

The Changing Role of the School Librarian

Gail Bush

A broad background in curriculum resources and technology makes the school librarian an invaluable collaborator for teachers.





IN BRIEF

Uniquely positioned to serve all academic disciplines at all grade levels, school librarians provide teachers with assistance and support in several important areas, including curriculum access, literacy initiatives, instructional technology, professional development, and community outreach.

Jane Addams asked, “How shall we respond to the dreams of youth?” I suggest that we tweak the question and ask, *How shall we respond to the dreams of teachers?*

Clearly we have reached a point where the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act, combined with the information explosion and the dizzying pace of technology innovations can make the most visionary, inspirational, and dedicated teachers throw up their hands in despair. So how do we respond to the dreams of teachers in the harsh light of reality?

An answer can be found in school libraries, where professional librarians are prepared to build supportive alliances with teachers. Although school library programs around the nation vary, they all share core values of service to their users, equity of access to resources, and a dedication to intellectual freedom.

Supporting Curricular Goals

School librarians are positioned to oversee all academic disciplines from kindergarten through high school. They see the same students year after year as they progress through school, some struggling and some soaring, and provide the research and support teachers need to achieve their curricular goals (Bush 2003).

In compliance with amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Educa-

tion Improvement Act of 1997, your school library ensures curriculum access for all students. For example, if your science classes are studying biomes or habitats, the librarian can make available resources at all reading levels and learning styles, including print, visual, auditory, manipulative, and interactive resources.

Leadership for Literacy

Literacy has been described as a way of reading the world around us (Freire 1985), and the variety of ways in which librarians seek to accomplish this task has grown exponentially. While they celebrate Banned Books Week in September to highlight our freedom to read freely in a democratic society, they are most concerned about fostering the love of reading in every student.

Beyond reading, *information literacy* grants learners the tools necessary to navigate through the sea of information in today’s society. Simply stated, information literacy is directed thinking about information needs; strategies for researching; finding resources; organizing and synthesizing information; communicating or presenting in a logical fashion; and evaluating the learning process. It is the same sort of research strategy that you employ when you buy a car, plan a vacation, or relocate to another city. Information literacy models aid librarians in translating learning standards into student directives.

Media literacy helps students to recognize the sources that provide their information. All informed citizens must have the basic ability to decode, analyze, and evaluate communication in the variety of forms—newspapers, television, and radio—in which it is presented to them.

Anyone involved with the youth culture understands the growing role of *visual literacy*, the capability to understand the meaning and components of visual images. Today, photographs, graphs, maps, charts, and drawings extend the meaning of texts and articles, and strategic readers need to be able to glean information from them.

Providing Instructional Technology

Technology is a tool, plain and simple. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end—teaching and learning. Most teachers find they could use a little help from the tech-savvy school librarian, who understands current instructional technologies, keeps abreast of trends, and seeks out opportunities to enhance learning with appropriate technology.

Adaptive, or assistive, technology is a prime example of how the school librarian can help make access to the curriculum a reality for all students, regardless of physical disabilities. Knowing what technology is available to aid students with visual, hearing, fine motor, or other disabilities; how and where to purchase it; and how to train teachers to use it are all within the realm of the librarian's ability.

Accessing the Greater Learning Community

The public library, local museums, feeder schools, and surrounding districts all have people dedicated to providing students with the most enriched learning environment possible. Your school librarian is in a position to support these efforts both within the library and beyond the school walls. Since librarians deal with students throughout their school years (not to mention their siblings), they have an opportunity to develop substantive relationships with their families. Family literacy, a trend that bridges both schools and the public library, makes the school library a conduit for helping parents understand both the resources available in the community and the best ways they can use these resources to support their children's educational experiences.

Heaven knows school libraries have challenges: shrinking professional and support personnel; increasing student

enrollments; supporting readers with a wide range of abilities, from English language learners to gifted and talented students; and tolerating the use of the library for study halls and testing centers. But by collaborating with teachers toward a shared vision of fostering a love of reading and learning, librarians can provide a convincing answer to the question we asked at the beginning of this article: How shall we respond to the dreams of teachers? ■

References

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- Freire, P. *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press UK, 1985.

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WEB RESOURCES

The American Association of School Librarians, the professional organization of K–12 librarians, posts national information literacy standards, with related links and projects.

www.ala.org/aasl

The Big 6 is a popular information literacy model that provides supplementary materials for teachers and school librarians.

www.big6.com

APTE offers award-winning visual literacy software developed for K–8, special education, and English language learners.

www.apte.com

The National Center for Family Literacy has developed literacy programs designed to help educators “fit all the pieces of family literacy together.”

www.familit.org



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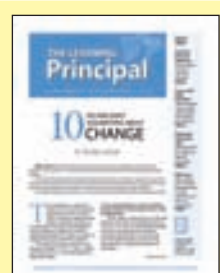
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