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Late/Onsite Deadline: No coupons will be issued after October 17, 2019. Late registrations will be accepted onsite only.

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NEW THIS YEAR—Vouchers for a salad or sandwich in the exhibit hall will be provided to attendees with full and one-day conference registration, so you can stay close and not miss a thing!

HOTELS

Through our official housing partner, onPeak, AASL provides reduced hotel rates and travel discounts for your trip to Louisville, KY. For detailed information on housing dates and policies, visit the conference website at national.aasl.org.

1. Hyatt Regency Louisville $179.00 Single/Double
2. The Seelbach Hilton Hotel $169.00 Single $189.00 Double
3. Marriott Louisville Downtown* $182.00 Single/Double
4. The Galt House Hotel & Suites (HQ)
   a. Rivue Tower $160.00 Single $165.00 Double $170.00 Triple $175.00 Quad
   b. Suite Tower $175.00 Single $180.00 Double $185.00 Triple $190.00 Quad

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I urge you all to be willing to take chances and move out of your comfort zone. As James Bryant Conant reputedly said, “Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.”

Living the Life I Love — pg 8

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Living the Life I Love — pg 8
Not in his goals but in his transitions, man is great.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson (2013, 3100)

Welcome to this Knowledge Quest issue about transitions. What does transition look like as we build a culture that truly transforms teaching and learning? How can we use AASL’s new National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries to make this transition? Speaking of the standards, let’s celebrate the first birthday of the AASL Standards by exploring this pivotal transition point in our professional practice!

I, like many of you, have been through all kinds of transitions, all kinds of change. It is interesting how those two words are often used interchangeably.

It seems that the difference between transition and change is subtle, but important. To change means to make something different while transition implies a passage or a movement. For school librarians, there are a lot of transitions—passages if you will—at this time of year: the transitions throughout the school year, the transitions to new ideas or goals brought by your administrator, the transitions in collaborating with teachers, the transitions in helping all learners navigate their school year, and the list goes on.

So, what transitions are we making about our own practice, our own craft, about the art and science of being a learner-ready school librarian in a learner-ready school library?

Let’s celebrate the first birthday of the AASL Standards by exploring this pivotal transition point in our professional practice!

So how do you as a school librarian foster your school’s transition to the new AASL Standards?

Like you, some of the transitions I’ve been through have been sobering, many have been exhilarating, but all of them made me who I am today and brought me to the life perspective I have in this moment. For this conversation, let’s consider your perspective about school libraries and the transition school librarians are navigating today. Learning from and embracing transition is sometimes hard and fraught with indecision and uncertainty, but once you’re through it, the disequilibrium makes you stronger, and makes you understand and appreciate what our learners go through as many face failure, change, and transition in their lives every day.

In my day job as a district director, my focus is transitioning the district to the new National School Library Standards, and, ultimately, to transform teaching and learning for all learners in the school community. I have the good fortune of working with amazing school librarians and administrators who are eager to learn new things, tackle challenges, change, and embrace transition. So how do you as a school librarian foster your school’s transition to the new AASL Standards?
In thinking about how to empower school librarians as they embark on the process and journey through this transition, I thought the following transitioning tips might be helpful.

**Be learner-focused:** I cannot stress this enough but always be sure that your conversations result in a focus on what the learner-ready school library does for learners. Isn’t it why we are all here? Consider letting learners help tell about the standards. You can use the videos on the standards portal or create ones starring your own learners. Take a look at the Learners Interpret the Standards series at <https://standards.aasl.org/videos>.

**Be realistic:** What do you want to accomplish this year? Consider using resources available on the AASL Standards portal <https://standards.aasl.org> to help you navigate through decisions about standards implementation. Among the resources are the infographics Managing Standards Overload; Where Do I Start? Six Action Steps for Getting to Know the National School Library Standards; and Reflect and Refresh.

**Be explicit:** Use the language of the standards with educators, both administrators and teachers. Match the standards to what they know and are passionate about. For example, if your school is focused on preventing bullying, start your conversation with the Include Shared Foundation and have a discussion about inclusion and diversity and the role of the school library. Consider this question: What can I bring to the table that supports the broader goals of my school? The archived professional development webinars in the standards portal can help here. Look for ones about connecting to policymakers and furthering your instructional leadership at <https://standards.aasl.org/pd>.

**Be conversational:** Take the time to know the standards, to be conversant, to be intentional in your delivery when discussing the standards. By understanding and internalizing the standards, you will be able to speak from your heart. Consider what most resonates with you about the standards and how you might share your excitement. The One-Pagers for Stakeholders will be useful, available at <https://standards.aasl.org/project/stakeholders>.

**Be centered:** Center your visits with educators around what is important to them. *And always, always frame your conversations around how your work supports learners.* Try to see through the lens of the educator you are visiting. Consider looking at your district’s or school’s goals, strategic plan, and/or mission statement. Using these resources helps other educators make connections to your work as a learner-ready school librarian. Download the Persona Profiles (available at <https://standards.aasl.org/project/personas>) to give you messaging points.

**Be passionate:** Pick the things about the standards you are most passionate about and start your dialogue there. Use stories and examples to describe the standards. Consider using the information about Message Boxes to help you channel your passion so that your message is effective. I love the Think Inside the Box! Tips for Using a Message Box document found at <https://standards.aasl.org/project/message-box>.

**Be resilient, be flexible:** I find that often nothing goes as planned; yet, what happens often turns out to be much better! See where this transition takes you! Consider this quote by Nikki Giovanni: “A lot of people resist transition and therefore never allow themselves to enjoy who they are. Embrace the change, no matter what it is; once you do, you can learn about the new world you’re in and take advantage of it.”

**Be the catalyst for change and the leader in transition:** A learner-ready school library is where change happens, where transition transforms. A learner-ready school librarian supports all learners as they embrace change and navigate the transition that accompanies it. Lastly, believe in yourself and your ability to be a learner-ready school librarian in a learner-ready school library. After all, in the words of actress Priyanka Chopra, “Any transition is easier if you believe in yourself and your talent” (2018).

**Kathryn Roots Lewis** is director of libraries and instructional technology for Norman (OK) Public Schools. She is also the project director for a grant funded by an Institute for Museum and Library Services National Leadership Grant for Learning in Libraries titled “Guiding Inquiry, Making and Learning in School Libraries.” In 2018 Kathryn received the Oklahoma Library Association’s Distinguished Service Award.

**Works Cited:**


“A library is a growing organism. It is an accepted biological fact that a growing organism alone will survive. An organism that ceases to grow will petrify and perish” (Ranganathan 1931). So wrote S. R. Ranganathan in *Five Laws of Library Science*, deftly encapsulating a principle that school librarians know well from their own experience. We grow and change in response to our environment; to pluck another choice word from Ranganathan, we evolve.

School librarians do not exist in a bubble. Despite the cliché of the stuffy, antiquated, bun-wearing shusher, school librarians are a dynamic group. We adapt to the challenges around us—not just those affecting libraries but also those impacting classrooms and communities. We may often fly solo in our buildings, but we are not insular.

New school librarians may not be aware of the amazing potential of their career choice. Sure, we change kids’ lives by developing readers and makers, collaborating with classroom teachers, and building relationships with our local communities. But as you read through this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, you will see how school librarians are also administrators, nationally recognized authors and speakers, educators of future librarians, and influencers of policy. The authors in this issue do not represent the sum total of possible school librarian careers; many dynamic librarians are busy carving out their own paths and building new definitions of what it means to be a school librarian. Some do so by running for AASL President, others by breaking down barriers in their buildings so that real collaboration can happen.

Regardless of the magnitude of our contributions, all of our efforts serve to advance our field.

This issue of *Knowledge Quest* looks at transitions, both personal and professional. Transitions can bring challenges—and I’m sure our readers can think of an example or two on their own—but they also bring opportunities for growth. Examples of this growth abound in the articles in this issue as when Hilda Weisburg details how a changing school dynamic propelled her from the classroom into school librarianship. Her further choice

One of the things that struck us while we were putting this issue together was how different the transitions our authors made were, and yet how certain motifs emerged: the excitement of making a commitment to a new position, the apprehension and self-doubt that strike as the start date approaches, the importance of supportive colleagues and lifelong friends to our success, the sense of duty to our community of learners and to our profession.
to pursue a higher degree in librarianship has influenced and benefited the entire field greatly. Even in retirement, her work continues to shine a light on the value of school librarians, and her leadership encourages us to be leaders as well.

Karla Collins and Jen Spisak transitioned from the K–12 arena to higher education, helping others build their careers as school librarians. One had aimed for higher ed, the other never suspected that academia would be part of her journey. Yet, here they are, discussing the challenges and virtues of moving away from working directly with kids to training the next generations of school librarians and enlarging their circle of influence.

Many school districts opt to have a district-level librarian as their main library contact. Ann Morgester discusses how her career took a different path when she embraced the district-level position and how it has enhanced her understanding of the world of school librarians.

Carmen Redding tells about her leap from front-line librarianship to state-level representative. Her story demonstrates the all-too-common challenge of fulfilling multiple responsibilities, as she strives to represent school librarians and youth services librarians in her state of North Dakota.

Other transitions in a school library career are highlighted in articles from Chiquita Toure and Erikka Adams. The switch from elementary to high school can indeed be drastic, as Chiquita demonstrates in detailing her transition. Going from fixed to flexible scheduling widened her perception of the potential of the school library. Erikka has found her niche (for now!) as a public school-turned-independent school librarian. The changes she experienced will resonate with those already enjoying careers at independent schools and may prove eye-opening to those who are unfamiliar with that sector.

One of the things that struck us while we were putting this issue together was how different the transitions our authors made were, and yet how certain motifs emerged: the excitement of making a commitment to a new position, the apprehension and self-doubt that strike as the start date approaches, the importance of supportive colleagues and lifelong friends to our success, the sense of duty to our community of learners and to our profession. Ultimately, as our authors show in chronicling their own journeys, transitions can help us evolve into more versatile librarians—and quite possibly more well-rounded people, too. These transitions change us, change the courses of our careers, and in so doing change the field of school librarianship. Only by embracing the evolution of our paths, whether it’s the front lines or behind the scenes, will students continue to reap the discovery, knowledge, and hope that we bring to our schools and communities. One thing is certain: no two journeys are the same.

Putting together this issue has been an honor—and an opportunity for growth—for both of us, as well. Our journeys as school librarians have led us along this path where we get to work with new people. We, too, have seen transitions in our careers and continue to embrace them. Neither of us expected to be contributing to Knowledge Quest as guest editors, but the opportunity is priceless. Having the chance to work with trailblazers in our field at all stages of their careers has been an inspiring experience, and one we suspect will help sustain us through the transitions that await us.

Paige Bredenkamp is a former English teacher and K–8 librarian. She now works with school librarians throughout Wyoming as the school library consultant at Wyoming State Library. She is a member of AASL.

Rob Hilliker is the director of the Edsel Ford Memorial Library at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut. He is a member of AASL and serves on the AASL Leadership Development Committee and the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board and serves as chair of the National School Library of the Year Subcommittee.

Work Cited:
living the life i love

Hilda Weisburg
hildakw@gmail.com
I am a planner, and yet I never could have planned my life. Looking back from the vantage point of a fifty-year career I am amazed at where I am and where I have been. If you have been in the workforce for even twenty years, you probably can say the same. Except on birthdays and anniversaries, we aren’t conscious of how the days grow into years and the years into decades.

Along the way we grow, learn, and make choices, and these take us down roads we never imagined. We often take our growth for granted since we didn’t realize it was happening. I can remember being at an ALA Midwinter Meeting and speaking with one of the major names in the field. He had lost his job after many years and was moving to a new state and position after the conference and feeling very uncertain.

Based on a recent experience I had, I told him he was going to find out months later, we met up again at an event. I was highly impressed by his knowledge and abilities—knowledge he didn’t realize he had accrued and that had become part of who he is. No one takes us for granted more than we do ourselves.

**Stepping into the Unknown**

My professional life can be divided into two parts: being a building-level school librarian and being “retired.” Few librarians I have met planned to enter the profession. Like them, I, too, am an accidental librarian. It was 1962. I was graduating from college expecting to become a high school English teacher and about to be married. My job search was intense because it would affect where my husband-to-be and I would live.

One high school English teacher job application I filled out asked for any additional information that would give them a further reason why I should be hired. I stated I had worked two years in a public library as a page while in college. I got an immediate call for an interview and was offered the job as the school librarian if I would take two courses over the summer to get an emergency license. I jumped at the opportunity and began working on my MLS at Columbia University (which has not had a library program in years). It was the best decision of my professional life.

I could have said “no.” I was getting married the day after the semester ended. I certainly didn’t need more stress. It might have been easier to find a job as an English teacher, the job for which I had been trained. Had I not taken that chance who knows what sort of professional life I would have had.

I had just made the first of many choices that would characterize my future. I started on a brand-new path. I often remind librarians that to grow we must move out of our comfort zones. Accepting this school librarian job was a scary step. I was very young and very much out of my comfort zone. I would be stepping out of that zone again and again.

The world was very different then. I had a library council consisting only of girls. I also had an A-V club for boys. Their duty was to set up and often run the 16mm projector for teachers. I think I have witnessed the entire tech evolution from silent filmstrips and opaque projectors to the vast array of resources school librarians manage today.

My first few years were far from brilliant. I wasn’t rehired after the first year, but I knew I loved my new profession far more than teaching English. There was another rocky year before I got my MLS. I eventually spent some time working as a YA and assistant children’s librarian in a public library. Then there was a span of about seven years in which I had my children. After the time away, I eagerly returned to school librarianship as an elementary librarian in a brand-new school modeled after the British infant school. I had no idea what to do as an elementary librarian, so I made up my library program based on what the teachers wanted and what seemed logical to me. I didn’t have training for the elementary level, but I learned by watching good teachers.

**Fortuitous Fork in the Road**

I had been working in this unusual elementary school when I heard that, through its library school, Rutgers University was offering the course work to get a Certificate in Supervision. I didn’t need one. I had a Master’s degree, and there was no chance the district would be hiring a supervisor for school librarians. Yet the possibility appealed to me. I recognized my job in many ways was affected by how administrators perceived me. I wanted a better handle on how they thought and what they valued.

So, I took a chance. After being out of school for ten years, I was back. The choice took my life in a new direction I could never have predicted. In the required library course work I met Ruth Toor, who became my friend and writing partner for thirty-five years. In one course we both did our final papers on the same topic. Our fellow students urged us to write a book on the subject.

Talk about leaving your comfort zone! I had never written a book and had no idea where to begin. One of my library volunteers, a college professor, connected me to her editor, who gave us guidelines for...
writing it. Scary as it was, Ruth and I tackled the project. Our first draft (typed of course) came back with tiny pink slips pasted on the edges of pages telling us how to make changes.

I was sure we had failed miserably. The editor reassured us with a sentence I never forgot, "We never correct bad writing. Only good writing is worth the time." In one year we wrote The Elementary School Librarian’s Almanac: A Complete Media Program for Every Month of the School Year (Center for Applied Research in Education 1979). Long out of print, it was the first resource for librarians that wasn’t a tool such as Common sense Cataloging or a book on children’s literature. Our book sold over thirty thousand copies.

The publisher asked us to do a monthly newsletter and The School Librarian’s Workshop was born. Another step out of our comfort zone. How would we fill sixteen pages ten times a year? We had no idea, but we figured something out. The newsletter proved very successful for many years.

Moving to a Larger Pond

All the while, my professional life continued to evolve in other areas. I became active in my state association after the president of the association spoke with me and said it was time I stepped up. I took another step out of my comfort zone by running for president of my state school library association: New Jersey Association of School Librarians now, but Educational Media Association of New Jersey then. I won the election and began learning to be a leader as I moved from vice-president, to president-elect, then president, and past-president. This office entailed planning and met the leaders in the school, and administration.

I joined ALA/AASL and served on committees. I learned about strategic planning and met the leaders in the field, all of whom were uniformly helpful and informative. I could talk about school libraries with fluency, communicating to teachers and administrators that I was an expert in my field.

Over the years I have served on countless AASL committees. Each of them brought me in contact with school librarians I knew and added many more to my growing community of friends in the profession. Each of them expanded my knowledge base. It is true that serving our professional organizations takes time and usually money as travel and registrations are often needed, but the return on investment is enormous. I have often said I should have gotten continuing education units for most of my committee work.

After not working at the high school level since my first unspectacular entry into the field, I was transferred from the elementary school to the high school. My superintendent let me know she wanted me to work on building a new library. The existing one was impossible to renovate. My thoughts bounced from "Wow, this is going to be phenomenal!" to "How am I going to do this?"

Obviously, I had no experience with a project of this size, but I accepted the challenge. Technology was making huge inroads. Encyclopedias were becoming available on CDs. And yes, I made several mistakes, among them holding onto the card catalog, although the library was automated, because I didn’t think I could get enough computers, and not noticing that the floor outlet for the circulation computer was nearly covered by the large circulation desk. But the finished project, one of the first to automate a school library, was applauded by the students, teachers, and administration.

I do need to mention that being in AASL put me in contact with some of the first adapters of automation. Through their help I was able to choose a system, get it approved, and then work on what was then a multi-vendor, complex process to get the card catalog converted and books barcoded.

More Huge Leaps

A new principal came to the high school, and we started heads over almost everything from the budget to my closing the school library when there was no coverage for my lunch (even though I always ate in the library so I could teach classes). When my supportive superintendent of schools decided to retire, I looked at how things would be after she left. I took another risk and, after twenty-two years in the district, applied for a job elsewhere. I shocked many. Educators don’t usually choose to leave the security of tenure. Once again, moving out of my comfort zone and choosing a new path proved to be correct. It was my experiences at my new high school that led me to give the advice I did to that enterprising library leader I mentioned earlier.

Ruth and I continued to write books for her husband, Jay, president of Library Learning Resources, Inc., who took over The School Librarian’s Workshop. We were regular presenters at our state conference and, on several occasions, were invited to give workshops for other state associations. Both of us became increasingly active in AASL. Ruth served as 1992–1993 president.

Entering the Second Phase

I continued in my new school until July 2004 when I officially retired from being a building-level librarian.
no one takes us for granted more than we do ourselves.
and entered the second phase of my career. I loved my job every day, but I was ready for more flexibility in my schedule and to see what else I could do.

As any educator who retires at the end of the school year can tell you, you don’t feel retired until school restarts. For the first few years I would look at the clock and note what class period we were in. You don’t turn off so many years all at once, but I was looking for new challenges and experiences.

At the beginning of the new phase, nothing much changed in my writing career. Ruth and I could now work during the day rather than after I finished the school day. But my life changed again. To quote from a favorite Langston Hughes poem, my daughter reminded me of my own “dream deferred.” Despite all the books Ruth and I had written, I never wrote the fiction book that I had wanted to write since my college days. In June of 2005, when school was still in session, but I was no longer working, my daughter took me with her to the International Women’s Writing Guild’s Summer Writers Conference. There I began writing a novel. It would take several years before I completed it, but my YA fantasy, Woven through Time, now published by Mundania Press, is still available. Someday I may even finish the sequel I have started.

Ups and Downs

Ruth and I began writing for ALA Editions. Our first book for ALA Editions New on the Job: A School Librarian’s Guide to Success was published in 2007, and we were pleased by readers’ appreciation for the book. (In 2015 a second edition was published.) But there was sadness as well. Ruth’s health took a turn, and in 2012 I took over The School Librarian’s Workshop, which her husband had been publishing for most of its history. I had never contemplated owning my own business. Now I had to file the paperwork, open the bank accounts, and get some help. (My daughter proved an invaluable help.)

I made The School Librarian’s Workshop into an e-newsletter since the drastic cuts in budgets, school librarians, and libraries had seriously reduced the number of our subscribers. Despite my best efforts, a few years later, it became obvious that continuing publication in any form was economically unfeasible. It felt like failure after thirty-five years of publication. I was at a loss. I didn’t know what I was going to do with my days. No matter how many years of experience a person has, no matter the many successes, I have come to accept that failure is always possible. And as always, what you do after a failure determines your life.

I nearly closed down The School Librarian’s Workshop Facebook group. I am glad I didn’t. Today it has over 7,800 members from around the world. The interchange among members continues to amaze me. I also contribute to the group regularly, and my weekly blog posts from <www.HildaKWeisburg.com> are posted on Facebook each week.

Still Risking

After years of serving on numerous AASL committees, I became chair of AASL’s Advocacy Committee. If you know me, you know I am always pushing advocacy for librarians and libraries. Part of the responsibility as chair was to be on ALA’s Committee on Library Advocacy, as that committee works with all divisions in ALA. The experience was enlightening.

I had and have so many friends in AASL. I was very comfortable there. Suddenly I was dealing with people I didn’t know from other divisions. Who didn’t know me. It was a lot like starting over. But like my experiences when I first attended AASL meetings, when I met and worked with members of other ALA divisions I discovered how welcoming and supportive librarians are as a profession.

As I write this in July, I am on two ALA Council Committees: the Committee on Professional Ethics and the Intellectual Freedom Committee. These are very much interrelated. Both have always been very active committees, but in today’s political climate it seems we deal with hot-button issues every day. As a staunch supporter of the First Amendment and intellectual freedom, I appreciate and am proud of ALA for being willing to tackle the difficult topics and be there to guide librarians, whether they direct large public libraries or are solo building- or district-level school librarians.

Along with many retired friends, I now teach pre-service school librarians. I was offered the opportunity, and it seemed like a logical extension of what I have been doing to promote leadership for school librarians. As an adjunct at William Paterson University in New Jersey, I almost always teach one of two courses each semester. I delight in my students’ learning as much as I did with my high school students. Course work is both different and the same as in my own days in library school. Cataloging is still cataloging, and Children’s
Literature is still Children’s Literature. But advocacy was never mentioned back when I was a grad student. It was assumed that schools would always have libraries and librarians. Now advocacy is present in both my courses. My students learn that lesson well. If we don’t become skilled advocates, our profession will cease to exist and our K–12 students will suffer the consequences.

Still Looking Forward

Because I am no longer tied to a five–days–a-week school schedule (the flexibility I wanted when I retired), I am free to give workshops when and where I am asked. The questions and feedback extend my understanding of the challenges school librarians face and, to be honest, it’s gratifying to know that what I offer has value to others. I do many workshops within New Jersey but have also presented in Texas, Florida, and at BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) in New York. Last year I gave a keynote for the Alabama School Library Association. This year I did the same for the Wyoming Library Association’s School Library Interest Group.

I have had the most fun with my latest book for school librarians, Leading for School Librarians: There Is No Other Option (Neal-Schuman, an imprint of ALA) 2017. In a dinner discussion at an ALA Annual Conference, my acquisitions editor expressed concern that the subtitle was too confrontational. A quick check with some school librarians confirmed to her that I was right—and librarians around the country have agreed. A few groups have studied the book for professional development, a circumstance that is extremely gratifying.

The highlight of my career so far came in 2016 when I was the recipient of the AASL Distinguished Service Award. Being recognized and honored by my colleagues who are such great librarians and leaders was an honor beyond my imagining. My mementoes of that occasion are among my greatest treasures.

I urge you all to be willing to take chances and move out of your comfort zone. As James Bryant Conant reputedly said, “Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.” We all need to take risks. Leadership and advocacy don’t happen behind the closed doors of the library. And those who are leaders have the responsibility of mentoring other librarians. As a number of people in the business world have said (though it’s hard to find solid attribution), “Leaders don’t create more followers, they create more leaders.”

What’s next for me? I don’t know. I do know something is around the corner. By the time you read this, someone will have asked if I am interested in doing one thing or another. It will be a bit scary. It will take me out of my comfort zone, and I will take on the challenge, knowing I will learn something new and will grow as a person and as a leader.

Yes, I am still growing. Although I am looking back at a long career, with twists and turns I could not have anticipated, I am not ready to stop. I believe if we aren’t growing we are dying—and there is so much more to learn. My life seems to exemplify one of my favorite quotations. Ursula K. Le Guin said in The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), “It’s good to have an end to journey toward, but it’s the journey that matters in the end.” It has been a fabulous journey, and I have enjoyed every step of it so far.
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They let us teach ADU
Making the Leap from Pre-K–12 to Higher Education

LTS?

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Even within the school library profession, everyone follows a different professional path and reaches different milestones. As we journeyed through stages as school librarians, we found ourselves making transitions that took us on new adventures. Our paths eventually ended up in higher education where we teach people to be school librarians—a profession we both love. We will share with you the challenges and pleasures of making this leap into the world of higher ed.

How We Got Here

**Karla:** The choice to transition from Pre-K–12 schools to higher ed was simple for me but not without its challenges. I always saw myself teaching at a college, following the path laid by my education professor father. Every time he left in a state car to visit student teachers, I imagined myself doing that same thing. My teaching career in Pre-K–12 schools was varied and ever-changing, but two things remained constant—I loved the students, and I loved making an impact on their learning and on their lives. In a school library, I was able to follow students through the years and get to know them differently than as a classroom teacher. As a school librarian, I often served as the mentor coordinator for new teachers in the school. It was exciting to work with brand new teachers, and I discovered it was time to share with future teachers my experiences and what I had learned. I also found myself feeling antsy and ready for a job in which I could visit different schools and see what was going on in different places, not work in the same school every day.

**Jen:** I never expected to be teaching in higher education. I was a middle school educator through and through for twenty years. I loved being a school librarian and could not imagine doing anything else. The energy of my students was contagious, and my colleagues were incredibly supportive collaborative partners. As my years of experience progressed, I received more and more requests to host student teachers, practicum students, and observers from inside and outside of education. The energy I got from excited future librarians was contagious, and I enjoyed sharing my knowledge and experience. I took pride in the programs these aspiring school librarians developed once they had received positions in the field. My desire to use my experience as a practitioner to advance the field of school librarianship by training future librarians increased.

**Karla and Jen:** Since transitioning to teaching people to do the jobs we loved for so long, we have discovered benefits and challenges, as would exist with any job transition.

**Flexibility**

**Karla and Jen:** An obvious difference in the move from Pre-K–12 to higher ed is the increased flexibility in the workday. Our program teaches in a hybrid model with all of our classes taught on Saturdays. During the typical work week, we might have meetings, grading to do, and classes to plan and monitor, but we are in charge of our schedules. While this might seem like a dream to someone who must check in each morning and sign out before leaving the building during the day, the flexibility was not without challenges, especially in the beginning. For an elementary librarian on a fixed schedule, every day is scheduled with little to no flexibility. The librarian determines how the time is organized, but the schedule is set. Any time without scheduled classes is used for library administrative tasks and collaborating with teachers. With flexible schedules at some elementary, middle, and high schools, the librarian has more control over the daily schedule, but flexibility is still limited.

**Karla:** I was woefully unprepared for making a schedule that would maximize my productivity and include all parts of my job requirements: teaching, scholarship, and service. In the mindset “the students always come first,” I found that I was spending the vast majority of my time planning my classes and grading assignments. Most of my other time became reactive, not proactive. I eventually set up a schedule for myself that included time each day for each of my job responsibilities so nothing would get pushed to the side. I have to say, it is glorious to walk out of the office building at lunch without having to ask the secretary, sign out, or report to anyone where I am going.

**Jen:** I have reveled in the new flexibility of my schedule. I’ve always been a self-starter and coming from a library that was on a flex schedule, I was used to scheduling my time well. After completing my first year in higher ed just a few months ago, I have found there are flaws in my process that I need to work out. Because of the new flexibility, I find that I have a difficult time separating my workday from my personal day. Because there is no official start or end time to my day, I tend to work from very early in the morning to very late at night. I feel guilty when I’m not working and guilty when I work nonstop. Balancing work and my personal life is my biggest challenge, especially since we teach all day on most Saturdays.

**Teaching, Scholarship, and Service**

**Karla and Jen:** In higher ed, faculty are expected to attend to three different areas of responsibility: teaching, scholarship, and service. The college or university
often determines the emphasis that is put on each one. For example, Longwood University is known as a teaching institution, meaning that a strong emphasis is put on teaching, while less weight is put on the other two responsibilities. At an institution with a strong emphasis on scholarship, to achieve promotion and tenure faculty are often expected to publish their research and be awarded grants. In addition, there is an expectation for service on many levels: at the college, state, and national levels as well as in the community and in the profession. Finding the right balance between these three responsibilities is a new challenge when moving from Pre-K–12 to higher ed. The greatest challenge is determining exactly what is expected at the specific institution and carving out the time to dedicate to each responsibility.

Karla: When I began teaching at Longwood, I was still completing my PhD dissertation so I was still deeply into the research for that project. The balancing act came when I completed the degree and needed to find new research projects. I found that I was great at developing ideas for research, but the challenge was in finding time to write up my findings. I began to overcome this by presenting my research findings at conferences, then writing articles based on the presentations. This was a huge change for me because I was petrified to speak in front of people when I began the job.

Jen: I had not expected to begin teaching in higher education before completing my PhD. However, due to an unexpected opportunity, I landed in my new profession eighteen months before completing my doctorate. As I am in the final semester of completing my dissertation, I am looking toward what will come next. In discussions with Karla, we have developed some great ideas for research we would like to conduct. It has been difficult not being able to jump in and get started with our ideas because first I have to finish my dissertation. Balancing the dissertation with working full time, presenting at conferences, writing articles, and being involved in both national and state organizations for service has been challenging but exciting at the same time.

Am I Still Impacting the Students?

Karla and Jen: In a Pre-K–12 school, educators work directly with the students. You get to see the lightbulbs go off, and you can directly observe and measure students’ learning. In higher ed, you do not see the direct results on young children. You still get to see the lightbulbs and measure learning in your adult students, but it is different. In fact, your impact is bigger. Each time students taking classes in our program learn new skills to use in their future libraries, they have the potential to impact the learning of every student in their schools. While our impact on young people may not be direct, it is exponential. When we teach collection development, we are not developing a collection for one school, but we are influencing the collections of the twenty schools where our students will one day be librarians.

Karla: What a responsibility! I feel the pressure to get it right like I never have before. What I teach or don’t teach will directly impact what our future librarians know and do in their schools. There are so many things to teach, and so many new things to learn. I constantly find myself balancing between covering too much of one topic and missing another equally important topic. I love to hear stories from current and former students who have an opportunity to implement something that has been taught in a class I am teaching. I know what I am doing is trickling down to the young people in the schools.

Jen: I believe we are definitely still impacting Pre-K–12 students. Just as I took pride in the programs my student teachers went on to create, I also look forward to the school libraries my current students will go on to create. Our school librarianship program is rigorous, and our students leave prepared to affect their future students in many positive ways. I feel we are responsible for a piece of that.

Seeing Best Practices in Action

Karla and Jen: One of the best parts of teaching in higher ed is the opportunity to visit students who are completing their clinical experiences. Our students are required to complete a specified number of hours in school libraries and, as part
of their clinical experience, they must teach a collaborative lesson that we get to observe. Through these observations, we learn about what is current in school libraries and current best practices in the field. Our candidates are teaching what we taught to them, but they are also using their own experiences—and the experiences and knowledge of their cooperating librarians—to teach these lessons.

Karla: I take advantage of school visits to look around and see what is new and to talk with the librarians about innovative practices. When attending librarian conferences, I purposefully choose sessions related to current practices so I can hear about what school librarians are trying and which tools and strategies are working in their libraries. It is sometimes difficult to hear about something great but know that I do not have my own group of young students with whom I can try the new ideas. Instead, I listen and learn, then share the ideas with my students hoping they will tell me about their successes.

Jen: I’m looking forward to beginning my first observations this semester. Currently, most of the classes I teach are held in school libraries. I love seeing how libraries are set up and what kinds of activities and makerspaces the school librarians have developed. Each library is a bit different, and I love seeing the innovative touches in each of them. It will be great to be able to see students in action!

Keeping in Touch with the Real World

Karla and Jen: We have probably all had a professor at some point who did not seem to have a handle on what was currently going on outside of the college classroom. To teach current practice using current and ever-changing technology and techniques, it is imperative for a library educator to keep current in the field. Professional reading is just as important when teaching in higher ed as it was as a school librarian, but it can’t stop at reading. It is important for library educators to be around current school librarians, listening to what they are talking about and how they are teaching. This includes attendance at conferences in the state and at the national level.

Karla: Long before I made the transition to higher ed, I knew I wanted to strive to remain current in the field. It was a personal goal to keep up and not be the out-of-touch professor. However, I found it challenging to keep up with the professional journals when I was out of the library. It was also challenging to keep up with the literature. Without the day-to-day contact, keeping current was something else that needed to be scheduled into my flexible but filled week. I love it when practicing librarians think about sharing something new with me, and chances are I will share the new idea in an upcoming class.

Jen: I find it’s extremely important to keep up with the practitioner side of school librarianship. I love conducting research and developing new ideas for school libraries, but I never want to lose sight of what is realistic. Keeping current with journals and blogs is important to me. Attending conferences on regional, state, and national levels is also important. Part of the scholarship component of teaching in higher education is to present at multiple conferences. In addition to presenting, though, I make sure to attend sessions of practicing librarians and engage in discussions with them as well. As far as keeping up with literature, I have rediscovered audiobooks since I am on the road so much!

Creating a New Professional Network

Karla and Jen: As library educators, we’ve met a whole new group of people and found a whole new purpose in attending conferences. There are conferences that consist of research presentations, panel discussions about current trends, and teaching ideas for higher ed. Deciding which conference will meet our greatest needs at a particular time can be overwhelming and daunting. In the context of the three main responsibilities of instructors in higher ed, we read about conferences related to all of them: teaching, scholarship, and service. It is not possible to have enough time or money to attend them all!

Karla: I have never been to so many conferences in my life! When I was a school librarian, the school system would not often pay for conferences, certainly not for those out of state, so I did not attend. I certainly did not offer to present at a conference! Since going to Longwood, I have become active in ALA and AASL, among other professional organizations. I find each conference to be a welcome opportunity to meet new people and make new connections.

Jen: In the past, my conference attendance was limited to places that were close to where I lived. I was very active in our state association and went to its annual conference every year. I would also attend the national Computers in Libraries conference in the Washington, DC, area each year as it was close to home. Taking days off for additional conferences was never something I was willing to do when I was a school librarian. I wasn’t willing to leave my students...
and staff. Now, I have more flexibility and have been able to attend AASL and ALA conferences. It’s been great fun meeting and building relationships with educators who publish many of the articles and textbooks I read. To quote the catch-phrase from *Wayne’s World*, I often look around and think, “I’m not worthy!”

**Lessons I Have Learned**

**Karla:** My time in higher ed so far has been a time of great growth. I would not be the same school librarian if I went back today as I was when I was in Pre-K–12 schools. I try to keep that in mind as I teach and avoid teaching from the ivory tower. I want to keep it real. However, my job is to teach best practices in school librarianship. Our class discussions include many that focus on the reality of the school library job and the decisions these grad students will have to make. We role-play a book challenge so they have practice saying the words they will need to say to an upset parent. We talk through scenarios about difficult students or teachers. We set up realistic collaborations and talk about the lack of time in a school library lesson/schedule. We read and discuss literature. We do all of this through the lens of a school librarian, which is often very different from that of a classroom teacher.

One of the greatest lessons I have learned is that schools are different in different parts of the state and that our Pre-K–12 students are often defined by where they grow up. The courses that are available to students varies greatly depending on the school system. For example, some school systems offer a wide variety of elective and vocational classes while others offer very few options. The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences within the state are noticeable and often extreme. In one part of the state, students are in class with learners from thirty different countries. Students speak many languages, practice many religions, and see many custom differences each day. Other parts of the state are extremely homogeneous. Some school libraries have budgets of tens of thousands of dollars while other school librarians are given no budget and must raise their own money to purchase new books for the library. Facilities and resources are not distributed equitably throughout the state, but this was apparent to me only when I had the opportunity to spend time in various school libraries around the state.

**Jen:** I’m still in the very beginning of my time in higher education. I have many lessons ahead of me. One great lesson I have learned is that some school librarians have great autonomy and are able to experiment with new ideas and build school libraries that are sensitive to the needs of their respective schools. Others have very limited flexibility in what they are able to do based on the structure of the school system for which they work. Regardless of the environment one of our aspiring school librarians ends up in, positive change can always happen. Even in an environment in which the school librarian has little autonomy, it is important to note that even baby steps can eventually add up to a giant leap.

**Conclusion**

**Karla and Jen:** As educators and librarians, we all transition through a number of stages. We start out in our jobs as apprentices and novices, then begin taking on more responsibilities as we become more confident in our jobs. Making the transition from Pre-K–12 to higher ed is no different. While we were both at points in our careers at which we were comfortable and felt good about our abilities, we were ready for new challenges. Higher ed has certainly provided that! We are constantly humbled by the responsibility and the opportunities we have been given. We are still school librarians at heart, but our reach is even greater in our new positions.

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**Jen Spisak** is assistant professor of school librarianship at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She serves as chair of the Virginia Association of School Librarians (VAASL) Scholarship and Awards Committee. She also serves on AASL’s Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Committee. In 2011 she was named Hungary Creek Middle School Teacher of the Year, and in 2012 VAASL gave her its School Librarian of the Year Award. She is the author of Multimedia Learning Stations: Facilitating Instruction, Strengthening the Research Process, Building Collaborative Partnerships (Englewood Pearson 2015).
TRANSFORMING MY
derspective

Ann Morgester
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Transformation is exhilarating, frustrating, and sometimes painful, but it is so critical to our students’ success that we regularly challenge and change our perspectives on what it means to be effective school librarians. Like many of us, I started my career in education as a teacher: language arts and social studies, with elective courses in art, media literacy, and study skills. As a teacher my focus was narrow, my curriculum, my students and, of course, the school. I participated in school-level committees (scheduling, parent volunteers, communication), and once I had become the social studies department chair I participated on district-level committees, although the focus was still narrow. After eight years of teaching middle school I decided to get my school library media endorsement through the University of Washington.

When moving to a high school library position, I needed to be aware of some changes, but my focus was still bounded primarily by my school and my program, my students, and my staff. My perspective was still fairly narrow. It wasn’t until I started teaching professional development courses and participating in our state organization that I started the process of expanding my perspective. I had always been a middle school and secondary-level educator, having elementary librarians in my classes quickly expanded how I saw not only library services but my school district. It became quickly apparent that elementary library services were a very different world from what I was doing on a daily basis. Working with the state association allowed me to see how things were different in other areas of the state and how other librarians managed the same issues of budget, time, and community that I did.

When the library curriculum coordinator position was created in my district, several people suggested that I apply for it. We hadn’t had a district-level library coordinator focused on curriculum and library services integration in over twenty years. Therefore, no one was really clear on what the job would entail, but they felt that I had the perspective to take it on. Because it was a new position, developing the job from the ground up was an amazing opportunity. I learned so much in the early years; the first key idea was that my perspective had to expand to see things from a district level.

One of the things that I feel I really lacked in my first couple years in the coordinator position was a clear vision and articulated core values around library service for the district’s libraries. I knew that I wanted effective library programs and student-centered service, but I hadn’t clarified what that meant in terms that could be easily shared and used as a focal point in leading the district library programs. This is where the rubber really had to meet the road for me in my professional practice. If I was going to be effective I had to clarify my purpose and vision.

Transformative Opportunities

I credit five things with transforming my perspective throughout my school library career and helping me to develop a clear vision and clearly articulated core values. What I have realized about each of them is that they required me to move beyond my library and even beyond my district. I believe that putting ourselves in a place to transform our mindset about our library, our school, and our students requires that we get the distance to see things from a wider viewpoint that we can then bring back to the service we provide for our patrons.

First, I think the most critical opportunity I received was being invited to go into 80+ school libraries to help librarians do collection development and weeding. This has been incredibly powerful in developing my core beliefs around engagement, access, and literacy. Very few librarians have the opportunity to weed in so many collections, and doing so has drastically changed my viewpoint on the critical nature of weeding in providing engaging

I now believe that failure to effectively weed our collections is nothing less than a form of censorship. If we don’t weed effectively, either our students need a machete to bushwhack their way to the engaging, relevant, and accurate materials we have or they simply don’t attempt to explore the shelves because what they want is buried in the mass of weeds.
collections for our students. There is no way to thank all of the school librarians who invited me into their collections and generously shared their perspectives and allowed me to learn from them and their students. Without their trust and generosity I would never have been able to gain such a unique frame of reference on collection development. (I'll elaborate further later.)

Another critical area was being involved in various positions with the Alaska Association of School Librarians while I was still in a school library position. The opportunity to be membership chair and then my three years as president elect, president, and past president truly helped me start to see library services beyond my own district and to begin to build a network of incredibly generous and professional colleagues around the state.

Another transformative experience occurred in 2014. I was honored to be selected to participate in the Lilead Fellowship. The focus of the fellowship was transformational change, and it was the best and the hardest professional development I have done in my twenty-three years in education. It provided a framework for thinking about library services and change that I have continued to implement in my district. And again this opportunity allowed me to
expand my network of inspiring and passionate library colleagues.

Then, through a connection I made while a LiLead Fellow, I was offered the opportunity to run for the AASL Region 8 Director position on the AASL Board of Directors. I am now in my second year on the AASL Board and again am so privileged to be learning from an incredibly energetic and committed group of people who believe in school libraries and service to the profession. They inspire me every day.

Finally, and back at my district, last year I was given the opportunity to work with a group of my district librarians to revise the school librarian job description. This year we will be launching an ambitious training plan to assist all my librarians in providing library services to the students we have now. Not the ones we used to have, wish we had, or even think we have. Transformational change is hard, and I am blessed to be able to lead that work in my district, no matter how hard it is.

Influential Changes

The two areas of library service where I think I have undergone the most change are around circulation policies and weeding. Both have a huge impact on student engagement in our libraries. We have to make our spaces welcoming and low risk for students, and our collections must be highly engaging, current, and relevant to get our students to check out resources and read widely and ferociously.

“Transformation isn’t about improving. It is about rethinking.” attributed to Malcolm Gladwell

One of the most painful parts of transformation is rethinking what you “know” to be true and realizing that it may not only not be true, but it may actually be counterproductive to achieving your core goals based on core values. This realization is the pivot point at which you have to decide how much pain you are willing to tolerate. One of the things that I had been told when I started as a school librarian in my district—and which seemed at the time to make sense—was that when students had overdue books they couldn’t check out more until they returned—or paid for—the books they already had borrowed. It didn’t matter for some librarians if the prohibition lasted two weeks, two years, or the rest of students’ time in the district; they needed to be “taught responsibility.”

Don’t get me wrong. Teaching responsibility is a critical task, and I do believe that it is the responsibility of all adults to help the young people we connect with to become productive members of a democratic society. But is it the mission of the school library to do that above all other things? I will admit right now that while I didn’t stop kids from checking out for years, I did stop their checkout privileges for months at a time to try to get them to take responsibility for the books that they had lost. Looking back on that practice I cringe, and here is why. My core values around library service, which I developed after reading Simon Sinek’s book Start with Why, are engagement, access, and literacy. My vision for the district libraries is “Books and Information in EVERY Student’s Hands.” So I have to ask myself now, when I blocked a student from checking out books was I focusing my effort on my vision and core values? Is it a high-value task that moved me toward my vision of effective library services for our students? At the time I hadn’t yet developed these core values and vision. However, when I look back at that time, I realize that what I was doing was making the library a risky place for some students when I really should have been making it a low-risk, high-reward space.

“Vision is a destination—a fixed point to which we focus all effort. Strategy is a route—an adaptable path to get us where we want to go.” Simon Sinek (2012)

When it comes to weeding our collections I have had the incredible opportunity to weed in elementary, middle school, and high school collections. I have weeded entire collections in a single year, and I have weeded smaller parts of

If I had to give a new school librarian one piece of advice on the career it would be that there is no point at which we can say we are done examining and changing our perspectives.
collections over time. I have weeded with librarians, and I have had school librarians tell me they just couldn’t let go and I should just do the weeding for them. Through their incredible trust and generosity, I have had an experience that most school librarians simply don’t have to develop a very broad perspective on weeding and collection development.

When I started in my high school library I was mentored by two very experienced and very aggressive weeder. I remember Nina Prockish telling me early on that “School libraries are not archival libraries. That isn’t what we do. Our collections have to be living and breathing collections that respond to the needs of our students.” But it wasn’t until I had the opportunity at the district level to weed in so many libraries that I came to truly shift my perspective on weeding. I now believe that failure to effectively weed our collections is nothing less than a form of censorship. If we don’t weed effectively, either our students need a machete to bushwhack their way to the engaging, relevant, and accurate materials we have or they simply don’t attempt to explore the shelves because what they want is buried in the mass of weeds. I now use this belief as one of the pillars of library service to get me to my vision of books and information in every student’s hands and align with my core values of access, engagement, and literacy.

**Continuing to Evolve**

“The grass is greener where you water it.” attributed to Neil Barringham

If I had to give a new school librarian one piece of advice on the career it would be that there is no point at which we can say we are done examining and changing our perspectives. We must always strive to rethink practices and priorities, and to remember that most of us weren’t trained in the type of librarianship that our students need today—and we don’t even know what type of librarianship our students will need in ten years.

Join your state and national organizations. Use the incredibly rich resources that social media have provided. Follow people that think like you and—even more importantly—follow the people who push you into rethinking things. Go to conferences, participate in webinars, present at the local, state, and national levels.

Changing perspectives is not a passive activity. It requires that we continually seek out the people, blogs, articles, tweets, and more that challenge us and evaluate them all in the context of the best interests of our students. It also requires that we see our students and their world with clear eyes. My first year in education I was given a poster that said, “You need to teach the students you have right now. Not the ones you used to have, wish you had, or think you have.” It bears repeating: We need to make sure that we are not providing library services for the students we used to have, wish we had, or think we have. Our work has to be about the students we actually have in the world they actually live in.

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**Recommended Resources:**


My Transition from an Elementary to a High School Library

Building a Better School Library Model

Chiquita R. Toure
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After thirteen years of teaching as a middle school language arts teacher, I returned to school and earned a second Master’s degree to become a licensed school librarian for grades Pre-K–12. There were no deep bouts of meditation. Instead, the transition occurred organically. It came as a result of my quest to discover who and what would fortify and sustain me in my professional career and personal life journey. Not surprisingly, my longing to focus on my primary role in education was guided by purpose. In a library space, I desired to become more centered in my thinking on how my role could be used to shift mindsets about what teaching and learning look like in the field of formal education. I wanted everyone who shares that space to imagine the school community as a network of learners.

In the Beginning

Making the transition to the position of a K–8 school librarian was not too challenging. In fact, it was oddly very similar to my role as a classroom teacher. Within the district most librarians used a fixed schedule for classes, and the expectation was to teach “library skills.” School librarians were charged with empowering our students to become more effective users of the library. Typical lessons, conducted only by the librarian, included learning how to use the online catalog system, the Dewey Decimal System, and reference materials, plus safe and proper use of the Web. The lessons relied heavily upon routine procedures and the use of print materials. The skills were important to teach because when our students possess this skill set they can function better as learners.

Not surprisingly, within the district, this library model was viewed as the norm, allowing classroom teachers time to take a break or catch up on grading. These visits to the library for lessons in library skills had many names: “specials,” “extras,” or even “unified arts.” However, all the sessions served the same purpose: providing relief for teachers. Furthermore, in the district K–8 students don’t have access to a full-time school librarian; instead, each K–8 librarian is responsible for making scheduled visits to at least eight schools and sometimes as many as ten. This situation made those fixed times for library visits necessary—and even more cherished by students and teachers.

Serving K–8 students was rewarding, but serving so many schools limited my time and access to most students and teachers. I was also concerned about the limited focus of the class visits to the library; focusing only on a few skills is not the sum total of how we should function as school librarians.

As a former teacher, I am sensitive to an elementary teacher’s classroom schedule and fully understand the need to refresh oneself and maximize student-free moments to get administrative tasks done. However, I am not an advocate of teachers’ use of library visits as catch-up time; it doesn’t best serve students or the school community at large. For me, the situation was reminiscent of antiquated models of teaching and learning. In the twenty-first century, we need our students more engaged and involved in inquiry-based projects, solving problems through application of principles. Teachers should be actively participating in collaborative projects with school librarians, and administrators can be more supportive of school libraries and how they function. School librarians can be agents of change if given the space, time, and resources. As a member of a community of professionals who endeavors to transform learning, I knew there was a better and deeper way to serve the school community.

The Transition

What and Why

I soon learned that I could have more interaction with students and fellow educators as a high school librarian in our district because a high school librarian serves full time at one location. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself for me to apply for the position of lead school librarian at a high school, I did and was fortunate enough to be offered the job. Transitioning to the position of head librarian, I was challenged to create and collaborate, to develop and implement innovative ways of managing a 21st-century space. Though I encountered obstacles like outdated books, little technology, and entrenched “old and usual ways” of doing things, I was determined to learn as much as possible with the goal of making our school’s library a model learning hub within the district.

After only a few days at the high school I found myself reflecting on why I had selected a position that would keep me connected to the school community. My primary reason was my continuing commitment to teaching. However, if I am honest with myself, my reasons for getting a second Master’s degree included having thoughts of myself as the classroom teacher who had become uninspired. The process of teaching and learning was not what I had envisioned. I felt constrained, boxed in, underutilized, and undervalued. I was sure other teachers felt the same and thought that maybe in my role as school librarian I could serve as a catalyst for change by helping others function at a higher level and reimagine their own roles—whether they were teachers, counselors, nurses, or administrators. Thus, I had a two-fold purpose in my new position in a high school library. My first purpose: Within
the school community—and maybe the district—redefine the role of school librarian from keeper of books to curator, collaborator, provider of professional development, and learner. Doing so would surely help me better serve the school community (students, staff, and parents). My second purpose: Explore and expand teachers’ ideas on the meaning and value of collective work.

Aligning myself with a school community within which I can engage in synergistic relationships allowed me to grow as a professional and add value to others’ learning. As a school librarian, I grew by building a skill set that helps me transform others’ ideas of teaching and learning. I wanted to be a resource for others—from the custodian to the principal. I wanted to impact and be impacted.

I found it interesting that those who created and proposed new school reforms were seldom fully engaged as practitioners and seemed unaware of what it truly takes to prepare students to become literate, informed, and engaged world citizens. In contrast, the new standards from AASL are a model of how to invite and embrace the expertise of school librarians who then become collaborators and co-creators. Because I found our role as school librarians honored and respected by AASL, professional development is important to me and keeps me abreast of new trends, standards, and innovative ways to create, teach, and curate. I have presented at Ohio Educational Library Media Association conferences, and attended conferences of the American Educational Research Association, American Association of School Librarians, and local literacy conferences.

These opportunities inspired me and helped me better understand how to build relationships with young adults in high school and guide them in their learning journeys. To begin, I invited the school community to see the library as a learning hub with mobile furniture designed for gatherings, presentations, problem-solving sessions, meetings, and—yes—even socializing. A grant and an increased budget enabled me to purchase new books, furniture, and technology. No fixed schedules! Instead, students and staff are welcome to visit throughout the day to read, compose, research, write, and get advice. Later, the creation of a simple makerspace enabled students to put puzzles together, make duct tape projects, play games and cards, crochet, and sketch.

The more I learned about the population I served, the better I understood its strengths and needs. While our book circulation statistics were low, I knew that our students are part of a generation that heavily uses the Internet to read and to learn about and communicate with the world. Sure, they read print books, but they seem to find fulfillment when they are evaluating, analyzing, and creating, which are the top tiers of Bloom’s Taxonomy. For that reason, I wanted students to have project-based learning experiences in which they applied information in products they helped to co-create.

How

From Fixed Schedules to Project-Based Learning for High Schoolers

It’s clear that the resources of the Information Age have granted learners access to resources from around the world. With the promotion of open-source material, the Internet helps students to explore and collect information to build knowledge and problem solve. Some barriers to communication with national and international communities have been eliminated. Additionally, as citizens of a technology-driven world we—and our students—have the potential to create circles of friends both near and far with whom we can learn, engage, and collaborate on common projects. Students needed to experience collaborative learning.
I have always been excited about the possibilities of following new pathways to learning, and worldwide access provides an almost unimaginable array of resources available. This is especially true when it comes to academic content, but I’m also interested in resources for developing and cultivating all aspects of the whole student: the intellectual, personal, and social.

Effecting Local and Global Change

One example of this personalized and empowered approach occurred in 2016 with our young women’s organization, when we set out to effect change in local and global communities. Though we sponsored several projects, two stand out as most impactful.

The first project entailed a collaboration with a national service-learning organization that sponsored a four-hour conference held in our school on the topic of human trafficking; the participants were all the young women in grades 9 through 12. Student leaders’ preparation for the conference included research, organizing the program, finding guest speakers, and planning activities. A survey had been distributed earlier to ascertain what our female students knew or did not know about this topic. While our student leaders were well informed and educated about this topic, the survey revealed that others were not.

All conference attendees were empowered by the various presentations. On the day of the conference, a local police officer who works in the division that focuses on human trafficking crimes supplemented a slide presentation with a Q&A
As a lifelong learner in a new job, I continued to ask myself what would happen if all educators in the school expanded our focus to engage students through the promotion of social and emotional skills by way of community service.

session. Red flags and characteristics of unhealthy relationships that can serve as a catalyst for human trafficking were identified. In another presentation attendees learned how human trafficking has been redefined to include not only vulnerable women from afar or those who play fictional roles in movies, but also includes people who grew up within our own communities. Perhaps, the most powerful part of the conference was the final presentation made by a survivor of human trafficking. Afterwards, our student leaders conducted evaluations administered to all attendees. Respondents reported that they had received a wealth of useful, thought-provoking information, and requested additional empowering sessions in the future.

Our second project was a global effort that included collaboration with a locally based empowerment organization that offers resources and services to women who live in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. Our introduction to the organization included meeting the director who shared her passion to generate revenue for women who live in impoverished and rural Ethiopia. The funds are used to promote entrepreneurship by helping women develop small businesses so the women can take care of their families. One young woman from our organization was so moved by the presentation she interned with the organization and developed a series of marketing materials and literature to educate others about the work that’s necessary to bring change in those communities. In essence, she became a global collaborator who understood the power of building communities. As a result of her internship we raised $1,000, which went towards the purchase of fifty sheep for a small village in Oromia. The village women, in turn, used those sheep to produce milk, cheese, yogurt, and other products that were then sold for profit.

In sum, the community service projects both locally and globally were very important lessons in how to network and manage learning environments beyond the four walls of a school building. More importantly, learners gained soft skills that allowed them to empathize—not just sympathize—with community citizens and take action. Our students’ learning was transformed through experiences with classmates, teachers, and community members. My continuing quest to redefine my role and expand people’s understanding of what school librarians do has made significant progress. While the school library has traditionally been known as a place for cool book selections, fact finding, and lessons about research and references, I’ve learned to expand my role from one of merely showing students problems and possible solutions to demonstrating the importance of gaining and using knowledge to empower communities.

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ACHIEVING BALANCE

MOVING FROM SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP TO STATE-LEVEL SPECIALIST

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“The principal would like to see you in his office,” the vice principal began. “You're not in trouble,” he added.

My face had betrayed me again, I thought.

My professional life took a turn that day for which I am grateful. I began my journey to become a school librarian. Like many librarians, I didn’t start my education career as a school librarian. I was an English language arts and music teacher. I became a librarian by default, some might say. The administration was reducing staff, and the high school librarian was retiring.

“Well, I’m glad I made your day,” the principal stated as I was leaving his office.

He had offered me the library position for the upcoming school year. Floating on air, I made my way back to the classroom. I was being given an opportunity I had only dreamed of. Changing career directions wasn’t something I had considered as being realistic. In fact, I wasn’t that far from retirement.

Growing into a School Librarian

I worked on my state’s library credential, taking classes for the next three years as I held the position of school librarian. What I learned in those three years tied together and reinforced all the years of pedagogy I had been exposed to in professional development. Those educational engagements were no longer bits and pieces in isolation. They became a cohesive foundation for how I approached student learning and delivery of instruction. But, I was a school librarian now, not a teacher, or so many of my colleagues thought.

“You are going to be the librarian?” they asked quizically.

“Will you still teach?” some asked, taking care not to add, “Because being a librarian can’t be a full-time job.”

“Oh, no!” chimed others. “Did you have to take a pay cut?”

Viewing school librarians as non-teachers is an old phenomenon that continues to have life. Being relegated to the position of school librarian was, most certainly in the eyes of some teachers, a step down from teaching. Some colleagues, administrators, students, and community members still hold the notion that librarians sit at the circulation desk and check out books all day. Let’s not forget that librarians also have time to read the books.

Besides, isn’t becoming the librarian what tired teachers do until they are ready to retire?

My library classes taught me that becoming a credentialed school librarian would not be easy. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* states that school librarians are “the essential link who connect students, teachers, and others with the information resources they need” (AASL and AECT 1998, 4). Additionally, according to *Information Power*, the school librarian has four specific responsibilities: as teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. In 2009, AASL's *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* added leader to the school librarian’s responsibilities. Collaboration, leadership, and technology are mentioned more than once in both these books as components that are interwoven in all of a school librarian’s responsibilities. As I studied *Information Power*, I noticed the emphasis on the role of the school librarian as a teaching partner as described on pages 4 and 5 of the text. I was beginning to understand the depth of my role and the weight of my responsibilities. I eagerly accepted the challenges.

As a former teacher, standards were nothing new to me, but realizing that

I ENVISION A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES THAT WILL OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS TO BENEFIT THOSE WE COMMONLY SERVE.
school librarians had standards made me respect the profession even more. Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning had a 1988 predecessor: Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs. Together these two texts helped shape the framework for future standards. In 2007 AASL released Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, which focused on the essential skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies for students engaged in all information literacies. Most recently, AASL released its newest standards: National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries. For the first time, the standards did not focus on one group over the others. Learners, librarians, and libraries share responsibilities for learning. AASL continues to update its vision in response to research and technology advancements. School librarians need to support the organization that works diligently to serve us.

As a high school English and music teacher, I recognized that professional affiliation was important. Having access to professional journals, packed with new insights and ideas, was a must for me. I was fortunate to be exposed to hours of professional development (PD) on various topics. The PD did not immediately produce increased student achievement as administrators hoped, but I found that just as we are products of our sum of experiences, I became a more insightful educator because of the mix of professional development in which I had engaged. I could not absorb all that I had been exposed to, but from each experience, I took away valuable ideas that I could add to my teaching toolkit. Yet, I never felt truly successful. A piece was missing. Then, I became a school librarian.

More Learning and Exploring

So, why were my library classes making such an impact on how I viewed teaching and learning? There wasn’t a single class or Eureka moment that brought my learning into focus. Rather, the way I was learning was the key. My classes were taught at the upper level of Bloom’s taxonomy: analyzing, evaluating, and creating. I was shown the SAMR cycle (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) and how to incorporate technology into learning in a meaningful, transformative way. I explored philosophies of education to determine if I was a pragmatist, constructivist, realist, or existentialist. A meaningful discussion ensued. I started to understand how I processed information and made it my own. As my learning transformed, I saw students’ learning in a new way. Now, I was eager to collaborate with classroom teachers.

I wish I could say that my first experiences were astounding successes. Unfortunately, they were not. I should have handled many situations differently. Collaboration takes dedicated time and planning. Relationships need to be developed. My enthusiasm alone was not enough to make projects work. My vision was not always the teacher’s vision. I realized that I had to step back at times and proceed with more care, foresight, and patience. Some teachers may see this “collaboration time” as a way for the librarian to teach his or her classes. Other teachers will take an active part. The key is having adequate planning time and a supportive administration.

Further Growth and Positive Changes

My opportunities to collaborate are different now that I work at the state level. Projects come together more organically. Creating partnerships and supporting one another is a natural extension of the job.

Applying for the School and Youth Services Specialist position became a focus of mine after I read an online post advertising the job. I was ready
for a change, something I hadn’t realized until a series of events sent me looking. Earlier that year, I had volunteered to take over the public library in our small rural community. The director’s husband had received a promotion, and they were leaving. I had recently begun serving on the library board. Although I never became the director, I realized that I was seeking new challenges. I had spent eleven years in the community, and family was not close by. Additionally, the school where I was librarian advertised for four ELA teachers for the upcoming school year. Because one of my majors was in English language arts, my chances of being moved to the classroom rose exponentially even though my administration assured me I would remain the librarian. Four years before, I had been taken out of the school library to substitute-teach full time in ELA for over four months. Scared of losing my position as librarian, I volunteered to do both, by working in the library before and after school and on weekends if necessary. The following school year, I came to the fall in-service to be told I would be teaching composition half-time. The contract that I had signed the previous spring read that I was the school librarian, but I had no recourse. My flexibility was surely being tested. Incidentally, the situations I describe are quite commonplace in education—especially in library positions.

I am a spiritual person and believe doors open and close for a reason. Had I signed a contract to be the school librarian for the upcoming school year, I probably would have been teaching English. Had I taken the directorship of the public library, I would have honored my commitment and remained in the community and in the school system nearby. Because I allowed myself the opportunity to look beyond my present situation, I was given the option of exploring other areas of librarianship. I applied for the state position, received an interview, and accepted the job all within two weeks. Inside of two more weeks, I was packed, moved, and working as a state specialist.

As I write this in July, a year has passed since I filled the position of School and Youth Services Specialist at the North Dakota State Library. This position was developed in answer to school librarians’ requests that they have a voice and representation at the state level. My role has been split between supporting school librarians and working with public libraries’ summer reading programs.

I am still becoming acquainted with my job, its responsibilities, and its possibilities. I have enjoyed seeing how other state libraries answer the needs of their librarians, be they in school, public, academic, or special libraries. I have found camaraderie with my counterparts from other states. We are able to share and glean the best library practices to enhance our services. We are developing relationships between libraries that share common patrons. I envision a partnership between school and public libraries that will open the lines of communications to benefit those we commonly serve. For now, my school and public library services are handled separately.

Recently, I gathered a small group of school librarians across the state to write an elementary curriculum for three disaster-preparedness booklets. These booklets and accompanying curriculum will be distributed to all elementary school libraries this fall. The committee members meet via Zoom, and we share ideas and lessons through Google Drive and Google Docs.

On a broader scope, North Dakota has joined forces with South Dakota and Wyoming as part of a Reach Out grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Over the course of the next three years, the school librarian specialists in each state will partner with Technology and Innovation in Education (TIE), educational consultants from Rapid City, South Dakota, to aid rural school librarians as they move to a more digital-based learning hub. PD opportunities will help librarians build capacity as instructional leaders to work collaboratively with other school librarians.
personnel—teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals. Rural school librarians will also develop skills to utilize open education resources to integrate digital applications into their professional practices. Again, librarians will work collaboratively with teachers to bring information to students.

When I focus on public libraries, my work is with the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) for children and teen public librarians. I have the opportunity each year to introduce the summer reading materials and facilitate six workshops across the state. For the 2020 programming year, I will also serve on the national School Outreach committee for CSLP.

This year, the Bank of North Dakota partnered with the state library to bring the 529 College Save program to the summer reading program participants. Each public library that ran a summer program will submit the participants’ names to me. Their names will be placed in one of eight regional drawings. Each winner will receive a $529 scholarship to be put toward education after high school. Every participant who completes the summer reading program will receive a $25 certificate to be applied to a College SAVE account.

Another one of my tasks is to coordinate the Summer Reading Celebration at the capitol grounds in Bismarck. We host a celebration in late May to begin the summer program. The two local public libraries use the opportunity to register summer reading participants. We bring in vendors who are willing to create learning opportunities for kids. No one is permitted to sell anything. Children, parents, and daycare center groups visit the various booths and take part in activities. This year we had approximately 3,500 visitors.

As a state-level specialist, I have been able to increase my visibility in professional organizations such as YALSA, serving as the North Dakota voice in teen services. I also answered an e-mail asking for volunteers to help write supplemental materials (fact sheets) for the new teen competencies for public libraries. I collaborated with three other librarians from across the United States. This fall I will present on teen competencies at our state library conference.

Leaving the students has been the most difficult transition for me. I miss the opportunities to work directly with them. I also realize I am a teacher and learner foremost, though I have had to put my teacher hat, as I knew it, away. The state position, however, has opened a new world for me. I have more flexibility to explore and deepen my professional interests, meet people at a national level, and share commonalities and differences. I look through information with a broader lens and consider the bigger picture and wider impact to delivering services. My journey has become richer, and as I pursue my Master’s in Library Science through Emporia State, I will welcome the opportunity to continue learning and sharing.

**Carmen Redding** is the school and youth services specialist for the North Dakota State Library. This is a newly developed position that she has held for one year. She belongs to the American Library Association, the American Association of School Librarians, the Young Adult Library Services Association, the Public Library Association, and the National Science Teachers Association. She volunteered to work with other YALSA members, developing fact sheets for the new teen competencies for public libraries. She is the state-assigned teen representative to YALSA and participated in the YALSA 2017 National Forum on Transforming Teen Services through Continuing Education at which attendees discussed ways to share the new teen competencies with public librarians serving teens.

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Professional Expanding

Transitioning to an Independent School

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Growth & My Horizons
When I thought of being a school librarian, I always pictured myself in public high schools. I wanted to be a public servant, so to me, that meant public high schools. I applied for many positions, interviewed at some, and accepted an offer to begin my high school librarian career. I was in that position for five years when I realized I wanted more professional growth and a change of approach to education. During this time, I recalled my pre-professional degree work at the Winsor School in Boston, Massachusetts, a small, all-girls 5–12th grade independent school. I remembered the environment as supportive; the students were eager and excited to be there. Perhaps I recalled this experience when my sister-in-law sent me a job posting at another small, experimental learning-based independent high school. I looked it over and with feelings of trepidation at leaving public schools—but also curiosity to return to something I remembered as positive—I applied.

Accepting the position meant I also accepted changing types of leadership, changing types of accountability, and changing expectations from a broader group of stakeholders. Immediately, I began to learn that not all independent high schools are the same, that these schools are not cut off from the outside world, that history and tradition are important pieces of decision making, and that independent school teachers are not as stuck in a role but get to try many roles. I saw all this in my first year, which flew by in a blur of adapting, reacting, learning, and connecting. I hit a few roadblocks, almost lost traction on a few turns, and three years later was still learning the rules of the road for being a librarian in an independent high school. For anyone who is about to embark on an MSLIS program, about to graduate from an LIS program, or considering changing roles, here are a few things to consider about being a librarian in an independent high school.

The Surprises

Connectedness

At the independent high school in which I worked, I saw teachers and administrators work hard to address world events, local community issues, and even internal community happenings that may affect the tenor of the student body. Like all teenagers, students at our school struggled with making healthy decisions and learning to communicate better, and experienced all the other not-so-pretty parts of being a teenager in the twenty-first century. The school as a whole learned how to address these struggles through training sessions, discussions, and a lot of new policies.

I saw the library and my role as natural supports in these efforts. One way was through interactive, pop-up libraries I created around campus, usually with themes on current school or world issues or on teen-centered wellness. The pop-up libraries would include links to database articles, surveys, and sometimes hands-on activities. Schedule permitting, I was also part of a health and wellness committee on which I worked with others across departments to look at how to create a cohesive approach to caring for students and providing resources at different locations around campus.

Another approach was being an advocate for increased student voices in decision-making processes where appropriate. In committees I sat on, I would interject student voices and opinions that I was aware of and encourage committees to invite students into the process to get real-time input from those usually most affected by what the group was trying to accomplish. I intentionally used students in the library as informal focus group members whenever I needed student insight on a potential library plan or school change under discussion.

Also, my assistant and I worked to promote a safe-space environment in the library, where all were welcome and all questions were encouraged. This environment attracted students who wanted to just relax in the comfortable chairs. This safe space also attracted some students who wanted to download their whole day with us and then go on their way. Also attracted were groups of students who might have questions or make statements about a recent campus speaker or event; I could engage with these students informally, sometimes with no stakes other than to get to know them and help them clarify their own thoughts and ideas.

Efforts to Increase Diversity

I also learned how admissions and communications teams work hard to target and address ways to broaden their school’s reach and impact on many different kinds of students, families, and communities in and out of the physical school. While independent schools may have to work harder to ensure their communities reflect the diversity of the global community, they do the work when the intention, money, and drive are there. Admissions and communications staff members made genuine efforts to increase the diversity of the student body.

Sadly, nationally 30 percent of total enrollment at independent schools are students of color (NAIS 2016), a percentage that does not mirror real global diversity. Cost is, of course, a
factor when students are selecting a school to attend. However, the percentage does also come down to student choice—why students choose one independent school over another. Those end decisions can be informed and convinced only so much by the efforts of the school itself. For example, the school at which I worked was in a remote rural location with the closest urban center being fifty minutes away, and that city was not all that big! This environment in itself will attract and support students who want that kind of landscape beyond their learning environment. However, such an environment is not for all students or all families.

Independent Means Choices

Like many people, I used to call independent schools “private schools,” and they are, but not all private schools are independent schools and not all independent schools are created equal. Any school that does not receive funding from a state government is a private school (Dillon 2018). Other differences, according to the National Association of Independent Schools, are that an independent school is “driven by a unique mission” and is specifically governed independent of outside influence (NAIS n.d.). Content focuses, pedagogies, and philosophies can vary according to that unique mission. This difference allows for a learning environment similar to a public charter school in which students have more choice in what kind of education they want to pursue and in how they pursue that education. Some independent schools have a unifying theme like STEM or the arts; some have built-in support programs for learners who need that support or have learning challenges. Some are day schools; others are boarding schools. The major difference is the price tag. Public charter schools do not have fees as a determinant of who may attend; most independent and private schools do.

I learned having a diverse community at an independent school is a tuition balancing act, a tightrope walk between supporting more students to have the chance to attend while supporting more and more robust programs on campus for those students already attending. To do both is expensive and, thus, has led to tuition costs steadily increasing over the last four years at most independent schools (NAIS 2016). Tuition and boarding costs can be almost as much as college tuition. Some schools offer financial aid packages, which vary depending on the size of the school, its endowment and other financial supports, and what focuses the school is promoting for the students who attend there.

Social/Emotional Support, Front and Center

School is a place for learning and personal growth. This is especially true for independent schools that are also boarding schools, where teenagers are away from home and need support to continue their growth in and out of the classroom. Due to proximity and exposure to each other, employees and students (and even administrators) at independent boarding schools act like an extended family in which having hard discussions, with students and employees alike, is a priority. Even though I didn’t have a group of students assigned to me, I often found myself in this role. I loved this involvement. As an educator, I truly believe in supporting young people’s emotional development. I often had to have the same conversations multiple times with the same student—and with other students, too.

When I had worked at a rural public school, I had acted in a similar way with an assigned advisory group, although unlike the independent school, the public school did not require faculty to have to provide that type of support. At that same public school, I had also seen character development happen in a few more traditional ways, sometimes implicit in the way teachers talked to students about how to treat other people, but mostly through threats of punitive measures: Here are the rules and if the rules are broken, this punishment happens.

In contrast, at the independent high school, I saw faculty, staff, and administration being more like full-time coaches or even parents.
to students, on and off the field. OK, maybe not parents, but more like that favorite aunt or uncle a young teen is drawn to for answers and listens to instead of parental units (sorry, parents!). Adults would approach a student issue by talking about choices, decision making, and looking beyond just the immediate consequence of an action. I saw more onus on students, on how they ended up in x situations or making y choices, and how they intended to right those situations. Seeing this process was witnessing metacognitive development made verbal, and I loved it! I won’t claim it always works and not all students choose to get themselves to better places. After all, they are teenagers and are learning about themselves and the world.

This approach to supporting students emotionally and guiding their behavior affected my role in a several ways. I often overheard students talking in the library about sensitive subjects or injudicious behavior (the speaker’s own or others’) and, when appropriate, would step in to address whatever was being said. I’d try various levels of seriousness, depending on the issue, from an easy joke to redirect to a sit down, intense one-to-one conversation. Sometimes my role might be sharing a resource or sending them to a specific website. Other times, I might share a potential issue of academic integrity with a student, the classroom teacher, and the student’s advisor if I felt unsure of a behavior I observed while co-teaching. Whatever the situation was, the climate of coaching at the school helped me see these actions not as punitive and, therefore, not to approach them in a negative way.

Listening and talking with students about difficult topics gave me more insight into two things about teenagers. One, they want to have these talks because sometimes they just don’t have all the knowledge they need and the experience to handle difficult situations; talking with someone they trust can be invaluable. Second, I saw just how smart and insightful students can be. Overall, I was re-inspired repeatedly to keep including them in the decision-making processes within the library and the school whenever possible and to feel more motivated to be an advocate for their voices whenever I could.

**Qualified and Passionate Colleagues**

An idea I’d heard prior to working at an independent school was that independent school teachers do not have to have advanced degrees. This idea seems to imply standards are lower for independent school teachers. The majority of my colleagues (so far) have advanced degrees and, sometimes, additional certifications for experiential, hands-on learning opportunities like Outward Bound, national/international service learning, wilderness first aid, rock climbing, and more. The root of this idea about lower standards is in part, I think, the flexible professional environment I’ve witnessed within the independent school where I worked. This environment is designed to foster and retain passionate and creative teachers, not lose them to burnout, overly structured repetition, or disinterest.

I’ve seen this kind of community encourage and allow teachers to branch out of their “classroom content” domain into other areas, whether it be introducing an elective course, teaching a full-credit course, or organizing an afterschool/extra-curricular offering that is in an area unrelated to their degrees. And sometimes I saw this branching out lead to a complete career shift for a teacher who found that this project area (outside the person’s degree and content area) to be a true passion (surprise!). This realization can happen in public schools as well, but to make a major shift in field involves more costs, tests, and records that need to be paid, passed, and reported to state educational offices. In contrast, independent schools may allow an easier transition for teachers, leading, in turn, to retaining those teachers, a win-win for everyone, especially students who see passionate, curious, and creative teachers trying and learning new things.

**The Tough Stuff**

Not mentioning the challenges I faced would be remiss. What?! It wasn’t perfect there?! Even though people pay to be there?! Yes, that’s right; the school at which I worked—and I’m guessing other independent high schools as well—are

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**What helped me most was visiting other independent school libraries and speaking with fellow librarians on what they did, how they worked at their schools, and where they fit into their schools’ histories, plans, and initiatives.**
not perfect. They have their own sets of challenges, similar and different to those public high schools face.

Hierarchy...Where?

One of the biggest challenges I faced was defining where, in the school’s broader landscape and its strategic vision, I as the school librarian and the library program itself fit into that vision. On the micro level, this situation meant supervision and the responsibilities of other staff members were unclear. On the macro level, long-term goals for the library’s future development existed only within the library-specific plans I created. My first year, I knew this situation had to change and worked hard to share my vision with the administrators and to continually ask them for feedback. I thought my work could also speak for itself and went out of my way to collaborate with many other educators in the school and to try dynamic ideas for programming. I hosted a series of authors, cohosted an event with the diversity coordinator that featured a film and discussion for the whole community, helped administrators design a professional development day, with the tech integrator co-planned a tech-sharing day for the faculty, and began sitting on multiple committees to broaden the scope and span of the library’s support for other areas on campus. I collaborated with many different departments on curriculum; at faculty meetings I spoke up about library resources and sometimes at the weekly all-school meetings had quirky informational snippets to share.

In my second year, I lost the part-time library assistant I’d just hired. As a result, I had less time to devote to being out and about on campus. I took more time to deep dive into library-specific work I could do while being in the library’s physical space. I rewrote the library mission and vision statements and developed a strategic plan with action steps that tied to the school’s plan and the outcomes the school specified for graduates. While this work may not have changed hearts and minds instantaneously, over the three years I saw more excitement and more collaboration from faculty. I saw more engagement from students. While this work did not lead to immediate discussion of long-term goals for the library, it did lead to administrators’ taking

more notice and interest in the day-to-day operations of the library and a clearer reporting system for supervision. All positive steps forward.

Think Outside the Line Item

One line item in the school’s tuition costs was for books, a sum that included audio copies of any books students needed for classes. Providing audiobooks was something I struggled with because I wanted to provide a variety of audio resources but didn’t know whether students were already purchasing or looking for them elsewhere. Looking at the bigger need, I found a creative solution to provide a support students did need from the library. I consulted the teachers I knew who promoted audio resources to students or helped them access audio resources, and we combined forces into a shared approach. Together, we created a plan to ensure that 1) we all marketed the available tuition funds the same way; 2) we all knew the process for students to get the audiobooks they needed; and 3) we pooled the additional audio resources we knew about into one unified guide accessible to all teachers and students. This guide was valued by the teachers who had helped
create it and by other instructors, as well as by students. Of course, the most important outcome was that students had access to resources in formats that matched their needs. However, as a bonus, this experience was a lesson to me; a useful resource and stronger relationships with other educators came from accepting the situation as a challenge not a dead end!

**All Eyes Are Watching!**

OK, that sounds a bit too Big Brother-ish. Let me clarify. In the public high school, I was lucky to be able to focus on students and faculty as my primary (really only!) and most important library stakeholders. In the independent high school, though students and faculty were still the most important stakeholders, a bigger cast of characters also had to be involved, informed, and made aware of library decisions. Who were these stakeholders? Parents who visited officially on parents’ weekends and unofficially when visiting their children. The admissions team, who would bring in prospective students and families. The communications team that needed clear and consistent messaging about the library to share with current and prospective families and the broader school community (e.g., alums, local community residents, any collaborating organizations). Trustees. Visiting groups of consultants. Visiting teachers from other independent schools. I also had to be aware of how I spoke of the school to people in my personal life.

That aspect of intentionality in speech and in sharing job specifics was not entirely new to me. When working in the public high school, I had always maintained professional boundaries, which were important to me for keeping work and my personal life separate. At the independent high school, I had to learn how branding was another type of boundary to maintain in addition to the usual professional boundaries; branding is how independent schools differentiate themselves to stand out from other independent schools. I had to live and talk the brand every day when describing the school, the library, and my role. I had to keep the brand in mind as I designed displays or thought of physical space changes to the library. I had to keep the brand in mind for when and how I approached different departments to collaborate and how I broached certain, new ideas. All of this “living the brand” would have been a challenge if I didn’t believe in it, or it was a false representation of the school. The brand at this independent school was true, thank goodness, and was one I believed in and supported.

**School Identity—It’s Important**

This challenge was something I stumbled on not very gracelessly because I was new to the independent school environment. I was unfamiliar with how rich a history many independent schools have and how that history can inform so many things at those schools. I struggled to figure out my school’s particular history, and how and why it factored into some decisions but not others. I attempted to foster relationships with people in different offices across campus to strengthen information sharing. When changing things or introducing new ideas through the library program, I tried to avoid stepping on the metaphorical toes of those to whom the school’s history mattered. I still stepped on toes, apologized for it, and looked to trusted colleagues to help me out in the future.

Although my colleagues wanted to help, their perspectives were very different from mine. Most of my colleagues had been at the school for at least ten years (if not more!) and many had also attended independent or private schools for some or all of their educations. This reality made my stumbles obvious to them and my questions harder for them—and me—to answer because my colleagues had never had to consciously think about navigating the politics, the expectations, or the community in quite the same way that I was finding necessary. I didn’t really have someone on the staff to turn to for the inside scoop I needed.

What helped me most was visiting other independent school libraries and speaking with fellow librarians on what they did, how they worked at their schools, and where they fit into their schools’ histories, plans, and initiatives. I was reassured by their kindness and grew more confident from their openness and willingness to answer any and all of my questions. They gave me perspective on how to parse the different types of responses and outreach I might get from different offices. They helped me understand why and how the histories of independent schools could help inform me...
and lead me to develop more library programming and, more importantly, stronger ties to the core mission and values of the school.

The very first time I reached out to another independent school librarian with an idea to collaborate, I was met with an instant yes! We made plans for monthly meet-ups, an online resource-sharing consortium, and a regional librarian meet-up group. At another independent school, a librarian shared a writing program she developed collaboratively with a nearby university’s writing center. As my students were hungry for more writing support and my teachers had no time to add more, I stayed in touch with her via e-mail as I slowly tried to build a similar program with a nearby college’s writing center. This experience showed me how creating a library program in direct response to a need would already ensure its success and use.

Another librarian at an independent school modeled how she used the school archives and Twitter to connect with the communications team and alumni network to share memories using historical school items. I envisioned doing this with the room of unarchived materials at my school, thinking that, perhaps, I could generate interest in the school community to formalize an archive. I also learned that an intentional social media blitz can tip the scales for program success. When I spoke to a few other librarians, they shared that communication between librarians and administrators is an area of struggle for others, too; I was not alone. These librarians reminded me of the obvious: Change takes time, and I had to keep on doing what I was doing.

This encouragement and sense of alliance was what I needed to remember to use my network. In both public and independent schools, librarians are often a department of one. We have to rely on our regional, state, and national networks for day-to-day support and idea sharing. While this approach may not be as easy as walking to the faculty room for a chat with another librarian, when used, it can be extremely effective and a powerful boost to morale. This had me looking into how I could get more involved in committee work with YALSA as I daydreamed of possibly making a difference beyond my school’s walls.

**Looking Ahead**

After three years at the same independent school, as I write this in July, I find myself transitioning to a new position at another independent high school to continue my professional growth and learning. I am stepping out of the role of solo library decision maker into a role as one member of a team of school librarians. This change excites me for so many reasons, mostly because I think the challenges I will face in my new role will be more about the role itself and the objectives of the role, in contrast to my last position, in which I was dealing with the larger landscape challenges while simultaneously learning the ins and outs of the school and trying to run school library programming, all on my own.

I can’t wait to start this new journey. I can firmly say I know the basics of the independent high school world, but even now I’m not sure. I hope I’ve learned enough to avoid stepping on metaphorical toes and enough to adapt more easily to this new school’s rich history and ways of being and doing. I know I’ve grown as a school librarian. I expect to again have passionate, qualified teachers as colleagues. Unlike my last school, though, I’ll also have a super-amazing group of school librarians to turn to for help and advice, people who will speak my language!

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**The very first time I reached out to another independent school librarian with an idea to collaborate, I was met with an instant yes!**

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**Erikka Adams** is the emerging technology librarian at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut. She is a member of AASL.

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SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP:

A Profession in 4 Acts

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Although school libraries—and indeed our world—have changed greatly since the publication of the first set of school library standards in 1920 (National Education Assoc. and North Central Assoc. of Colleges and Secondary Schools 1920), each subsequent iteration of the standards has sought to define the next incarnation of a profession undergoing continual evolution. In this article, four professionals who have transitioned into different phases of their school library careers offer reflections on how the professional standards influence their work.

**Act 1: Transitioning to Librarianship**

Mary Nevares, school librarian, South Texas Independent School District, @BLA_Librarians

As a school librarian I answer many questions from students, teachers, and staff. Problems need solutions, and people in school settings often go to a librarian for assistance. As a school librarian new to the profession, I am not always sure that what I’m doing is best practice; that’s why it is essential for me to use the National School Library Standards to guide me in my profession.

I worked as a classroom teacher for eighteen years before becoming a school librarian. In my role as department chair I was in charge of leading our department through its curriculum-writing process. The process included confirming that the curriculum documents reflected all of the required standards such as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). At the time I believed that going through this curriculum-writing process would ensure student success. While the documents we created reflected the standards to a significant degree, the student outcomes were always a toss-up. One thing I noticed is that our standards focused only on student actions. We were missing critical components such as the beliefs and actions of the educators.

AASL’s National School Library Standards are designed to deal with this problem. The standards are an integrated framework that works to demonstrate the connections between learners, school librarians, and school libraries. As a result, three sets of standards work together to provide a quality learning experience for students. The first chapter of the National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries contains statements of Common Beliefs that represent the foundation for the framework of the AASL Standards (AASL 2018).

When the National School Library Standards book was published, the first thing I did was examine my own beliefs and compare them with the Common Beliefs in chapter 1. I saw this as a first step toward developing my own set of professional principles that I could strengthen and build upon throughout my career as a school librarian. These beliefs govern my day-to-day activities, and I look for ways to demonstrate that reality in my work. I see the Common Beliefs as a way to connect to a broader community of school librarians through our shared principles. If we all start from the same viewpoint, we can work toward the same goals.

Understanding the new National School Library Standards can seem like a daunting task, but some things I’m doing now are helping me. For example, I am working through—and reflecting on—“Where Do I Start? Six Action Steps for Getting to Know the National School Library Standards,” a helpful and thought-provoking infographic available at [https://standards.aasl.org/project/six-steps](https://standards.aasl.org/project/six-steps). These action steps mirror those found in the AASL Standards Framework for Learners. In essence, to understand the standards, librarians taking the action steps are modeling the actions of the learners. The action steps can be taken in a way that doesn’t seem overwhelming to me. You can go as fast or as slowly as you need. At the time of this writing (July), I plan to gather colleagues in my district during the school year to go through the six action steps with me. Together we can discover the ways the standards can work for us.

Another thing I’m doing is staying connected via social media. By using the Twitter hashtag #AASLstandards, I can keep up with the latest developments, ideas for implementation, and challenges. AASL shares videos, information about webinars, and helpful infographics to break down the content of the standards in easy-to-understand ways.

As a person new to the library profession, the National School Library Standards guide me on the path I need to follow to become an effective leader in my school community. The AASL Standards are the perfect tool to help me develop my craft as I transition into my school library career.
Act 2: Trailblazing School Librarian

Renee Dyer, school librarian, Weslaco Independent School District; EdD student, Sam Houston State University, @WEHSLibrary

When I started my journey as a school librarian twenty-five years ago I was fresh out of graduate school. I had passion, conviction, and the misconception that the classes I had taken and the theories I had learned would provide me with every resource I needed to blaze a trail in my journey to becoming the best school librarian the world had ever seen. Of course, that wasn’t the case. I would need many more tools and guides to chart my path as a librarian.

Like most of you, I have sought direction from professional publications along my journey: Booklist, VOYA, and School Library Journal to name a few. I have also sought guidance from professional organizations including the American Library Association, the Texas Library Association, the Texas Computer Education Association, and the International Society for Technology in Education. More recently, I have looked to my social media-based personal learning network (PLN). These have all been important sources of guidance for me, but the resources that have always served as my compass for research-based best practices in the library have come from the American Association of School Librarians. For me, those best practices were introduced with the 1998 edition of Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs. With the knowledge I could access in Information Power, I could go anywhere and show my students and teachers the route to technology proficiency and out-of-the-box thinking. That trail led me to build partnerships for learning on my campus, in my school district, and throughout my community and state. I was the trailblazing librarian I had always dreamed of being—for a while, and then my trail became a little less clear. Alternate routes appeared on the map as new resources and new ways of accessing information emerged.

I realized that AASL was once again supporting me when they issued me a new map in 2007, Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. These standards held tips for navigating the uncharted trails, so I could once again explore new terrain. The updated paths on the map lead to leadership, inquiry, and integration. When I hiked down the leadership trail, I found many others there that I could teach and learn from. The inquiry and integration trails seemed familiar but different, as if their routes had been lengthened with new and challenging terrain that required me to dig in and traverse the trail one step at a time so I wouldn’t slip off of the path. But, eventually, those trails, too, began to fork and switch back, making me question the validity of my map. AASL also saw the paths changing and handed me a new map last year, the National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries. This new map contains some familiar trails as well as trails that are unfamiliar to me. I am eager to explore them. I know I won’t get lost along the way with the AASL Standards there to point me back in the right direction, and to build upon my past experiences and knowledge.
I still haven’t reached my destination, but in truth, my travel was never about the destination; it has always been about the journey. AASL’s guidance has ensured that it has been filled with adventures, challenges, and opportunities. I hope each of you enjoys the journey—it’s more important than reaching the destination.

Act 3: School Librarian Leadership

Len Bryan, Library Technical Systems Manager, Denver Public Schools, @lenbryan25

After teaching English and coaching for eleven years, I served as a campus librarian for five years: two in a middle school and three in a high school. I was lucky to be in Texas, which has a strong school library presence, largely thanks to the amazing professionals there, and the School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas, which have been recently revised. I was also lucky to have colleagues across the district and the state to support me and inform me of best practices in school librarianship.

My good fortune continued as I transitioned to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission in 2014, where I became the program coordinator for school libraries, and served as a consultant for campus and district librarians across the state. Along with our strong state standards, AASL’s 2007 Standards for the 21st-Century Learner served as a national benchmark by which we could measure our progress as a state. Many of the checklists, reference documents, and other materials that are now in the appendix of AASL’s National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries existed on the AASL website; they had not yet been curated into a single resource, so they required some searching to locate and use with librarians. The new book has made looking up relevant information much quicker and easier!

On the road again, I transitioned to Oregon in 2016—a new state for me, with new state standards. In Oregon I served as the only librarian in a district, working with 20,000 students and 1,500 teachers across 35 campuses. The AASL Standards served as an anchor point between state standards, as I learned about my new state and where our school library programs could best serve the needs of students, teachers, and our school communities. The AASL Standards, newly revised and released in 2017, gave me a national lens through which to view my district role, and helped me focus on the work that made the most impact: teaching students (and teachers) information literacy skills. I lived in the learner standards as I taught students and teachers to inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage with library resources, most notably our state databases. I also referred to the standards in my communication with principals. This district has not employed campus librarians in quite a long time, and most of the teachers and administrators were unaware of what licensed school librarians can do for them and, more importantly, for their students. AASL’s National School Library Standards gave me a place to begin those conversations.

Ultimately, my goal in using the professional standards is to guide the growth of the next generation of school library professionals by creating curriculum that fosters the development of the values and practices advocated by the professional standards.
As I write this in July, I will be moving again in a few weeks, this time to Colorado, where I will definitely be using the AASL Standards to inform my assessment of the department I will be managing the Central Library Technical Systems in Denver Public Schools. Connecting the important functions of this department to district goals as well as to AASL and state standards will be one of my many new opportunities in this role. I hope to utilize the AASL Standards Framework for School Librarians to help us ensure we are providing campus librarians with the tools and knowledge they need to create teaching and learning cultures where students can innovate, collaborate, explore, and create new learning products. I also hope to use the tools in chapter 14 of the standards book to assist us in developing an in-district school library evaluation similar to the building- and district-level checklist on pages 174–180.

Our AASL Standards are especially helpful for school librarians, who may have a bit of wanderlust and are willing to change positions or move from state to state. The standards provide a nationwide framework within which we can operate. If our state library associations have created standards and have done the work in connecting their state standards to AASL Standards, we can use these crosswalks to see how our practice is similar across settings, regardless of our roles.

### Act 4: Faculty Perspectives

**Dr. Aaron J. Elkins, assistant professor, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman’s University**

In his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer (1990) describes teaching, scholarship, and service as the three aspects of the work of academics. Although the priority and balance of each of these aspects varies by institution, the professional standards influence each of these three aspects of my work as a school library faculty member.

**Teaching**

Perhaps the most obvious way the standards influence my teaching is by shaping the development of my curriculum. As a school library faculty member working to prepare the next generation of school library professionals, I have used the professional standards as a foundation for my curriculum, a base upon which I add my experience as a school librarian, and a crosswalk to the state professional standards. The publication of the new standards gives me the opportunity to review my existing curriculum and identify areas where there may be gaps and opportunities for growth. Ultimately, my goal in using the professional standards is to guide the growth of the next generation of school library professionals by creating curriculum that fosters the development of the values and practices advocated by the professional standards.

### Scholarship

The professional standards have been a particular interest of mine in my research. In my dissertation (Elkins 2014), I examined how the performance responsibilities in *Empowering Learners* (AASL 2009) compared to the performance responsibilities from the job descriptions for school librarians in Florida (not well, in case you were wondering). Along with two colleagues, I surveyed school librarians to see which roles from the professional standards they felt were most important and in which they most frequently engaged (Elkins, Wood, and Mardis 2015). I discussed how the professional standards may inform role perceptions, and how the contrasts between those role perceptions may affect school librarians’ willingness to engage in extra-role behaviors (Elkins 2015). Most recently, I revisited the data I collected during my dissertation research to see how factors like the age of the job description, the number of performance expectations in the job description, and the source of the job description affected the rate of agreement with the performance expectations from the professional standards (Elkins 2018). I am eager to begin new research with the new set of professional standards and am most interested to see how school librarians are fulfilling the professional standards in their work lives.

### Service

For faculty members, service work typically means working on committees at the departmental, college, and university levels but can also include work in the community or for professional organizations.
I work to communicate with my colleagues the intersection between the professional standards and our curriculum. Additionally, I currently serve on AASL’s Standards Implementation Committee and am excited to be involved in facilitating the rollout of the new standards.

**Conclusion**

While we are each in different “acts” of our school library careers, the professional standards have meaning to each of us, whether as a guiding document, compass, foundation, or lens. We are confident that our relationship with the professional standards will continue to grow and deepen as we continue to develop as school library professionals.

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**AASL member Aaron Elkins** is an assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman’s University (TWU) in Denton, where he won the Faculty Award for Outstanding Service. He serves on AASL’s Standards Implementation Committee and AASL’s Intellectual Freedom Award Subcommittee. Among his recent publications is “Mind the Gaps: School Librarians’ Job Descriptions and the Professional Standards for School Librarians in the United States,” published this year by School Libraries Worldwide.

**Renee Dyer** is librarian at Weslaco (TX) East High School. She is an AASL member. In 2014 she was the first recipient of the Bonnie Baker Thorne Award for Outstanding Service in Education. In 2013 and 2011 she was among the top three librarians honored by the Texas Computer Educators Association. Renee wrote a successful grant proposal that resulted in the Sprint Foundation awarding her school district $2.5 million in services and devices through the foundation’s 1 Million Project.

**AASL member Mary Nevares** is a school librarian in Edinburg in the South Texas Independent School District.

**Len Bryan** is the library technology systems manager for Denver Public Schools. Previously, he served the children of Texas for ten years in the classroom, teaching middle school and high school English. He earned his MSLIS from the University of North Texas in 2009 and served as a middle school librarian. He then took on the opportunity to open a new high school, where he served as librarian, webmaster, and National Honor Society advisor, among other roles. He later served as the school program coordinator at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and the district librarian for Hillsboro School District. He is a member of AASL and serves on the AASL Standards Implementation Committee and is chair of the AASL Social Media Committee.
National School Library Standards

DEFINING THE PROFESSION. TRANSFORMING LEARNING LEADERS.

The National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries reflects an evolution in teaching, learning, and library standards, defining a profession that harnesses curiosity, models responsibility, inspires exploration, promotes creativity, and deepens understanding. This publication provides school librarians with the context needed to cultivate growth mindset in all learners and facilitate successful partnerships. The streamlined and integrated standards framework ensures that standards-related activities are mutually reinforcing for learners, school librarians, and school libraries. Check out additional AASL Standards tools and products including pamphlets, posters, bookmarks, clings, and a mobile app.

SHOP AT https://standards.aasl.org/shop
BEYOND THE RESEARCH PROJECT: INQUIRY EVERY DAY AND EVERY WAY
Instructional collaborations between classroom teachers and school librarians often involve the “research project.” These annual assignments (typically) are opportunities to put the inquiry process into practice and provide a rich context for learning. But the National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries (2018) remind us that inquiry happens beyond the research project—inquiry happens every time a student uses information to answer a question, complete an assignment, or solve a problem. Moreover, inquiry will look different in the context of each subject area. The purpose of this article is to offer a new way to see inquiry: as something that happens routinely in solving problems with information, as something that requires a common process but contextualized approach in each situation, and as something that is critical in personalized and lifelong learning.

Learning itself may be described as an information process enabling us to survive and thrive, driven by a natural curiosity about our world. The National School Library Standards recognize the critical nature of inquiry in the learning process, addressing it explicitly as one of the Shared Foundations that “describes the core values that learners, school librarians, and school libraries should reflect and promote” (AASL 2018, 17). But aspects of inquiry are also recognizable implicitly throughout all the Shared Foundations. School librarians recognize the value of inquiry in constructing knowledge, establishing lifelong learning habits, and encouraging personalized learning experiences. In addition, we know that inquiry activities inviting student voice, choice, and agency are highly motivating for student and educator alike.

The National School Library Standards also make clear that students engage in the inquiry process in a variety of situations beyond the annual research project: “Although individuals may not always consciously reflect on their inquiry processes, the process of asking questions, gathering information, making sense of the information, making decisions, and sharing results is something we all do every day” (AASL 2018, 28). Some call this “information problem-solving” to reflect the ubiquitous nature of inquiry (Eisenberg, Murray, and Bartow 2016). The National School Library Standards describe the competencies associated with inquiry, and provide guidance in instructional planning, assessment, and reporting of student growth. It’s time for school librarians to take the lead and work with staff colleagues in changing the way educators see and teach inquiry.

Every Day Inquiry: Beyond the Research Project

It’s time for school librarians to take the lead and work with staff colleagues in changing the way educators see and teach inquiry.

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search! Information problem-solving is more than just a Google search—it’s a process that involves identifying the need for information, determining the best resources, locating and accessing information, synthesizing and sharing information, and evaluating the process. It also happens throughout every day, inside and outside of school, and in a variety of educational and personal situations.

It is important for students at every level to learn about all forms of inquiry—from informal information problem-solving to formal, structured research. Proficiency in the inquiry process is essential for students as they become independent, lifelong learners. The research on learning points to problem-solving as the critical difference between those who master content and those who do not; that is, experts in any content area are better at solving problems than novices (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000). The AASL Standards describe a Key Commitment for the Shared Foundation of Inquire: “Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems” (2018, 47). Let’s face it. While our students may struggle with applying a formal inquiry process, they know problems when they face them.

School is not the only place where students learn. They learn in informal situations as well—at home, online, in public libraries and museums, playing sports or video games, and so on. This informal learning is influenced by student-driven motivation for learning and their control over the structure of the learning experience. Encouraging students to recognize their own information problem-solving situations as opportunities to apply school-learned inquiry skills outside of school is critical in promoting independent and lifelong learning. One way to do this is to involve students in generating a list of information problem-solving situations they experience outside of school. Another approach is to collaborate with the public library to reinforce inquiry competencies and the inquiry process into homework help, makerspaces, gaming, and other services for children and teens. Partnerships with public libraries is an effective strategy for reinforcing inquiry learning in the public library as an informal learning environment. The National School Library Standards challenge us to guide students in seeing the process in their everyday lives at school and beyond, and to apply their understanding of how it helps them answer questions, complete assignments, and solve problems.

The AASL Standards call on us to “select and trust in a systematic inquiry process that supports true inquiry” (2018, 74). The Big6 information problem-solving process (Eisenberg and Berkowitz 1990) is simple but powerful, flexible, nonlinear, easily applied to everyday situations as well as research, and can be used with students in grades K through 12. The Big6 may be introduced to students by demonstrating a variety of applications: solving math problems, finding books to read, and completing research projects. Students may also be prompted to recognize situations for using the Big6 to solve problems outside of school: figuring out which movie to watch on a Friday night, finding a book to read in the public library, improved success in video games, and packing for a school-sponsored camping trip. It’s time for school librarians to take the lead in showing students how to tackle any problem they face with skill and confidence—through the inquiry process.

Embracing a formal inquiry process such as the Big6 is not only useful in the context of inquiry learning, but also for planning instructional planning. An understanding of all the stages of the process, and guiding strategies appropriate to each, is essential to effective instructional planning. Guiding students through the inquiry process does not necessarily begin by locating sources of information (as students most often want to do) or even task definition (as preferred by teachers and school librarians). One of the advantages of the Big6 approach is that while all six stages are necessary for successful information problem-solving, the stages do not need to be learned or completed in a linear fashion. School librarians can work with students in recognizing the requirements of each assignment and matching those with the appropriate stage of the process to determine the skills students will need to develop and
apply. It’s time for school librarians to take the lead in communicating to students and instructional partners the many applications and nuances of the inquiry process.

Every Way Inquiry: Information Problem Solving across Content Areas

It’s also time to recognize that students will experience the inquiry process differently in each content area. In their Knowledge Quest article, Lauri J. Vaughan, Sue Smith, and Meredith Cranston (2016) introduced the concept of “disciplinary information literacy.” They recognized that the problems students faced in each of the content areas required different approaches. Researchers have also found that experts in a particular content area are better problem-solvers than novices, but that this problem-solving expertise does not necessarily transfer to other content areas (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000). This conclusion supports what we already know, that the type of problem students encounter in mathematics, for example, is different than the type of problem they encounter in other areas of the curriculum. School librarians need to collaborate with teacher colleagues in every subject area to understand the type of problems students face in each, and what success looks like.

When students recognize the context and type of problem that they face, they are better able to determine the type of information they will need and the appropriate approach to take; this is the Task Definition stage of the Big6. Understanding this will help school librarians become more effective in guiding students through the inquiry process as a teacher in the library and instructional partner in the classroom. Spending time on recognizing the type of problems students face in each subject area goes a long way toward getting them off on the right foot in any problem situation. Just as students learn to distinguish between the four properties of addition (commutative, associative, identity, and distributive), so too must they learn to determine the appropriate style for a writing assignment (expository, descriptive, narrative, and persuasive). In social studies, they must identify patterns in the causes of conflict and social movements, just as they must identify and evaluate the impact of characterization, point of view, theme, tone, and other elements within literature. With this approach, students aren’t simply solving problems in science and history, they are thinking like scientists and historians. This is the rationale for the Problem-Solving Learning Environment in which the curriculum is centered around content-specific problems (Jonassen 2011).

Recognizing every way inquiry improves the effectiveness of guidance through every stage of the inquiry process. When students recognize that inquiry in science looks different from inquiry in music, they also recognize the information sources that are reliable and relevant within specific content areas. In the Big6, this stage is called Information Seeking Strategies. Students learn to identify the useful resources in each content area (CultureGrams for geography and culture-related inquiry assignments, for example), as well as general ones (Britannica Online and ProQuest, for example). Moreover, students learn strategies for evaluating online resources within each content area.

The way information is located and accessed may vary as well. A History Study Center database search may be the appropriate inquiry strategy for an exploration of the causes of World War I, but entering numbers into a calculator may be the appropriate inquiry strategy for determining values in a complex algebra problem (Location and Access stage of the Big6). Further, taking two-column notes may be an appropriate strategy for gathering examples of personification in literature, but collecting growth rates in a spreadsheet may be a more appropriate strategy for determining the effect of pollution on plant growth in an investigation of rainwater runoff (Use of Information stage of the Big6). Finally, the ways that students demonstrate learning will also be content-area dependent—think of a demonstration in a science fair, or a theatrical performance in a drama class. This stage, called Synthesis in the Big6, is critical in having students demonstrate their learning in every subject area. But students also need to recognize the most effective presentation strategies within each and for the audience they are addressing. School librarians who recognize that inquiry looks different across the curriculum may provide leadership that transforms instruction and learning. Finally, students should be able to judge their own success—in the final result of the inquiry as well as their skills in the process. These two assessments comprise stage six of the Big6, Evaluation.

Inquiry and Personalized Learning

John H. Flavell (1979) described metacognition as cognitive monitoring and regulation; that is, thinking about one’s own thinking, and making necessary adjustments. In their book Metaliteracy (2014), Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson expand the concept of information literacy to include metacognition. This approach
encourages critical thinking and an assessment of one’s own knowledge, essential for personalized learning experiences in both formal and informal learning situations. When students draw upon their understanding of the inquiry process, they are better able to self-diagnose obstacles and faulty strategies. Students who understand the value of Task Definition, for example, will take the time necessary to think about the type of information problem they face, consider similar problems they may have resolved successfully in the past, and then begin locating information from the kind of sources they know will most likely lead them to success. As learning becomes more personalized, self-regulation becomes critical.

The AASL Standards are designed to guide the profession as it is practiced today. Informed by research and deep engagement with stakeholders, the standards highlight the value of inquiry throughout the learning process. What better time to see inquiry in a new way—as opportunities for learning through information problem-solving that happen every day and in every way? By helping students understand the metacognitive value of learning the inquiry process as they develop the competencies in the AASL Standards Framework for Learners, school librarians are providing students with powerful tools for transforming their own lives.

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Mackey, Thomas P., and Trudi E. Jacobson. 2014. *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners.* Chicago: ALA.

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School librarians have a unique opportunity to help students learn how to explore nature safely and creatively, leading them to engage in hands-on learning experiences.

Science Nonfiction: A Gateway to the Outdoors

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If a spider bites me, will I die?
What does poison ivy look like?
Is it safe to pick up a caterpillar?

Fuzzy caterpillars. Daddy-long-legs. Mud puddles, squirrels, and dandelions. Even an urban schoolyard offers many enticing opportunities for learning about science and exploring nature. But for many children, the outdoors can be a scary place. Fears and misconceptions are major barriers to independent learning.

In his ground-breaking book *Last Child in the Woods* author Richard Louv has described most children as suffering from “nature deficit disorder”—a sense of being disconnected from the natural world (2005). But it’s not just woods—even lawns, backyards, and city parks are going unexplored as kids spend more and more time inside. Spiders might have deadly bites, and what if there’s a snake, and how about poison ivy—can it kill you? No wonder kids like to stay inside and play video games. At least indoors you know what’s safe to touch.

School librarians have a unique opportunity to help students learn how to explore nature safely and creatively, leading them to engage in hands-on learning experiences. The AASL Standards V. A. 1, 2, and 3 speak to the need for students to explore their world and pose questions (2018). These standards align strongly with the remarkable range of science and nature nonfiction books being published these days.

Kids love drama, and students often seek out books about the most dramatic—and frightening—parts of nature: volcanos, sharks, tornadoes, piranhas. But although these topics make for fascinating reading, they perpetuate the idea that nature is a pretty dangerous place—it’s safer indoors! School librarians can make students aware of books that can guide them to the natural world that waits to be explored just outside their own doors.

Students don’t learn about nature in classrooms. There are no lessons about what poison ivy looks like, no standardized tests on where to find a four-leaf clover or how to pick up a frog. And increasingly, kids don’t have the opportunity to go out into the woods and fields and mess around and learn these skills on their own. The AASL Standards stress the importance of helping students display curiosity and initiative. Books can be students’ gateway to the outdoors, and the school library can...
be the place where their curiosity is piqued and they learn not just facts, but how to explore.

As a writer, I aim to excite students about science and nature. My books are set close to home to open the possibilities of nature exploration in every child’s environment. I try to encourage close-up, hands-on learning that engages all the senses. My passion for writing grew out of my experiences as a naturalist leading walks at a nature center, as I saw how over the years it grew harder and harder to convince my students to leave the parking lot behind. It occurred to me that all those kids standing fearfully on the sidewalks need some help in learning how to climb trees, pick daisies, watch tadpoles, and all that stuff that textbooks leave out.

A child spots a caterpillar on the sidewalk but shies away, nervous it might be dangerous to touch. A book like *Itch: Everything You Didn’t Want to Know about What Makes You Scratch* answers questions about itch-causing caterpillars and leads to close-up observation. Kids will marvel at the astonishing way a caterpillar maneuvers all those little legs to crawl up a grass stalk, and speculate on the endless miracle of how this fuzzy, wormy little thing becomes a rainbow-winged butterfly. For many children, the biggest impediment to going outdoors is bugs! No one likes to be a snack for a mosquito, but reading about why they love to bite us and how they behave can lessen fears and lead to curiosity.

Many of my science books are aimed specifically at defusing children’s fears of nature and encouraging safe exploration. *Leaflets Three, Let It Be: The Story of Poison Ivy* helps even the youngest explorers learn how to identify and avoid poison ivy while explaining how the hated plant is actually an important survival food
for many beloved species of birds like robins, bluebirds, and cardinals.

Wait Till It Gets Dark: A Kid’s Guide to Exploring the Night helps students use all of their senses to explore a landscape that is totally unfamiliar to most people—the outdoors at night. Many students, even ones who live in rural areas, have never seen a firefly or glimpsed the Milky Way, because it’s too scary to go out into the dark. But reading about ways to explore safely, like giving your eyes a few minutes to adjust to the darkness, can lead to magical experiences that will whet a child’s appetite for learning more.

A childhood spent observing nature can lead to a lifelong passion for learning about science. My book Karl, Get Out of the Garden! Carolus Linnaeus and the Naming of Everything illustrates how one curious child turned his love for nature into world-changing scientific discoveries. By exposing students to a range of nonfiction science and nature books, school librarians can inspire students to begin the process of finding their own answers.

The AASL Standards stress that students should “engage with new knowledge…using evidence to investigate questions” (2018, 34).

Through science nonfiction texts, librarians can create lifelong outdoor learners, and spark a love of nature that can motivate students to excel and succeed in science. Students’ first-hand observations can lead them to ask questions—and then discover how the study of science leads to ever more questions.

- How fast can a caterpillar crawl? Let’s time it!
- How many seeds does a dandelion have? I’ll count them.
- How does a spider make a web? Let’s watch and find out!

Anita Sanchez is the author of many picture books about nature for children, including Karl! Get Out of the Garden: Carolus Linnaeus and the Naming of Everything (Charlesbridge 2016); Leaflets Three, Let It Be!: The Story of Poison Ivy (Boyd’s Mills Press 2014); and two middle-grade science nonfiction books Itch: Everything You Didn’t Want to Know about What Makes You Scratch and Rotten! Vultures, Beetles, and Slime: Nature’s Decomposers (both Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2018). She has taught classes and given workshops on nature and history at the American Museum of Natural History, Colonial Williamsburg, the Harvard Museum of Natural History, and the New York State Museum. She lives in Amsterdam, New York.

Works Cited:
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