful, powerful advocates we have become and how we promote our union. And we make our union strong by the work we do... I think we make the BCTF strong. And we make them look good." Another BCTLA executive board member explained, "Every person in here is the BCTF...It is clear to me that *I* am the BCTF." In terms of participation in advocacy efforts supported by the BCTF, one chapter councilor stated, "It gives us a collective voice and a sense [of] some level of power."

The data collected at both the BCTLA Executive Board and the BCTLA Council meetings indicate a high degree of school librarians' involvement not only in the BCTLA but also in the work of the larger union. BCTF uses the strategy of coordinating between the union leadership and the PSAs to centralize action, which Sara Slinn noted is an organizational advantage. Slinn also remarked, "Central to BCTF's success has also been its ability to muster grassroots teacher support (2011, 77)."

### ***Finding 3: The Leadership of the BCTLA President Is Vital to Two-Way Communication between BCTF and Members of BCTLA.***

The relationship between the BCTF and BCTLA is enhanced by the leadership of the BCTLA President. Members of the BCTLA who participated in the discussions perceive that the BCTLA President and executive board members' constant conversation with BCTF results in representing well the concerns of BCTLA. A participant at the BCTLA Council meeting said, "[the president] Heather's...consistent, considerable, persistent, tactful, and again tactful, interaction with the, not just BCTF, but with governmental officials...People...like...Heather are very active in the BCTF and making sure that that liaison is very strong."

BCTLA participants interviewed indicated that the two-way communication between the president and the larger teachers' union is vital to representing members' concerns and perspectives. One executive board member stated, "They are really invested and put the time in." In addition, the president of the BCTLA also holds several leadership responsibilities within the BCTF, including a seat on the PSA Council. Another executive board member remarked, "It really helps to make all of those very strong connections between the [BCTLA] Executive [Board] and the BCTF and all the different services they provide with us." Many BCTLA participants expressed that they have a place at the table due to the president's high involvement with the union.

The BCTLA President appears to have embraced a covenantal relationship with the union. A covenantal relationship is defined as a bond between two parties (in this case between the organization and the union member-leader), based on trust where common goals and beliefs are shared (Twigg, Fuller, and Hester 2008). In covenantal relationships, "individuals must believe that the organization is committed to them and cares about their well-being" (Twigg, Fuller, and Hester 2008, 28). This orientation allows the BCTLA President to navigate the organizational politics of the union while representing the BCTLA and promoting two-way communication.

Additionally, the BCTLA President demonstrates a transformative leadership style. Transformative leadership is defined as "an ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders" (Caldwell et al. 2012, 176). This transformative leadership style is evident in the president's commitment to the BCTF and BCTLA, but also her focus on the betterment of children through advocating for a strong school library program in every provincial school.

***Finding 4: A Strong Personal Connection Exists among BCTLA Members.***

Members that partook in the discussions indicated that participating in the BCTLA is valuable for expanding professional networking and for identifying problems and solving them together. BCTLA members have strong personal connections with each other. In other words, BCTLA is an interconnected group. Members are organized and passionate about school librarianship. An executive board officer remarked, “I’m back into this now once again and [there are] so many meetings, but really feeling happy to be part of a thriving culture.” Another executive board officer stated, “One of the good things about this meeting is that we can identify the problem without being really negative about it and work towards solutions.” Additionally, a table officer commented on the value of “just knowing there are a lot of other people out there doing the same job, have been in the same shoes and here’s some stuff to help you.”

Evident in the data was the perception by BCTLA table officers and executive board members that the association was “their” association, and their involvement in the association contributes to its strength. Table officers and executive board members mentioned that they felt as if they were part of a whole and that their collective voices made the association strong. Bascia (1990) has explained that teachers’ unions can provide teachers with a major source of their professional identity, and this appears to be the case for the BCTLA members who participated in the discussions. A third executive board officer stated, “I just like being involved. I get inspired by it, and I like to hear what’s going on.” Additionally, one senior BCTF official also commented on the strong personal connection between BCTLA members. She stated, “[They have] a formidable level of organization...I think it’s [because] [school librarians] know how to organize and they know how to...use electronic communications to do that.” This personal connection indicates that the members are working together toward a common goal.

***Finding 5: Members of BCTLA Are Passionate about the Role of School Librarians Despite Significant Challenges.***

The school librarians who are members of BCTLA play a key role as school leaders. One executive committee member stated, “You’re not a leader unless you’re going to meetings, you’re sitting on committees in your school, you’re part of the leadership group.” Members who participated in the discussions appear to understand the big picture at their schools, and they cooperate with other teachers to improve student achievement. They are very organized, resource experts, and passionate about their profession. A participant at the council meeting explained, “We’re always organized. We know what we want. We have goals in mind. We’re very big picture. We’re not small picture... I think we all do that as teacher-librarians.”

Despite the valuable characteristics of school librarians, they encounter serious challenges. While other core-subject teachers focus only on teaching, school librarians feel that they must make an additional effort to advocate for their positions. A BCTLA executive board officer stated, “I’m busy from the moment I step foot in the school until the time I leave and then even more. So, I’m as busy as a math teacher, but a math teacher doesn’t need to advocate the same [as] I do.” A chapter councilor corroborated this by stating, “We have more of an onus on us to prove that we are worth our time because we have to go and find the people who want to work with us.” This element of challenge is evident in the professional literature on school library advocacy. For example, Gary Hartzell (2003b) indicated that resistance to change in the educational workplace is common and that school librarians must employ specific strategies to overcome this resistance.

BCTLA school librarians employ these strategies in various ways. They educate stakeholders about their roles and the effect of their position in the school, for example, by presenting at board meetings and conducting programs such as Drop Everything and Read. They also use social networking and assist other teachers, especially new teachers. One executive board member commented that “[School librarians] help to...remind people and I think they’re important to do. Drop Everything and Read, I think, is a really good thing because it actually calls for an action. Saying nice things about school libraries and actually doing something. You’re asked to do something that relates to libraries; I think is really an important way of promoting. And, there seems to be a fair amount of take-up on it as well.”

The table officers and executive board members remarked about how difficult it is to be a school librarian, that advocacy was always on the forefront because they continually feel as if they are under siege by both the British Columbia Ministry of Education as well as issues at the local level. The BCTF policy analyst stated, “In the last few years [there has been] a...kind of an attack almost on teacher-librarians and...a kind of downgrading of provincial Ministry expectations about support to that.” Despite these challenges, the passion of the participants shone through. It was clear in the meetings that the BCTLA members interviewed believe that a school library staffed by a credentialed school librarian is a cornerstone of every school. Several participants remarked about the power of the school library to change lives through inquiry-based learning, the freedom to read, and other positions that demonstrate the value and mission of school libraries.

***Finding 6: Despite Consistent Advocacy Efforts Made by BCTLA and the BCTF, the Organizations Face an Uphill Battle in Terms of Having Their Efforts Impact Policy.***

School librarians’ advocacy in British Columbia has led to local results. This outcome is consistent with the notion of a longstanding tradition of local control in teachers’ unions (Johnson et al. 2009). Some members reported positive incremental results such as ensuring contract time for the school librarians in schools. For example, in describing how she advocated using the help of the union to change the library schedule from fixed to flexible, one table officer stated, “We went from 80 percent prep time down to 60 percent prep and 50 percent prep in schools.” Another table officer described how contract time for school librarians was increased in her district: “In Richmond a few years ago we had a minimum with our small schools of less than about .2 [FTE]. We went and advocated, and we made sure that our smaller schools started at .4 and then everything else was topped up on top of that. So it worked.”

As the BCTLA engages in advocacy, administrators, teachers, and parents begin to recognize the value of school librarians. One table officer remarked, “The advocacy that we’ve done at our local level going to a board meeting to doing a presentation has meant that our library time has been maintained even when there’s been significant cuts elsewhere.”

Despite the consistent advocacy effort made by BCTLA and BCTF, both organizations face an uphill battle in terms of having their efforts impact provincial policy. Because local unions dictate the terms of most collective bargaining and staffing decisions are primarily made at the local level (Johnson et al. 2009), the BCTF has worked toward reinstating the provincial policy of one school librarian to every 702 FTE students while simultaneously advocating for staffing decisions about school librarians to be bargained for at the local level. According to the BCTF policy analyst, the British Columbia Ministry of Education is not supportive enough of school librarians. This situation makes it difficult to work toward a policy for protecting school librarian positions. She stated, “I think it would actually take some kind of social shift. If the feeling in society was that you really *had* to have school libraries and you really *have* to have teacher-

librarians, then I think it would happen. Governments really, really listen to public opinion. And, you know, I've seen public opinion shift in huge ways over things like drunk driving.”

As evidenced by the continuing litigation, the recent strike, and negotiations between the BCTF and the Ministry of Education, the battle to have a credentialed school librarian in every school in British Columbia continues to be daunting. It is unknown at this time whether the province-wide student to school librarian staffing ratio will be reinstated. It is clear, however, through the messaging of the BCTF that the union's position is to advocate for a return to the original staffing ratio that was agreed upon in 1994. Political pressures brought to bear by the Ministry of Education may make reinstatement of the ratio difficult. The fact that the union voted overwhelmingly for and participated in a strike is evidence that members of the BCTF believe that somewhat drastic measures must be taken in order for the Ministry of Education to sit at the table and engage in collective bargaining.

## Implications and Recommendations

The structure of a union opens many possibilities for school library advocacy. Advocacy and agenda setting happens primarily in localized contexts, and school librarians must adapt advocacy strategies to fit their unique situations (IFLA 2014). For example, in the Boston area, union leaders brought a grievance against Raynham and Bridgewater public schools when it was discovered that volunteers had been staffing school libraries rather than certified school librarians (Legere 2010). However, the grievance was quickly withdrawn as public backlash criticized the union for keeping students from accessing the libraries (Hyman 2011). This example indicates the tenuous nature of union activities in school library advocacy.

In another example, an advocacy group called Chicago School Librarians has been working with the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) in advocating for a full-time librarian in every Chicago public school. They have garnered national press (Vevea 2014) and used the structure of the union to pressure Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett to add school librarians (CTU Communications 2014). The group uses a strategy of connecting with the union's larger goals related to an equal education for all students. As of this writing, the matter has not been decided, and the Chicago School Librarians group continues to advocate for librarians in every public school. It may be preferable to connect to the union's priorities and demonstrate how strong school libraries contribute to those priorities, rather than having the union take an adversarial stance against the school district. To avoid pitfalls, advocates should work with their union leadership to decide the best course of actions.

Based on the findings of this research, it appears that school librarians can effectively use a union structure to carry out advocacy activities. School librarians can be active advocates by participating in local unions and associations and by carrying out advocacy activities that are impactful and speak to the local community. To maximize their advocacy activity, union-active school librarians can take advantage of the “megaphone” of the union. The school librarians of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association seem to be effective in tapping into this resource.

The BCTF/BCTLA case also brings up interesting implications for a variety of factors that can be applied beyond the context of a union. Many states in the U.S. are “right to work” states under section 14(b) of the Labor-Management Relations Act, informally known as the Taft-Hartley Act (1947). Under this federal law, states are allowed to enact laws that affirm that no person can be compelled as a condition of employment to join a union or pay union dues. Currently twenty-

four states have “right to work” laws. (Canada has no such provision in federal or provincial law.) Therefore, unions may have little to no influence in contract negotiations. However, lessons learned from the BCTLA/BCTF example that can be applied to areas without strong unions include increasing effective two-way communication between school and district administration and school librarians, using the megaphone of professional associations to influence policy, and practicing transformative leadership.

Gary Hartzell, professor emeritus of educational administration, indicates that school librarians who build influence using two-way communication skills can be effective advocates for strong school libraries. He offers many strategies for building influence with school and district administrators in his seminal text, *Building Influence for the School Librarian: Tenets, Targets, and Tactics* (2003a). School librarians who wish to increase effective two-way communication can refer to Hartzell’s text to devise a strategy for building influence in their school, district, and state or province. These strategies include understanding the school librarian’s place in a rational bureaucracy, connecting with those who have greater influence in the bureaucracy, and developing attributes of likability, among other suggestions.

Another avenue for advocacy in areas without strong unions is to take advantage of the megaphone of the area’s professional library association and other professional associations related to education, such as the local parent-teacher organization, association of educational administrators, and special-area associations (such as associations for reading, English, science, social studies, and math educators). Collectively, these associations can provide a platform through which school librarians can advocate for strong school libraries. Benefits of participation in professional associations include access to lobbyists, access to professional development, and networking opportunities (American Society of Association Executives 2014).

Finally, school librarians should practice transformative leadership (Caldwell et al. 2012). As opposed to transactional leadership, where leaders and followers use each other to get what they need (Burns 1978), transformative leadership is the practice of advancing goals of social justice, equity and win-win scenarios for both the leader and the follower (Van Oord 2013). Lodewijk van Oord (2013) outlined a five-step process to facilitate transformative leadership. First, leaders must evaluate current practice. Second, leaders and followers deliberate how to develop and improve. Third, the group collectively drafts a plan for development. Fourth, leaders discuss the plan with key stakeholders. Fifth, the group collectively reaches a decision-making moment. This protocol involves all stakeholders and ensures that all have a voice in the process. A transformative leadership style can provide advocates with the power to connect to the larger social agenda of providing a world-class education for all children. This goal is both laudable and effective; it allows school librarians to find common ground with educational institutions and positively influence policy considerations.

Union activity, professional associations, transformative leadership, and influence-building techniques in support of school libraries offer promising opportunities for library advocates. School librarians who wish to increase their advocacy efforts might consider joining a teacher’s union or professional association. School librarians should find out whether the teachers’ union or professional association will support an interest group dedicated to school libraries. Interested school librarians should start an interest group and recruit members. School librarian interest groups can then take advantage of the structure of the union or professional association to promote school library issues. As seen in the BCTLA case, it is important to participate in the larger governance of the union or professional association in addition to promoting school libraries. School librarians must remember that “meaningful reform cannot be achieved without ownership by the teachers who are called upon to implement the changes and by the associations

that represent their collective voice” (Winzer and Mazurek 2011, 1–2). Involvement in a teachers’ union or professional association can maximize school library advocates’ voices.

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## Appendix A

### BCTF Staff Interview Questions

#### BCTLA Executive Board and Council Questions

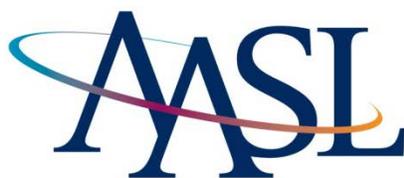
1. How long have you been a staff member/table officer/executive board member? Why did you choose to participate in this association?
2. How does your past experience (work, volunteer, family) impact your activities as a staff member/table officer/executive board member?
3. Discuss the relationship between Provincial Specialist Associations and the BCTF. Specifically, what is the relationship between BCTF and BCTLA?
4. How do the BCTLA and the BCTF work together to advocate for a credentialed teacher-librarian in every provincial school?
5. What is the impact of this advocacy effort?
6. What was the provincial scenario last school year regarding teacher-librarians?
7. When did you find out about the problems?
8. What information did you gather?
9. How did you deliberate?
10. What were your immediate perceptions of the impact of the situation?
11. How did information change over time?
12. To what extent were your constituents informed? What did they know? What were their reactions?
13. What constituent groups did you consult (principals, teachers, parents, community members)?
14. In the process of reaching a decision, what alternatives did you consider?
15. Were there constraints, legally or contractually, that prevented you from taking directions that you would have preferred?
16. Were there elements of deliberation that were difficult? What was difficult about them?
17. Discuss the retention of librarian positions specifically. Was there a time when these positions were on the table to be cut? What did you think about that? Were there reasons why you supported (or didn't support) eliminating these positions?
18. Are you satisfied with the final decisions that the BCTF made to date? If so, how? Were there any decisions that you disagreed with?

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