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The Future of School Libraries

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We live the future now. Students starting Kindergarten in September 2018 will graduate in June 2032. Not science fiction—rather, a school librarian's call to action. Our students have no time for our prevarication or procrastination.

This issue invites us to consider the Future of School Libraries. None of us can know the future, but we can provide some insights based on our best deep thinking. One thing we do know is that future-focused education is clearly about so much more than technology integration. We also know that the future is a process of continual innovation and incremental improvement. Brian Glazer, former principal of Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax, Virginia, the often-ranked #1 high school in the nation, mused in a letter on the school's website that we must "get comfortable with imperfection in pursuit of innovation." The future arrives with unexpected demands to meet the ever-changing needs of our students' realities. The future may be thought of as a series of alternatives from which we (and our students) choose.

I've observed over time that enlightened leadership is critical to significant positive impact on learning. Without widely shared leadership, innovation stagnates, the professional learning community fragments, and we lose sight of individual students in favor of top-down compliance and convenience. Teachers willing to leave their egos at the door and leap naked into the uncertain void of change depend on leaders willing to model that leap and value the hard work of teaching.

Finally, the vision that motivates us has significant influence on our ever-changing destination. All members of the school must be able to articulate what students need from their education today. All members must value the experience of every individual student and support change in that student's world.

In my role as district chair for secondary library services, my steering committee and I have led a two-year process for our K–12 school librarians to envision the future of their libraries and their practice. The process has been eye-opening for us all as we adopted the Future Ready Librarians Framework (available at <http://futureready.org/program-overview/librarians>).

What is the future of school libraries in the midst of this accelerated educational change? Ideas for this issue of *Knowledge Quest* come from thinkers and doers whose work I follow and respect. I've attempted to keep the conversation practical and at ground level because it's not always easy to determine the next step in your particular progression in your particular school library. Curl up in your favorite reading chair with a cup of coffee and an open mind as you read through this issue. Imagine the possible future...

We begin with Mark Ray, former school librarian and current director of innovation and library services in Vancouver (WA) Public Schools. He is an integral driver of the Future Ready Schools initiative. Mark's article picks up on Simon Sinek's TED Talk suggesting that "People don't buy *what* you do...they buy *why* you do it" (2009). Mark talks about the *why we do it* for school

librarians and positions our work in the Future Ready Librarians Framework as he proposes that we focus on meeting the needs of individual students.

The American School of Bombay (ASB) <www.asbindia.org> is a vanguard school in 21st-century future-focused education. Craig Johnson, its acclaimed superintendent (Special Feature 2016), and his team talk about how school libraries work at this Pre-K–12 international school. Decentralized out of the traditional library space to where they are most needed, collaboration spaces, makerspaces, and book pods have popped up all over the school. The iCommons concept supports the ASB 21st-century vision and provides us with a picture of a possible evolution of school libraries.

Sometimes big-picture thinking and watching for trends can be overwhelming. We can thank our comprehensive eyes and ears Miguel Figueroa, director of ALA's Center for the Future of Libraries, for his constant scanning for reporting on issues that affect library services. He's the force behind the *Libraries of the Future—Read for Later* blog <www.ala.org/tools/future/blog> and an expert in the thinking-forward mindset. In his feature he shares his insights and practical advice.

For those who cannot wrap their heads around the thinking-forward idea, Lee Watanabe Crockett, coauthor of the book *Literacy Is Not Enough* and president of the Global Digital Citizen Foundation, has written a feature for you. He draws our focus back into our immediate practice, providing insights on teaching information fluency and global digital citizenship so that students can apply essential skills in the future. He brings a global perspective and urgency to our daily practice.

Kristal Jaaskelainen, ELA master teacher and instructional coach in an alternative education setting, and her colleague Musetta Deneen, an experienced Spanish teacher at the same school, recognize the school library's expanded role and partnership with other educators. Their practical advice and examples of collaboration may stir something in your heart as an educator and move you to reach out in ways you may not have considered before. These authors challenge us to teach to what individual students need rather than to the test. Kristal and Musetta get out of their comfort zones and persist until they find just the right strategy for each student, often in collaboration with the school librarian.

Burgeoning urban schools have their own issues that scale up with the size of the student population and the number of faculty. Mary Keeling, supervisor of school library services in Newport News (VA) Public

Schools and chair of AASL's Standards Implementation Task Force, offers some perspective. Mary uses AASL's new *National School Library Standards* to frame cultural competence and culturally relevant instruction in the urban setting. Her examination encourages us to internalize the new standards in ways that encourage student success across many cultural variables.

Consideration of the success-data inherent in our profession and how additional data can be generated seems a good way to round out the features in this issue. Marcia Mardis, professor and assistant dean at Florida State University School of Information, Sue Kimmel, associate professor and graduate program director at Old Dominion University, and Laura Pasquini, lecturer at the University of North Texas, provide an overview of AASL's CLASS II project, which is aimed at establishing the foundation for comparison and groundwork for causal research about the effectiveness and impact of school libraries.

Yes, the future is now. School librarians live at the apex moment of choice. Do we maintain our well-trodden paths with comfortable static illustrations and tactile pages of text, or do we recognize what students need from their education for a successfully navigated future and make significant changes in our practices? This is a choice between irrelevancy and leadership. We, the thinkers and the doers represented here, challenge you to embrace leadership and invent the future.

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