



*When will it stop being “new” that school libraries staffed by credentialed school librarians are dynamic learning hubs that provide “experiences with and access to resources, information, ideas, and technology.”*

## Reflections on Traditional Practices of the School Librarian

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What are the “traditional practices” of the school librarian? Which of those practices are still relevant today? When I reflect back on my twenty-two years as a school librarian, I believe that my practice has always been learner-centered and will continue to be as I move forward. I have also always aligned my goals to the mission and needs of my learning community and have reflected on these goals yearly. This practice includes communicating with administrators and working with them as partners to achieve the goals for our learners.

However, when I reflect back on specific practices, I think about the professional standards and their influence on my work. First, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998) was an essential text book while earning my school library certification and Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science, and it informed my early practice as a school librarian. In 2009 I shifted to using the AASL text *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. I now rely on the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018) as the core text to guide my practice and my lessons. Guided by these important documents, my practice has consistently involved teaching and supporting the following elements within my school community:

- reading
- information literacy, and
- technology.

### Reading

“Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” and “Intellectual freedom is every learner’s right” are two of the common beliefs identified in the AASL Standards as being central to our profession (AASL 2018, 11). These common beliefs point to the need to have selection policies that provide criteria to develop an inclusive collection to support all learners. (Example selection criteria for school libraries can be found in the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom’s 2018 “Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries.”) The school librarian’s training and expertise in collection development is essential. School librarians must build a collection of resources for their entire community of learners. It is important for school librarians to recognize personal biases and to not let those biases influence purchase decisions. Best practices have shifted to put a heightened emphasis on inclusive collections and for school librarians to audit their collections for representation.

However, having an inclusive collection is just the foundation of the school librarian’s role in reading. School librarians must motivate, engage, and instruct learners in reading, and ensure learners understand how to access the collection. It is important that students can easily find what they need. I have always provided reader’s advisory, book talks, book displays, and reading promotions; sponsored author visits; and

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more. I have also taught learners how to access resources, and co-taught inquiry lessons while supporting learners' use of reading comprehension strategies as part of these lessons.

AASL's position statement "School Librarian's Role in Reading" (AASL 2020a) is an excellent resource that positions the school librarian as a literacy leader and provides the details of their role in reading aligned with the AASL Standards' Shared Foundations: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage.

### **Information Literacy**

Back in 1998, information literacy standards were a foundational part of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. However, with the expansion of information available to our learners and the proliferation of social media, the importance and urgency for teaching these skills has greatly increased. Information literacy (including effective use of all forms of information and media) has been woven into AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. School librarians engage learners in the inquiry process and teach the research process per the Inquire Shared Foundation. As stated in the Engage and Include Shared Foundations, school librarians teach how to evaluate information and media, and also how to evaluate a variety of perspectives.

Best practices for teaching information literacy have been updated since my earlier days as a school librarian. School librarians should be aware that many previous practices such as focusing only on teaching learners evaluation guidelines using acronyms such as "CRAAP" and teaching them to use domain extensions such as ".org" in their source evaluation could be doing more harm than good (Valenza 2020). The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) Civic Online Reasoning (COR)

Curriculum is a 2022 AASL Best Digital Tool for Teaching and Learning. Teaching students "lateral reading," which is checking what other sources have to say about your source, is an integral part of this curriculum. SHEG recommends teaching students to think more like fact-checkers (SHEG n.d.). The framework of teaching our learners to think like "digital detectives" (LaGarde and Hudgins 2021) can be used with students of all ages.

### **Technology**

The article "K-12's Digital Transformation Is Giving Libraries a Modern Makeover" in *EdTech Magazine*, although written in 2018, came up recently in my Twitter feed with the quote "Today's school libraries are reinvented. No longer just a haven for dusty books and stern shushes, the library is now a place for digital resources and makerspaces and flexible learning!" (Andrade 2018). My reaction was a sense of frustration. When will it stop being "new" that school libraries staffed by credentialed school librarians are dynamic learning hubs that provide "experiences with and access to resources, information, ideas, and technology" (AASL 2018, 59). This is my twenty-second year as a school librarian, and my job has *always* involved integrating technology into my teaching and collaborating with other educators. The types of technology that I and my students use may have changed, for example, from HyperStudio to Google apps and from a lab of desktop computers to supporting one-to-one Chromebooks, but I have always been considered one of the technology leaders at my school.

In 1998 *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* stated, "Three basic ideas—collaboration, leadership, and technology—underlie the vision of library media programs" (AASL and AECT 1998, 47). In 2013 *School Library Journal* published the infographic "Q: Who's the tech leader at your school? A: Odds are, it's the librarian" (Ishizuka 2013). In 2018 one of the common beliefs expressed in the AASL Standards is "Information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available" (AASL 2018, 11). In 2020 school librarians rose to the challenges during the pandemic and played an important role in translating their services to support new virtual and hybrid learning environments (AASL 2020b). Innovation is one of AASL's core values, and school librarians continue to often be the first adopters of new technologies whether it be film strips or personal computing or 3-D printing.

School librarians work to elevate learning by using technology in meaningful ways to inspire and engage learners. AASL's Best Digital Tools for Teaching and Learning webpage <[www.ala.org/aasl/awards/best](http://www.ala.org/aasl/awards/best)> is a great resource for all educators.

## Summary

The job of the school librarian is multiplex. School librarians are leaders, instructional partners, information specialists, teachers, and program administrators. And although specific best practices have changed, three disciplines that have long been a part of a school librarian's practice include reading, information literacy, and technology. I believe that these three elements will continue to be essential to our student-centered and mission-driven practices as we move into the future.

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