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ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Visit <www.ala.org/aasl/kq> to read five online exclusive articles from this issue.
“When school library and librarian become two interdependent entities—rather than a person and space tied together—we can have a greater impact on our students and our schools.”

Books and Mortar—and Beyond — pg 54
Library Spaces, Library Faces

Gail K. Dickinson, 2013–14 AASL President | gdickins@odu.edu

As I write this (November 2013), I am heading to Hartford, Connecticut, for AASL’s 16th National Conference and Exhibition. I will learn much from the speakers’ presentations and concurrent sessions; I will visit with old friends and meet new friends; and I will look with envy and wonder at the new products displayed at the vendor exhibition. I am not alone in my anticipation. All across the country and, indeed, the world, thousands of school librarians are making their way to Hartford. “See you at conference?” was the farewell greeting that ended many conversations in the past days and weeks as the excitement grew.

In libraryland, as with other fields, professional development is increasingly experienced online. Conference calls and discussion threads take the place of committee meetings. Social media allow for more real-time conversations with friends from around the country than face-to-face conversations with friends next door. Catching up at conference is sometimes just picking up the thread of a conversation started online where we watch each other’s lives unfold through status updates on Facebook and Instagram photos.

All of this constant interaction makes one wonder whether having face-to-face conferences makes sense anymore. Our lives are spent online, and it is logical to regard travel to conferences as yet another vestige of a previous century, along with landline phones, typed memos, and carbon copies. Yet the anticipation bubbling through the social-media venues about conferences seems to indicate that there is something that draws librarians together—despite the expenditure of precious time, money, and energy—to meet face-to-face.

What’s a “Real” Library, Anyway?

Some of the same conjecture can arise when considering the value of virtual library spaces versus traditional physical library facilities. That the granite walls and marble halls of libraries are dissolving is inarguable. Libraries are becoming flipped. Instead of patrons coming to get resources to use at a later time and place, libraries are now the means through which patrons gather materials from a variety of sources—many online—and then patrons use the library to learn, collaborate, and create spaces with new purposes. Makerspaces, those places where patrons create vibrant resources that, in turn, can be shared, are on the rise. Patrons sit at home, in corner cafes, or anywhere they happen to be and explore the wealth of resources available through their neighborhood library.

But even with all of the reliance on digital resources, there is still something about walking into a library that lifts the heart and stills the soul.
and around every corner of every shelf, knowledge awaits. Libraries have updated their furniture, brightened their colors, and changed their shelving to accommodate new formats, but libraries have remained the physical foundations of learning communities.

Some administrators and tax payers in our schools and communities have difficulty seeing the need for physical spaces for libraries. They can’t see the difference between their personal use of information through their televisions or smartphones and the limitless resources and services that libraries provide to build strong communities. Some people draw the conclusion that the information bouncing along those airways and fiber-optic cables is sufficient to their needs. Their perception that libraries function only as repositories of print resources perhaps explains the basis for their lack of support for libraries, but their perspective remains ill-informed and illogical.

Those fighting to maintain support for library facilities look back on the days of strong quantitative guidelines with a sense of longing. If school libraries were still required to have twelve books per student, the ability to seat 10 percent of the student body simultaneously, and a prescribed square footage, the fight would be easier, some defenders claim. And yes, it probably would, except that the above argument plays right into the hands of those who would repurpose the library space in schools. The use of virtual resources is increasing, and access to digital collections outside the school days is increasing at an astronomical pace. If the space is tied to students’ and staff members’ sitting in the library for the purpose of using materials that cannot leave the room, then we will fight a losing battle.

The Role of AASL

AASL standards and guidelines provide both a framework and a foundation to guide policies and procedures in school libraries. Sometimes those policies and procedures can be a moving target, as research and tradition sometimes struggle to keep up with innovation and entrepreneurship. The old rules of school library facilities seating 10 percent of the student body, having shelving for twelve books per student, or maintaining space for a monstrous circulation desk complete with bookdrop just don’t make sense in today’s flexible learning commons.

School librarians may feel frustrated as they struggle to provide the best learning space for students and the best teaching spaces for learning. As the walls of the school library have expanded, so has the job of the school librarian as teachers and students expect assistance nearly 24–7 for whatever tasks they undertake. It is ironic that the job has grown beyond the very walls that we are trying to preserve.

AASL has moved beyond quantitative guidelines and standards. Those old rules of thumb governing space and size were based almost solely on opinion rather than on solid research. AASL now offers support that has much more solid value, such as the guidelines, position statements, toolkits, and other aids that demonstrate what school librarians should be doing in the library. Check out eCOLLAB and the wealth of resources that illustrate the modern school library. Explore the latest developments to prove why the school library is important to your school in School Library Research.

No one—not AASL, nor any other group, nor I as president of this great organization—has a definitive answer to what the modern school library facility should look like. I don’t think that not having an answer is a failing; instead, I think it is a strength. Our primary focus isn’t on the collection or number of chairs. Resources abound in and out of the library. The librarian’s role, from our earliest history, has always been to teach students where to find valid resources and how to use them. School librarians teach students to inquire, to draw conclusions, to share their knowledge, and then to pursue greater knowledge (AASL 2007). The library as a physical facility has always been an open door to learning, and, although what is beyond that open door will change, the learning remains the same.

It’s not about libraries; it’s about learning.

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Work Cited:

School librarians all over the country are looking around at library spaces and wondering whether some small changes could be made to improve student learning, provide easier access to resources, and create a more welcoming place for students and teachers. This issue of *Knowledge Quest* is all about different ways to adapt and use physical and virtual library spaces. Spring is a wonderful time to begin thinking about how a school library can grow to meet the needs of its users. The process is about changing the way you think about the services and resources you provide. It’s about being OK with getting out of your professional comfort zone to adapt to your students’ needs. It’s about creating a student-centered library space in any way you can.

AASL’s *Library Spaces for 21st-Century Learners: A Planning Guide for Creating New School Library Concepts* focuses on employing user-based design strategies to plan school library spaces and describes the process of gathering information, planning a new space, creating a needs assessment, and adding aesthetic components. If you are considering making a major change in your library, this title is a must-have.

In this issue each author focuses on student learning and student needs but from different perspectives. Whatever kind of library you have, we encourage you to discover at least one small thing you can do to improve your space or your library program this spring. You don’t need to ask permission to make this change or involve maintenance in a major renovation. These changes could revolve around improved flow, usability, who you work with, how you interact with users, which resources you purchase, and the look and feel of the library space. What can you do to help your users more effectively think, create, share, and grow?

This issue is filled with information on makerspaces and learning commons and opens with “Teen Experts Guide Makerspace Makeover” by Colleen Graves, who shares her learning commons transformation and how her Teen Advisory Board helped her create makerspace workshops.

David Loertscher and Carol Koechlin share a preview of their online article “Climbing to Excellence—Defining Characteristics of Successful Learning Commons.” The goal of the learning commons is to provide a single centralized location for all users to get help on the complex issues of teaching, researching, and being a student or teacher today. A powerful theme in the article is the authors’ view of the learning commons as a bridge between school and the real world—a wonderfully descriptive and accurate representation of what is happening in successful learning commons today. The full text of this fascinating article is available as an online exclusive on the *Knowledge Quest* website.

This year we’ve heard many whispers about creating quiet spaces in the library. Thinking about the introverts and extroverts when looking at the school library space can effectively address the needs of the entire student body. Ray Palin shares his techniques for creating quiet spaces—without structural alterations—in the middle of the collaboration, multimedia projects, and makerspace workshops in an existing school library’s often noisy learning environment.

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**Who wouldn’t want to empower their students in program planning and see them become leaders within the space?**

Think, Create, Share, and Grow in Your Library Space This Spring

**Pam Harland | pam.librarian@gmail.com**
Heather Turner talks about enlisting student iStaff members as a method of increasing student ownership and investment in the school library program. Who wouldn’t want to empower their students in program planning and see them become leaders within the space?

Creedence Spreder and Matthew Lighthart work together in a public library/school library shared space where the mutual benefits of this partnership extend far beyond the walls of their libraries as both programs have positive impacts on their community.

In “From Drab to Fab” Jessica Gilcreast describes her long-term efforts for changing an old, unfriendly library into a new space for learning and discovery as she watches, listens to, and learns from her teachers and students. She also shares several clever ideas that could be introduced immediately.

Lindsay Cesari fills her library with happy, healthy students primed for academic success by “Arranging a Library to Support Adolescent Development.”

Beth Ebenstein Mulch shares how she turned library orientation into an audio and visual walking tour through the use of iPads and augmented reality. Find out how she and her student collaborators did it and what her new students think of the orientation process now.

Sara Kelley-Mudie describes ways that a school librarian can impact learners by embedding herself into classrooms for teaching, making “library skills” part of everyday learning and, at the same time, enhancing the usefulness of quiet traditional library space valued by many students.

Sue Kowalski writes about her plans to support teachers and learners during a year-long major renovation of the entire school and to plan effectively for the new library space. She also envisions ways that her iStaff student volunteers can build on their successes and help with the transition as they further develop their leadership skills. This article is available as an online exclusive on the KQ website.

Leslie Cartier discusses her successful efforts to create a flexible learning commons for elementary students and change students’ and teachers’ perceptions and use of the school library. She shares how improving the physical space led to transforming learning.

Ellen Lawrence encourages school librarians to “break out of the library” as she describes how to strengthen library programs by developing innovative and collaborative partnerships and working with teachers and classes in creative new ways that won’t strain the library budget.

Lucy Santos Green and Stephanie Jones guide school librarians through the process of developing and delivering online courses, an ideal delivery method for instruction in digital literacy and information literacy. This article is available as an online exclusive on the KQ website.

If creation of virtual spaces intimidates you, Rebecca Buerkett offers several easy-to-implement ideas for creating a virtual library space to extend library services outside of the school library walls. This article is available as an online exclusive on the KQ website.

April is National Poetry Month, and in “Make Space for Poetry” Wendy DeGroat teaches us to create a poetry collection filled with varied voices that our students will read and make connections with through their own lives. This article is available as an online exclusive on the KQ website.

Finally, Caitlin Ahearn melds the virtual and physical spaces as she explains how to create instant access to virtual resources through QR codes strategically placed around the school library. She shares what she learned from the experience and provides easy-to-follow instructions for creating signs and shelf labels that include QR codes.

School libraries are changing and growing this spring. We imagine our students finding new information, working together on DIY projects, and finding their own comfortable spaces within their school library. Creating library spaces where our students can think, create, share, and grow is a realistic goal for all school librarians.

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Recommended Resource:

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Envision a middle school library where teens congregate after school, excited—even at the end of the school year—about creating and making something they’ve never tried to do before. Hear the chatter of excited voices asking the school librarian what the next “Mayker Monday” workshop will be. Picture students among the stacks, clustered around pine tables, busy building and creating. Instead of constructing yet another paper football, they are, in fact, collaborating on how to build their own app. Imagine students getting excited about creative technologies and engineering and hoping to one day attend MIT.

That’s the power of a makerspace in a school library.

What Is a Makerspace?
Put simply: A makerspace is a place where makers can envision a project, find an expert, and create something. Libraries have always held programming during which patrons were able to come in and create. The only difference is that a makerspace encourages problem-solving skills and connects with the greater community for expert ideas. Our makerspace is available for our students every day, so they can create and play with innovative technology daily. We’ve focused our makerspace on inventive electronics, robots, circuit bending, duct tape, and even cooking.

In a makerspace, kids can create bristlebots out of toothbrushes and pager batteries, use a Makey Makey kit to assemble a banana piano, or learn how to write a successful blog. The possibilities are endless, and you need a panel of teen experts to guide your planning if you want the makerspace to be successful.

Why Is One Needed?
In our world students need creative-thinking and problem-solving skills so they can be prepared to enter the job market after college. A makerspace project is intended to teach students how to think for themselves and problem solve and to get students interested in getting a job in technology, science, or engineering.

We want our students to develop problem-solving skills and become engaged with making technology, not just using it. By taking things a step further and becoming a maker, creator, innovator, and inventor, they can take ownership of the innovative technology that surrounds them. The school library should be seen as a place to create, build, and craft their own ideas while engaging with the community—not as just another dusty bookshelf. In a global economy with so much competition overseas for jobs in technology, a
THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SHOULD BE SEEN AS A PLACE TO CREATE, BUILD, AND CRAFT THEIR OWN IDEAS WHILE ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY—NOT AS JUST ANOTHER DUSTY BOOKSHELF.

makerspace helps students feel encouraged and equipped to begin a career in technology. To facilitate students’ developing curiosity about the world around them, educators, including school librarians, must encourage students to see themselves as curators of their own learning. Furthermore, the space isn’t just a place to play Minecraft; it is a place where teens contribute to a learning community and become involved in a practical experience.

How Did I Get Started?

Last summer I transformed our school library into a learning commons, and the results of the shift were phenomenal. Adding color, new furniture, and a welcoming atmosphere got the students in the door. Every morning the library was full with sixty to one hundred students who wanted to read, study, or work on collaborative projects. However, to keep kids coming through the door, I knew I needed to institute some creative programming.

I had a small conference room behind circulation that was used only on random days for testing. This seemed like the perfect place for collaboration. I set up a Teen Advisory Board (TAB) and had the students help me pick furniture and design the space with the guiding idea that the furniture should be lightweight, moveable pieces like floor rockers and stools. We have two trapezoidal tables that can be separated or placed together to make a larger collaborative space (see figure 1). The teens helped me paint the tables with chalkboard paint and planned where to place furniture so that it could be moved easily. Just letting students paint got them excited about the space. I’m not sure anyone had ever let them paint anything before! While this space is too small to host maker workshops (we use the main library for those) students use the makerspace during the day to read, make videos, or collaborate on other projects. For inspiration, magazine binders contain instructions for various maker projects; these binders are displayed in rain gutters on the wall.

After ALA Midwinter 2012 I began to read e-mails (posted via an ALA online discussion) about “Mayker Mondays,” and my TAB and I decided to institute workshops for students. This simple idea—envisioned by a number of school librarians—was to host maker projects every Monday in May. It was late April, and most teens at middle school were so ready for summer. Be that as it may, the day we talked about makerspaces and workshops, my TAB was brimming with enthusiasm. I explained what a makerspace was, and we began to browse a Google doc list of ideas started by PC Sweeney. My kids couldn’t believe all the cool ideas we found in the doc, and right away we started planning Mayker Mondays. We made a list of ideas that the TAB members were enthusiastic about. They wanted to make LED throwies at Christmas time; they thought it would be fun to make Lego scenes and film them; and they were stoked about the possibilities of making their own apps.

The key to successful workshops was letting the teens choose what workshops we would hold. I thought getting donated toys and making Frankentoys would be really enjoyable, but the kids were more interested in blogging and Minecraft. Each member of our
TAB had a hand in designing the space, choosing the workshops, promoting each event, and leading a Mayker Monday event (see figure 2 for examples).

We decided to end the year strongly and hold a makerspace event every Monday for the month of May (see figure 2). For the upcoming school year, we are going to hold one or two workshops a month, and teens will still lead the workshop or be in charge of finding a community expert to coteach. The workshops last only one hour and are done directly after school. Most of my time creating workshop ideas was spent during our TAB meetings since the students were the ones in charge.

Workshop Ideas

Our workshops started out with minimal to no cost for the library. The teens decided we’d introduce Mayker Mondays with duct tape projects because duct tape is so popular. Each student brought a roll of duct tape, and we crafted presents for Mother’s Day. The first workshop was a mix of girls and boys who were enthusiastic about making different objects out of duct tape (see figure 3). Each TAB member printed instructions for a project he or she could help other students assemble. The students at the novice level made bookmarks, and students who were already duct tape experts designed wallets. Students who couldn’t make the workshop came to the library the next day to pick up how-to instructions.

The next week, our resident blogger taught interested students how to start and make their own blogs. She led students through choices of sites for blogging and explained the difference between microblogging/fandom blogs like Tumblr and personal or media blogs best supported by Blogger and Edublogs. She explained how to keep readers interested and the importance of posting frequently. Her "Blogger

Figure 2. Publicity for the first set of workshops.

Figure 3. Zeni shows off her leadership capabilities.

Credit: Photo by Colleen Graves
“Expo” was shared via Google docs, and all of the teens who created blogs linked their newly hatched blogs on this doc. One sixth-grade leader raved, “It was fun because we could collaborate and become blog buddies. It also felt awesome to be a teacher because I was the expert!”

Our biggest event was our Minecraft workshop (see figure 4). We had one expert from our school and two outside experts in attendance, one of whom was a friend who actually works for a gaming company. The leaders demonstrated some of their amazing feats in Minecraft and gave students tips on codes they could use to build underground worlds, bombs, and indulge in all manner of Minecraft mania. After this workshop, kids asked if we could have a Minecraft workshop every week!

**Students as Leaders**

Having students as workshop leaders (see figure 4) was an integral part of the success of our makerspace events. One big benefit was that, if I didn’t know anything about the activity, I could rely on my student helpers to lead others or to know somebody who could. For instance, I know next to nothing about Minecraft, and, actually, none of my TAB members did either, so we recruited a student expert on campus along with a high school student who spent hours on the game. Our own student expert created Minecraft workshop flyers and hung them all over campus. His teachers came to the library and asked me if that student was really leading a workshop. They were surprised he had volunteered to lead others because normally he is quiet and reserved. His mother was also surprised and excited to see him taking a leadership role. As a school librarian, I was seeing a totally different side of this student and was able to help instill confidence in this young man. Concurrently, he felt ownership in the library and felt like it was not only a safe place, but also a place where he could grow.

**What’s Next?**

With the assistance of grant money, the library makerspace workshops being planned as I write this will include electronics and a variety of other tools to entice students into tinkering with technology and to encourage students to join the do-it-yourself movement. Our counseling office is helping us partner with community experts by corresponding with our district career center and employing guest speakers to lead activities with our students. We are also speaking with community experts at Motorola and IBM about leading our students through maker workshops; these workshops will allow the school library to provide access to training and tools and will give all students the opportunity to develop skills with technology.

I also think expanding on our previous workshops will help kids sustain interest in these new ideas. Maybe we can hold another blog workshop to see how our students are doing with their blogs or spend a month or two actually making an app we can post on iTunes and Google Play!

**Expanding Our Influence**

A school library already provides a safe place for our students. Creating a makerspace adds a nurturing, positive environment that encourages creation, questioning, and thinking. Involving students in the redesign and

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**Figure 4. Minecraft Mania in the library.**

Credit: Photo by Colleen Graves
workshops encourages the process of creative collaboration. Plus, their sense of ownership creates a bustling library that can be the heart of a school’s community of learners. One teen exclaimed, "Makerspace workshops were fun because I could hang out with my friends and make stuff." I strongly recommend allowing students to guide a library’s redesign and workshops. Overall, being positive, flexible, and willing to experiment leads to stakeholders’ adopting a transformative view of what was once seen only as a place for books. At our school, students no see the library as a place where they not only belong, but a place where they can become a cutting-edge leader. When the library becomes a space to tinker with inventive ideas and dabble with technology and electronics, it becomes not only a place to learn, but also a place to create.

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recent awards include the Texas Library
Association Vivian Greenfield Education
Award (2011), ALSC’s Bound to Stay Bound
Books Scholarship (2011), and a Lewisville
Education Foundation Grant for “Apps and
Adapts” (2013), a grant that allowed her
to buy apps and accessories for the school
library’s iPads used in the learning commons
she created by transforming a thirty-year-old
traditional library space. She blogs at <www.
colleengraves.podbean.com> and is active as
a leader of professional development sessions
in her district (Lewisville ISD) and beyond.
Her article “Learning Commons on a Dime”
was recently published in School Library
Monthly.

Recommended Resources:


Manella, Lorenzo. 2013. “How to Turn a School into a Makerspace.” Maker Faire Rome (April 19).

CLIMBING TO EXCELLENCE

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING COMMONS

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Over the years we have asked our readers and colleagues to join us in creative and flexible thinking exercises to help reinvent or re-energize the work that needs to be done in school libraries. Flipping current ideas about libraries and learning helps to create fresh vision from new perspectives. Our work to conceptualize a school library responsive to client needs and global changes erupted from this exercise nearly six years ago. We started not with the space or program but with the users’ needs and then tried to figure out what the organization had to do to get the desired results.

Why the name "learning commons"? It became clear that the focus of the transformed traditional school library should be on learning in its many manifestations, whether formal or informal, and the word "commons" should reflect a shift from a top-down organizational structure to the flat networked world in which the clients, both teachers and students, considered themselves to be in command of their information access and learning. Then as we confronted the future, would a physical space in the school known as the learning commons still be needed? Would it be only a virtual space? We opted for both, led by a very different kind of professional.

What is a Learning Commons? A Learning Commons is a common or shared space that is both physical and virtual. It is designed to move students beyond mere research, practice, and group work to a greater level of engagement through exploration, experimentation, and collaboration. A Learning Commons is more than a room or a website. A Learning Commons allows users to create their own environments to improve learning. A Learning Commons is about changing school culture, and transforming the way teaching and learning occur (Loertscher, Koechlin, and Rosenfeld 2012).

We have proposed that the learning commons serve a unique purpose in the school as a bridge between educational philosophy being practiced and the real world. As such, the learning commons serves school curriculum but is also known as a place for experimenting, playing, making, doing, thinking, collaborating, and growing.

We have been travelling along on this journey from school library and computer lab to a school-wide learning commons for a few years now. During that time many exciting transformations yielded both challenges and rewards. Time to take stock of where we have been and reflect on where we want to go!

The learning commons is always in a beta state on the climb to excellence. Although this journey has no clear destination point or end, the process should have defining characteristics we can use to consider progress and set goals for improvement. How will we identify these special distinctive features that reap the best results? We must examine the kinds of spaces that lend themselves to the participatory learning we seek in the learning commons. We need to review the best learning experiences and backtrack to try to uncover the possible elements that lead to success. We must analyze the qualities and skills of the professionals leading this work. And, finally, we must try to capture the dynamics that seem to drive the best results; what are the characteristics that define a successful learning commons?

To read the full article, please go to the exclusive online content on the Knowledge Quest website <www.ala.org/aasl/kq>.

Work Cited:
Loertscher, David V., Carol Koechlin, and Esther Rosenfeld. 2012. The Virtual Learning Commons: Building a Participatory School Learning Community. Salt Lake City, UT: Learning Commons.
Much has been written about the advantages associated with the learning commons model of library design. Less has been written about its drawbacks. The open, technology-rich, and collaborative atmosphere of a commons nicely supports teaching, group work, and digital communication. Yet, for some tasks and for some students, the commons atmosphere might also limit the library’s usefulness.
For tasks requiring concentration, such as reading and problem solving, the social and active nature of a learning commons could be distracting. And for the more introverted student, a loud and busy room might seem uninviting. For these reasons, library design should take into consideration different types of work and different personality types. In a learning commons, therefore, space and resources should be organized and managed in ways that meet 21st-century learning needs but also ensure fairness and service to all students.

Library architects, along with knowledgeable educators guided by best practices, can design new libraries that effectively serve the school and the total student body. By working from a clear vision and with carefully crafted plans, designers can achieve openness while also including smaller, quieter spaces suitable for individual work. When designing the library within a new high school in Henrico County, Virginia, for example, school and district-level librarians balanced instructional, social, and technology space with "smaller, different environments," such as reading areas and a workroom, "so that there would be options for all students’ needs..." (Martin, Westmoreland, and Branyon 2011). Their full list of design considerations, which were abundant and included spaces for exercise bikes and gaming, points out the opportunities present when building an entirely new library facility.

However, for librarians in older schools like my own, more limited design options might be the reality. Many older school libraries are small and usually have too much permanent shelving and too few electrical outlets. Simply retrofitting these rooms with tables and equipment like SMART Boards and computers can be difficult. In these situations, where a school library’s redesign potential is largely determined by permanent aspects of the original floor plan, librarians are forced to think creatively when developing a learning commons. Inadequate physical space and other limitations like money might also necessitate multiple reorganization efforts to finally arrive at a room useful to the entire school community. The ultimate configuration and operation of the learning commons, while reflecting the local building and local budget, will also reflect the school librarian’s goals. In my learning commons, as a result of an increased focus on students who do their best work quietly and alone, my primary goal is to create and maintain a culture of widespread productivity and learning by establishing a balanced environment where various types of academic work are supported equally.

Focus on Balance

My interest in creating a balanced learning commons environment increased after reading Susan Cain’s book Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking (see figure 1). In the book, Cain says, "We also need to create settings in which people are free to ... disappear into their private workspaces when they want to focus...." (2012, 93). Lamenting what she calls the “Extrovert Ideal,” the belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and works well in teams (2012, 4), Cain goes on to list notable introverts like Theodor Geisel and Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak who “need extra quiet ... to do their best work” (2012, 93). By citing several studies on work environments and productivity (2012, 79–92), Cain dispels the notion that collaboration is always “the key multiplier for success” (2012, 78). She points out that if “one third to one half of Americans are introverts,” (2012, 3) then it might be time to rethink design ideas like classroom learning pods and open-plan offices in the workplace (2012, 76, 84).

Quiet and more private workspaces have been on the minds of librarians for a long time. Even before the clicking of computer keyboards, the beeping of cell phones, and the chatting in collaborative commons, librarians evaluated the climate of their rooms. A review of the professional literature on the topics library “noise” and “quiet” within the database Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts reveals, however, that interest in the topic has noticeably increased during the past ten years, particularly among public and academic librarians, and seemingly in response to the rise of the learning commons. While most of these articles express concern over the issue of loudness and
changing user behavior, in some cases there are outright objections to the new social atmosphere. One librarian at Hofstra University’s Axinn Library, for example, claimed that “in the new Commons we have either pushed away or pushed out library users so that libraries can become social centers” (Caniano 2010). Another writer put it this way: “The problem is that the social model undermines … quiet, serious study” (Gayton 2008).

Unlike these critics, I fully embrace the idea of the social learning commons (see figure 2). Despite my heightened interest in quiet work environments, I accept noise and activity as an essential part of a modern school library. In fact, at conferences and in writing (<http://goo.gl/zr3mq> and <http://goo.gl/43vEn>), I have applauded bold library reinvention and advocated for increased openness, information sharing, technology, and group work. David Loertscher, Carol Koechlin, and Sandi Zwaan have emphasized that the learning commons was “an extension of the various classrooms in the school; a place everyone owns, works, and collaborates in a collegial social environment” (2008, 7). In my view, if it were anything less, education would suffer. Yet, if the learning commons were all there were, a complete and productive library culture would be lost.

Finding a middle ground between social and individual work environments within my library required making small but numerous changes. Ideas for change mostly came from features seen in other libraries or from the ideas of other librarians. Physical space constraints required that some ideas be compromised, along with some existing features of my library. For example, reducing desktop computing and adjusting some parts of the room that had previously served a different function were necessary. In the end, while not revolutionary, modifications made to my learning commons significantly increased alternatives for students seeking more isolation and less noise.

Reducing Distractions

With the assistance of architects and sound professionals, or simply on their own through problem solving, librarians have developed a variety of strategies to reduce noise disturbances and visual distractions. Some common strategies, which have guided my efforts in my learning commons, include masking sound, buffering sound, zoning activity (see figure 2), and controlling traffic flow.

Overcoming noise with other sounds such as white noise or environmental soundscapes, a technique typically called masking, has been used successfully in a variety of libraries. Indeed,
according to surveys designed to evaluate acoustics within large academic libraries, the technique can change perceptions of overall noise levels and make loud spaces actually seem most quiet (Wroblaski 2010). Unlike sophisticated masking systems in which centralized sound equipment delivers continuous background noise to targeted areas of a building through speakers installed in or above ceilings, the noise masking in my library is accomplished inexpensively through a small speaker and MP3 player located atop a bookshelf. Inside a small alcove off the main floor of the learning commons, my system plays sounds of rain or soft classical music. This background sound remains isolated but does much to mask noise emanating from the center of the room.

Significantly, another sound-masking method was recently introduced to my library. As a result of a recent administrative decision, study hall students may now use personal iPods and MP3 players. While students’ music is usually louder and less soothing than a rainstorm, it nonetheless can block out the library’s extraneous noise. Further, according to a Cornell University facility planning publication “Noise in the Office Workplace” (Maxwell n.d.), “Distraction is more likely when workers do not have control of the noise source and it is unpredictable.” Peace and quiet, it seems, can have different volume levels and take different forms.

Without a widespread masking system in place, noise in open libraries can seem inescapable. Sounds from conversations, instructions, and equipment like copiers can reverberate, surround patrons, and quickly become bothersome. Even when students and teachers consciously lower volume levels, some other students may still find the room too loud. I know that in my school at least a few study hall students in different periods have avoided the library entirely, preferring to stay in class where it was reliably more quiet and more suitable for reading and studying.

Creating Havens

In an effort to make concentration in the school library easier, an area for silent study was created in a part of the room farthest away from the entrance (see figure 3). In a small room that had originally housed library equipment and, more recently, paperback fiction, a few students can now seek isolation from noise and activity. After consolidating books along one wall, adding a windowed
door, countertop space, and bankers’ lights to achieve a studious atmosphere, the space acquired a new visual and acoustic character. While sound continues to seep in and the room falls short of being one of Susan Cain’s recommended “private workspaces,” this silent zone might still be viewed as a haven by some students. The room remains easily accessible for book browsing. However, its other purpose is now clearly identified by a sign: “Silent Study: No Talking, No Noise, No Exceptions.”

Also available for individual workspace are several chairs and mobile carts that have been scattered in between and around the library’s bookshelves. As a result of a recent decision to forego desktop replacements and instead purchase Chromebooks, student and computer work areas have become increasingly decentralized. Rather than having to work among many other students at a bank of hard-wired computers, students are now free to move about the learning commons and work wirelessly in a more comfortable location (see figure 4).

Substituting Chromebooks for desktops has also created opportunities for students to complete different types of work on the old computer furniture. Free of cables, keyboards, towers, and monitors, these old tables and chairs can now be used as spacious places to read and write. My learning commons now offers more flexibility and an increased element of personal space within a shared space. This idea, covered at a 2012 Library Journal Design Institute and described as “alone in a crowd, together in privacy,” derives from space that “theoretically holds multiple people, but in practice is used by only one person” (Schwartz 2012).

Some librarians have designed new student spaces by redesigning their book collection. After surveying students about library climate, where “she saw about a 50/50 split between those who thought we should be less strict about noise and those who thought the library was too noisy,” Kathy Pearce, librarian at Oyster River High School, in Durham, New Hampshire, capitalized on her “Dewey Lite” reorganization to better serve both groups of respondents (Pearce 2013b). According to Pearce (2013a) in a document produced for the 2013 New Hampshire School Librarians Media Association’s Annual Conference, “‘Dewey Lite’ is a system that combines the

Top Left: Figure 4. Separate and “silent.”
Right: Figure 5. Increased mobility with Chromebooks.
Bottom Left: Figure 6. A “Walden Zone.”
thematic feel of the bookstore model,... retains the exact location attributes of DDC [Dewey Decimal Classification].…. and results in "smaller spaces for individual or small group work...." and "a quieter, less trafficked location for fiction." Pearce and her staff are "working on creating 'alcoves' where single tables, a study carrel, or a comfy chair or two will provide a bit more separation from the main part of the room" (Pearce 2013b).

**Establishing a "Walden Zone"**

A complete separation from the learning commons was my aim when, in my most recent redesign efforts, I decided to open up the school library to the outdoors. Now, once the snow has melted and the mud is dry, students can use a handful of patio chairs located in a grassy area outside the building (see figure 5). Accessed through a side door to the school library and visible from inside the library, this area is a computer-free zone where reading is the predominant activity.

Although students may listen to iPods, the area resembles the digitally disconnected "Walden Zones" proposed by William Powers in his 2010 book *Hamlet’s Blackberry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*. On warm days, by offering fresh air and sunshine, the outdoor library can be a popular place. By eliminating computer screens and, as Powers recommends, "shutting off the flow of information," it also provides another alternative to a bustling learning commons (Powers 2010, 228).

**Doing Our Best in Our Situations**

The changes made to my school library, which were completed over time, represent what can be done in my local situation and at a very modest cost. In a different setting, I might have done things differently. Some of my changes have been more effective than others. For example, some days the silent room is not silent. Faculty and students sometimes request the room for the purpose of making recordings or conducting interviews. While fulfilling these needs can send mixed signals about the room, this type of compromise is frequently necessitated by library limitations. As school librarians know, serving a school full of individuals means meeting a host of different needs. That’s our job. And that’s why I set out to make my learning commons more useful to everyone.

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Ray Palin is school librarian at Sunapee Middle High School in Sunapee, New Hampshire. In 2013 he was selected to participate in the One Week / One Tool digital humanities institute at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University and was part of the team that launched the Serendip-o-matic search engine [www.serendipomatic.org]. He has reviewed books for Library Journal and ACRL's Choice magazine and has most recently written articles for Online, the annual print newsletter of the New Hampshire School Library Media Association. He blogs occasionally at [www.raypalin.info].

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School Librarians in the Anytime Anywhere Learning Landscape is an exciting opportunity for school librarians to learn how to best SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITIES while taking a PROMINENT LEADERSHIP ROLE in NAVIGATING A NEW FRONTIER.

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A school library is a space that continues to evolve with the needs of its users. It is unique among spaces in that it impacts the entire school. No other space—and no educator other than the school librarian—touches each student every year and every day. Until students leave your school, you and your space are part of their journey. Spaces both virtual and physical that are student-driven change the space positively.

**Space Creation and Library Zoning**

Creating a space for the needs of all students is a mighty undertaking. Students learn differently, and the first year the learning commons model was employed in the Solvay Middle School Library Learning Commons (LLC), the transformation led to challenges. The space was previously a "Shhh" library where collaboration and talking in any form were not allowed. The photographs accompanying this article illustrate that the space is generous and open. Several bookcases were removed to make the space multifunctional. Therefore, the space can be used for numerous activities. Some of these activities include student performances, book fairs, student presentations, makerspace events, and Wii competitions. For example, during the Harlem Shake craze a seventh-grade student wanted to create our school’s own version in the library. The organizer recorded, edited, and received permission slips from every student involved. Over eighty students in grades 4–8 were Harlem Shaking in the library after school. The video was hosted on YouTube and embedded in the homepage of the LLC website. The goal of these activities has been to foster students’ ownership and leadership and allow them to use their talents to educate others.
During the first year, students pushed the boundaries of what an LLC could and will be. After having a silent library for so long, the students who enjoyed working in a louder space were excited and took full advantage. However, there is such a thing as a happy medium, and those students who prefer a quieter space were left frustrated. Therefore, after much thought, the students and I came up with a zoning system that helps all students learn and grow in their own way.

Each table/area has a sign with the noise level expected in that area.

The LLC contains quiet zones and conversational zones color-coded red, yellow, and green. In addition, the librarian’s office was transformed into a group study room for additional flexibility. A seventh-grade student said (about zoning), "I feel like the library has a place for me. It is a calm environment where I can get my work done. I like being able to hang out with my friends and get projects done."

By sitting in a particular place when they enter the LLC, students make a choice about what they will accomplish. Middle school is a place in which students experiment and begin to understand the people they will become, so it’s appropriate that the LLC has a large social component.

iStaff Support

During a meeting I was talking with Sue Kowalski (Pine Grove Middle School, East Syracuse Minoa Central School District) about her iStaff (information staff) and how they had transformed her library. I latched onto this idea and created my own version of iStaff. In the past library helpers had been limited...
to eighth-graders whose only responsibility was shelving books. The iStaff I envisioned would help create, develop, and run the LLC, allowing me more time for collaboration with teachers and reaching more students. The iStaff would not be limited to a grade level and was to be open to all interested students.

Due to staffing reductions, the assistance provided by the iStaff was essential to creating a successful school library program. I couldn’t collaborate with classroom teachers as much as I do without the aid of the iStaff. The middle school students are excited to have the opportunity to help. A sixth-grade iStaff member said, “I like being able to help in the library and check out my own books. I really like knowing what is going on in the library, and there is always something going on.”

Students are at the heart of the LLC program. Approximately ninety students are iStaff members each year. No student is turned away, and all can be involved in some way. Students are in charge of charging iPods, iPads, laptops, and any other technology in the LLC. This year the iStaff is learning how to use all of the technology in the school so that these students can troubleshoot in their own classrooms. They help fellow students with technology issues, set up for events in the LLC, promote events, create bulletin boards, circulate books, shelf, and much more. They make suggestions to make the LLC a better place. They are leaders to their peers.

Students have a vested interest in the LLC’s success. Suggestions have included technology classes. For example, students expressed interest in creating websites so we (librarian and iStaff) decided to offer student-run classes on website creation. Other students wanted to make movies and book trailers so we instituted a video-creation space for student use in our group study room. Future projects include a makerspace with a 3-D printer and a green screen in the current library office. These spaces will further develop student-directed learning.

One thing educators can never forget is that students are still kids. This was never more apparent than during my first year at the Solvay Middle School. Members of the iStaff would always forget to retrieve the books from the bookdrop room, which is located in a locked space. One day, I told a story about how secret ninjas lived in the room and came out only at night to do secret ninja things. Ever since that day, it has been known as the “Secret Ninja Room,” and students never fail to check the room every period of the day to search for the elusive secret ninja.
Student LLC Passes

Every morning as the sea of students comes off the buses, they become a tsunami trying to get LLC passes. An iStaff member and I stand outside the library and furiously hand out passes. Although eventually this system will be paperless, we are in the transition phase, and study hall teachers still require a pass to leave the classroom. However, students do not sign up in the morning. They sign up online using a system that I developed through Google Drive. Our district is a Google Apps for Education user, and all of the middle school students are familiar with and, through the LLC, receive training on Google Drive. No longer do students have to have classroom and study hall teachers’ permission to come to the LLC. I initiated an online LLC pass system using Google Forms. This system has been copied by several librarians in my area who were trying to create a paperless system that would have the flexibility to easily share access with staff. Not only is the online system easier for students, but it is also constantly updated. Signing up to visit the LLC is as easy as going to the LLC website <www.smsllc.weebly.com>. (Feel free to contact me for further information on this pass system.)

Virtual Library

Without realizing it, students began to use the website for more than just signing up for the LLC. Carolyn Foote (Twitter: @technolibrary), said in a webinar for TL Virtual Cafe, “First, you have to believe that you have something to contribute, a reason to be on the Web.” The LLC website and its presence online are a large part of accessibility and utilization of the library. I have a keen interest in Web technologies and am continually enhancing the LLC website. Some of the biggest challenges can be working within the confines of the provided website solution purchased by the school.

The virtual LLC is a place for students to access resources for both personal and school projects. We have an online calendar and provide access to new technologies, blogs (mine and the LLC’s), Web 2.0 tools, book trailers (student-created), and much more. A Twitter account was set up, even though it is filtered at the school. The Twitter account is accessible off campus and has proven to be a good way to educate students about upcoming events. Past students have also used Twitter as a way to contact the LLC.

In addition, students created their own websites for various projects, and the LLC website links to these websites. Accessibility and recognition for student projects are important. Sometimes teachers have students create projects that have no life after the projects have been turned in; only the teachers see the valuable results of the students’ work. However, students have worked hard on their projects, and the expressions of students’ learning should be used in the future by other learners.

Exciting Times

The Solvay Middle School LLC is continuing to change and transform into a student-centered space; change is expected and is one of the constants in education. School libraries are uniquely placed and have been living the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) long before CCSS and 21st-century learning standards were glimmers in the distance. As long as school librarians focus on the needs of their users, school library programs will have a bright future. Being relevant, accessible, and sensitive to the needs of users will continue to be paramount. It truly is an overwhelming—but exciting—time to be a school librarian!

Heather Turner
is school librarian at Solvay Middle School in Syracuse, New York. Active in the New York Library Association/Section of School Librarians, she heads several NYLA/SSL 2014 conference planning committees, including Workshops, Publicity, Audio/Visual, and Conference Program. In her district she runs professional development workshops on Web 2.0 technologies and research requirements of the CCSS. Fascinated by the potential of technology in education, she blogs about free technology that can be used in schools—especially in libraries. Read her blog at <http://tech4schoollibrarians.com> and follow her on Twitter @HeatherATurner.
How Creeds Elementary School and the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library Combine Forces for the Benefit of Their Community
History repeats itself—unless, that is, we are committed to learning as much as we can from our past successes and failures. Many librarians and educators I talk to say that the current fiscal environment is the worst in memory. However, libraries and schools have seldom enjoyed freedom from financial worry, and I sincerely doubt that this situation is likely to change.

Way back in 1997, the future in Virginia Beach looked uncertain as well. Population growth and an aging infrastructure were straining the capacity of public schools, while increasing demand also created similar challenges for public libraries. The community of Pungo, nestled in Virginia Beach’s vast but sparsely populated agricultural center, was facing a dual challenge; their only elementary school was in dire need of renovation and their tiny public library needed more space to meet customers’ needs. The funding for both projects simply was not there. In response, leaders from the city and schools created a partnership between public libraries and schools that would bring them together, literally, under one roof (see figures 1 and 2).

Obvious savings in land and construction costs aside, this was a partnership intended to fully leverage the assets that each organization could bring to the table. The result was, and is, a model for sharing, not only of physical spaces but of resources as well. Yes, this type of partnership saves tax payers’ money, but it also enhances the ability of each organization to provide the best possible service to their community.

The mutual benefits of this partnership are at once overt and subtle. A physically contiguous floor plan, with interior doors that directly link the two institutions, is just the beginning. Shared spaces maximize usage of facilities, while reciprocal institutional lending agreements dramatically increase access to materials. Cross-pollination of ideas and expertise enhance the ability of both institutions to provide a continuum of lifelong learning opportunities. Cost sharing for additional support staff increases the capacity of each organization to provide needed services. In short, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

How does this partnership play out in day-to-day reality? That really depends on your perspective. To get a true idea of how each organization leverages this partnership to benefit its community, we will provide you with insiders’ accounts from both the school and public library perspective. We will not attempt to monetize the positive impact of sharing, mostly because it’s difficult to place a price on many of the benefits we describe. However, it does not take much imagination to see how this partnership provides both financial and quality-of-life benefits to the community.

A Little Context

When the original Pungo-Blackwater Public Library was built in 1990, it was a major advancement for the community. The public library, which shared space with a police substation and a parks and recreation “community center,” was adjacent to Creeds Elementary School. However, over the next decade demand for service at this tiny 1,000-square-foot library outpost grew to a point where the existing facility was woefully inadequate. At the same time, Creeds was preparing to undergo a major renovation to its 1930s structure to provide much-needed growing room to accommodate the community’s expanding population. Leadership from both public libraries and schools recognized the unique opportunity to expand both organizations with a single capital project. Planning began in 1997, and the new joint-use facility was opened in 2000.

Of course, not every aspect of the partnership was simple or easy to negotiate. The devil, as they say,
is usually in the details. Luckily, the architects of the partnership agreement had the foresight to establish terms that were specific and flexible in equal measure, as well as the good sense to engage the community in the planning process. The resulting agreement provided clear guidelines for sharing costs, spaces, and resources, but left to management important decisions about the administration of the partnership. Most importantly, to ensure that the agreement could adapt to changes over time, the agreement included mechanisms for periodic review of the partnership.

Matt Talks about the Public Library Perspective

The partnership between Creeds Elementary School and the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library is essential to the success and vitality of this small rural library. Because Creeds is the only school in the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library’s service area, which is spread over a large geographic area, being physically connected to the school greatly enhances our ability to serve students and their families. For example, parents often come to the library after dropping children off in the morning or before picking up children at the end of the school day. Alternatively, families will visit the public library together after school lets out. The result is that this specific demographic (Creeds students and their families) accounts for a significant portion of the library’s business.

Because the public library is small, about 4,300 square feet, the ability to share spaces with Creeds Elementary School greatly enhances our capacity to provide programming to our customers. While the school is open, we partner with Creeds to create a mutually agreeable schedule for our shared Storytime Room and small conference room. When the school is closed (after hours, weekends, and breaks), we have access to an even greater range of spaces. These include the school’s computer lab, library, and auditorium. The computer lab allows us to provide hands-on instructional programming for as many as twenty customers at a time. Likewise, the school library and auditorium allow us to provide educational and enrichment programming for much larger audiences than we could ever hope to fit in the main public library space or even in our Storytime Room. On occasion, we have even used the Creeds gymnasium to host larger audiences or when the auditorium was booked.

Sharing resources allows us to be more cost efficient and make the best use of our limited operating budget. Examples of sharing range from using Creeds’s large-format laminator when creating displays and storytime materials to using their student laptops and charger cart when providing hands-on financial-literacy classes for teens. In turn, some of those same teens will stick around after a class to clean up the school grounds as part of their public service volunteerism. If someone’s projector goes down just before an important presentation, the partner is there to lend a hand—or a bulb.

Additionally, we work closely with Creeds on cross-promotion of events and programming opportunities. If the school has
a special event coming up, we can talk it up to customers when they visit the public library. If we are hosting a program that will appeal to students or their families, Creeds can e-mail them promotional materials.

Reciprocal borrowing from the two collections enhances our ability to provide excellent customer service. While the general public is not able to check out materials from the Creeds school library, Creeds students can access the school library collection when school is closed and borrow those materials via the public library. Often we will be able to help students find a popular book on the school library shelves when all public library copies are checked out. Public library staff members also have borrowing privileges and use the Creeds collection to supplement programming materials and access materials not owned by the public library. Teachers and students also greatly benefit from the wealth of public library materials available to them right next door.

Staffing is yet another area where this partnership creates opportunities that would not otherwise exist. While we are not talking about having teachers staff public library service points or asking public library staff to serve as substitute teachers, we do see real benefits. The most obvious example is the sharing of a full-time custodial position, though there are plenty of other more subtle benefits. By splitting the cost of a full-time position, the school is able to add another custodian to their staff of one. In turn, the school’s entire custodial staff ensures that the public library’s needs are completely taken care of. Another important example is the enhanced physical security of the building. The school security team is responsible for the entire premises, eliminating the need for us to contract private security for the public library.

Building maintenance is handled entirely by the Virginia Beach City Public Schools staff. They provide a wide range of services that includes coping with all of the standard maintenance issues that arise in any building. In addition, the school district’s maintenance team is very helpful and flexible in working with the public library on changes and improvements to the existing infrastructure.

Figure 2. Pungo-Blackwater Public Library entrance at the south end of the renovated Creeds Elementary School.
facilities. This creative and talented team of carpenters, plumbers, and electricians constantly impress us with their ability to help us create an optimal environment for our customers. The maintenance team is also very responsive to our requests for service and is almost always able to complete projects on time or ahead of schedule.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this close partnership and the close physical proximity are the exciting outreach and “in-reach” opportunities. Bringing a class over for a tour of the public library is as simple as working out the schedule and opening the interior door (see figure 3). Coordinating outreach opportunities with teachers is also much easier when you only have to step next door to meet. Because of this ease of access, we are able to broaden our perspective on what types of outreach can be efficiently provided. It becomes much more practical to work with smaller groups of students on more specific topics than is typically feasible in other public library settings.

We still provide more traditional programming, such as reading to large groups, promoting summer reading, etc. However, we can also experiment with other opportunities, such as programs for students on readers’ advisory appeal elements (for example, pacing, voice, and tone), how to give exciting book talks to your friends, or even small group work aimed at raising students’ reading levels. Staffing is always a concern when planning outreach activities, but our partnership with Creeds allows us to maximize our potential to provide meaningful programming to the teachers and students next door.

Creedence Talks about the School Library Perspective

Sharing a space and resources with the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library has been a very rewarding partnership for me as the school librarian at Creeds. One of the benefits I appreciate the most is being able to access the public library collection and use its resources when students are working on specific assignments. I am able to request materials to supplement what I have in our school library. All school libraries have this option via interlibrary loans, but I can literally walk next door and pull items off the shelf or request materials in person. The teachers benefit even more because often two or three people collect materials for them rather than just one. The staff at Pungo is always willing to research topics and find more resources for Creeds teachers and students.

Figure 3. The authors, pictured with Creeds Elementary School principal Robin Davenport (center), at the internal doorway between the public and school libraries.
Another major bonus is that we share a fantastic story room. Many kindergartners are at ease on their first day with me because they have already visited the Storytime Room through programs offered by the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library. New Creeds students already feel at home because of their previous visits to the public library in the same building as their school.

Students and parents have access to the Creeds school library after hours and in the summer because the two libraries are connected. This was an especially important benefit when Creeds participated in the Accelerated Reader program and a weekly nighttime program called Creeds Reads. Due to budget cuts, the public library hours changed, and participation in both these programs definitely declined; students and parents were no longer able to come to the library after dinner because of the earlier closing time. We made the decision to discontinue the Accelerated Reader program due to the decline in participation and for budgetary reasons at the school level. However, access to the Creeds Library after regular school hours is still a huge perk in having connected libraries.

Being able to promote each other’s programs is another advantage of our partnership. I cochair the morning announcements at school; therefore, Pungo gets free advertising for their events. To promote the summer reading program, the Pungo staff holds a special assembly or visits with each of the classes to give them information. The kindergartners and first-graders even enjoyed a tour of the library. We have offered joint events such as a Moon Watching Event and a parents’ information night on e-readers and accessing the digital collection through the public library and Creeds websites.

Sharing spaces requires open communication. We work together to make sure both programs have access to the story room, conference room, and the Creeds library for special events and programs. Both sides are willing to be flexible when possible, a circumstance that makes for a rewarding partnership.

Related News Stories:


Six years ago I accepted the position as the school librarian in a diverse urban elementary school (80 percent low-income student population). The library had a bare-bones automation system, block scheduling, and no library assistant. None of this, however, was my biggest challenge. Inheriting an institutional, cold, child-UNfriendly space with no budget has been my biggest challenge. However, I don’t plan to dwell on the negatives—from here on out I’m going to refer to this challenge as my labor of literary love. I am a school librarian (hear me roar!), and this is my story about transforming my library from drab to fab and creating a space for students (and teachers) to learn 21st-century skills.

Year One

So there I was: I had landed my first job as a school librarian. I was so excited to have a space to call my own, and then I walked in the doors and looked around. Picture this: book stacks in institutional rows, rectangular tables and chairs (circa 1983), a teacher’s desk, a neglected and outdated automation system, and barely a shred of decor indicating it was an elementary school library. I wish I had taken pictures of the library before I started to transform it! Lucky for me it was summer vacation so my infant son and I were able to spend many of those summer days at the library, as I painted a mural on the wall and sorted through the stacks.

There were a million things I wanted to change, and a million and one things I wanted to do, but I knew I had to be methodical and organized. After all, on a fixed schedule and no budget I would’ve gone insane (in addition to stressing out the school staff) by changing too many things too quickly. So the first year I had four goals: weeding, rearranging, building relationships, and writing a grant. So many of the
books were outdated and b-o-r-i-n-g that I had to roll up my shirt sleeves, begin to fill boxes with unwanted books, and recycle the books that were falling apart. I knew the unwanted books could find a home with the students in the school. A few boxes with the words “free to a good home” were all it took. I didn’t go too crazy with weeding the first year; I wanted to get to know the collection and students’ needs and interests better before I thoroughly weeded the collection.

Luckily, my bookshelves are mostly all on wheels; rearranging the shelves to create a better flow was simple. The library had been set up with rows of bookshelves that made the space feel small. A simple rearrangement let in more sunlight and made the library feel more open and welcoming. As I rearranged and weeded I also got to know 550 students and their classroom teachers. I tried to learn what was happening in the classrooms and how I could support the curriculum. I have to say I did have a small advantage; I had taken over the school librarian job from a different position in the school, but my role was much different now. I did, in a sense, have to re-establish myself as the school librarian and not the after-school coordinator. Although I had formed positive relationships in my previous role, I would now have to redefine myself; with that change would come the need to prove myself. Teachers can be tough critics, and I was very cognizant of that reality.

Building relationships was probably going to be the process that would progress most slowly, but I was okay with that circumstance. I had a lot on my plate, and focusing on the students was my priority. I did manage to write a grant my first year to purchase books and a SMART Board for the following school year. At this point, I knew one thing for sure: I loved my job! I spent countless hours at night creating lessons, following other school librarians online, and learning from what they were doing, but without a doubt I was energized, and I loved every minute of it.

**Year Two**

My second year I again set goals for myself: continue weeding, provide teachers with professional development opportunities focused on using the interactive whiteboard, create a tech space for the SMART Board, write another grant, and add multicultural books to the collection.

To build the staff’s trust, I chose to bring in a SMART Technologies rep to implement the training with me. It’s not that I couldn’t do the training alone, but I wanted the school’s staff to begin to trust decisions I was making that would ultimately affect the entire school. We were all able to benefit from the expertise of a technology expert from the company that developed the SMART hardware and software. For my part of the professional development I identified and demonstrated some fun websites that staff could use with the kids.
My hope was that if I made use of technology more convenient, they would—call it my own field of library dreams.

Up until now, technology for learning was rarely being used in the school. On a cart we had thirty MacBooks that were barely used—that situation had to change. My hope was that if I made use of technology more convenient, they would come—call it my own field of library dreams.

I ended up moving furniture again and dividing our library in half so that teachers could come in with a class and use one half while I worked with students in the other half without either group of learners being distracted. I used my rolling bookshelves to divide the space. On the tech half, I set up the SMART Board and the Mac cart; the cart could be rolled out and borrowed, or the laptops could be used at conference-style tables. I had found the tables elsewhere in the building; they weren’t being used so I had them moved into the library—score!

Finally, after getting to know my collection and students for a year, I felt like I could support some bolder opinions. For example, “This is the most lily-white book collection I’ve ever seen!” Where were all of the books that represented the really diverse population of kids in this school? The Muslim kids, the kids from Sudanese, Turkish, Latino, African American, or Asian families, the special-needs students? Oh. Umm. Gee. The collection didn’t have any books that reflected this diversity! Time to write another grant proposal.

This time I was awarded a grant to purchase multicultural books and library furniture. I carefully selected multicultural picture, fiction, and nonfiction titles to be added to our collection and also purchased some fun area rugs and beanbags to brighten up our evolving space.

Year Three
My third year I did not set quite as many goals. I had made a lot of changes, and I felt like I needed to settle in for a year and focus on working with teachers in grade-level meetings and write another grant request. I am convinced that my most successful changes have been the ones that have happened naturally. By looking for patterns the students and teachers made on their own, I could see what changes needed to be made and what the library had to offer the school. During the third year I wanted to focus on fine-tuning and observing. I successfully wrote a third grant proposal and was able to purchase new technology (Flip Cams, software, and a digital camera) and add new titles to the collection.

Collaboration between teachers and the librarian was growing—although at a slow pace. A handful of teachers had started to incorporate the library into their plans. I had also started to solidify my role in the building as the go-to for tech help. Yay me! The space was quickly evolving into a bustling school library with scheduled classes coming for their weekly visit, in addition to teacher-supervised groups and small groups with support staff. My vision was working!

Year Four
By the fourth year I felt confident and ready to make more positive changes in the library to benefit the students and faculty. Change should inherently come easily to librarians. (If you fear change, you may be in the wrong profession, or maybe you should be an archivist.) Teachers were slowly embracing the new technology in the building; students were taking ownership of the library and loving the new layout, and I clearly saw a path forming that I needed to follow. We needed a computer lab in a separate space, and there just happened to be an appropriately sized office attached to the library, though currently the office was occupied by the Title I Reading staff.

However, I mustered up my courage and pitched the idea to my principal, hitting all of the talking points I wanted to touch on. The students and faculty needed this resource to provide our students with 21st-century skills; I would maintain the space and coordinate the sign-ups to use the space. Would my principal uproot an entire office and find other space for its occupants? Yes! He would! We now
I’ve learned that, regardless of budgets and resources, where there’s a will there’s a way. I have learned advocating for students is critical, as is not taking a back seat and accepting circumstances that may seem to be out of my control.

had a permanent computer lab that teachers could use, a space where I could teach technology lessons, and the lab would be in its own space where the lessons wouldn’t distract library users. Oh, sweet success.

Now that I had all of the original space back in the library, I decided it was time to ask the PTA to let me chair the book fair committee. Previously, the PTA had hosted the book fair in the hallway and raised money for the school library. Of course, I was appreciative of this awesome support, but I had a few ideas that I thought could make the fair better, so for the first time the school library was transformed into a book fair for a full week. I used this as an opportunity to create a school-wide event to celebrate Read Across America. During the week-long event, book sales increased significantly; as a result, I was able to purchase more materials for the library program. I also managed to purchase more comfy furniture for students to curl up with books.

When I started at the school library, another teacher also jumped on the beautify-the-library bandwagon; each year since, she has done a class project with her students. The class picks a theme and works in small groups to paint ceiling-tile murals that the whole school can enjoy in the library.

By the end of year four, through private donations and grants, I was able to add over one thousand new titles to the collection; a handful of teachers were collaborating with me on a regular basis; I was delivering professional development to the faculty on workshop days; and our library space now not only had a student-centered library but a 21st-century computer lab. However, a librarian’s work is never done.

Years Five and Six

Years five and six I focused on staff professional development, school-wide literacy events (including a million-word campaign and Read Across America), plus I was ready to begin to un-Dewey the collection. Gasp! The rationale: With the traditional arrangement, students had a hard time finding books they were interested in. By watching and observing how students used the school library and how teachers taught literature to students, I realized that the current organization of the collection wasn’t helpful for them. It needed to change. I wanted to start small and pilot one section.

I have to say, contemplating the change made me feel like a bad librarian. Ditch Dewey??! Shame on me! But I did my research, and I went with my gut. I would start with my fiction section, reorganize it by genre, and then move on to nonfiction if the modifications to the fiction section were successful. I chose eight genres and spent the better part of the school year reshelving books and adding a genre spine label to every book. The result? Independent library usage by even the most reluctant readers, special needs students, and ESL students. Adding genre labels and posters to the shelves helped all students independently find what they wanted. Book bins were added to the shelves so students could browse more easily. I found that students loved to browse the collection longer and more often to see what was there—so many new discoveries!

In addition to focusing on my existing library program for students, I also spent those two years focusing on staff professional development on integrating technology into the classroom in bite-sized bits. Classroom teachers appreciated professional development that could be done on their time when it was convenient. This approach proved to be extremely successful and provided differentiated instruction for our faculty. Change is not easy for many, and integrating technology can be scary for some. By the end of the sixth year we had come a long way. Every classroom teacher in the building used the library and the resources it provided. No longer was I merely the provider of a prep period for teachers; the school library had become an extension of the classroom.
By the end of six years, our school library had been transformed into an entirely new space for learning and discovery. Teachers and students did the transformation; I was merely the vehicle to help make it happen. Our library teaches me; I watch, listen, and learn from the library stakeholders. I make changes as I observe the new paths people are taking. This isn’t to say that I don’t try to be an agent of change. I most certainly do. I follow the movers and shakers; I keep up with the latest, greatest library happenings around the country, but I carefully implement new ideas to suit the needs of our library’s users.

Lessons Learned
The fact that I was in an urban school with no budget and no district support never mattered—well of course it did, but our situation never stopped me from having high expectations. I have learned that an effective library program does not just exist, it is created with intention. It is relevant and standards-based; it changes and evolves; it is a wave. Like a wave, the school library program cannot exist alone; it is always a part of the ocean around it, separate but together. If a library is not enmeshed in the school day, the librarian is doing something wrong.

I’ve learned that, regardless of budgets and resources, where there’s a will there’s a way. I have learned advocating for students is critical, as is not taking a back seat and accepting circumstances that may seem to be out of my control.

I recommend participating in shameless self-promotion, being an agent of change, a defender of intellectual freedom. Step outside of the library walls, get involved in local library organizations, team up with the public library...Are you pickin’ up what I’m puttin’ down? The time is now. Change your library space to suit the needs of your students and teachers. It is not your space; it is their space. Watch the patterns patrons are making naturally and follow them. Most importantly, there is no elevator to success; we all have to take the stairs.

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ARRANGING A LIBRARY TO SUPPORT ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

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When designing a school library, the first consideration is often the space’s ability to meet students’ academic needs. Most decisions are typically centered on the users’ cognitive development; spaces are designed to advance learners’ ability to think and understand the world around them. These are certainly important goals, especially with the pressures of standardized testing. Unfortunately, if a space is designed with the single-minded focus of cognitive development and academic success, it may fail to address other essential aspects of adolescent growth.

When designing a school library space and deciding how to arrange resources, it is important to consider multiple components of adolescent development, including social, emotional, and behavioral aspects. Acknowledging these developmental facets and their importance can provide additional justification for some of the more controversial aspects of modern school library spaces, like gaming tables, lounge seating, and areas devoted to resources related to teen issues.

Social Development

Educators are well aware that students undergo changes in social development in their teenage years. During adolescence, students transfer their focus to peer groups, transitioning from the earlier importance of family as they work toward becoming independent adults (APA 2002, 21). Adolescents form close, caring relationships with their peers, where friendships become less about shared interests and more about emotional intimacy. These relationships are centered on openness, honesty, loyalty, and the ability to keep secrets (Wolfe, Jaffe, and Crooks 2006, 80).

Students’ social development often frustrates educators and may serve as a distracter in an academic environment. Although it may seem superfluous, this aspect of adolescence serves an essential role in ensuring academically motivated students. Students that form peer friendships are shown to have higher perceptions of self-worth, better self-image, and perform better academically (APA 2002, 21). Research suggests that high-quality friendships or at least one close friend can protect adolescents from becoming victims of bullying (Massari 2011, 11). In contrast, students that fail to form close ties are more likely to display negative behaviors like delinquency, drug abuse, and dropping out of school; in addition, their lack of close ties places them at great risk for psychosocial problems in adulthood (APA 2002, 21).

Supporting Social Development in the Library

When designing a school library space, we need to consider the social-development needs of adolescents. This goal means finding ways to encourage the development of close, personal relationships among peers, especially among students that historically struggle to do so. A library can easily be arranged to encourage budding friendships, once a school librarian accepts the importance of adolescent socialization.

Historically, we have arranged academic spaces, especially libraries, to eliminate talking and limit social interaction. To encourage social development, school libraries should provide students with opportunities to form friendships during the school day, especially at the beginning of a new school year (Bergin and Bergin 2012, 443). School librarians can encourage
this friendship formation in their space by creating zones where quiet conversation is permissible. Conversation zones should feature soft lounge furniture placed in a grouping around a coffee table or footstools (see figure 1) or at the very least, contain tables that accommodate multiple seated students.

When students are forming new friendships, spontaneous conversation may be difficult; providing students with a group activity helps minimize social anxiety. To encourage interaction, school librarians can set small gaming tables with chess or checker sets, Mancala, or Bananagrams (see figure 2) or devote a table in the library to a collaborative jigsaw puzzle.

Of course, social interactions among adolescents are not always positive; in arranging a school library’s physical space, ensuring adequate supervision to prevent bullying and aggression is also essential to adolescents’ healthy social development (Bergin and Bergin 2012, 404). The library’s circulation desk should be centrally located with clear visibility to all areas, allowing for close monitoring of student behavior. Also, consider the installation of security cameras in difficult-to-monitor areas; the simple presence of a camera is often a successful deterrent to unwanted behaviors. Lastly, make sure the rules and expectations for positive social interactions are clearly posted in the space and understood by students.

**Emotional Development**

Emotional development in adolescence is characterized by a desire to explore and refine individuals’ personal identity (APA 2002, 15). An adolescent’s identity includes components of personality such as self-concept, what people think about themselves, and self-esteem, how people feel about their self-concept (APA 2002, 15). Adolescents explore and refine their self-concept and self-esteem by experimenting with different ways of looking, behaving, and sounding.

An important aspect of emotional development in adolescents is the development of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence requires competency in relationship skills like empathy, effective communication, perseverance, and cooperation (Massari 2011, 9).

During adolescence students are refining their personal identities and building emotional intelligence. Supporting the development of emotional intelligence is a worthy goal for school library programs. Students with competent emotional intelligence are more likely to have better mental health, positive self-image, and better self-esteem (Ahmad, Imran, and Mehmood 2009, 7). They are also more likely to form friendships and be well liked, be more productive, be capable of setting and obtaining goals, and ultimately get better grades (Massari 2011, 9).

Most importantly for a school setting, improving the population’s emotional intelligence can reduce bullying. Students who can’t regulate their emotions are more likely to be bullies, and students with higher degrees of sadness and emotional vulnerability are more likely to become targets for bullies (Massari 2011, 9–10). Therefore, if students are able to establish emotional awareness and develop self-regulation skills—components of emotional intelligence—incidences of bullying may decrease dramatically.

**Supporting Emotional Development in the Library**

School librarians can help students’ emotional development by providing safe ways for them to experiment with their identity and opportunities for them to build emotional intelligence and self-
School librarians can help students’ emotional development by providing safe ways for them to experiment with their identity and opportunities for them to build emotional intelligence and self-esteem.

estem. School library programs should encourage students to explore their interests and provide resources to help them do so (APA 2002, 16). Adequate signage is essential; students should be able to find books devoted to their interests without having to ask an adult. Consider moving to a subject-based or “bookstore style” classification system for nonfiction or at least clearly labeling sections like “Hobbies” and “Sports” with large prominent signs so students can easily find materials that address their interests (see figure 3).

Another way school librarians can help students develop a strong and positive sense of identity is to demonstrate that the school library, and by extension, the school culture, values their peer group (Bergin and Bergin 2012, 525). A peer group may be defined by race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. A library’s physical space can demonstrate this validation through resources, book displays, and posters. For example, in addition to selecting books featuring GLBT characters, school librarians may post rainbow flag symbols indicating support of schools’ gay-straight alliance clubs. Displays devoted to different peer groups should be prominent throughout the school year. For example, books featuring famous African Americans shouldn’t be limited to February’s Black History Month.

Behavioral Development
Lastly, behavioral development is an important consideration when designing a school library space. Influenced by development in other realms, this aspect is characterized by experimentation. Experimentation in adolescence provides a feedback loop that allows students to further fine-tune other areas of their development. One hallmark of experimentation in adolescents is risk-taking (APA 2002, 29).

Adolescents engage in risk-taking behavior for a multitude of reasons. Some research suggests the teenage brain craves “excitement, fun, and novel” experiences, and, although these experiences may be inherently dangerous, the intense sensations they provide override any concern. Risk-taking frequently occurs in group settings, so the behavior is also viewed as a way for adolescents to gain status and acceptance from their peers. Lastly, students engage in risk-taking behavior because it provides a means for them to identify with their parents and other adults (APA 2002, 30).

Although risk-taking may make adults in the school community nervous, it is an important part of adolescents’ behavioral development because it helps students shape their identity, try out their new decision-making skills, and realistically assess themselves, others, and the larger world (APA 2002, 29). The challenge for school librarians is to design a space that encourages adolescents’ safe risk-taking.

Figure 3. Subject-based classification and adequate signage to improve students’ finding information independently.
Supporting Behavioral Development in the Library

School library spaces can be designed to support adolescents’ behavioral development. Risk-taking is an undeniable aspect of this stage, so it is important to promote safe opportunities for adolescents to do so (APA 2002, 31). An easy strategy for school libraries is a bulletin board featuring information about club opportunities, sports team tryouts, and contests, providing students with avenues for safe risk-taking.

Additionally, adolescents, as part of their behavioral development, need accurate information about risks associated with particular activities they may find attractive, including smoking, drug use, promiscuity, and drinking (Wolfe, Jaffe, and Crooks 2006, 179). To address this need, school librarians can create a “Teen Issues” section. This section should be a collection of books devoted to providing accurate information about risky behaviors, including resources on alcoholism, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. Ideally, the collection should be easily accessible, located near lounge areas where students tend to congregate naturally. School librarians will find that these titles are a go-to for students with downtime during study halls.

It may also be useful to organize this collection using a “bookstore” model, eschewing the more formal Dewey classification. Additionally, because teen issues collections see so much use, it is much easier to organize the books when spine labels are color-coded by subject.

Not all students may be comfortable with exploring these subjects in the public setting of the school library, so posters promoting electronic resources on these subjects, like Rosen’s Health & Wellness subscription database (see figure 4) or the Nemours Foundation’s free TeensHealth site <http://teenshealth.org/teen>, should be prominently displayed. Include a QR code on the posters so students can quickly access the site or create business-card-size handouts that include passwords and usernames for accessing the information later privately.

Supporting Academics and Development

In summary, school librarians have many ways to use their physical space and resources to support adolescents’ social, emotional, and behavioral development. Some ideas, like lounge seating and gaming areas, are not new concepts; however, supporting all areas of adolescent development may provide convincing justification librarians can use in schools where administrators are slow to warm to more enlightened models of a modern school library program.

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LIBRARY ORIENTATION TRANSFORMATION
From Paper Map to Augmented Reality

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"You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

This truism surfaces each summer as I try to find inspiration and raise enthusiasm for the school library orientation offered at the beginning of the school year. At my high school, teachers are not required to participate in the library orientation program, and so we, as librarians, often must shift into a sales role in an attempt to get teachers to schedule their students to come and see what services the library has to offer.

Past orientations involved a short initial lecture regarding the available services followed by the handing out of a blank map of the school library with a list of areas and resources. Students would be let loose to walk around and fill in the map, learning something in the process, we hoped. This activity was followed by a group discussion of what they found.

Put frankly, this approach simply was not working. I liked students having the freedom to walk around and explore without having to listen to me lecture for thirty minutes, but glazed looks and overheard conversations showed that the map approach wasn’t engaging or effective. Students would congregate and just take one student’s paper to copy. They would socialize and didn’t take the activity seriously. I didn’t feel like our message was getting across, and the experience was not memorable. Last year we tried to jazz things up a bit and added a bingo game after students filled out the map. Students had fun and liked being competitive, but really not much had changed. The orientation remained unmemorable, and students were not taking away what we wanted them to remember.

This disappointment bothered me throughout the school year, and I knew I needed to update our orientation and inspire students, but I didn’t know how. Around this time I was also a member of my district’s Teacher Leadership Program (TLP), a cohort of teachers interested in research, sustained new learning, and collaboration on how to engage students in project-based learning. In one of our sessions we were introduced to Aurasma <www.aurasma.com>, a free augmented-reality app. As we played and experimented with Aurasma during our session, I knew augmented reality was something special. I knew it had potential. I just didn’t know how and what I could do with it. While I personally had a smartphone, our library did not have tablets, and I couldn’t count on students having access to a mobile device. How could augmented reality be used?

Suddenly I had it! I pictured museum audio walking tours and envisioned something similar—but even more engaging—in our library. Instead of my voice I imagined our students hearing and, more importantly, seeing like magic on an iPad screen their fellow students and teachers showing them around the library. I wanted our school library to come to life in front of new students and for them to learn from their peers about all of the great resources and services our library has to offer.

So What Are Aurasma and Augmented Reality?

Aurasma is a free app for iOS and Android mobile devices. It uses technology to allow the camera on a smartphone or tablet to recognize real-world images (targets or, as Aurasma refers to them, “auras”) and respond by displaying overlay videos, pictures, or websites on top of the camera image that appears on the device’s screen. The overlays are programmed using a free online studio that is accessible once you become an Aurasma “partner” <www.aurasma.com/become-a-partner>.

How Did We Use It?

We gained special permission from our school district to use some of our authorized library funds to purchase iPad devices instead of books. We then worked with central IT to purchase the tablets and to ensure support and wireless access. After we received our twelve iPads, I enlisted the help of teachers and students to create the videos that I would use as overlays. I engaged English teachers who regularly use our services and partnered with our TV production and drama classes to ask students to volunteer to create the videos.

I could not have imagined the power of turning over an iPad to a student and telling that person to film the video. Many of the students were hesitant at first, but once I stood back and let them use the iPads on their own, they began to have so much fun with the
I paired student teams with sections based on their areas of interest. This decision was critical to the usefulness of the resulting videos. Real interest in their topics resulted in more enthusiastic and engaging video overlays. For example, manga-loving students filmed the manga and graphic novel section with authentic enthusiasm and personal knowledge that could not have been conveyed by a librarian’s lecture. One of our theater students talked about the monologues we had to offer. Our Spanish display area was filmed and then described in both English and Spanish.

With the videos filmed, I set out to create an Aurasma channel for our library. Channels are like folders and contain collections of auras. Next, I needed to link each video filmed by students with a target image. Aurasma’s Partner Guidelines describe a trigger image as “a real-world image, object, or location recognized by Aurasma and used to activate a digital Overlay.” I found that the Aurasma online studio allows easy and intuitive editing and compiling of the videos (see figure 1). The Aurasma app was added to each iPad, and our library’s Aurasma channel was selected and followed on each (see figure 2). Users can browse or search the Aurasma app for channels they would like to follow (see figure 3).

What Did We Find?

When August arrived, I was anxious to see the reactions of students and staff. After our first orientation, I knew we had something special. I purchased and used an adapter to connect the iPad to our projector to demonstrate to students what we would be doing during the library orientation. First, I showed a publisher-created book trailer I had connected to a book. Next, I showed a video created by a student describing our biography section. The student reactions were priceless. Students exclaimed, “This is tight! What is this, magic? That is crazy!” Students worked in groups of two or three per iPad and were let loose around the library to locate targets and watch the videos that appeared as the tablets recognized them (see figure 4).

Many students went directly to the display of fiction titles that instantly brought up associated book trailers. Students were amazed that there were targets not just for our various library directory signs but also for individual objects: a World Book Encyclopedia set, our book drop in the wall outside.
of the library, and even our library’s Blackboard page. A tenth-grade English teacher remarked that she was surprised to see her students so focused and engaged. Another English teacher approached me to see how he could use Aurasma with his students when they study Gothic literature. A number of students asked how they could star in future videos.

Having overhauled the orientation, I was so excited to see that students were finding it to be helpful, informative, and fun. We had a few juniors come in for orientation and without prompting they said this was so much better than last year’s version.

I can confidently say our use of augmented reality has changed students’ vision of the school library space from a boring place to a surprisingly fun and cool place to hang out. Most importantly, they will remember this orientation and certainly take away a better understanding of our resources than in the past. In the words of a tenth grader: “This is tight!”

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BOOKS AND MORTAR

Figure 1. The beautiful library with its immovable tables and lamps.
Setting the Stage

I fell in love with my school library the first time I walked in. The high ceilings, the huge windows that let in lots of natural light, the beautiful circulation desk, the tables...that, I discovered, were bolted to the floor. Lamps were bolted to the center of each table. The library was beautiful but not exactly a flexible teaching and learning space (see figure 1).

Making Lemonade

The bolted lamps and tables—in initially a source of frustration—ended up being a catalyst for changing my teaching practice. Since the library space was not conducive to teaching, I worked on embedding myself in spaces that were already set up for teaching: classrooms. Embedding myself in classrooms was a natural evolution of the collaborative relationships I had built with teachers and helped me move toward a coteaching model with several colleagues. As Jake Carson and Ruth Kneale have noted, “Through embedded librarianship, librarians move from a supporting role into partnerships with their clientele, enabling librarians to develop stronger connections and relationships with those they serve” (2011, 167).

Moving beyond the physical walls of the school library to teach sent a message that the skills I taught were important all the time, not just when working on the assignments for which I traditionally collaborated with teachers. Evaluating sources, synthesizing multiple viewpoints, and creating citations (among many other skills) became ideas embedded in the day-to-day work of classrooms. In short, I was able to better embed information-literacy skills in the school’s curriculum.

As well as being embedded in physical classrooms, I focused on embedding myself in online spaces as well. Using LibGuides I built a Web presence for the library and added links from the main library website to class- or assignment-specific guides on teachers’ webpages accessible through our course-management system (see figure 2). To help students and teachers achieve greater independence and confidence when using these resources, I created tutorials and screencasts for questions and issues that came up frequently. Taking the time to create these guides made me much more efficient at answering questions and providing support and helped me maintain a presence for the library even when I wasn’t available to answer questions in person.

Valuing the Lemonade Stand

The limitations of the school library space were a catalyst for embracing an embedded librarianship model, but what of the library space itself? With school librarians embedding themselves in classrooms, what happens to the physical library?

Even though it is becoming easier to find information or access library resources no matter where you are, “books and mortar” libraries still have significant cultural weight that we need to be mindful of. In literature, movies, and TV, “going to the library” is still a shorthand phrase used to express that someone is smart or a serious student. As noisy and active as we know libraries can get, in many people’s minds libraries are still associated with quiet. While we may not always be comfortable with some of the
stereotypes about libraries that are portrayed in popular culture (and even work to change them), our students internalize those messages—and good can come from them.

During the spring of my first year, a student—by no means a library regular—came into the school library during his free period. I asked him if he needed help finding something or had a question, and he told me, “I have a big tennis match this afternoon, and I needed a quiet place so I can keep myself calm and focused. I figured the library was the best place to go.” This student, who may not have sought out the library otherwise, had internalized the popular image of the library as a place to find quiet; although he never became a daily visitor, that image is what got him through the door the first time—and the space for quiet and reflection is part of what kept him coming back.

As time went on, I observed more about the role the library space—and students’ perceptions of it—played in their academic lives. On Family Weekends, students would bring their parents in to see the library. When parents would ask their children if they studied in the library often, the students would almost always assure parents that they did. I quickly realized that this conversation was a coded way for parents to ask, “Are you a serious student?” and for students to assure their parents that they were. Even if the student in question was rarely in the library to work, I never blew anyone’s cover. Both parents and students had internalized positive messages about what it meant to be a frequent library visitor and a serious student.

Whole classes and small groups of students had always made regular use of the library when working on research. This use was generally an extension of the time these classes spent in the library for instruction. As I embedded myself in more classrooms, I expected the number of students working in the library during classes to drop. In fact, the numbers stayed the same and even increased during some time periods. While some students came to use computers or books, many of them weren’t using any of the physical resources of the library other than tables and chairs.

Optimizing Use of the Library

By not doing as much direct instruction in the school library, I freed up space and resources for students who wanted to take advantage of the library as a scholarly space. By moving whole-group instruction to the classroom, teachers and I were better able to differentiate small-group and individual instruction for students—and even to differentiate for students who had different needs for working environments. To stay motivated, some students needed to be around other people in the classroom; to stay focused, other students needed a quieter space. Keeping the classroom as an instructional space and the library as a work space allowed us to differentiate for our students, as well as keep the school library space available for use by students in other classes and study hall.

These interactions and experiences highlighted for me the important role that the library can play as a “third place” for students in a school. The library is a unique space in schools and in students’ lives—a place to pursue both academic and personal interests, a place to meet and work with peers, but also a place to find quiet and a space for reflection. A recent report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project backs up these anecdotal observations. According to the Project’s research about young people’s library usage, “those ages 16–29 were significantly more likely [than older users] to have visited the library just to study, sit and read, or watch or listen to media” (Zickuhr, Rainie, and Purcell 2013, 32). Young people value not only the services we offer, but also the space in which we provide them.

Viewing Librarians and the Library as Separate Entities

The Pew report also made clear that young people recognize the importance of librarians, with 80 percent of Americans under 30 saying “it’s ‘very important’ for libraries to have librarians to help people find the information they need” (2013, 5). As we embed ourselves in classrooms, the role of the school librarian—and the guidance we can offer—becomes even clearer to students. Students and teachers value both the services and the space the library has to offer—but that doesn’t necessarily mean they need to be tied together.

Our students and colleagues have multiple priorities for us. When school library and librarian become two interdependent entities—rather than a person and a space tied together—we can have a greater impact on our students and our schools.

Fully embedding ourselves and the library program into the life of the school is also a way to advocate for the important role school librarians play. It’s easy to replace someone who can be perceived as a guardian of a space; it’s harder to replace someone who is embedded in multiple spaces throughout the school.

Discussions of learning commons and “bookless” libraries hint at
this separation between library and librarian. Though I think we’re still working at getting to the heart of what that space should be—indeed, what that space should be will likely vary based on the needs of the school and its students—at the core of those discussions is an unspoken belief that the space of the library matters.

Looking Forward and Outward

While school librarians’ goals for the library are moving to embrace a broader range of programs we need to pay attention to what our students expect from the library space and make sure the programs and services we’re providing align with what our students and teachers need and want from the library and the librarian.

This focus on stakeholders’ expectations doesn’t mean we need to shelve plans for ambitious programs; it simply means that the programs and services the school library offers don’t need to be confined to the library’s physical space. Having these programs outside the walls of the library can bring greater exposure to what the school library—and especially the librarian—have to offer. If we want the programs of the library to be a part of everyday life, we can’t confine everything we do to the library.

Renovating a space can be cost-prohibitive and time-intensive, but re-envisioning how a space is used and how the library can make use of other spaces in a school is a way to broaden the impact the library program has. The skills we teach are important everywhere, not just in the library; the school librarian needs to be present in more spaces than the library.

We can’t always change our space (Remember those tables that are bolted to the floor?), but we can make best use of the space we have. Listen to the messages students and teachers give you about how they view the library space and what they need from it.

School libraries matter. School librarians matter. And for both to have the greatest impact we need to think of them as two entities rather than one.
Elementary school libraries are not often thought of as suitable spaces for learning commons because most elementary school libraries operate on a fixed schedule, allowing only one class at a time to use the space. Elementary school libraries are too often the drop-off location for a specific class during the classroom teacher’s planning period. For as long as I have been an elementary school librarian, I’ve been bound and determined to change that paradigm. It never felt right. It never felt dynamic.

I spent my first years trying to convince my administration to adopt a flexible schedule. I thought I could get decision makers to bite if we started small. I advocated for a pilot program in which only one grade level out of six (in a K–5 building) would operate on a flex schedule. In the end, the administration would not budge. I knew then that I had to take a different approach—something I could control myself.

I thought that if I could transform the look and feel of the library, the changes would encourage teachers and students to start thinking of the library differently—and using it differently.
Transforming the Physical Space

I made an all-out effort to transform the library into a learning commons, starting with the physical space. I thought that if I could transform the look and feel of the library, the changes would encourage teachers and students to start thinking of the library differently—and using it differently. Step one was to alter the physical space to accommodate multiple uses. The original library had a quasi-classroom area containing six round tables (that could comfortably seat only four young students), a screen, and one computer that connected to a ceiling-mounted projector. Windows separated that area from an adjoining computer lab. The school library had no wireless access and was completely void of comfortable seating for leisure reading.

The small circular tables in the classroom area were not conducive to learning with mobile devices. Four average-sized fifth-graders could barely fit around the tables, and the addition of laptops or iPads made the area feel even more cramped. The shape of the tables prevented them from being pushed together to create a greater workspace.

At the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year, my school district provided each of its libraries with an iPad cart, stocked with thirty iPads. (In the previous school year, the cart contained only twenty iPads.) The addition of ten more iPads meant that I now had access to a full class set. More good news: That autumn the district’s director of technology notified me that the budget contained a line item for technology furniture and said I could use some of the funds for our library. Having done research on library design during my post-graduate program, I immediately began looking for mobile furniture to replace the antiquated circular tables. I wanted to create a space where the primary function could be changed at a moment’s notice, a space that could accommodate many needs and purposes.

To this end, I found innovative tables in hourglass and reverse hourglass shapes. Not only are the tables much larger than their predecessors, they also can be wheeled together to create seating for large-group sessions or workshops or be pulled apart to allow for collaboration among small groups of students.

The hourglass and reverse hourglass shapes immediately appealed to my students. The tables resemble giant puzzle pieces that can be configured in myriad ways. They also look sleek and modern, design elements that elementary students are not usually afforded.

At roughly the same time, through a district-wide grant, I received a SMART Board for the library. The addition of the interactive whiteboard in the library classroom made the space instantly more desirable to teachers because all classrooms had already been equipped with SMART Boards, and lessons could be developed using SMART Notebook software. The addition of the new equipment meant that teachers could hold their classes in the library classroom, using existing lesson plans, while I taught my classes in the adjoining computer lab (also equipped with an interactive whiteboard) or vice versa.

Transforming Learning

With all three elements in place—the full iPad cart, the innovative movable tables, and the SMART Board—the library classroom had now become a flexible workspace. Students could use iPads 1:1 or 1:4 or spread throughout the library when producing individualized content, such as voice recordings. As a result, learners have more options for research and presenting their findings and more control over their own learning process.
Here is one instance of how this process works in practice: I had third-grade students conduct a soup-to-nuts iPad project incorporating Common Core State Standards benchmarks. Their task was to select an endangered animal from the deplorably long and growing list of such species, perform research about that animal, and create a multimedia presentation to educate the public about ways to protect that animal.

Changing the physical space has, in fact, altered student and staff perceptions of the school library.
While the school library program still does not operate on a flexible schedule (yet), use of mobile furniture and technology in the library has approximated a flexible environment, despite the fixed schedule.

To select and find information about their animals, students used Endangered Animals, an iPad app. Some students also used an app called WWF Together to gather information (though not all endangered animals are featured on WWF Together). Next, using a Google image search, students began to collect illustrations of all aspects they had researched about the animal. Students saved images to the camera roll on their iPads and noted on their graphic organizers where they found the images. Finally, to share their findings, learners used Tapikeo to create a multimedia presentation. This app presents students’ learning in a grid format. Students are able to add images, text, and narration to each cell they create. The finished product is an HTML file. Edmodo hosted the HTML files, and I provided parents with a public link so they could access and download their children’s work. The project was so successful that many parents downloaded the Tapikeo app for their children to use at home.

These third-graders were the youngest students in the district to perform such a feat, and the newly acquired library furniture and technology made it possible. During the research phase, students had plenty of space on the new table tops to use the iPads 1:1 and to take notes on a graphic organizer. At times we combined an hourglass and reverse hourglass table to increase the workspace, allowing struggling students to be closer to those who
were more successful; students learned directly from their peers. During the production phase, students spread out across the entire facility and used the adjoining computer lab, a new leisure-reading zone in the library, and the library classroom to create narrations for their projects without disrupting one another.

When students completed the project, they projected their work from an iPad directly onto the SMART Board to show their peers, and we moved the tables out of the classroom area to create theater-like seating.

Since the advent of the mobile furniture and enhanced technology—including recently acquired (and very popular) wireless hotspots—the library classroom has also been used for all of our building planning meetings in which the principal and classroom teachers meet to set building-wide goals. On those occasions, the tables are pushed together, conference style. The space is also now used in this configuration for summer workshops and library department meetings. Classroom teachers are increasingly using the space for instruction and video conferences, configuring the tables as they see fit. They have also used the space for poetry celebrations; all the tables can be moved out of the way and chairs set up in rows to seat visiting parents.

In the spirit of a true learning commons, I have also set up a Google Calendar on the library website so that teachers can view and schedule use of either the computer lab or iPad-cart instructional space. When the two learning environments will be used simultaneously, I ask fifth-grade library helpers to paint seasonal designs on the windowpanes that separate the library classroom from the computer lab. In addition to creating more privacy, window painting provides these students with a sense of ownership over the space and adds a personal and fun touch to both environments.

**Transforming Perceptions of the Library**

Changing the physical space has, in fact, altered student and staff perceptions of the school library. Teachers want to use the space to support learning with mobile devices and to access different modalities, such as video conferences. Students enjoy the variety of learning environments now available to them. The school library is finally a flexible and dynamic space where two different learning environments can coexist simultaneously. The administration is even using the space more frequently than before.

While the school library program still does not operate on a flexible schedule (yet), use of mobile furniture and technology in the library has approximated a flexible environment, despite the fixed schedule. In fact, at the time of this writing, I am now included in weekly meetings with classroom teachers to collaborate on enrichment opportunities for our students. We meet for one hour each week to review assessment results and plan for our students’ needs. I do not believe that this transformation in the school culture would have occurred without the shift to a physical learning commons. The paradigm is beginning to change, and students are the beneficiaries of the improvements.

**Leslie C. Cartier**

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Breaking Out of the Library to Create a Culture of Literacy

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Breaking Out of the Library to Create a Culture of Literacy

When students ask, “Where is the school library?” how do you answer? When administrators ask, “What impact does the school library program have on students?” what evidence do you show them? When teachers ask, “Can you help me plan a unit including ethical use of online resources?” do you jump at the chance and offer to help teach? When parents ask their kids if they’ve been to the school library or know the name of the librarian can their kids answer? Highly functioning school library programs have always been active places in schools, inviting and supporting students as they develop a love of literature and providing resources for inquiry for schoolwork and personal needs.

With the influx of technology, school library programs started to adapt traditional services by embracing new innovative resources. However, even with online research databases and cloud computing, most school libraries still occupy a fixed physical space in the school, a destination for students and teachers when they need help with reading or research.

Change is inevitable, especially in 21st-century education; we are teaching students to prepare for jobs not yet created (Fisch 2007). Several years ago, it was easy for me to see the writing on the wall, predicting change when my district’s leadership team discussed the possibility of one-to-one computing. Clearly, it was imperative that the school library program be viewed as an essential piece of the curricular puzzle and not just a service provider for students.

For more on creating a library program without a space, read Sue Kowalski’s online exclusive “Rethinking the Possibilities @ Your Library: Creating a Library Program without a Library Space” on the KQ website at <www.al.org/aasl/kq>.
However, I just didn’t know how I would establish such a belief within the school culture. Like any good librarian and educator, I turned to my colleagues for help. Via print journals, online blogs, and association conferences, I gathered as much information as possible about activities to help me reach out to the greater school community. Even though one-to-one computing was not implemented at my high school, students are allowed to use personal mobile devices during the school day, and each core department has at least one computer lab.

Virtual Walls

Sometimes, virtual walls seem to be easier to break through than physical walls. Thanks to mobile devices, many students are digitally connected to the world all of the time. As school librarians we can let our libraries loose by reaching out to students via the Web. Most, if not all, libraries have a Web presence, and many librarians are lucky enough to have full editing control of their websites. Therefore, school librarians have the power to break down virtual walls. If you don’t have editing rights, consider using a free tool such as Google Sites or Weebly to share resources and promote school library activities.

In addition to posting basic information about my library online, such as hours of operation, contact information, and upcoming events, I also use my library’s website as a portal for the online...
public access catalog (OPAC), which includes links to student-created book-trailer videos. Students love watching videos online and are extremely excited to see videos created by other students. The book-trailer videos are posted on YouTube, and then a URL link is added to the MARC record in the online catalog. Students can view the videos with their mobile devices or a school laptop dedicated to OPAC use only. I also created a QR code for each video and posted the code on the relevant physical book in the library so students can scan the code with their mobile devices to view the video. Students are taught how to access the school library website, search the OPAC, and view the video book trailers during booktalk lessons in the library.

In the fall of 2012, thanks to a tech-savvy student teacher, my library launched a Twitter account to connect with students and parents. Knowing all students don’t have a Twitter account, I worked with a technology staff member to embed a Twitter feed on the school library’s website so students could view the library’s tweets even without a Twitter account. The first tweets promoted National Library Week activities. Students following the library’s Twitter account received trivia questions and clues to help them win daily prizes. Still going strong, the library’s Twitter account is routinely used to post messages about upcoming events such as author visits, extended hours, and book club meetings.

Another way to let library programs loose in the world of virtual instruction is to promote online book discussions with students. My library’s first attempt at online discussions involved creating a discussion board through our school’s learning-management system; students could post comments about the books nominated for the Abraham Lincoln Award. (The Abraham Lincoln Award is a readers’ choice award for grades 9–12 in Illinois, our home state.) The next year we opted to use a wiki for the project, a switch that allowed incorporating more graphics and multimedia. The wiki was promoted during booktalks, but classroom teachers didn’t require participation or offer incentives for posting, so the discussion board and wiki didn’t receive many comments.

The third year the library staff collaborated with three classroom teachers to develop a series of lessons using social media features of our library management system Follett Destiny Quest. Teachers and students loved these lessons. In Destiny Quest students create virtual friendships with other students, classroom teachers, and librarians. Virtual friends can view what books others “have read,” “want to read,” or “are currently reading” (see figure 1). Virtual friends can also recommend books to friends and post online book reviews accessible to all users via the OPAC. During the introductory lesson to one class, a student exclaimed, “This looks just like Facebook!” when she logged into Quest and saw her “In” box filled with updates from classmates.

Teachers loved the switch to Quest because they could track comments made by students and use the same rubric they had in the past for written book reviews. The key to success in this case was having teacher buy-in from the beginning and allowing students a wider array of books on which to comment, not just books nominated for one award. An additional benefit of using Quest is the mobile app. Students were thrilled when they learned they could download the free app and use it to renew books or place holds.

Eventually, I’d like to adapt the Quest lessons so students can continue discussing reading and literature after high school. Guiding students through setting up an account using a site such as Goodreads would allow them to connect with friends and family outside of school and long after graduation. Although I have yet to use it during instruction, my library does have a Goodreads profile. One library staff member has created shelves for various book lists such as the Abraham Lincoln nominees and lists used for booktalks in the school library. Even without virtual friends, the site is a great resource for the library staff when students come to the library looking for books they heard about the previous week during a booktalk.

**Physical Walls**

One easy way to promote a culture of literacy beyond the physical walls of the class is for students to publicly see teachers read. However, most teachers get only a few precious minutes to read at home before falling asleep. The next best thing to seeing teachers read is for...
students to know their teachers do read—and what. Each year, I give all new teachers in my building a “currently reading” sign. To promote my library, I get a fifteen-minute window during new-teacher orientation; in part, I focus on the culture of literacy in our school. The signs are 8.5 x 11 laminated sheets stating the teacher’s name and “…is currently reading:”. I urge the teachers to post the signs in their classrooms or offices and use a dry-erase marker to note what they are reading. I encourage them to list books, magazines, or newspaper titles so students know teachers are reading. I also made sure to give these signs to my principal and assistant principals so they can show their support for reading and literacy. This one small gesture was my first step in breaking down the physical walls of my library.

My second step in breaking down the physical walls is more like a leap. Not only does my library have a flexible schedule, but it is also the only place in the school with flexibly scheduled computer labs. This benefit has been a great asset for my library program because I’m always close by to offer assistance to teachers and students using print and digital resources. However, in the past few years we’ve seen a shift in the need for instruction or assistance in the library, especially in the area of digital resources. This shift is partly a result of the new school policy allowing students to use personal mobile devices in school. Another cause is the addition of classroom sets of laptops. The English Department, my library’s heaviest user for whole-class instruction, has two classrooms outfitted with laptops, and the PE/Health Department has one set of laptops. Slowly, I saw a change in the classes scheduling time in the school library and labs. Instead of instructors scheduling lab time in the library for classes needing assistance or instruction with digital resources, teachers wanted to bring classes in need of word processing practice or experience with skill-and-drill assignments.

Even though some classes still needed instruction on research databases or digital presentation tools, many of the classes didn’t need to come to the library because they were using classroom laptops. Quickly, I reached out to teachers in the laptop classrooms and offered my assistance. I even offered to come to the classroom to lead lessons I had taught previously in the school library. Some teachers accepted my offer immediately; others said “thanks” but felt they could handle things on their own. So, I continued to instruct in the library...
and occasionally left the library to teach lessons in classrooms. These classroom lessons were a great opportunity to show students how to access online library resources from remote locations. For many students this practical application ignited the realization that they could use library resources from home.

What started out as an informal invitation to a few teachers is now a fully supported library service. The library has created a menu of services outlining our resources and instructional services. The menu includes “dining-in” and “take-out” options so teachers can easily request support. The “take-out” program, “LMC 2-Go,” was officially launched in the fall of 2012. On the evening of parent–teacher conferences each department office received a small restaurant-style take-home box filled with candy, gum, and mints. Attached to the take-out box of treats was a QR code that linked to a video describing the LMC 2-Go program. As part of LMC 2-Go during the 2012–2013 school year, school librarians were on the loose, teaching in classrooms over 150 times. To see the LMC 2-Go video, scan the QR code that accompanies this article.

In addition to LMC 2-Go services, the biggest break out of the library walls has been team teaching in a classroom for an entire year. Many school administrators focus on assessment. As a librarian, I always struggled with assessing student growth in information-literacy skills. I experimented with exit slips and surveys but my results tended to be subjective rather than objective. I decided to spend a year team teaching in an English class to see what impact my experiment might have on student learning. First, I pitched the idea to an English teacher with whom I had a strong working relationship. Then we took the idea to the English Department chair. With the blessing of the English chair, we proposed the idea to the assistant principal for curriculum and instruction. Everyone was excited about the project and offered support as needed. The English teacher and I met regularly to discuss curriculum and plan lessons. The classroom teacher led most lessons, but I took the lead for independent-reading units, research projects, and lessons on digital citizenship. I assisted in grading and participated in both curriculum night and parent–teacher conferences.

To assess students’ information literacy skills, I decided to use the Tool for Real-Time Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (TRAILS), developed by Kent State University (see <www.trails-9.org>). TRAILS assesses five core areas: developing a topic; identifying potential sources; developing, using, and revising search strategies; evaluating sources and information; and recognizing how to use information responsibly, ethically, and legally. The classroom teacher and I administered both a pretest in August and posttest in May/June. As a class, the students demonstrated growth in three areas: developing a topic, identifying potential sources, and recognizing how to use information. Additionally, my time in the classroom gave me a new understanding of the English curriculum, and I was better equipped to assist other teachers when they brought classes to the library for short-term projects.

Overall, my year in the classroom proved to be beneficial for the students and my entire library program. I’ve decided to spend this year team teaching with the same teacher; instead of using TRAILS, we are developing our own assessment that will be aligned with our school’s curriculum. In addition, another certified school librarian in my school is team teaching with a health teacher. The four of us spent a few hours this past summer discussing successes and challenges of team teaching and strategies for assessing students’ information-literacy and technology skills. We remain excited by the possibilities of both collaborative projects. Because this is my second year with the same teacher I have a better handle on how to objectively assess student growth. For the health teacher and other librarian, this school year is an opportunity for the library to reach beyond
English and reading to demonstrate the importance of information-literacy skills in other areas of the curriculum and in life.

Although I didn’t know it when I started my first year in the classroom, this type of collaborative teaching by classroom teachers and librarians is often found in universities. “Embedded librarians,” as Barbara Dewey (2004) first called them, are an integral part of many successful academic departments and, more recently, are also coteachers for online classes. Embedded librarianship is one way for library programs to be an integral part of a school’s learning environment and not just a space for teachers to bring their classes. “Embedding librarians should be seen as a strategy for strengthening and refocusing the library’s presence within an organization and demonstrating librarians’ added value” (Riccio 2012). For my high school, embedding librarians in the classroom not only strengthened the library program but also enhanced curriculum building because librarian and classroom team teachers aligned their curriculum to Common Core State Standards, AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, and International Society for Technology in Education’s NETS-S Technology standards.

Make Change Work for You

Change is difficult, so start small and seek out willing partners. Literacy is fundamental to learning and growth, and, because of that centrality of literacy, a school library must be a vital and vibrant part of the greater school community. Break down virtual walls by using the Web and social media to promote programs and services. Break down physical walls by taking carts of books to classrooms.

Ellen Lawrence

Ellen Lawrence is an advocate for information literacy and technology. Her district library program was named AASL’s 2012 National School Library Program of the Year. As one of two library directors in the district, Ellen focuses on ways to support student and teacher performance across the curriculum. She has presented at local and national conferences on topics including information literacy, technology, and professional development. She has a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, a master’s degree in instructional technology, a second master’s degree in educational administration, and started a doctoral program in January 2014.

Little steps build relationships. Offer to help teachers evaluate students’ bibliographies for research projects. Using the sharing feature built into resources such as EasyBib and NoodleTools makes it easy (and paperless) for librarians to see and comment on sources cited by students. After facilitating a booktalk for a class project using literature circles, ask the classroom teacher if you can be part of the classroom book discussions. Let students and teachers know you are willing and able to assist, even if that aid requires leaving the library.

When students at our school use the library, I hope they are not only frequent visitors to the library’s concrete location but are also regular visitors to its virtual location on the Web. I want them to visit the physical library to check out print materials and for personal assistance, but I hope they think of our library as a resource available anytime anywhere. Administrators know the impact our school library program has on students because administrators see evidence of the library program throughout the building and hear students and staff talk about library programs.

Collaborating with teachers is part of our library’s mission statement, and librarians are often invited to classrooms. Parents are partners in the library program as well. The school library is open for eighth-grade information night, open house, and parent–teacher conferences.

Every school is different. Each teacher and student has different needs. Let your library be the tool that supports learning—no matter what the location or need.

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QR CODES
TAKING COLLECTIONS FURTHER

Caitlin Ahearn
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With some thought and direction, QR (quick response) codes are a great tool to use in school libraries to enhance access to information. From March through April 2013 I interned at Sanborn Regional High School (SRHS) under the supervision of Pam Harland. As a result of her un-Deweying of the nonfiction collection at SRHS, I discovered that QR codes provide an excellent opportunity for librarians to create new pathways for information access. In this article, I explain the method by which Pam and I integrated QR codes into the SRHS collection and offer suggestions on ways you can use QR codes to enhance access in your library.

**Why QR Codes?**

When I began my internship in March 2013 at SRHS, Pam and her assistant, Jackie Fenderson, were in the midst of un-Deweying the SRHS nonfiction collection. By the end of March, through lots of work hours and decision making, we completed the un-Deweying. As a result of Pam’s planning, when the project was completed the nonfiction collection had twenty-three individual sections, ranging from course-specific topics, such as “American History” and “Shakespeare,” to popular subjects, such as “Cookbooks,” “Music,” and “Graphic Novels.” It was a great feeling to accomplish such an overhaul of the collection. I remember thinking how relevant and connected the collection really was to the students’ curriculum and their daily lives. The collection was suddenly organized in ways that learners perceived as logical and with words that they use, rather than ways and words librarians use. For example, geography books are now gathered together in one area and are alphabetized by country name, rather than organized by geographic location. The process appeared to be complete, and the thought hadn’t really occurred to me that there was much more to do.

However, that evening I read about 1:1 iPad programs and saw a brief mention of one librarian who used QR codes for a scavenger hunt through her library. I quickly realized QR codes can be used to connect students to virtual resources, such as LibGuides and the library website. I thought about the new cataloging system at Sanborn and how I could use QR codes to incorporate SRHS online resources, such as LibGuides or Jackie’s reading recommendations blog. So, though I had left school that afternoon thinking that we had reached a significant goal and truly aligned the collection with students’ needs and wants, I went to sleep knowing that un-Deweying wasn’t the finish line—it was just a beginning.

**How?**

The next morning, I arrived to school early and approached Pam immediately with the idea. She instantly jumped on it and told me to get to work. My first step was to brainstorm a list of all of the possible virtual resources for which to create QR codes. The list included the library catalog, Jackie’s reading blog, and numerous LibGuides that Pam has been creating, updating, and using in recent years. After listing possible contenders for code creation, I matched them with corresponding sections of the library. For example, a code to the library catalog would be affixed in spots throughout the library, but a code to Jackie’s blog best fits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
<th>QR CODE LOCATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Newsstand</td>
<td>atop periodical shelves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library Catalog</td>
<td>atop fiction and nonfiction shelves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fenderson’s Fabulous Reads (Jackie’s blog)</td>
<td>atop fiction shelves</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960s LibGuide</td>
<td>affixed to the shelf of 1960s books</td>
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<td>American History Databases</td>
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<td>American History LibGuide</td>
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<td>French Revolution LibGuide</td>
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<td>History of Rock and Roll LibGuide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resume Writing LibGuide</td>
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<td>Screenwriting LibGuide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakespeare LibGuides: HAMLET LibGuide and MACBETH LibGuide</td>
<td>affixed to the shelf of Shakespeare books</td>
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Table 1. Resources linked to QR codes posted in the library.
in the fiction section. After this process, I developed a strong list of fourteen codes and where to post them around the school library (see table 1).

I began my QR code journey with the Online Newsstand for several reasons. Students at Sanborn read magazines and newspapers daily, but I suspected the majority were unaware they had digital access to more than seventy publications. However, I began with the Newsstand primarily because I hoped that it would generate excitement and curiosity in students, which would get them intrigued about future codes.

Plenty of QR code generators are available online; Pam suggested I use goo.gl because, in addition to generating a shortened URL and a QR code, goo.gl supports tracking statistics. Using goo.gl, I shortened the URL for the Online Newsstand and then accessed the QR code by viewing the details for the newly shortened URL. From there, I copied the code into a file for a sign that I created to inform library users about the Newsstand. After printing the signs, I placed them on top of the magazine and newspaper shelves (see figure 1).

Throughout the first day, to determine students’ level of interest, I talked up the Online Newsstand and the code. Most students were unaware that the Online Newsstand existed, and many were thrilled that the library had QR codes. Others were excited about the Online Newsstand, but they had no idea what a QR code is or how they are helpful. This was a really important finding; my mission became not only to introduce codes into the library, but also to introduce students to the power behind QR codes.

This realization clued me into the second QR code I should post. Instead of generating another code that linked to a library resource, I determined that my next sign should be about QR codes in general and how to scan them. The sign included a brief explanation of QR codes and two recommendations for QR code scanners, one for Android devices and another for Apple products. I also included a code to the library’s website so that students could immediately test the QR code scanner app that they had downloaded (see figure 2). I placed these signs on tables around the library. These signs were a huge hit. Students typically gather in the library before and after school, and within the first two days of putting up these signs, I observed many students reading the signs, grabbing their devices, and scanning the code. What a feeling of success!

From there, I continued creating codes for the other library resources in my original list. I printed these on labels that could easily be affixed to library shelves, directly next to the corresponding un-Dewey labels that Pam and her assistant Jackie had affixed around the library to identify the library’s new sections. By the end of the week, I had instances of fifteen different QR codes posted throughout the library. The 1960s code was created and...
When creating signage and shelf labels, I found that less information really is more in this case. At first, I gave students a plethora of historical information about the codes themselves. Pam reminded me to stay on point and be direct with the signs and shelf labels. The objective of the signs was not to inform students about what these codes were used for in the past, but rather to tell and show them how they are used today. She advised that if students have questions about the codes, they’ll often ask or investigate these questions on their own. And, it turns out, she was right; students asked many questions about QR codes. Instead of overloading signage with too much information, I recommend sticking to the point, which in this case is to increase information access.

To review, these are the steps I used to create the QR code:

1. I logged into my Google account.
2. I accessed goo.gl in a separate browser tab.
3. In another tab, I copied the whole URL for the Online Newsstand.
4. I pasted the URL into the goo.gl URL shortening bar and shortened the URL.
5. On the goo.gl page I clicked “Details” under the new, shorter URL that was displayed to the right of the field where I had entered the Online Newsstand URL.
6. I right-clicked on the QR code, copied it, and pasted it into the document I had created for the sign/shelf label (see figure 3). QR codes can be resized. However, after formatting the label or sign, be sure to test the code to ensure that, in the process of resizing, you didn’t accidentally crop the code and, thereby, invalidate it.

So What?
Connecting our students directly to LibGuides and other library resources via QR codes gives learners direct access to these resources at the same time they are searching for print resources. Students are using mobile devices at ever-rising rates, and they are using them in our libraries and schools. It is our duty as school librarians to support learners’ needs and the ways they meet these needs. Now, more than ever before, students have tools to access authoritative information in electronic forms. Learners are accustomed to using various devices, including laptops, tablets, Kindles, and smartphones. It isn’t for us to decide how they access information; we just need to support students’ choices, for if we don’t, we risk losing those students who feel the school librarian doesn’t care about their needs. QR codes are a simple, yet meaningful, way in which we can increase our students’ access to library resources. QR codes offer us just one more way to meet the information needs of today’s tech-savvy, device-toting users (see figure 4).
By means of QR codes, students can be linked to traditional resources, such as assignment information, the library catalog, electronic databases, websites, and to 21st-century resources, such as the Online Newsstand, e-books, YouTube videos, and Twitter feeds. The possible applications of QR codes are endless—they can be generated to connect users with curated quick reference sources, an interlibrary loan request form, the library website, and author blogs, as well as to promote library events and new resources and formats.

As students find and navigate these resources, they will become more literate and more experienced in determining the appropriate resources for their specific information needs. For example, students looking for the most current information about SRHS, they may consult the school newspaper, which is only in print, or the principal’s blog. The more adept our students become at deciphering exactly what they are looking for and in which medium they want the information, the more capable our students will be when searching for information after they leave our libraries. Thus, providing these QR codes is just one more way in which we can help our students enhance their transmedia skills.

**What’s Ahead?**

During this process, I realized that it’s important to remember that QR codes are just one way in which people, including our students, access information in today’s world. Using them in the library setting provides us, as school librarians, with a great opportunity to increase and enhance access to our virtual spaces. That being said, in the near future further technological advancements and additional tools will be available, and we have to be willing to adjust our programs and adapt our libraries.

The ultimate goal is to expose our students to the vast number of resources available and to teach them the process of selecting the appropriate resources and media for their information needs. Therefore, I recognize that, while QR codes provide us the ability to connect our physical resources to our virtual ones today, these codes won’t always be the best way to connect our resources to our patrons in the future. We’ll continue to find the best ways to equip our students with the inquiry and transliteracy skills they will need to be lifelong learners.

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press4Kids News-O-Matic

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On an infamous day in 2001, I was working as an elementary school librarian in Brooklyn, New York, providing instruction to twenty-nine second-grade students as the first tower of the World Trade Center was hit by American Airlines Flight 175. At that moment in history, memories froze in time, and life never quite resumed as normal for this country. As the day unfolded, questions were posed by students of all ages, and answers from teachers were not necessarily forthcoming. Days, weeks, and months later teachers and parents had tremendous difficulty answering the Five W’s of questioning: who, what, where, when, and why. In many households across the country, televisions were turned off completely, access to the Internet was regulated, and newspapers were censored and tossed in recycling bins by adults with the intent of protecting children from the barrage of news media images of this now infamous time.

Today’s current events are often frightening, overwhelming, of mature content, and difficult even for adults to comprehend. From national and world terrorism, to school shootings, local violence, inappropriate social media fiascos, and adult-centric content, the news often must be delivered with a warning about the sensitive nature of its subject matter. Nevertheless, students still need to understand the world they live in, and exposure to daily news coverage is a necessary part of the Common Core learning.

Because of the recent shifts to the Common Core State Standards, students strive for college and career readiness by mastering skills that embrace critical thinking, formulating opinions, understanding point of view, and synthesizing information. In a Common Core environment, it is imperative for students to develop the skills necessary to closely read and navigate text of increasing complexity. Students are charged with applying these skills to be successful in their college studies and careers, as well as to be active members of a democratic society. To this end, some teachers filter the news by summarizing articles and providing snapshots of what they deem as significant daily events. This practice is clearly dependent on teachers’ time and ability to censor and adapt content for students. Other instructors provide weekly or monthly subscriptions to news publications written specifically for children such as Time for Kids, Scholastic News, or Weekly Reader. Although these publications are well-written and important, they tend to provide mostly in-depth

The online news app tackles current events in an engaging, innovative, and age-appropriate fashion that fosters development of 21st-century technology skills and provides the guidance, support, and vetting teachers and parents need.
Topical stories and lack daily news coverage. In what way can educators and parents provide young school-aged children with access—in an age-appropriate manner—to news media and current events, and help them understand complex issues?

The solution: News-O-Matic. This daily electronic newspaper just for kids provides age-appropriate news stories for children seven to eleven years old. Developed by Press4Kids, News-O-Matic is an app that founder Lillian Holtzclaw Stern describes as “what is current; what you and I are reading in the newspaper” (2013). All articles are written in kid-friendly language and are vetted by both an educator and a child psychologist. The online news app tackles current events in an engaging, innovative, and age-appropriate fashion that fosters development of 21st-century technology skills and provides the guidance, support, and vetting that teachers and parents need to discuss and examine current events with children.

Originally designed for parents as a daily online news application, News-O-Matic has successfully entered the realm of education and the school environment. Although the initial vision of News-O-Matic was intended as a source for parents to read the news with their school-aged children, the company was solicited by educators around the country who requested a school product line. News-O-Matic provides a resource that enables kids to read current news independently in an innocuous environment and learn what is happening in the world around them by reading factual information written in terminology children can understand and relate to. In contrast to a traditional online news website, the app environment protects children from accessing external links and is 100 percent advertisement-free. The school edition provides teachers with added benefits, including educational supports such as reading levels, lesson plans, Common Core alignment, discussion questions and answers, and a Daily Teacher’s Guide. The Daily Teacher’s Guide provides Lexile levels for each story, as well as the applicable Common Core State Standards, story objectives, and assessment and discussion questions. Additionally, graphic organizers and student worksheets can be accessed by educators.

News-O-Matic delivers five news stories daily, Monday through Friday. Each news story is written in an engaging manner for kids; comprehension aids are integrated within the text: hyperlinked vocabulary words, captioned photographs, supplementary facts, and suggested “acts” or activities that encourage kids to get involved in their community, as well as to respond, react, and rate the articles. Ratings include “awesome” with two thumbs up, “okay” with one thumb up, and “it stinks” with a thumb down.

An interactive map coordinates with the reader’s GPS location to provide geographical context for students so they can visualize how far away the event is (in miles and kilometers) from their current locale, how long driving to the event site would require, and how many physical book lengths away the location is.

Included in each story are also fun facts corresponding to the geographical location of the news story. Additionally, brief videos are integrated in the stories to provide a genuine multimedia experience for learners. With each daily issue, games are accessible to complement the news media and engage readers in the News-O-Matic environment. Readers are encouraged to send the writers and editors responses to news stories. For budding artists or students who prefer responding through illustrations, an integrated art palate encourages kids to draw responses for submission.

News-O-Matic was honored on AASL’s 2013 inaugural list of Best Apps for Teaching and Learning <www.al.org/aasl/bestwebsites>. Common Sense Media declared News-O-Matic as “one of the best news sources for kids” (2013). Currently available on iTunes as an individual app subscription or a school edition available through the Volume Purchasing Plan (VPP), the hot-off-the-presses Press4Kids News-O-Matic app is a valuable resource for kids learning to understand newsworthy daily events.

Melissa Jacobs Israel is a coordinator in New York City’s Department of Education Office of Library Services. In that role, she provides support services to school librarians throughout New York City. She is also the current chair of AASL’s Best Apps for Teaching and Learning Committee and current president-elect of the School Library Systems Association of New York State and was recently selected as a Community Representative for the Digital Public Library of America. Melissa has been published in School Library Journal, Teacher Librarian, School Librarian’s Workshop, and Knowledge Quest. She is a frequent presenter at conferences for local and national organizations, including ALA and AASL. She’s available on Twitter @missyji.

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I didn’t purposely set out to write history lessons, but I do know that an important event in history is like a stone dropped in a pond. Its ever-widening ripples have the power to stir up nations, communities, and families.

I didn’t intend to write historical fiction when I first set out to write a book for young readers. My hope was to portray the growing pains of two thirteen-year-old girls over the course of one summer.

Forty years have gone by since my first attempt! Painting the Rainbow is still a story about friendship, but it is also about how world events and social trends affect us, not only the ones we are living through but also those that have occurred in the past.

Like most people, I had my own growing pains to draw upon. When I was eleven, my family moved to Brazil. When I returned to the United States two years later, my friends had changed, and so had I. As a writer for young adults and middle-grade readers, I’ve turned again and again to diaries I kept in the 1960s when I was a teenager. They are embarrassing to read now with all the exclamation points and boys’ names scrawled all over the place, but they offer a wealth of details.

"I woke up way too early today," I wrote in August 1965. "The workmen came and were banging away at our poor old kitchen. I hate the changes we are making. Mom and Dad don’t understand, maybe because they didn’t grow up in this house. I guess I’m clinging to how everything was before Brazil, and I still had all my friends here."

As a teacher of middle-school kids, I also have had ample opportunity to witness the moment in a friendship when one or both kids realize they are no longer the same. The aftermath brings mourning, jealousy, and resentment. It seems as if the twin tasks of growing up—becoming self-aware and aware of others—are at odds with each other. Young people hope so much to be special in some way but fear that if they’re too special, they won’t fit in.

But why did I choose to set Painting the Rainbow in the 1960s?

It was a time I knew well, of course, but I also wanted to show how the 1960s made a perfect backdrop for a story about upheavals in relationships. During those years the United States seemed to be going through its own adolescence. The civil rights movement and the Vietnam War pushed society, tested families, challenged institutions.
"I stayed up all night reading Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin," I wrote in my diary in June 1965. "It's about this guy who changed his skin color so he looked like a Negro, and then he went to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. It's so awful how people are treated, and I can't get it out of my head."

I was also trying to make sense of the bitter arguments that were erupting all around me. I also wrote in 1965, "This Vietnam business—I think all wars must be hopeless. But if I disagree with the idea of war, does that mean I'm not loyal to my country?"

I wanted to bring the climate of the times into the story, but I was also driven to add one more layer to the book. When I was growing up my elders sometimes made hateful remarks about the Japanese. At the time I didn't understand why they would say such things. My need to understand this prejudice actually helped me create the plot of my novel.
In Painting the Rainbow the older generation refuses to talk about an uncle who died during World War II. This family secret causes problems for the younger generation, but, for a long time, I myself, the author, didn’t exactly know what had happened to him. Solving the mystery brought me to some unexpected places. Most rewarding, I came across the true story of a young Japanese man who was attending a college in the United States when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I went to the archives of the college to read the diary he’d kept during that time and learned what his feelings were as he was caught up in this traumatic event. His life inspired my fictional character Kiyoshi, who is the trigger for the family drama that unfolds in the course of the novel.

It has been a long journey since I first set out to write my book. From the very beginning I had my two girl characters: Holly, who is a bit of a showoff and is boy-crazy, and Ivy, who is shy and musically gifted. But initially, Holly was the sole narrator of the story. Over time it seemed important to make Ivy equally sympathetic. She was so quiet, though, I didn’t know how to make her character shine through. The solution seems so obvious now: I gave her a diary, and she gained a voice. Another diary! And the more I included historical events in the story, the more grounded and real my characters became. The tale also became more textured and interesting as I allowed differing points of view to emerge.

In the end, Painting the Rainbow became just that—a book about respecting different points of view, a book made possible by the characters’ learning to understand their own family histories within the broader context of world history.

As I said, I didn’t purposely set out to write history lessons, but I do know that an important event in history is like a stone dropped in a pond. Its ever-widening ripples have the power to stir up nations, communities, and families. These ripples can even travel through time, down through many generations. But just as powerfully, individuals can stand in a pond and drop stones, too. I hope that the greater our understanding of the past, the more effectively we can serve the present and, therefore, the future—all those kids who haven’t been born yet—by sending out ripples that help rather than harm.

Amy Gordon was born in Boston, Massachusetts, spent several years growing up in France and in London, England, and moved back to New England when she turned six. After graduating with a BA in language arts and literature from Bard College, Amy found a career in teaching and taught drama to sixth- through ninth-grade students for almost thirty years. She now runs writing workshops and an after-school drama program. Her books are favorites of young readers and have been named to numerous child-voted state-award master lists, including those in Georgia, Missouri, Kansas, and Texas. Her most recent novels for middle-graders are Painting the Rainbow (Holiday House 2014), The Shadow Collector’s Apprentice (Holiday House 2012), and Twenty Gold Falcons (Holiday House 2010). She lives in Gill, Massachusetts. For more about this author, visit her website at <www.amygordon.com>. For educators guides for Amy’s books, visit <www.holidayhouse.com>.
Defining Characteristics of Successful Learning Commons

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Introduction

If you knew about Google in the year 2000, you were one of its first users. By 2005 your students were beginning to Google around your library webpages. New tech tools were appearing daily, and Google Apps for Education was launched. That year at a school administrators’ conference in San Diego, a common comment circulated that we would no longer need school librarians in California.

What did all this mean? Do you remember the first time you saw a Google document in which multiple writers could write simultaneously on the same piece of virtual paper? This was not evolution; this was a revolution. By 2007 it had become clear that school libraries were in trouble. Even with the professional research of Keith Curry Lance, which claimed benefits in state after state, holding on to school libraries’ and school librarians’ time-honored roles in education was in jeopardy.

That year, the authors teamed up to rethink the role of the school library from the ground up. We had to question and rethink everything in the face of an exploding information environment: the appearance of the iPhone, the proliferation of laptop computers, and the advent of the iPad. Thus, we published the first book about school learning commons in November of 2008 and in December attended the dedication of a high school learning commons under the direction of Valerie Diggs at Chelmsford (MA) High School.

Now, six years later, much has happened as school librarians faced the explosion of information and technology, tried to learn what this revolution was all about, and, more importantly, claim a place in this challenging new world. Many recognized the inevitable changes that were needed. Others tried to hold on to their traditional role. And now, we find many across North America and Australia rising to meet the challenge.

We are not the only profession or entity having to reinvent itself. Manufacturing, medicine, pharmaceuticals, and the automobile industry are just a few examples. At the same time, we saw our customer base reinventing itself. Children and teens were becoming addicted to social networking. What we began to notice was that if they did not like a tech tool, they could switch—by the millions—to a new one overnight. Whether we recognized it or not, we were being placed in a position of competing or getting out of the way.

Why the name “learning commons”?

It became clear that the focus of the transformed traditional library should be on learning in its many manifestations, whether formal or informal, and the word “commons” could reflect a shift from a top–down organizational structure to the flat networked world where the clients, both teachers and students, consider themselves to be in command of knowledge building (see figure 1). Then as we confronted the future, would there still be a need for a physical space in the school known as the learning commons? Would it be only a virtual space? We

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opted for both, led by a very different kind of professional.

Evidence of school library transformations has energized our journey. In 2010 the Ontario School Library Association, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Education, published "Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons" <www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/677_OLATogetherforLearning.pdf>. In 2013 Achieve, an organization building Common Core materials in the U.S., published "Implementing the Common Core State Standards: The Role of the School Librarian Action Brief" <www.achieve.org/files/CCSSLibrariansBrief-FINAL.pdf>. Using the essence of these two documents, knowledge gained from grassroots experiences, and our own three books (see list of recommended resources), we would like to outline the role, the characteristics, and the indicators of a reinvented school library climbing to excellence.

Reflect with us and other futurists you know about the winds of change, the red flags, the realities, and, best of all, the possibilities. In this article, we trace the concept of one major proposal: the learning commons.

For a few years now, we have been travelling along on the journey from school library and computer lab to a school-wide learning commons. During that time many exciting transformations yielded both challenges and rewards. It’s time to take stock of where we have been and reflect on where we want to go! The responsive nature of this approach to excellence in teaching and learning means that the journey will never end; but it is continuously morphing to address the current and future needs of learners and schools. As our world continues to spin out new ways of working, playing, and learning together, one thing we can count on is the learning commons.

### Changing Environments

Our interpretation of the world of information and technology now—compared to how it used to be—affects the kind of environment we need to construct for the young people we mentor. If we are about preparing young people to compete in the current and future world, then the cocoon we call schooling must take a different approach than the cocoon of yesteryear. Children and teens know little of top-down edited information as they experience Wikipedia. They assume the availability of instantaneous information because of their cell phones and smartphones. They are experts at social interaction but might not know their next-door neighbors. They expect to be connected on any device, anywhere, and any time. They think that they can get rich by putting their music, writing, or inventions out for the world as they see other young people becoming billionaires. If young people can’t find an app they like, they invent one. They ask Siri for phone numbers and directions. From their perspective, everything worth knowing, doing, or consuming is at their fingertips—and we expect to appeal to this crowd with a traditional library? Well, we can be like the smart techies rolling out "safe" iPads in Los Angeles only to find out that protection schemes are outsmarted the first day. Perhaps we could rethink the role of the cocoon, not as a skin totally protective from the cold cruel world out there, but rather as an environment of mentored experimentation as the pupa prepares to survive and thrive.

Thus, we have proposed that the learning commons serve a unique purpose in the school as a bridge between educational philosophy being practiced and the real world. As such, the learning commons serves school curriculum but also is known as a place for experimenting, playing, making, doing, thinking, collaborating, and growing. For example, it may be the only place...
in the school where the networks are open; it may be the place where clients are experimenting with the latest 3-D printer; it may be the virtual hub of school activities. Although the learning commons will look and feel different in every school, it must be the center of inquiry, digital citizenship, project-based learning, collaborative intelligence, advanced literacy, as well as the center of creating, performing, and sharing. It will sometimes take on a role as "third space," neither home nor school. It is the place young people love—their space.

We as librarians have a history of helping kids and teens reach out. We have done it despite policies that thwart intellectual freedom. Now, we open the world. However, we must take a fresh look at both our physical and virtual spaces. When learners enter the school library learning commons, what do they see first? Rows and rows of bookshelves? A single controlled teaching area? Signage listing "don'ts"? A couple of couches within easy sight of the massive checkout desk? A story rug with a rocking chair? Is the space all about control? Is the website just a one-way stream of information?

Ideally, not. Thus, characteristic 1 of a learning commons:

A collaborative physical and virtual environment that invites and ignites participatory learning

We will start the list. You add to it:

• Ownership is replaced by "Access To."
• Single teaching spaces are replaced by multiple and flexible learning spaces.
• Quiet is replaced by varying noise and activity levels.
• A few tired-looking presentation artifacts have been replaced by a plethora of high- and low-tech productions.

By making deliberate space conversions, both physical and virtual, what are the behaviors we are encouraging?

• Collaborating, participating, helping?
• Authentic and engaging inquiry and knowledge building?
• Playing, creating, tinkering, building, making?
• Demonstrating respect in both physical and digital space?
• Experimenting, sharing, performing?
• Producing, doing, constructing?
• Connecting, accessing, self-monitoring?

If the physical and virtual environments are not stimulating the expected responses, then we modify, rethink, redesign, and rework until they do. It has become obvious that much of the world’s technology, organizations and now governments must be in a constant state of perpetual beta. This reality means that flexibility allows continuous change as the needs of the clients change. Perhaps a few examples we have witnessed personally in actual visits to learning commons and through the reading of numerous transformation experiences in Teacher Librarian will provide context.

• Tour guides in the new learning commons who can’t stop talking about the exciting projects that they are doing in this new space
• The sophomore in high school who invented a $1,500 centrifuge that does as well as the $15,000 commercial model
• The iTeam of the learning commons, seventy-five strong, who make the place hum and who are tech mentors across the entire school
• A small group of students creating a documentary film in an alcove
• The middle-schooler who single-handedly organized and led adults and fellow students in the creation of a graphic-novel alcove
• Young people streaming into the learning commons, picking up tablet computing devices, and going right to work as a normal occurrence
• Kids writing on a giant whiteboard wall in the learning commons about their suggestions for stopping bullying in the school

• At least seventy-five high-schoolers sitting on a giant staircase in the learning commons during lunch working individually and in small groups on their projects while they eat

• Several hundred teens sitting on the brand new learning commons rug from which chairs and tables have been removed so students can watch performances by their peers, performances ranging from music to drama to poetry slams

• The head of the English Department who sits in the learning commons during his planning period because he wants to be where the action is and where he can help his students

• The place where exhibits by students and faculty change regularly

• The virtual learning commons in a Spanish-immersion school where kids contribute regularly in both Spanish and English

• A student tech team who tests all the new technology coming into the building and has the ear of the tech gurus when tech issues are to be resolved immediately

• A fairly large learning commons where at least twenty different activities are happening simultaneously almost any hour of the day—and at night in the virtual learning commons space

• A single student engrossed in her book oblivious to everything going on around her

• A senior seminar where teacher and librarian are consulting with students working on their final projects in the learning commons conference workspace

• Elementary children working on projects during their “assigned” learning commons time as the adults mentor a different group in an adjoining space

• An elementary student who is organizing a digital book club in advance of a blockbuster film coming to town

• Elementary and middle school students across several schools in the district competing on Minecraft for the most sophisticated structures

• Students engaged in a virtual learning experience with students in Asia, Africa, and Australia

• A middle-schooler who is president of the science fiction virtual book club that spans other schools across the community

• Preparations by students and adults for entries they will show at the community Maker Faire in the public library this weekend

• A fifth-grade student doing a health project and tinkering with software she found on the Web but is modifying to interface with the 3-D printer

• A principal doing a walkthrough and interviewing students about the projects they are working on

Thus, characteristic 2:

A responsive dynamic that is invested in school-wide improvement through an evidence-based process of design, modify, rethink, redesign, and rework.

Learning Commons Response to Ever-Changing Environments through Personal Expertise and Leadership

The number one factor in converting a library into a learning commons is the strength and vision of the professional doing the transition. This circumstance has been true no matter whether the person has come through the traditional library education credentialing or a different preparation. This is no new discovery because we have always known that a quality professional makes all the difference. Changing the name of the
space does not miraculously make the difference.

One major problem in the profession has been the low number of professional staff in the library. Both in academic libraries and in the K–12 arena, we are beginning to see a reaching out to other specialized professionals in the organization. Thus, the professional staff of the learning commons might include not only a lead school librarian, but also a reading specialist, a technology-integration specialist, a curriculum specialist, a student-success professional, and perhaps even a counselor. Why? Most of the specialists in the school have a mission very similar to that of the school librarian. That is, these experts are trying to reach every teacher in the building to embed their specialty into each teacher’s classroom. By joining the staff of the learning commons, these professionals team in ways that break down the isolation of the classroom. The mission of the learning commons expands, and the physical and virtual learning commons thrives from a diverse set of professional expertise. The learning commons becomes a one-stop shop for help and collegial collaboration across a number of fronts. To administrators, here is a united cadre on board to make a difference in the entire school’s push toward excellence.

Our observations of professionals who are developing a vibrant learning commons provide some indicators of success:

• The teacher librarians are gutsy risk takers, disruptive thinkers, change agents with a vision.
• These leaders are masters not just of traditional materials; they also keep up with the technology and lead the push to harness the power of technology to improve teaching and learning.
• They keep up with the trends not just in libraryland but also have their personal learning network tentacles out across education and beyond. They watch the research in a wide variety of fields to have a vision that is broad rather than siloed.
• They attend a range of conferences either virtually or in person as they continue their own professional learning.
• They constantly think about and re-think where they are, where they want to be, and how they are going to get there. We have met scroungers, political giants, charmers, go-getters, and folks who step out, act, and ask forgiveness later.
• In one state, we have seen two giants, with totally different personalities, make major differences: one through dazzling technology, the other by just loving her inner-city kids into college and careers.
• The principal either “turns the school librarian loose” or marches alongside as they lead the change.
• At the district level, a great library supervisor links arms with a great education-oriented technology director. These two make each other look good as they push the building-level folks, support them, inspire them, and just keep saying “yes, yes, and yes.”

So, it does not seem to be a one-size-fits-all leadership team that creates a learning commons transformation. However, we have noticed that few take “no” for an answer, and when they are beaten down by organizational chaos or bureaucracy, they seem to get up and fight on to succeed in spite of the barriers.

Thus, learning commons characteristic 3:

Professionals who can successfully lead out front, or lead from the middle, or push from behind are great candidates to head a learning commons.
Participatory Learning Community

In the learning commons everyone is an active participant in knowledge building and learning to learn. Both teachers and students are engaged in building their own personal expertise and contributing to the growth of others. The resulting synergy is conducive to driving whole-school improvement that sticks.

This active community of learners revolves around participatory work in four major areas to position the learning commons as the:

- Center of Knowledge Building
  - Inquiry experiences that build personal expertise, cooperative group work, and collaborative intelligence
  - Use of best resources, technologies, spaces, and instructional strategies
  - Participatory learning environments such as Knowledge Building Centers
- Center of Literacies
  - Cross-curricular experiences to support traditional reading, writing, listening, and speaking
  - Motivational strategies to foster reading dispositions and lifelong reading habits
  - Instruction designs that develop multimodal learning literacies and transliteracy
- Center of School Culture
  - Student-driven events, projects, clubs, and celebrations in both physical and virtual learning commons spaces
  - Showcase of school-wide learning
  - Global networking with other learners
- Center of Experimentation
  - Professional learning and teacher research
  - Testing of new strategies and technologies by students and teachers
  - Participatory play, creation, and building such as in a makerspace

From Theory to Practice

Pedagogically, a number of creative ideas are evolving in education as techniques for stimulating high-quality teaching and learning: understanding by design, personalized learning, the flipped classroom, connected learning, guided inquiry, project-based learning, mastery, blended learning, and more to come. In an environment of multiple methods or a push one way and then another, what can a vibrant learning commons contribute?

We recommend that every school librarian have a repertoire of intervention strategies in a variety of teaching models that are popular in the school. We may have little to contribute in some of the models where prescriptive and direct teaching lock out the world of information and use just one technology, but when we see an opening, we can pounce on the opportunity. We term this either intervention or embedding of knowledge-building strategies into learning experiences as illustrated in figure 2.
For example, the teacher might have struggled because previous group projects were being done mostly by one member of the team with the rest of the team representing the classic slacker. Seeing this behavior, the school librarian could volunteer to join forces with the teacher to teach the kids about cooperation and collaborative group work. With the students, the teacher and librarian develop expectations for each team member, set up checkpoints, and watch for improvement indicators. After the project is over, the school librarian and teacher do a metacognitive Big Think with the students: What do we know about our topic? How did our groups work out? How could we do better the next time we do group projects? Before the next collaborative project, educators and participants review the results of the Big Think, reset expectations, and watch for and make progress. Such an intervention and resulting improvement in behavior would be something to document as a successful intervention.

Whatever our tactic, we are meshing what we know into an appropriate instructional design. The classroom teacher is attracted to. By doing so, we are saying that two heads are better than one and that working in tandem to apply the best strategies can create the kind of learning experiences that engage and succeed beyond our normal expectations. The focus is no longer a push toward minimums; it is freeing students to climb far beyond what they usually think possible. That potential for students’ growth is why we can guarantee that, if a classroom teacher works with us, the outcomes will be far superior to whatever the teacher could have done alone in the classroom. That track record of success is what we seek, the track record we can demonstrate, and the track record with which we can advocate.

This integration with learning experiences throughout the school is the work of the new school library professional we describe earlier in this article, the learning commons leader. Two new resources to support taking on this role were mentioned earlier.

- Ontario Library Association’s Together for Learning initiative <www.accessola.org/OLAWEB/OSLA/Together_for_Learning/Together_for_Learning.aspx?WebsiteKey=397368c8-7910-4dfe-807f-9eeb1068be31&hkey=844d0926-a451-4a8b-a004-413f8047cee5>, which now has a new Web presence that brings the document alive with examples and implementation ideas for schools
- “Implementing the Common Core State Standards: The Role of the School Librarian Action Brief” <www.achieve.org/files/CCSSLibrariansBrief-FINAL.pdf> is developed around the following practical recommended initiatives:

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2 Check out Ruben R. Puentedura’s blog <www.hippasus.com/rpueblog> for a list of his many presentations about pushing up learning through technology using his SAMR model.
Building reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills together across the curriculum.

Building appreciation of the best literature and informational materials together across the curriculum as a part of a literate culture.

Creating a school-wide participatory culture.

Building co-taught research projects in blended learning experiences.

Promoting interdisciplinary real-world problems, projects, and learning experiences that take advantage of rich information resources and useful technology tools.

Using technology to boost teaching and learning together.

Creating cultural experiences across the school, community, and the world.

Fostering creativity, innovation, play, building, and experimentation.

Assessing the results of collaborative learning experiences.

Managing the integration of classroom, school library learning commons, and technology tools.

Thus, characteristic 4:

Participatory learning through attention to excellent instructional design, using best resources and technologies, and building personal expertise and collaborative knowledge are the work of the learning commons.

In Summary

Many major leaders in education are exploring the changing realities for schools and recommending shifts in teaching to address new ways of learning in our networked world. We suggest that the school learning commons approach is a viable, holistic, and fully sustainable direction for schools. In this article we have championed the new learning commons lead teacher as a school librarian ready to lead with the partnership of other keen specialists and educators in the school. We have provided readers with observations, suggestions, and anecdotes from our own learning commons journey to date, as well as our synthesis based on alignment with our own research and that of other educational and business thinkers. We conclude that at this time the characteristics listed below are a must for success:

Climbing to Excellence—Defining Characteristics of a Successful Learning Commons:

• A collaborative physical and virtual environment that invites and ignites participatory learning

YOUR BIG THINK—SO WHAT? WHAT NEXT?

Perhaps this simple reflection will help you chart new approaches based on the defining characteristics we have trumpeted.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEARNING COMMONS CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>WHERE ARE YOU NOW?</th>
<th>WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?</th>
<th>HOW WILL YOU GET THERE?</th>
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<td>Collaborative Environments</td>
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• Professionals who can successfully lead out front, or lead from the middle, or push from behind are great candidates to head a learning commons.

• Participatory learning through attention to excellent instructional design, using best resources and technologies, and building personal expertise and collaborative knowledge are the work of the learning commons.

We expect that some of our readers may be new to the profession while others are well into the process of making the transition from school library to learning commons. Wherever you are on the continuum we urge you to begin documenting and sharing your stories as you transform learning environments and embrace participatory learning. Climbing to excellence via the learning commons is a journey worth embarking on and worth fighting for.

Recommended Resources

Books and Documents


Loertscher, David V., Carol Koechlin, and Esther Rosenfeld. 2012. The Virtual Learning Commons: Building a Participatory School Learning Community. Salt Lake City, UT: Learning Commons.


Articles

Loertscher, David V., and Elizabeth “Betty” Marcoux, editors. Teacher Librarian.

Since 2008, the editors have solicited and published many articles on the concept and development of the learning commons in the K–12 environment. Many of these were collected and published in the following collection. Others can be found by searching various databases and accessing the issues at: <www.teacherlibrarian.com>.


Instructional Partners in Digital Library Learning Spaces

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AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (2007) call on school librarians to provide students with opportunities to develop essential learning skills for the twenty-first century. These standards are addressed in the school librarian’s role as instructional partner. In this role, the school librarian collaborates with teachers to plan, develop, deliver, and assess instruction that infuses technology, inquiry, and information-literacy skills into the subject curriculum. For the most part, school librarians have a clear understanding of how to implement this role in the physical library space.

However, we still do not fully understand how to serve as an instructional partner in the digital library space. Digital library spaces come in many different forms. Virtual libraries, for example, have been a part of school library programs for quite some time. More recently, the flipped classroom movement was adapted for school library instruction. In this article, we differentiate between virtual and flipped library learning spaces and introduce a third digital library learning space: fully online course offerings.

Virtual Libraries

Virtual libraries commonly refer to digital collections and repositories that libraries offer to users. These are “multipage online resources devoted to the needs of their specific learning communities” (Valenza 2005, 54). Virtual libraries provide 24–7 access to a broad collection of resources including online databases, focused pathfinders, links to vetted Web resources, e-books, curated resources, as well as space for hosting student-created projects. Virtual libraries encourage student exploration and individualized searches. In contrast, flipped libraries are used to scaffold and guide exploration and research in preparation for class assignments.

Flipped Libraries

In the flipped classroom model, the teacher assigns instructional material for students to access outside of class. This material differs from assigned reading or website exploration. Instead, students view tutorial videos, listen to podcast or watch vidcast lectures, or access screencasts. Class time is then used to “work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning” (Roehl, Reddy, and Shannon 2013, 45).

As an instructional partner, the school librarian is in the best and strongest position to affect student learning.

The flipped library operates in much the same way. Accessing a library-created tutorial on available search tools and library databases, completing a webquest that helps to develop an inquiry plan, reviewing the steps for creating and safely operating a blog—all of these are activities students can complete at home so that when they are in the physical library, the face-to-face time is used for deep exploration, collaboration, and creation (Jones and Green 2012).

Fully Online Course Offerings

Online learning is defined as “education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet [and] does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component” (Int’l Assoc. for Online Learning 2011).

Online courses designed and developed by school librarians differ from flipped library or virtual library resources in that online courses are fully online learning experiences spanning multiple modules and weeks. Many are hosted in learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Google Sites. These courses contain readings, video and audio resources, discussion forums, spaces for uploading student work, and online grading features. Fully online courses developed by school librarians can address digital literacy, information literacy, and ethics, among many other topics (Lincoln 2009).

Which Roles?

When school librarians develop resources for the flipped library or virtual library space, they are operating under the roles of program administrator and information specialist. They are developing and curating resources for students and teachers. They do not become instructional partners until those resources are...
used collaboratively with students and teachers, often in the physical space of the library. When putting up resources, a librarian hopes that these will be accessed and used to promote collaborative library/classroom activities.

In contrast, when a school librarian plans, develops, and delivers an online course, he or she is an instructional partner and a teacher from the very beginning of the process to the very end.

As an instructional partner, the school librarian is in the best and strongest position to affect student learning. This is why we argue that it is important to include online courses as part of the digital library learning space.

Are We Ready?
Considering the growing popularity and expectation for digital library learning spaces, are we ready to fulfill our role as instructional partners within this framework? To explore these questions, we surveyed approximately one hundred librarians in two contrasting environments: a small rural county in South Georgia and a large urban school district in North Texas. We purposely selected these participants because we wanted to give a voice to school librarians in a variety of instructional, economic, legislative, and demographic areas. We ended up with a mixed and experienced cohort. Elementary librarians made up 64 percent of the survey respondents; secondary librarians made up 36 percent. Over 72 percent of those surveyed had more than ten years of experience as educators. The findings are described below.

Through collaborative projects, school librarians hope to impact student learning. In fact, 97 percent of the respondents listed an increase in student achievement as their primary motivation for collaborating. Despite the obvious importance the group placed on collaborative and instructional partnerships, their frustration at time as a barrier to collaboration came across clearly. One school librarian told us, "We are all short on time. Librarians are stretched thin in terms of manpower and..."
often get bogged down in their administrative and day-to-day clerical obligations that make them less available to be involved instructionally.”

We then asked if this group would consider digital learning spaces such as online courses as a way to collaborate. Out of the one hundred school librarians surveyed, 16 percent told us they had no experience with online learning. The majority of the group (80 percent) described their online experience as online graduate students or as participants in online professional development. Although a large portion of this group experienced online learning from the perspective of a student, we contend that this experience does not translate into preparation for teaching online.

The fact that more librarians in this survey were not involved in teaching online is not surprising given that 69 percent of the respondents said they had no formal preparation to do so.

The fact that more librarians in this survey were not involved in teaching online is not surprising given that 69 percent of the respondents said they had no formal preparation to do so. Terms formally associated with online learning, such as “course management system,” seemed unfamiliar to a large portion of the school librarians we surveyed. Although school librarians in our survey had little experience with formal online learning tools and services, they had extensive knowledge of Web 2.0 tools as shown in figure 1.

Online course design experts encourage online instructors to use Web 2.0 technologies to make course materials available outside of a formal course management system (CMS). Building online learning outside of a CMS moves the school librarian’s focus from administrative tasks to designing activities that are “collaborative, authentic opportunities for students to engage in meaningful experiences related to the curriculum” (Nelson, Christopher, and Mims 2009, 85). In other words, an expertise in systems such as Blackboard or Moodle is not necessary. When asked about access to free Web 2.0 online learning delivery options, 61 percent of school librarians surveyed identified Google Sites and wikis as viable options for teaching online.

We recognize this sample is a snapshot of “the typical school librarian.” Nevertheless, these results support our belief that the desire to fulfill the role of instructional partner is stronger than ever and that many school librarians seek innovative ways to provide students with 21st-century knowledge and skills. We propose the design and delivery of fully online courses as a powerful option for school librarians to meet that challenge.

Designing an Online Course for Your Library: Where to Begin?

We will not address ways to teach information literacy or other content items because you, the school librarian, have the expertise to teach information-literacy skills, while your instructional partners, classroom teachers, are subject matter experts in their respective fields. Instead, we will focus on the teaching choices that make for a successful online learning experience. The process of designing for online learning can be organized into four P’s: Plan, Prepare, Present, and Perfect (see figure 2).

Plan for Online Learning

If this is the first time that you are planning to teach online, we strongly encourage you to build upon a series of lessons or professional development that you have already presented face-to-face. You may also need to decide if you are designing with a classroom teacher or for an independent library course. Teaching online is different from teaching face-to-face. However, in both instances, detailed planning is a must! During this phase it is important that you take the time to determine procedures, break down tasks, and develop a timeline for your course. Start with your basic lesson plans, including learning objectives, and expand on the following items:

- **Learner Analysis**—Who are members of the intended audience for your course? What preconceived notions or ideas might they bring to the course?
Would your audience feel most comfortable using specific tools and activities? Can the classroom teacher provide any student data (for example, information about learning needs, adaptive needs, prerequisite knowledge, content areas students have struggled with previously that need to be emphasized)?

- **Prerequisite Skills**—In addition to content, consider the technology skills the audience must possess ahead of time to successfully complete your course. If preparing for younger students, what scaffolding or parental support will you put in place?

- **Instructional Strategies**—Some activities and tools are unique to online learning: discussion boards, webquests, virtual tours, and podcasts. How will you use these tools to engage your audience with the course material?

- **Media**—Selecting high-quality media resources is an important component of online course design. Where will you obtain these materials? Will you create your own? How will the audience access these materials? Are there password and security considerations?

- **Time**—How much time will it take to complete your course? Will you have due dates? Will the course operate on a rotating basis? Will you have time-sensitive experiences such as meetings using Skype or Google Hangout?

- **Support Documents and Additional Resources**—Create a collection of online and print resources that your course audience can refer to for clarification and further information. This is your opportunity to draw from those pathfinder-building skills! Once this information has been captured, consider the procedures for tasks such as turning in assignments, using discussion boards, communicating with the instructor, contacting tech support, and, if work is graded, grade dissemination. If designing with a classroom teacher, determine who will be in charge of which procedures.

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**Figure 2. Process of designing for online learning.**

- **P**lan
  - Determine procedures
  - Break down tasks
  - Develop timeline

- **P**repare
  - Chunk content
  - Add resources
  - Edit, edit, edit

- **P**resent
  - Monitor daily
  - Foster community
  - Give feedback

- **P**erfect
  - Assess learning
  - Re-evaluate design choices
  - Make changes

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**THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ONLINE**
Afterwards, go through these items and break down tasks, considering the skills the course audience might need to be able to complete each one. Determine if an instructional strategy or approach might take too much time or force the course audience to focus on an area of the content for longer than necessary. In the process, you are also developing the timeline for your course.

Decide how long the course should take. Think about whether the content you are addressing would best be presented with due dates, or as a flexible, rotating course that can be started at any time. When collaborating with a teacher, the timeline of the course will be dependent upon the course curriculum and how long the classroom teacher plans to teach this topic.

Prepare for Online Learning
Several free and open-source tools are available for hosting online courses. Each offers advantages and disadvantages. Explore and determine which tool best serves the needs of your school. Some, such as Edmodo, offer a high level of privacy and security. Others, such as Google Site, work well with a suite of Web 2.0 tools (many of which are in the Google apps family).

Consider what the school system allows, what is or isn’t filtered by a firewall, and if the course will be accessed after school. In addition to Edmodo and Google Site, school librarians can build courses using Weebly, Zoho Sites, SnapPages, or Schoology. Some of these tools can also be combined to create even more powerful resources. Please note that, as is the case with many Web 2.0 tools, some of these sites have features that are only available for a small fee. Make sure you determine which of these features you need before making a choice.

Finally, go through your course with a fine-tooth comb. Edit, edit, edit! Clean up grammar, spelling, make sure terms are consistent throughout, documents follow a naming pattern, links work properly, and resources are easy to find. Consider having a friend or colleague test the course for you.

Present the Online Course
The course has begun. Now you are teaching online. Make a habit of monitoring and checking in with your course at least once a day. If you are collaborating with a teacher, this is a responsibility that can be shared. You can help students develop a sense of community by including activities that encourage students to share interesting personal facts, additional resources, and peer-review one another’s work. Students are sure to have questions that must be answered.

During the implementation of the course, give consistent feedback on student assignments, discussion posts, and contributions. Providing this feedback creates a cycle of learning and gives you an opportunity to model your own learning strategies to the course audience.

Finally, give yourself feedback. Keep notes on what works and what needs to be adjusted. Discuss these notes with any co-designers or collaborators.

The most important thing to remember is to be consistent in your design and approach. Organize information in the same way each and every time. Consider your favorite website. How frustrating would it be to navigate a site where the menu changed location on each page!

Now that the content is divided and organized, go through each activity and build a collection of resources for the course’s audience. You may want to add small groups of resources to each chunk, or you may choose to create a pathfinder or a list using a social-bookmarking tool such as Sqworl or Diigo.

Perfect the Online Course
At the end of the course, collect evaluations from your course’s audience and the collaborating classroom teacher. Be specific in the questions you ask so that learners and the teacher understand they are evaluating...
the course content and structure. SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, and Polldaddy are tools that can be used to collect evaluations anonymously.

Use these evaluations to revisit design and structural choices that were made during creation of the course. Educators understand the importance of reflection and how reflection leads to excellence. Make any changes you feel are necessary before implementing the course again.

**Conclusion**

Digital library learning spaces offer a dizzying array of options for school librarians to partner and collaborate with students and teachers, promoting student learning across the curriculum like never before. Although creating these spaces can be time-consuming and challenging, including virtual libraries, flipped libraries, and fully online library courses into the school library program will pay off in increased student engagement and achievement.

The potential of these spaces for use in fostering lifelong reading habits, developing digital and information literacy, encouraging independent research, highlighting student-generated digital artifacts—all while advocating for the library program—is exciting! By investing in the development of digital library learning spaces, the school librarian supports students’ lifelong curiosity and pursuit of knowledge, whether at home, at school, or at play.

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**Stephanie A. Jones** is an assistant professor in the online instructional technology program at Georgia Southern University where she teaches future school librarians. After spending fourteen years as a school librarian in Georgia, she completed her PhD in instructional technology at the University of Georgia. Having also served as a public librarian, Stephanie has a Master of Librarianship degree from Emory University. She is a coeditor of the Educational Media and Technology Yearbook. Her current research interests include the career development of school librarians, online teaching and learning, and storytelling pedagogy. She is the chair-elect of GLA’s Georgia Association of School Librarians Division.

**Works Cited:**


Rethinking the Possibilities of Your Library

Creating a Library Without a Library Space

Sue Kowalski | kowalski423@yahoo.com
As I write this, I am starting my seventh year as librarian at Pine Grove Middle School. You might expect that getting our school library up and running would be a routine process made easier with experience. Yet with each year, school librarians need to rethink, retool, and reinvent to move forward and lead the way for teaching and learning.

This re-envisioning for the 2014–2015 school year is unique at Pine Grove; pieces of our school community will relocate to six different locations because of a major renovation starting in July 2014. Sixth-grade students will stay at several elementary schools for an additional year but be taught by Pine Grove teachers; our seventh-graders will move into a currently vacant facility, and our eighth-grade students will enter high school a year early. At the elementary and high school levels, students will have full access to their school libraries and librarians already there. At the seventh-grade facility, there is no “official” library for students. I will advocate for my role to reflect the mission and vision of our program as we create learning commons areas across our temporarily fragmented school community.

Exciting as the prospect is, at times I feel like I could be a candidate for a reality makeover show that addresses the physical and emotional trials of a school librarian who has to sift, sort, pack, rethink, recycle, redirect, hold on, and let go! I know we aren’t the first who are going through this process, so finding a “been there, done that” network is not difficult. Many have had to transition due to natural disasters or other negative reasons, so moving as part of a strategic plan for our district is exhilarating. The learning commons of our library in the 2014–2015 school year will be a hybrid of sorts as we balance multiple brick and mortar spaces and a virtual library (Wallace and Husid 2012, 26).

Our action plan for these transitions must take into account the vision and mission of the program, physical space, virtual space, outreach, and leadership. Each of these areas and their impact on our users must be considered so that our decisions will have positive systematic impact during and after our move.

Vision of the School Library

All change requires a catalyst. Ideas for transforming can and will come from others, but the school librarian must lead the way. Though it certainly wasn’t my ideas that prompted renovation of an entire school, I am a part of the team that is contributing to all aspects of the planning and transition, especially as they relate to the library program.

In the last several years we have created several zones in our learning commons approach (Loertscher, Koechlin, and Zwaan 2011). We’ve formalized our student volunteer program, called “iStaff,” to better meet the needs of the entire school. Our virtual space is under ongoing change to make the richest possible connection to our entire community. My instructional leadership has seen major shifts to align with the Common Core State Standards, district and school initiatives, and technology integration. Where I teach and how I teach vary from day to day, class to class. Despite all these changes, however, my activities have always taken place under one roof. Now we must devise a plan to replicate the quality of our program and make sure it’s fully embedded in teaching and learning across the district.

We’ve had to start making a list of non-negotiable areas to ensure that lack of an official space doesn’t equate with lack of an official library. Though the constant queries of “What will you do?” and “Where will the library be?” during the renovation still cause some internal angst, I’m finding myself energized by the process and the opportunities that will surface before, during, and after the renovation process.

For some, thinking about an “alternative” library may be difficult. Conversations, exemplars, and brainstorming will help prompt potential solutions. For others, a flurry of “we could,” or “what if,” or “how about” will surface quickly and provide rich input to our roadmap.

Mission

Our mission is to continue to provide a strong school library program that teaches students to become effective and ethical users of ideas, information, and technology. Looking forward, our vision to create a student-centered program remains an integral part of the instructional culture during and after the renovation.
The mission and vision of the school library program must align with state expectations, district and school strategic plans, and fit with the community climate. What works for our program might not be the universal best plan for all school libraries. Formal and informal input into “what next” will support our creation of a plan that is representative of all of our stakeholders.

Varying perspectives must be invited, solicited, and encouraged as we develop a mission and vision that sustains an effective school library program for the years to come.

Physical Space/Facility

Our current school library is a large and flexible space. Despite minimal storage options, we have managed to amass a lot of “stuff” in addition to our physical library collection. My often “out of the box” plans for programming, displays, makerspaces, and learning zones have resulted in multiple shelves and closets resembling a My Life as a Hoarder episode. Fortunately, because much of that extended collection has come from donations and personal acquisitions, getting rid of items won’t cause an auditing nightmare.

On the other hand, our library often ends up being an “archival warehouse” of unused sets of district textbooks, equipment, AV supplies, instructional supplies, and other discarded treasures. This move will prompt the overall weeding and redistribution of our physical collections.

As a member of the leadership team managing the moving and relocation process, I must curate input and then make decisions and recommendations that reflect efficiency and the vision of our program. Similar to moving from one home to another, to ensure an effective transition, I must have a plan in place long before moving day.

Our print collection is in need of its own renovation. Our move will cement many decisions. Times have changed, and having a large print collection of materials users might need is not possible or necessary (Johns 2011, 26). Our new plan must address a more “on demand” access to quality materials. Last year we color-coded five zones of nonfiction books in a basic “genre-ification” of our collection. In addition to helping with student access, this creation of broad categories will help us relocate smaller collections off site. Print magazines, newspapers, and media will need a redesigned distribution plan that will range from a minimal change in mailing address to a more comprehensive shift to electronic access.

For a range of target audiences, our current library “space” fills niches that go well beyond instruction. We are seen as a safe haven, a place to connect, a center for leadership, a zone for creation, a hub for exploring, a quiet space, a collaborative meeting ground, and a go-to place for professional support. We’ve worked hard to achieve this status and will need to develop alternative spaces that fill these same niches during our transition. Even in the interim, students need library spaces that empower creativity, communication, and community (Loertscher, Koechlin, and Zwaan 2011).

Virtual Space

Maintaining a virtual presence is a given for a school library. Making sure, however, that the virtual platform is effective and allows for self-directed interaction is critical. For example, if I can guide students to a portal of resources, but they have difficulty doing the same without my directions, we have failed to create an effective virtual platform. If a teacher wants to integrate media from a database into his instruction, but the steps to access the resources are cumbersome or unclear, the effectiveness is lost. Through effective platforms, tutorials, directions, FAQs, and online communities, a library can provide 24–7–365 support.

As we face a school year with students in six locations we will also need to be proactive as we consider ethical access to resources and address issues like IP authentication, password sharing, and budget allocations. Conversations with district librarians, vendors, our
A strong school library program needs to be systemic. Collaboration within and beyond the walls of the facility are needed to reach a healthy level of user engagement.

Outreach

A strong school library program needs to be systemic. Collaboration within and beyond the walls of the facility are needed to reach a healthy level of user engagement. This outreach will take place during instruction, special events, community programs, and professional learning. When stakeholders feel their input and participation matter, their levels of investment for sharing input, contributing time, and advocating increase.

As we prepare for the move, our top priority focus in our transition plan is on instruction. We must move beyond a traditional face-to-face model and incorporate delivery through virtual channels. Because we haven’t been forced to go this route, we typically tap into the “live” version or a guided tour of virtual resources. We must diversify our instructional toolkit so teaching and learning remain the primary focus of our program but are not limited to a “live” visit. Webinars, Skype, Google hangouts, FaceTime, podcasts, blogs, wikis, Twitter, Remind101, and other digital platforms can enrich instruction regardless of physical space. The library must become embedded through collaborative planning, instruction, and assessment; a virtual platform can support those connections (Henry 2013, 23).

Another key component of our current outreach is access to the resources on the Middle Ages. LibGuides, and other similar platforms, allow access to general and content-specific portals for users.

Multiple access points and log-in information that will allow for 24–7–365 self-directed access is a necessity. Promotion and marketing will be essential to connect patrons to resources, tools, updates, and digital opportunities. Exposing users to the benefits of opting in for automatic updates via RSS feeds, Remind101, and e-mail can also increase connection to resources (Harris 2012, 14).

Leadership

We have been very successful over the last several years in providing leadership through many aspects of the school library program. Our iStaff program has empowered an average of seventy–five students each year to take on a leadership role in the areas of collection development, facility management, technology integration, and public relations. One of the biggest worries about our temporary situation is “What about iStaff?” Because this initiative has had such a significant impact, we must make student empowerment during the renovation year a priority and find a way to integrate a student work program.

Our plan is to have an iStaff program at each of our six locations. This program will operate under one umbrella but allow for participation at each school. This model could allow for student managers to help oversee the entire program, brand a district–wide implementation of a recognized student leadership program, scaffold the format for different age levels, and create partnerships with other existing service leadership programs like DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), student council, and YDL (Youth Development and Leadership). Training and support will enrich the experience and empower these student leaders with a transferable skill set.
Support staff may find their roles will shift when a library is temporarily displaced. An assistant, for example, who spends most of her day managing drop-in traffic, will not be in the same position when a designated library space doesn’t exist. Advocating for this person’s expertise, however, to maintain electronic portals of resources, manage a focused online book request system, access digital tools, and create decentralized mobile libraries will maximize staff talents and put the focus on priority tasks for teaching and learning.

Sometimes changes are thrust upon us, and we have to adjust quickly. At other times we have ample warning that changes loom ahead in our library world, and it’s our role to take the lead in transformation.

Plan and Sustain

Sometimes changes are thrust upon us, and we have to adjust quickly. At other times we have ample warning that changes loom ahead in our library world, and it’s our role to take the lead in transformation. School libraries will experience changes in management, staffing, funding, schedules, support, and facility. Some changes will cause hardships that will be difficult to overcome. Others will create opportunities to rethink, retool, and reinvent. Having a plan in place that prioritizes the mission and vision of the school library will empower the librarian to guide a successful transformation.

As Pine Grove Middle School continues its transformation, I am proud to lead the way as we travel through some unknown territories en route to our destination. Surely we will face obstacles to overcome, but I’m excited about making the shifts needed for our school library program to survive and thrive during our renovation and beyond.

Sue Kowalski is school librarian at Pine Grove Middle School in East Syracuse (NY) Minoa School District. The immediate past president of NYLA/SSL, she is actively involved in the development of public awareness and advocacy campaigns that support ALA’s Campaign for America’s Libraries. Sue also serves on ALA’s Public Awareness Committee and AASL’s Standards and Guidelines Committee. Her library program won a 2011 National School Library Program of the Year award. Sue is a 2012 ALA/Carnegie I Love My Librarian winner and a 2012 Teacher Librarian Leadership Award winner. She recently authored a chapter on student engagement to be published in Collaborative Models for Librarian and Teacher Partnerships (IGI Global 2014).

Works Cited:


Recommended Resource:

Loertscher, David V., Carol Koechlin, and Esther Rosenfeld. 2012. The Virtual Learning Commons: Building a Participatory School Learning Community. Salt Lake City, UT: Learning Commons.
Where to Start?

CREATING VIRTUAL LIBRARY SPACES

Most teachers and school librarians are great at decorating their teaching spaces. Flashy and informative posters, colorful bulletin boards, book displays, and student artwork all contribute to the aesthetic appeal and the functionality of a library and classroom. But probably the most important library space isn’t one patrons will see when they walk in the door; it’s the one they will see when they turn on the computer. Whether a school librarian is beginning a new library position or working on a library upgrade, creating a virtual library space should be a priority. BUT WHERE TO START?

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Why Have a Virtual Presence?

Every school library should be accessible via the Web to meet the needs of 21st-century students. These days even elementary-aged students often have mobile devices, and a virtual presence enables the school librarian to extend services outside the library walls and hours. Students expect to be able to access materials from the classroom, during study halls, and at home at the touch of a button. If authoritative sources are not easily accessible through the school library’s website, students will resort to the first result on their Google searches, often Wikipedia or Answers.com.

Beyond allowing students 24–7 access to authoritative research materials, a virtual presence allows school librarians to promote the library program! Blog posts about library events, photos of students in the library (with appropriate permissions, of course), virtual displays of student work, curated links, communication tools, and links for parents and community members help show off all the great things we do! And in this economy, frequent advocacy about our library program is absolutely necessary.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A VIRTUAL PLATFORM.

The first step in creating a virtual presence is choosing a platform, or as Joyce Valenza would say, a “parking lot” for the website (Valenza 2012). Three primary options exist: the school’s Web platform, the online catalog’s Web platform, or some other independent platform.

Using the School’s Platform

Using the school’s existing platform has its benefits, the primary one being that the site probably already exists and just needs to be enhanced. Some might take a “better to ask forgiveness than permission” attitude about their school library’s virtual space, but building a website takes a lot of time, and it would be heartbreaking to design a fantastic site, only to be told by a principal or IT director that it won’t work with the school’s existing software.

Many school authorities like uniformity in their website pages and prefer that the library page parallel the appearance of the rest of the school’s site. For this reason, my current library website is built in Edline (see figure 1).

While it is possible to create a functional website using pretty much any platform, using school sites has some disadvantages. For one, school sites often don’t play well with widgets, which will be discussed below. For another, the library’s Web address is sometimes really long, making it harder for students to remember. However, if the students know how to find the district homepage, they can easily be taught where to click to find the library site. (The fewer clicks the better.)

Using the OPAC

Using the school’s online catalog for a Web platform is another option. Many online catalog programs, such as OPALS (Open-Source Automated Library System) and Follett Destiny, provide the option to customize the OPAC homepage for use as a jumping-off point. This feature has the advantages of being easy for the librarian to set up and for patrons to use and providing a one-click access point for all patron needs (for an example, see figure 2). As with a school platform, however, sometimes an OPAC site has little flexibility in layout and appearance, limiting usability and visual appeal.
Using an External Platform

Despite the ease of using an established internal school or OPAC website, many school librarians prefer to build their library website using an external platform such as Wordpress, Google Sites, Google Blogger, Glogster, Weebly, LibGuides, or a wiki. Typically, when this kind of Web platform is used, a link to the external site is provided on the school website. While an external site provides far more customization options, it may require an extra click for students accessing the main page via the school’s website.

For a great list of external platform options, visit the School Library Websites wiki at <http://schoollibrarywebsites.wikispaces.com/Building+Tools>. For ideas, this wiki also contains a great list of exemplary websites.

STEP 2: DECIDE WHAT RESOURCES TO INCLUDE.

Before building your site, spend some time visiting other school library websites for ideas. Place the most important (i.e., most often used) resources at the top of the page since students don’t always like to scroll! On their websites most school libraries...
libraries provide links to research materials such as pathfinders, virtual reference materials, databases, online catalogs, and scheduling calendars. Other possibilities include links to downloadable e-books and audiobooks, online safety information, curation tools, search strategies, book trailers, information about Mock Caldecott voting, blogs, readers’ advisory information, fun sites, free Web tools, copyright information, games, and much more.

Info-Tech Compendium

Many school librarians incorporate online learning platforms and fun widgets to draw their students to the library website. If the school uses Edmodo, My Big Campus, Moodle, Dropbox, or other online learning platforms, the library website should include links to these resources, even if links are already posted elsewhere on the school website. Think of the library site as an information-technology compendium for the school! Consider incorporating a blog or news feed into the site. This feature allows the school librarian to promote library events and highlight student projects, and also provides an easy way to post timely information and pathfinders for classes coming to the library for research. Most-recent projects show up on the top of the list, and the information remains available for a long time, making the news feed convenient for students doing research, as shown in the L. P. Quinn Elementary school website in figure 1.

Appeal and Functionality

Visual appeal and functionality are nearly as important as content. If a site is difficult to navigate or visually boring, students won’t want to spend much time there. It’s not difficult to incorporate attractive graphics or create custom icons to make the page more attractive and user-friendly. For example, as shown in figure 5, Gail Brisson of Trumansburg Elementary School designed big custom buttons to highlight the most important items on her page, making it easier for her young students to find the online catalog and other important links.

Whenever possible, the school library website should include photos and videos of students. Children are developmentally narcissistic, and they love to see themselves online! Opportunities to see themselves can be a big draw to the site for any age group.

Widgets

Widgets are small Web tools, usually located on a page’s sidebar, that can add fun and learning to a site. Facebook and Twitter widgets, Shelfari or Goodreads widgets, ClustrMaps, Flickr slideshows, Wolfram Alpha, Voki—a quick search will turn up a host of interesting educational widgets that can be embedded into a site by simply copying and pasting some HTML code.

For an example of what widgets look like on a site, visit Deb Schiano’s excellent site at Lounsberry Hollow’s Virtual Learning Center <www.lhvlc.com>, part of which is shown in figure 6.
STEP 3: ASSESS.

Once the school library website has been up and running for some time, send around a survey to get feedback from students and staff about how they use the site and what they use most or don’t like. Getting responses can be difficult so don’t hesitate to offer an incentive, such as placing students’ names in a drawing for a guaranteed study hall pass or an iTunes gift card. To tempt teachers, offer a free class period (“Bring your kids to the library for booktalks—a free prep period for you!”). As often as possible, respond to the recommendations that appear in the survey responses. This acknowledgment encourages future feedback.

STEP 4: TWEAK CONSTANTLY.

Once the virtual presence is up and running, continue to monitor patrons’ needs and adjust the features of the virtual library as needed. One of the most difficult things for most librarians to resist is including too much information on the website! If the site is too busy, finding things is hard—especially for younger patrons.

While including lots of images and widgets may make a site visually appealing, be aware that not all users may have a super-fast Internet connection at home. Build judiciously and check to see how long the page takes to load on a slow connection.

Also keep in mind that many users will be viewing the library website on a mobile device. View and explore the site on a smartphone or tablet to make sure the site is user-friendly on mobile platforms.

Finally, always test out widgets and links at school to make sure they work with the district’s filters. While it may not be a problem if a Facebook or Twitter widget doesn’t work at school—especially if you are targeting parents or other adults in the community who can use the site unfiltered at home—anything that will be used at school or by students should work with the filters. Check links often to make sure they aren’t broken or the destination sites blocked.

JUMP IN!

The options for creating a virtual library presence may seem overwhelming, but don’t be intimidated by all of the choices and decisions—jump in! Any virtual presence is better than none, so don’t be afraid to play around with different platforms and tools and build over time.

Whenever possible, get students involved in the creation, testing, and upkeep of the site. Students who curate information on their school library’s site not only learn more, they feel ownership and are more likely to use the site. A virtual library space is always a work in progress and can be a fun sandbox for testing new technology tools as well as helping students and teachers meet the Common Core State Standards and AASL learning standards.

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Work Cited:

It inspires empathy, compassion, and awe (Laux 2013). It is inclusive, vibrant, and mind-expanding (Legaspi 2013). Its nuance and focused attention build our capacity for the “sweet music of contradiction” (Dawes 2013), countering the media’s tendency to reduce complex issues to good or bad.

Poetry.

Yet a visit to a library’s poetry section may turn up only a few poets who students could bump into somewhere other than at a séance. The speaker in Cornelius Eady’s poem “Dance at the Amherst County Public Library” (published in 1986) imagines our children’s children visiting a public library:

Which poets would they find on the shelves?
The answer probably is
They will only find
What I found this afternoon:
Shakespeare
And Paul Laurence Dunbar.

It’s unlikely that school libraries are this barren of poetry today, but if poetry offers students so much, including familiarity with metaphor, a language power that sways public opinion more than statistics or political affiliation (Thibodeau and Boroditsky 2011), then why does a gap persist between the poetry young readers, poets, and writers find in school libraries and the poetry they could find there? How can the space we make for poetry offer more to our students?

Lack of collection development resources contributes to this gap’s persistence. Reviews in School Library Journal regularly provide suggestions for elementary and middle grades, but few for high school students. Yet as students’ yearning to express themselves intensifies, and with it, for some, their sense of isolation, poems in which students discover struggles and joys similar to their own can instill a sense of belonging. Some students will also find in poetry a way to reach into themselves and reach out to the world, for at its essence, “poetry is singing. It is a way to give voice to the unspoken” (Legaspi 2013).

So let’s explore resources and strategies that can move our poetry collections, particularly our high school collections, closer to reflecting these possibilities. The
Poetry resists typical weeding timelines. In the world of fiction and nonfiction, we’re accustomed to the meteoric rise of new writers, trilogies, or series or the rush of popularity after a book garners a rave review or the movie version comes out in theaters.

Sources of Reviews and Other Leads

If you’re not a poet or avid poetry reader, how do you find contemporary American poetry books that might appeal to your students? Publishers Weekly, Booklist, and the New York Times Book Review publish poetry reviews. If you subscribe to EBSCO’s Advanced Placement Source (AP Source) or Gale’s General OneFile (a core part of PowerSearch), you’re in luck. Full-text Booklist reviews appear in both databases; Publishers Weekly is in AP Source, and the New York Times Book Review is in General OneFile.

However, the coverage in these review sources skews toward books published by Norton and other large publishers, when university and small independent presses publish top-notch poetry books, too. Some of their titles, such as Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s Lucky Fish, and book-detail pages for the Pitt Poetry Series include links to sample poems, such as ones from Richard Blanco’s Looking for the Gulf Motel.

Poets who win the Nobel, Pulitzer, or National Book Award may also appeal to your students, but just as with New York Times bestsellers, only some will be a good fit. (I can still see the sly smirks from students who asked if I’d order Fifty Shades of Grey.) The same is true of books by current and former poets laureate (for the Library of Congress or your state) and winners of awards from publishers and other entities.

Poets who win first-book prizes aren’t necessarily in their twenties. One distinguishing aspect of the Yale Younger Poets Series <http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/youngerpoets.asp>, the oldest annual literary award in the United States, is that the winning poets must be under forty; like accolades, however, even the relative youthfulness of the poets who win this award doesn’t assure their poems will speak to your students.

What factors should you consider? Apply the same matchmaking strategies to selecting poetry books as you would to fiction or nonfiction, considering your students’ diverse identities and interests, and potential curriculum connections. No book preview available from your book jobber or Amazon? Googling a contemporary poet usually leads to at least a handful of poems (though perhaps not all from the book you have in mind). Listen to the poet’s voice, the poems’ tone and music. What feelings do they evoke? Would the experiences they encapsulate, their contexts, speak to your students? Can you see a student reciting one of them for a forensics or Poetry Out Loud competition?

As you survey the poetry landscape, look at who’s reading at poetry festivals like the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and Split This Rock, as well as in reading series sponsored by Cave Canem, Kundiman, Poet’s House, and similar organizations, as well as poets visiting or on faculty at your local universities.

The Arc of Poetic Recognition Is Long

Poetry resists typical weeding timelines. In the world of fiction and nonfiction, we’re accustomed to the meteoric rise of new writers, trilogies, or series or the rush of popularity after a book garners a rave review or the movie version comes out in theaters.
Poetry’s arc of recognition is longer. When Nikky Finney won the 2011 National Book Award, over twenty-five years had passed since her first book was published. Before Richard Blanco stepped up to the microphone to read “One Today” at President Obama’s second inauguration, he’d been publishing for fifteen years. Garrison Keillor read Laure-Anne Bosselaar’s poem “A Paris Blackbird” on The Writer’s Almanac <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/archive.php> fifteen years after the collection in which it was printed hit library and bookstore shelves.

This reality means the guideline to weed a poetry book if it was published five to fifteen years ago unless it’s a classic, as suggested in Less Is More and many similar guides, needs reconsideration (Baumbach and Miller 2006). If you selected the book with the matchmaking care described above, read a few poems. Can you hear your students’ joy or pain? Do the poems sing? Surprise?

As you make your decisions, strive to maintain students’ access to widely recognized classics, the poets and poetic movements most studied in your school, and a diverse range of 20th- and 21st-century poetic voices. Would discarding a book erase a literary movement in American poetry, particularly controversial ones that may get erased from future time-period anthologies? For instance, if you’re keeping a book that includes the Beat poets, do you also have something in which the Black Arts Movement is represented?

**Literary Magazines**

If the arc of poetry recognition is long, how else can you discover poets your students might enjoy? Connect students with literary magazines (aka lit mags), an essential source of new poetry by emerging and established writers. Most publish quarterly. Some, like Prairie Schooner, offer mobile apps or mobile versions of their publications.

Develop a webguide for creative writing or add a poetry section to your webguide for English classes and include links directly to lit mags in your databases. Both General OneFile and AP Source include coverage of American Poetry Review, Antioch Review, Chicago Review, Harvard Review, New England Review, and World Literature Today, as well as The Atlantic.


Some of these magazines sponsor contests for high school students, such as the Patricia Grodd Poetry Prize for Young Writers sponsored by The Kenyon Review each November.

No budget for books or database subscriptions? Many respected literary magazines, such as Virginia-based Barely South, Blackbird, and Shenandoah, make their content freely available online. Do lit mags based in your district, state, or region make their content available online? Download the 2013 Literary Magazine Guide from NewPages.com (available in PDF and mobile versions) for literary magazine titles, descriptions, and Web addresses. Not all lit mags contain poetry, but most do. Some also have a regional focus or feature writers who represent specific ethnicities/nationalities.

**Free Online Resources**

Thanks to the Poetry Foundation’s Poetry Tool (also available as a mobile app), Poetry Daily (available at <http://poets.com>), Poets.org from the Academy of American Poets, and sites like them, even school librarians with no acquisitions budget can connect students with poetry. This is especially true for poetry published prior to 1923 and several high-profile poets of the mid-20th century. Selections are more limited for poems published since the parents of our freshmen were born (i.e., post-1983 or thereabouts), which is another reason purchasing books by contemporary poets is an essential step in improving students’ access to their work.


Poetry reaches a new dimension—and a different audience—when embodied and given breath, so include audio resources on your webguide, such as Penn Sound <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound> and the site cocreated by Camille Dungy and Matt O’Donnell to raise awareness of emerging poetic voices: From the Fishouse <www.fishhousepoems.org>.

Of these resources, Poetry Tool, Poets.org, and Fishouse provide the most options for discovering poems by something other than title or poet’s name. Interested in knowing more poets from your region? Use Poets.org’s interactive poetry map. Have budding filmmakers in your hallways or students who like to collaborate on multimedia projects? Connect them to multimedia poetry projects from The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting: Voices from Haiti <http://pulitzercenter.org/features/...>
Since poetry can be challenging to select, some librarians limit their purchases to anthologies. While anthologies can be useful for broad coverage of time periods, global regions, or themes and introduce students to a variety of voices, they limit students’ familiarity with a poet to a few poems, precluding the deep study of poets that single-author books (including volumes of collected/selected works) facilitate and omitting examples of the narrative arc reflected in single collections.

Every poet who provided feedback for this article emphasized the need for single-authored books so that students have the opportunity to fall in love with a poet’s work and understand the range and complexity a poet’s work can encompass. Kwame Dawes recommends that high school students graduate having read at least three single-author volumes of contemporary poetry. When selecting single-author books, consider the matchmaking factors discussed earlier.

For the anthologies you do purchase, select a mixture of publishers and editors. Along with Norton books and Keillor’s Good Poems (Viking 2002), select a few anthologies that represent various time periods in American poetry, some that lend a global perspective (e.g., Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry 2002), some that focus on themes to which your students can relate (e.g., The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing, Bloomsbury USA 2010), and ones that expand the diversity of poetic voices in your collection (e.g., When She Named Fire: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems by Women, Autumn House 2009). For middle and high schools, Cynthia Grady recommends Poetry Speaks Who I Am in the Mirror: A Novel in Poems and Journal Entries, Persea 2012) or biographies in verse (e.g., A Wreath for Emmett Till, Houghton Mifflin 2005).

Remember your young writers too, the ones who can’t fit creative writing into their schedule or who prefer self-education for creative arts.

For the anthologies you do purchase, select a mixture of publishers and editors. Along with Norton books and Keillor’s Good Poems (Viking 2002), select a few anthologies that represent various time periods in American poetry, some that lend a global perspective (e.g., Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry 2002), some that focus on themes to which your students can relate (e.g., The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing, Bloomsbury USA 2010), and ones that expand the diversity of poetic voices in your collection (e.g., When She Named Fire: An Anthology of Contemporary Poems by Women, Autumn House 2009). For middle and high schools, Cynthia Grady recommends Poetry Speaks Who I Am in the Mirror: A Novel in Poems and Journal Entries, Persea 2012) or biographies in verse (e.g., A Wreath for Emmett Till, Houghton Mifflin 2005).

Remember your young writers too, the ones who can’t fit creative writing into their schedule or who prefer self-education for creative arts.

To round out your collection, talk to your English/Language Arts teachers about the poets or poetic movements they highlight in the classroom. Are several of your students first- or second-generation immigrants from the same country or global region? Include a related book, perhaps a bilingual edition. What upper-level languages are offered at your school? Comparing translations of poems is a wonderful vehicle for discussing diction, connotation, tone, and the dance between words’ music and meaning. Are certain issues, like environmental concerns, impacting your locality? Include an eco-poetry or nature anthology. In regard to diversity, are the economic difficulties some students face reflected? What about poets whose work includes poems that explore their identities as LGBTQ?

In regard to other ways into poetry, consider novels in verse (e.g., The Girl

Nurturing a Poetry Culture

What can you do to raise students’ awareness of your poetry collection? Poets.org offers a list of ideas for celebrating National Poetry Month, many of which apply to promoting poetry year-round.

Visiting poets at our school have ranged from David Wojahn, director of Virginia Commonwealth University’s creative writing program, to members of VCU’s slam poetry team, Slam Nahuatl. I’ve had book spine poetry contests to invite students to get their hands on the books, hosted coffeehouse-style
events where students read original writing or poems they love, featured book displays about poetry, and cosponsored a collaborative poetry-photography contest with the English and art departments.

Just as teachers’ expectations for research assignments can increase students’ use of databases, teachers’ enthusiasm about poetry and their willingness to integrate it into their lessons can enhance students’ interest in poetry.

A popular assignment here is for students to develop a personal anthology focused on a theme they choose, such as marginalization, the sacred, or hands. As they get started, I introduce students to a variety of sources and search strategies for finding poems, essays, and stories related to a theme, including developing a list of related keywords like “palm” and “touch” (for a “hands” theme), and using Google Books to search the preview of a book in our library to find all references to those words. Students may create anthologies like these in several formats, including using the poetry notebooks feature of Poets.org.

For collaborative lessons, I’ve worked with English teachers on units about documentary poetry (a pulse within poetry that combines poetry writing with research from primary source research) related to the events in novels or to genealogy research, and with a social studies teacher on a war poetry unit.

Our school curriculum is organized by global region, so when I send a reminder about library resources and webguide updates as we transition between regions, I sometimes include a poem. As they introduce new regions, some teachers integrate the library’s poetry CDs into their teaching, such as I Want Burning: The Ecstatic World of Rumi, Hafiz, and Lalla.

Making Space for Poetry Matters

Whether you make space for poetry online, on the shelf, or both, the space you make matters, the voices students find there matter, and the wonder, power, possibilities, and connections they can find in this living art matter.

Academic reasons abound. “Poetry teaches economy and precision of language” (Thompson 2013) and is “central to the study of language and rhetoric” (Dawes 2013), and with poetry’s subtleties and layered meanings, many poems score high on the Common Core’s text-complexity rubric, particularly in qualitative complexity. Cynthia Grady, poet and head librarian at Sidwell Friends School, has made Common Core State Standards sheets for several of her poetry books. A sample is included in the poetry collection development kit that follows this article.

In regard to curriculum, poetry touches nearly every discipline. Teachers can integrate poems to enhance content they’re already teaching, use poems to introduce or conclude a unit or as a mental refresher between activities (Miller 2013).

More importantly, poetry matters for students and their lives beyond the classroom. For long-range perspective, “poetry teaches students about the emotional history of the world” (Laux 2013), and for the sometimes messy reality of their right now, “poetry teaches students about what it means to be a human being on this planet” and shows them that they are not alone in their struggles or their joys (Daniels 2013).

Wendy DeGroat
serves as the librarian at Maggie L. Walker Governor’s School for Government and International Studies in Richmond, Virginia (library site: <www.resourceess.info>). Beyond school, Wendy curates Poetry River <www.poetryriver.org>, a site that facilitates diversification of the contemporary poetic voices taught in American literature courses. She’ll be teaching a workshop about documentary poetry on March 28, 2014 at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival in Washington, DC. Her last QK article was “Together We Can: Libraries as Story Centers, Students as Story-makers” in the September/October 2013 issue.

Works Cited:


Poetry Collection Development Kit for School Libraries

This kit provides resources for developing a digital, print, or blended collection of contemporary American poetry (post-1980) in school libraries, particularly high school libraries. It is inspired by my lifelong passion for poetry kindled by an English teacher and the ways I’ve witnessed poems light the imaginations, expand the understanding of, delight, soothe, and embolden students over my two decades of work as an English teacher, librarian, and writing mentor.

In the “Suggested Books” section, the kit also reflects survey responses from several poets who teach, including Laure-Anne Bosselaar, Jim Daniels, Kwame Dawes, Camille Dungy, Cynthia Grady, Dorianne Laux, Joseph O. Legaspi, Arlyn Miller, and Von Thompson.

What’s New? Sources of Leads

Reviews:
- Booklist (in Gale’s General OneFile and EBSCO’s AP Source databases)
- Publishers Weekly (in AP Source)
- New York Times Book Review (in General OneFile)
- Print and online literary magazines (some on the open web, others in databases)

Featured readers at poetry events and faculty and fellows in poetry organizations:
- Cave Canem <www.cavecanempoets.org> focuses on African American poetry
- Canto Mundo <www.cantomundo.org> focuses on Latino/a American poetry
- Kundiman <http://kundiman.org> focuses on Asian American poetry
- Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival <www.dodgypoetry.org> offers readings on a YouTube channel
- Split This Rock Poetry Festival: Poems of Provocation and Witness <www.splitthisrock.org>

Sampling of smaller presses known for poetry (some with annual contests):
- Alice James <http://alicejamesbooks.org>
- BOA Editions <www.boaeditions.org>
- Copper Canyon <www.coppercanyonpress.org>
- Coffee House <http://coffeehousepress.org>
- Graywolf <www.graywolfpress.org> features a poem of the week
- Milkweed <http://milkweed.org>
- Persea <www.perseabooks.com> features teacher’s guides for some titles, like Kearney’s novel-in-verse The Girl in the Mirror
- Sarabande <www.sarabandebooks.org>
- Tupelo <www.tupelopress.org> offers reader’s companions for some titles, like Nezhukumatathil’s Lucky Fish

Free Online Resources

Poets and Poems
- From the Fishouse <www.fishousepoems.org> offers an audio archive of emerging poets; it also supports keyword searching
- PennSound <www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound> features an audio archive featuring a wide range of poets
- Poetry 180 <www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html> offers a poem-a-day project edited by Billy Collins
- Poetry Daily <http://poems.com> offers poems reprinted with poet bio and stay on the site for one year; an app <http://poems.com/special_features/app/app_announce.php> is also available for the site
- Poetry Out Loud <www.poetryoutloud.org> offers an annual high school competition, as well as some audio files
Poetry Tool [Poetry Foundation] <www.poetryfoundation.org> supports subject browsing; it offers podcasts and an app <www.poetryfoundation.org/mobile>
Verse Daily <www.versedaily.org> offers poems reprinted with poet bio and links to other poems by the poet
Writer’s Almanac <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org> offers audio text archive for the popular public radio program

Poetic Craft:
• How a Poem Happens <http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com> offers poems and interviews with poets (e.g., Spera’s “In a Field Outside the Town”)
• Learning Lab [Poetry Foundation] <www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/>
• On Writing (American Academy of Poets) <www.poets.org/page.php/prmlD/55>

Multimedia Poetry (two examples from the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting):
• Hope: Living and Loving with HIV in Jamaica <www.livehopelove.com> features poems by Kwame Dawes
• Voices from Haiti <http://pulitzercenter.org/features/voices-haiti> features poems by Kwame Dawes

Online Literary Magazines:
For help selecting from the thousands of literary magazines available, including many online (e.g., Cortland Review <www.cortlandreview.org>), consult the NewPages Guide to Literary Magazines, 2013 <www.newpages.com/LitMagPDF>.

Suggested Books

These lists offer a sampling of American poetry published since 1980 that has appealed to students with whom I’ve worked, as well as anthology/craft titles recommended by poets I surveyed.

In December 2013, each book was still available new (although I purchase used copies of books for my library when that’s the only option). As you would in other genres, select those books that best fit your curriculum, your students, and their interests. (Those books that were recommended by a poet are indicated with “rec.” and the poet name after the title.)

Individual Collections
• What Is this Thing Called Love by Kim Addonizio (Norton, 2004)
• Looking for the Gulf Motel by Richard Blanco (Pitt, 2012)
• Rice by Nikky Finney (Triquarterly, 2013; first published in 1985)
• Becoming the Villainess by Jeannine Hall Gailey (Steel Toe, 2006)
• Kingdom Animalia by Aracelis Girmay (BOA Editions, 2011)
• Feeding the Fire by Jeffrey Harrison (Sarabande, 2001)
• Hip Logic by Terrance Hayes (Penguin, 2002)
• Given Sugar, Given Salt by Jane Hirshfield (Perennial, 2001)
• What the Living Do by Marie Howe (Norton, 1999)
• Hoops by Major Jackson (Norton, 2011)
• Quantum Lyrics by A. Van Jordan (Norton, 2007)
• E-mails from Scheherazad by Mohja Kahf (UP of Florida, 2003)
• Dien Cai Dau by Yusuf Komunyakaa (Wesleyan, 1988)
• The Book of Men by Dorianne Laux (Norton, 2011)
• The Rose by Li Young Lee (BOA Editions, 1986)
• Up Jump the Boogie by Joseph Murillo (Cypress, 2010)
• A Wreath for Emmett Till by Marilyn Nelson (HMH, 2009)
• Lucky Fish by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (Tupelo, 2012)
• Why I Wake Early by Mary Oliver (Beacon, 2004)
• Mezzanines by Matthew Olzmann (Alice James, 2013)
• Fast Animal by Tim Seibles (Etruscan, 2012)
• Shoulda Been Jimmie Savannah by Patricia Smith (Coffee House, 2012)
• Life on Mars by Tracy K. Smith (Graywolf, 2011)
• The Standing Wave by Gabriel Spera (Harper, 2003)
• Here, Bullet by Brian Turner (Alice James, 2005)

Collected/New & Selected
Along with earlier American poets like Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Robert Hayden, Langston Hughes, Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks, consider newer collected/selected works, such as:
• Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton by Lucille Clifton (BOA Editions, 2012)
• Sailing Around the Room by Billy Collins (Random House, 2001)
• Fire to Fire by Mark Doty (Harper Collins, 2008)
• Hardehead Weather by Cornelius Eady (Putnam, 2008)
• New Selected Poems by Philip Levine (Knopf, 1992)
• Shadow Ball: New and Selected Poems by Charles Harper Webb (Pitt, 2009)
• Words Under the Words by Naomi Shihab Nye (Eighth Mountain, 1994)
When I asked poets surveyed to list other poets they wished more high school students read/studied, poets who responded to the survey mentioned the following names (not all of whom are American). None of them listed their own name.


**Anthologies – Norton and Beyond**
Along with anthologies for 19th- and 20th-century American poetry, consider anthologies that diversify the poetic voices students encounter and add global and/or multilingual dimensions for literary movements.

**Organized by Place or an Aspect of the Poets’ Identities**
- Black Poets Lean South (2006); Every Shut Eye Ain’t Asleep (1994); Furious Flower (2004)
- Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry (2010); this collection features forty-nine American poets who trace their roots to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
- Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas (2011) – rec. by Dungy
- Working Words: Punching the Clock and Kicking Out the Jams (2010)
- From the Fishouse (2009) – rec. by Dungy, co-founder of From the Fishouse
- Poetry Speaks Who I Am (2010) – rec. by Grady

**Organized by Theme**
**Art:** Heart-to-Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth Century American Art (2001) – rec. by Miller
**Human Relationships:** Risking Everything (ed. Housden)
**Happiness:** Dancing with Joy (ed. Housden)
**Loss/Grief:** The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing (ed. Young); What Have You Lost? (ed. Nye)
**Nature:** Black Nature (ed. Dungy); Bright Wings (ed. Collins)
**Politics/Witness:** Against Forgetting (ed. Forché) – rec. by Legaspi; Poetry Like Bread (ed. Espada) – rec. by Thompson
**Spirituality/The Sacred:** Women in Praise of the Sacred (ed. Hirshfield); The Soul Is Here for Its Own Joy: Sacred Poems from Many Cultures (ed. Bly)

**Poetic Craft**
My students’ favorite poetic craft book is Ordinary Genius by Kim Addonizio. Books recommended by multiple poets surveyed included the following:
- In the Palm of Your Hand (Kowit)
- The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms (eds. Strand and Boland)
- The Poet’s Companion (eds. Addonizio and Laux)
- Triggering Town (Hugo)

**Common Core Standards**
See the appendix of this kit for a sample Common Core correlation sheet (grades 3 to 8) created by Cynthia Grady for her poetry picture book, I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery (Eerdmans, 2011).

**Reflections**
As I expect you do with fiction and nonfiction, read widely in poetry and be open to the unexpected. Like the winds that “buffet” the speaker’s car in Seamus Heaney’s “Postscript” as he drives along the coast, some poems will “catch [your] heart off guard and blow it open.” Others, even by the same poet, may not resonate with you. Read on. Encourage students to approach poetry this way too. As they explore, invite them to see the page (or screen) as a blank canvas rather than a long left margin (e.g., Nezhukumatathil’s “Two Moths”).

As your heart, ear, and imagination tune in to poetry, you may find yourself even more alive to the joyful possibilities of wordplay and the dance between language’s music and meaning than you are already.

**Stay in Touch**
In addition to being a poetry advocate at school, I promote poetry beyond school by curating <poetryriver.org>, a resource for diversifying the contemporary poetic voices studied in American lit classes and for learning about documentary poetry (which combines primary source research and poetry).

For future tips and suggested titles, visit the site or subscribe to posts. Questions? E-mail me at poetlibrarian@gmail.com.
The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), in cooperation with the Children’s Book Council (CBC), reviews and selects books for their annual Notables list. For the past decade, the list has included an average of five books of poetry each year. Some suggestions are listed below for implementing the Common Core State Standards in grades three through eight with *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2.** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.6.** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.5.** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6.** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9.** Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2.** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.5.** Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.