“Today’s graduating students are entering a world full of unknown opportunities, challenges, and potential pitfalls.”

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A Question of Evidence — pg 16

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**Characterizing Leadership @ AASL**

Detective Lindsay Boxer, Dr. Kay Scarpetta, Robert Langdon, Dirk Pitt, Stephanie Plum, and John McCarthy are characters who investigate evidence to solve mysteries.

Although the first five names are familiar to suspense fans, I doubt if many of you know John McCarthy. He is my father and a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) special agent. With seven children in the family, he taught us that evidence and applying the results of information seeking is the best method to solve disagreements, find something lost, or prove an idea. Whether writing a suspense novel, managing the family, or proving professional worth, evidence provides guidance to frame decisions. Characterizing the leadership work of AASL by focusing on the investigative strategies of main characters in best-selling books illustrates how AASL as an organization works to meet the professional needs of its members.

Lindsay Boxer, a character created by author James Patterson, is a homicide inspector who works collaboratively with Medical Examiner Claire Wshburn, Assistant D. A. Jill Bernhardt, and Chronicle reporter Cindy Thomas to solve crimes in the San Francisco area. Lindsay Boxer uses data and information from her colleagues to reconcile criminal evidence and develop a prosecution strategy; if the case is brought to court, together, the team solves problems and exposes the truth. In a similar fashion, people working together successfully are one of the greatest resources of AASL. The AASL volunteers and staff work collaboratively on committees and task forces to make decisions based on the best available evidence, while developing tools and strategies that implement the goals of the strategic plan, including advocacy.

AASL committees and task forces use data and information to fill a need identified by members or originating from the strategic plan. Currently, twenty committees and twelve task forces ranging from the Advocacy Committee to the State Department of Education Inquiry Task Force are producing position papers, tool kits, marketing logos, and research related to a specific topic. Each team solves problems and provides leadership tools for school library media specialists and their school library programs. One example of this teamwork is the response of AASL staff, your president, and the Advocacy Committee to a need in school districts across the United States. Since the ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim, the continued downturn of the economy means tough decisions are being made in school districts to compensate for the shortage of funds. On the surface, cutting library programs and staffing fees up large dollars fast. But nothing is free, and it is essential that school administrations recognize the important role school libraries play in graduating students who are skilled in the multiple literacies needed in the 21st century.

Saving funds by eliminating certificated school library media specialists or by reducing school library media specialists’ half time reduces student access to strong school library programs and denies equal access for all students to the shared resources and information skills instruction crucial for students to learn and thrive in the 21st century. This fall more districts were added to the at-risk list for library cuts, and AASL responded.

Letters went to the school board chair, chief executive officer, and chief academic officers of Baltimore City Public Schools and to three members of the Special Administrative Board of the Transitional School District of St. Louis, Missouri. AASL’s Advocacy Task Force is developing a crisis kit to assist school library media specialists in school districts where political action is necessary.

We have evidence that advocating for library programs brings results. In the state of Washington, allocation of $4 million for emergency funding for school libraries is the outcome of the work of the Spokane Moms. Lisa Layera Brunkan, Susan McBurney, and Denette Hill. They eloquently and effectively proved that inequality of personnel and material resources creates a disparity for students across the state of Washington. They stated that a “two-tiered system of services—some children are developing 21st century information literacy, while others are relegated to an antiquated system of check-in and check-out” (www.fundourfuturewashington.org). As difficult economic times chip away at the very infrastructure that makes our students’ education relevant, school library programs are needed now more than ever. Look to the AASL website (www.aals.org) for contact information and tools that provide data and practical applications to solve your crisis.

Another book character, Kay Scarpetta, created by author Patricia Cornwell, often needs to sift through mistaken information and illogical conclusions to solve a crime. Like the disconnect between the information and the conclusions that Kay Scarpetta confronts, AASL and its members must confront the mistaken attempts by school districts to reduce school library programs based on dollar figures alone. AASL knows there is a need in the market and show evidence that 21st century students need more, not less, instruction to be prepared for the future.

In response to this need, the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force unveiled a plan of action during ALA Annual Conference to implement the new AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner. The plan was approved by the AASL Board of Directors. The Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force is developing a three to five year plan, Learning 4 Life (L4L), to nationally implement the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner (AASL 2007a). L4L uses the number four to reinforce the four standards, which are to:  

1. Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge  
2. Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge  
3. Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society  
4. Pursue personal and aesthetic growth

The standards can be downloaded at (www.aals.org/aasl/standards). Yet another problem-solving, Robert Langdon, is a fictional professor of religious symbology created by Dan Brown. In the Da Vinci Code and other novels Langdon decodes ancient ciphers. He is the master of deciphering symbols and understanding how they relate to the message being delivered. The Learning for Life (L4L) branding is an effective symbol to market AASL standards in your school. The reason that branding—logos, and symbols are important as a leadership tool can best be explained by the work of Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal. In the 1980’s, Bolman and Deal developed one of the most useful methods to view and study leadership. They synthesized existing theories of leadership and organization management styles into four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The four frames are analytical tools that order experiences and allow leaders to gather information and to make judgments when making decisions (1997):  

• The first frame, the structural frame, focuses on tasks, facts, and logic; personality and emotion. An administrator who leans toward the structural frame uses rules, policies, and a chain of command to set direction and hold people accountable in the school.  
• The second, the human resource frame, focuses on human needs. One who inclines more toward the human resource frame value feelings and relationships, accomplishing leadership through facilitation and empowerment.  
• The third frame, the political frame, assumes there is a continuing competition among different constituencies for resources, power and emphasis analyzing individual and group interests. Political leaders are those who advocate, negotiate, and value practicality.  
• The last frame, the symbolic frame, defines the vision of the organization. In this frame, the culture of the school is important to the future decisions. Typically, the school’s goals are defined via metaphors through graphics and slogans. The symbolic leader develops symbols and culture within the organization to provide a shared sense of mission and identity.

The L4L brand is an example of AASL’s use of the symbolic frame to provide leadership by developing a sense of community and culture. Her book, The Da Vinci Code defines clearly and concisely the value of the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner. With the release of the new standards, many members are questioning how the standards should be implemented. These learning standards direct students to higher levels of
learning, creativity, and self-assessment. These are life skills. L4L clarifies the standards and provides a shared sense of mission, by explaining succinctly that learning for life is dependent upon the four standards and the four strands within each standard. This symbol provides a visual connection between the standards (listed earlier) and the strands—the skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and assessments—that characterize lifelong learning. The L4L logo is a visual and cohesive image that captures the mission of the standards, which is to define the goals of the school library media program of the future. L4L provides a clear representation of the outcome for students who have access to a school library media program led by a certificated school library media specialist.

About eight years ago, one of my high school students told me that the easiest thing about researching was there was so much information. Then he said the most difficult thing about researching was there was so much information. We can all smile at that comment because it is our reality.

My last investigator, Dirk Pitt from Clive Cussler’s novels, uses technology to solve mysteries and unravel secrets. He does not mind pushing ideas and people (including my last investigator, Dirk Pitt from Clive Cussler’s novels, impossible. Like Dirk Pitt, AASL is determined to use information. We can all smile at that comment because it uses technology to solve mysteries and unravel secrets. And like my dad John McCarthy we must use the evidence and apply the results of information seeking to solve misunderstandings. find lost and crucial information, and prove our value. Just as main characters in best-selling books solve assignments that seem impossible to complete, the leadership of AASL is working to provide its members with the best resources to fulfill every need.

The evaluation included discovery discussions with AASL staff to identify the organization’s goals for communications, and a review of its print and online communication vehicles, in addition to discussions with selected AASL members. Using the results, AASL will create an integrated communications strategy to gain the most from its current communication channels and messaging. An important element of this initiative is the AASL’s strategic goal to create a communication channel where school library media specialists feel like they belong. It also aims to become “…the premier source of news and professional discussion for school librarianship and education” (orgSource 2008, 3). This communications audit has provided us with important data and information so that we can rearrange and reinvent communication channels to develop a coordinated and integrated communication plan. Like Dirk Pitt, AASL is dedicated to do what it takes, using technology to solve the challenge of communicating professional news and information to you. The AASL staff is currently constructing an action plan so that communications within and outside the organization will be targeted, effective, and relevant.

Works Cited:


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Knowledge Quest | Evidence-Based Practice
“Evidence-based practice in libraries emerged in the mid-1990s as a movement to improve professional practice and develop effective outcomes for the communities that libraries serve.”

Facets of Practice

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Evidence-based practice is a lively and polarizing conversation topic for school librarians, as author Christine Dollaghan (2004) described it as way to either clear a room or start an argument. On one hand, it is an important way of substantiating the value of school libraries, particularly in the current paradigm of data-driven educational philosophies. Quantitative data that advances advocacy for the value of the school library can be matched to standards and test scores. On the other hand, the focus on performance assessment, data collection, and quantitative methods does not easily reflect the larger goals or the core values of the library profession. Goals such as intellectual freedom and social responsibility are better measured by qualitative research methods—portfolios, student interviews, and observations—methods that can be as valid and informative as the currently favored quantitative assessments. In all cases, evidence-based practice (EBP) is a powerful tool for school librarians—a source of accountability and a connection to the interdisciplinary nature and values of library work.

School librarians can incorporate the strongest research findings to broaden instructional approaches and contribute to the development of the school library as a unique, enduring, multifaceted, interdisciplinary partner in the goals of the larger school community.

An Overview of Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence-based practice in libraries emerged in the mid-1990s as a movement to improve professional practice and develop effective outcomes for the communities that libraries serve. As a response to calls for accountability in areas of practice, librarians in all types of libraries began to consider “evidence” questions: What approaches contribute to effective library programs? How do we measure their value? What are the specific goals and outcomes that frame practice? How are organizational goals of the workplace affected?

Librarians draw evidence from current research, as well as from the day-to-day reflections and assessments that they design to improve library programs and services, and to plan for the future (Booth and Brice 2004). Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2002) have defined six domains of practice based on the daily activities of librarians. These six domains of EBP provide a framework for research in all types of libraries aligned with the four roles of the school library media specialist defined in Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (AASL and AECT 1998) and emphasize the areas of common concern for building an evidence base within the larger profession of librarianship.

Crumley and Koufogiannakis (2002) propose that the practice of evidence-based librarianship can be based on the six domains and suggest the following strategies for adding to the body of evidence for successful library programs:

- Ask questions about practice.
- Find, critically appraise and incorporate research from library science (and other disciplines) into daily practice.
- Conduct high-quality qualitative and quantitative research as a practicing librarian.

Importance of Critical Appraisal

The sequence of evidence-based practice begins with critical appraisal of existing research to answer questions that emerge from daily practice, and continues through a cycle of implementation and assessment. A librarian who develops the habits and skills to investigate recent research that may answer questions about instruction and/or daily practice will be able to focus on important issues and provide substance to recommendations made as a collaborative instructional partner. This, in turn, reduces the librarian’s future uncertainty about benefit from alternate perspectives (Booth and Brice 2004).

While the first step of critically investigating and appraising existing research is rarely emphasized for school librarians, either in their professional preparation or day-to-day responsibilities, it is precisely this information that best guides and informs practice by bringing innovative approaches to instruction. The growth of new technologies and a collaborative culture have created a pressing need for educators and librarians to adopt instructional approaches that are supported by valid, thoughtful, and current research. School librarians who can critically appraise existing research have the opportunity to strengthen their quantitative efforts to improve student achievement, and to introduce additional approaches and methodologies to substantiate the broader, long-term contributions of the library to student learning. Outcomes that support core values, such as intellectual freedom, service, social responsibility, and commitment to diversity and equity, are more effectively implemented and assessed in the school library by including both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

School Librarians as Evidence Based Librarians

While daily practice encompasses all six EBL domains and Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (AASL and AECT 1998) defines four roles for school librarians, school library research is currently focused primarily on the single domain and role of librarian as teacher/educator, driven by current issues of advocacy. The evidence that is being considered and collected has been described as:

- Evidence for practice
- Evidence of practice
- Evidence of practice
These research efforts seek to lend validity to quantitative measures of student achievement; a collection of evidence is one of practice that contributes to student learning as measured by performance data on standardized tests. The goal is to create a body of evidence gathered from test results that will point to the effect of school libraries (Todd 2008).

Critical appraisal of a wide variety of existing research on instructional strategies from related disciplines has received less attention, yet evidence for practice is essential for evaluating curriculum and instruction. Knowledge of pedagogy and its supporting research enables the school librarian to design effective, differentiated learning strategies. Decisions about how to gather evidence and what evidence best illustrates outcomes of student learning comes from understanding the strengths and weaknesses of existing methodologies in instructional research, both quantitative and qualitative (Clyde 2002).

Effective, high quality research design in existing research studies may be based on collecting data from structured formal assessment of skills (quantitative) or it may be based on systematic observations, self-assessments, and interviews that allow insight into the learning process (qualitative). In mixed-methods studies, researchers often use both approaches to focus their research results by capturing the validity of their findings. Practicing school librarians need to understand when one or both methods (1) may be used to improve the information librarians can use to improve their practice, and (2) will be effective in collecting the evidence for substantiating the value of their work.

Evaluating Research: Critical Appraisal for the School Librarian

Clearly defined tests and checklists of validity for research approaches exist to enable the school librarian to substantiate instructional methods or conclusions. The EBPL (Evidence Based Library Practice <www.newcastle.edu.au/service/library/gosford/ebhl/toolkit> specifies step-by-step instructions for the EBP process, and presents guides and checklists <www.newcastle.edu.au/service/library/gosford/ebhl/toolkit/appraise.html> for evaluating research studies. Using this toolkit, school librarians can evaluate the validity of research outside of the current hierarchy that has been proposed as a less approach and that guides the implementation of the No Child Left Behind law.

The U.S. Department of Education defines a measure of “scientific research that ranks controlled random trials at the apex of hierarchy of research quality. The view of the EBPL is that evidence of research that is more suited to disciplines outside of hard sciences—research that demands the examination of complexities that cannot be isolated into strict testing situations. Evidence-based practice began in medicine and the health sciences, where the use of controlled studies (systematic review) to assess the gathering of quantitative data is the accepted approach. However, interestingly, as EBP has matured in medicine and the health sciences, and has been adopted in other disciplines, researchers have realized the value of quantitative research approaches. Users of evidence-based practice are trained to interpret data and to make evidence-based decisions (Crumpley 2006).

The prevalence of problem-based research in education is a familiar framework for education and can be used to collect evidence of their practice. Librarians began by initiating efforts and assessment to help advance a common goal for many schools—the cycle of continuous improvement. As accountability and student learning have become defined almost exclusively by the performance data and scores on standardized tests, librarians who work closely with the data in action research have given way to the demand for detailed quantitative data. The efforts and measures of assessment preferred by school administrators have narrowed to those that are most easily documented—data that can be easily collected and measured, and then entered into sophisticated tracking systems to support data-driven decisions.

While the quantitative evidence that is being collected and analyzed is one definition of evidence-based practice (exclusive to education as defined by No Child Left Behind), this focus on quantitative evidence has provided a narrow perspective to help on student learning. Evidence-based practitioners in disciplines other than education have acknowledged that, in addition to data from quantitative research, qualitative studies—that measure nuances of human behaviors and allow further insight into and beyond the standardized assessments—are necessary to most effectively implement interventions and approaches to improve outcomes (Scherer and LaPier 2001, Jack 2006, Chatterji 2008).

School Libraries and Interdisciplinary Research

K–12 school libraries are interdisciplinary ventures. With the implementation of new standards, the emergence of new techniques and the increasing need for interdisciplinary collaboration, school librarians who assess, interpret, and integrate current studies into all aspects of their practice are instrumental in providing effective outcomes, moving the profession forward, and contributing to the growing body of evidence that others can use. The breadth of library practice is clearly defined by Crumpley and Koufogiannakis (2002) and outlined in the roles defined in environments, is just beginning to be evaluated in the school setting. The research rationale for 2.0 technologies and the impact of collaborative communication applications in preparing librarians for the global environment are two examples of practice that can be greatly enhanced by research that is being done in disciplines other than education.

Theory and research in user information behaviors reveal a number of approaches that may be implemented with outcomes that will ultimately affect student achievement. Constructivist approaches, project-based learning, and guided inquiry have been cited as necessary to producing learners for the global economy (Wagner 2008). Information behaviors in digital environments (Neuman 2004, Bilal 2005), the impact on children’s inquiries when they are investigating structured

Evidence-based practice is a powerful tool for school librarians—a source of accountability and a connection to the interdisciplinary nature and values of library work.
The critical thinking skills that librarians teach students are exactly the ones librarians need to adopt. As practitioners, school librarians can use approaches that are guided by innovative research as the key to differentiating instruction for all learners. As researchers, school librarians can locate specific journal articles that relate to the question, ideally looking beyond the library and education literatures to explore journals on computer science, sociology, or business. Journal alerts and RSS feeds can effortlessly channel recent research from peer-reviewed journals to a librarian’s inbox. (The Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Journal <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP> offers accessible summaries and evaluations of both recent and classic research studies.

The next steps of action research—implementing the approach and assessing the results—are guided by the appraisal of what research has been found to address the question. A clear understanding of why an approach is chosen helps in selecting outcomes that will best inform implementation of the approach, as well as in choosing outcomes that support stated goals. Multiple choice tests that are necessary for collecting data for the student database may be augmented with planned structured interviews, observations, or analysis of projects to provide a broader contextual perspective to refine the approach and improve student learning.

Conclusion
Using critical thinking skills to evaluate emerging research and synthesize ways to apply the results of that research are among the ways school librarians can effectively implement the evidence-based process in the broad scope of school library practice. Assessments and outcomes that satisfy the immediate performance needs of student learning can be supported and enhanced by thoughtful investigations that include valid, high-quality research from qualitative and mixed-methods research paradigms in related disciplines.

Evidence-based practice gives school librarians tools to continue to build on the essential research evidence base within school libraries. They can incorporate the strongest research findings to broaden instructional approaches and contribute to the development of the school library as a unique, enduring, multifaceted, interdisciplinary partner in the goals of the larger school community.

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Green, Lisa M. 2007. “Evidence-Based Practice and Qualitative Research: A Primer for Library and Information Professionals.” Evidence Based Library and Information Practice 2, no. 1, 15–30.
It is greatly encouraging to see the focus on evidence-based practice (EBP) in school librarianship. I believe this to be an essential direction. A recent School Library Journal Leadership summit focused on EBP, and resulted in “The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians: If School Librarians Can’t Prove They Make a Difference, They May Cease to Exist” (Todd 2008). The overview of the summit outcomes sums up both the current thinking and current challenges as perceived by key leaders in the school library profession.

Emergence of Evidence-Based Practice

Broadly defined, EBP is fundamentally about professional practice being informed and guided by best available evidence of what works. The EBP movement had its origins in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom in medicine and health care services. Sackett et al. defined evidence-based medicine as the “conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. This practice means integrating individual clinical experience with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research” (Sackett et al. 1996, 71).

This definition has pervaded the now wide-ranging EBP literature across many fields of practice, drawing on the idea of meshing research-based evidence with professional knowing and experience to make professional decisions and implement professional action. Interest in EBP has grown, and its application has extended from medicine to allied disciplines, such as nursing, pathology, and cardiology, and to the social sciences and business professions. Both the education and librarianship fields are developing strong approaches to EBP, and these provide directions, and pose challenges and tensions for EBP for school librarianship.

Evidence-Based Education

The Institute of Education Science, in the U.S. Department of Education, defines evidence-based education as the “integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction” (Whitehurst 2002). In recent years, federal education legislation has made evidence-based education a high priority. The No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) and the Institute of Education Science, established through the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002, have emphasized scientifically-based research, advocating the use of objective measures to compare, evaluate, and monitor student progress, and to identify causal and associative relationships and interactions.

From this focus, the “gold standard” of educational research has emerged, grounded in a concern for the large number of educational interventions that are based on evidence from poorly designed and advocacy-driven studies. The gold standard research requires randomized controlled trials that are well designed and implemented, that demonstrate the absence of systematic differences between intervention and control groups before the intervention, and that employ measures and instruments

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It is a passing fad. (Ironically 2005). Key concerns include:

- The emphasis on the use of randomized controlled trials in laboratory settings as the gold standard of generating evidence (the medical model of testing interventions) does not reflect the non-random reality of schools, descriptive surveys, case studies, decision analysis, and the lowest priority to qualitative research, such as focus groups, ethnographic observations, and histories.

Two characteristics stand out in the EBP frameworks being developed in education and librarianship: using the best available evidence, which gives preeminence to evidence derived through randomized controlled trials, and combining that evidence with professional acumen to deliver high-quality services. It is a question of evidence.

Evidence-Based Librarianship

The evidence-based practice framework for librarianship, like that of education, has its foundation in the evidence-based practice tradition of the medical field. Brice, Booth, and Bexon define evidence-based librarianship as “an approach to information science that promotes the collection, interpretation, and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian-observed, and research-derived evidence. The best available evidence, moderated by user needs and preferences, is applied to improve the quality of professional judgments” (2005, 3).

Eldredge, a key advocate of evidence-based librarianship, argues that its goal is to improve library practice by using the best- available evidence combined with a pragmatic perspective developed from working experiences in librarianship. It encourages the pursuit of increasingly rigorous research strategies to support decisions affecting library practice. Eldredge has proposed a hierarchy of best-available evidence, giving priority to higher levels of evidence from rigorous research, such as randomized controlled trials, controlled-comparison studies, and to a lesser extent to cohort studies, descriptive surveys, case studies, decision analysis, and the lowest priority to qualitative research, such as focus groups, ethnographic observations, and histories (2000).

Table 1

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<th>Evidence FOR Practice</th>
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<td>Research evidence as inputs</td>
<td>Applications / Actions</td>
<td>Results—impacts and outcomes, evidence of closing gap</td>
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<td>Evidence/wwc</td>
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Thus, the EBP focus of school libraries takes on a more holistic approach to evidence:

- evidence for practice
- evidence in practice
- evidence of practice

Evidence for practice focuses primarily on examining and using best available empirical research to form practices and inform current actions, and to identify best practices that have been tested and validated through empirical research. This is the informational dimension of school library practice.

Evidence in practice focuses on school librarians integrating available research evidence with deep knowledge and understanding derived from professional experience, as well as with local evidence, to identify learning dilemmas, learning needs, and achievement gaps to make decisions about the continuous improvement of the school library practices to bring about optimal outcomes and actively contribute to school mission and goals. This is the transformational dimension of school library practice.
Evidence of practice, as the measured outcomes and impacts of practice, is derived from the processes, activities, and the measured, primarily user-based data. It focuses on the real results of what school librarians do, rather than on what school librarians do. It focuses on impacts, going beyond process and activities as outputs. It establishes what has changed for learners as a result of the librarian’s actions, processes, and the nature and extent and quality of effort (Todd 2007). This is summed up in table 1.

"Placing emphasis on systematically gathered evidence moves school library advocacy from a "tell me" framework to a "show me" framework."

Key Concerns for EB in School Librarianship

The EB agenda for school librarians poses some key concerns. It is clearly being driven by trends and requirements in education, particularly in focus on data-driven decision making, accountability, and measurement of outcomes. The emphasis on research-based evidence, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, presents a considerable challenge for school librarians. As Gordon points out, “You won’t find school library impact studies, and other recent research on school library and student achievement in Effective Instruction: A Handbook of Evidence-Based Strategies, a new book that includes educational research that tests interventions (EDIE, 2006). Nor are school library studies among the current list of gold-standard studies published in the DOE’s What Works Clearinghouse” (2007). Despite the richness and diversity of school library research, there is no national, school library research that meets the supposed gold standard requirement.

This disparity between the current gold standard in education and the state of research in school librarianship based on evidence for the whole school library research and professional community to engage in some sustained and complex discussions on the future directions of school librarianship research, and what is needed to continue building a strong research base for the profession. Willinsky (2001, 5) argues that a reliance on the randomized clinical trial is difficult for several reasons:

- because experimental conditions are harder to maintain in schools
- because of the cost of undertaking such extensive studies is enormous
- because he considers it a “disservice to the very goals of education to turn to randomization and programs—as well as the life of the classroom—over to the strictures of a statistically significant difference achieved in experimental trials.”

Loertscher specifically elaborates a useful framework for collecting local evidence from multiple sources. The framework centers on two types of evidence of learning outcomes: direct measures, defined as measures of actual learning, and indirect measures, defined as measures of actions and processes that play a key role in bringing on the change in learning outcomes. Both direct and indirect measures focus on practice—what school librarians do in relation to instructional collaboration, reading, inquiry, information literacy, and information technology, but the key goal of both direct and indirect evidence is to elucidate outcomes and to establish the school library’s contribution to these outcomes.

The current educational climate and agenda suggest that school librarians should give emphasis to direct measures of student learning. Through these measures, school librarians may work to develop evidence-based claims about progress with meeting curriculum outcomes. By placing emphasis on outcomes, evidence-based practice in school libraries shifts the focus from the medium to the message—from articulating what school librarians do in their day-to-day work to articulating their effect on what students become. Placing emphasis on systematically gathered evidence moves school library advocacy from a “tell me” framework to a “show me” framework. Accordingly, evidence-based practice first and foremost validates that quality learning outcomes can be achieved through the school library, secondly, through these quality learning outcomes EBPs validates the important role of the school librarian as an integral and valued partner in the school, and as a key team member in achieving the school’s mission and goals.

The recently released AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner (AASL 2007) place emphasis on learning outcomes, underpinned by reading as interpretation and critical thinking as a standard of new knowledge. The standards explicitly identify outcomes in terms of: “inquire, think critically and gain knowledge,” “apply, make informed decisions,” “apply new knowledge, and create new knowledge,” “share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society,” and “pursue personal and aesthetic growth.” AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner elaborate a very important and rich framework of the learning, literacy, and living outcomes potentially achievable through the systems and practices that have emerged around evidence-based practice evolves. The standards identify the dimensions and dynamics of best practice, the school library, and accordingly identify the focus of the school librarian’s work. The standards clearly provide a framework for the evidence inputs, evidences gathered, analyzed, and disseminated in the course of the work of the school librarian. They provide a structure for making evidence-based claims about the school library’s contribution to learning, and for giving focus to the specific evidence-collecting strategies. In the current educational climate, there cannot be any excuse for ignoring these opportunities.

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While education professionals agree that students need to become information- and technology-literate 21st century learners, there is less agreement on the instructional strategies and assessments that will measure the skills our students should master. Our application to the NSLMPY Award was an overview of the outputs and outcomes that we profile in our annual report and that contribute to the continuous improvement of our program. One of our most effective outcomes has been the increase in student achievement scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). This increase appears to have resulted from collaboration on assured experiences between library media specialists and science teachers. The assured experiences reinforce inquiry and communication skills, as well as state standards for information and technology literacy and for science content strands.

With 91 percent of graduates pursuing higher education, Simsbury High School (SHS) maintains rigorous graduation requirements. The curricula emphasize academic excellence, and students must master subject content. In addition, students have opportunities to practice and develop sophisticated levels of performance while conducting inquiry-based research.

Our library media mission statement reflects the full integration of our program into the school’s curricula:

The Simsbury High School Library Media Center program is committed to excellence in education by helping students achieve state and national standards in information literacy and technology literacy. The program helps students become active readers of print and online information and become effective and efficient users of ideas and information. The program is dedicated to developing lifelong learners, by providing flexible and equitable access to print and online resources. Professional development in information literacy and technology literacy is offered to classroom teachers for the benefit of student achievement. Classroom teachers, library media specialists, curriculum specialists, and technology integrators work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students by developing both the differentiated learning activities and the diverse LMC collection of print and electronic resources (Simsbury n.d.).

The grade-level benchmarks and performance standards of the Connecticut Information and Technology Literacy Framework were published (CSDOE 2006), we decided to create assured (guaranteed) experiences in information and

Road Map
for Improvement:
EVALUATING YOUR LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAM

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Editor’s note: In recognition of their exemplary program, Maureen and Janet were honored by having the Joe Townsley Library at Simsbury High School named the National School Library Media Program Year Award Winner for 2008.
identified the specific information skills and technology skills that we would integrate into specific content area lessons.

One result was that we established an assured experience in social studies that orients students to the library and its resources. The students learn how to search subscription databases and create a works cited page using NoodleTools software (www.noodletools.com/index.php).

In addition, we created five assured experiences in science to prepare students for the annual CAPT. The Connecticut Department of Education has suggested five curriculum-embedded tasks to address each of the five new (October 2004) content standards in science for grades 9 and 10 (CSDOE 2004).

Since the science section of CAPT assesses the scientific inquiry and communication skills taught in these embedded tasks, we felt it was logical to integrate information and technology literacy standards into these science tasks. As a result, when we collaborate with science teachers to prepare the students for CAPT, we are helping students meet literacy standards in science, information, and technology.

The five assured experiences in information and technology literacy are as follows:

1. Interpret charts of the past twenty-five years of energy use in Connecticut and research alternative energy.
2. Write a persuasive outline concerning the labeling of bioengineered food.
3. Evaluate websites on the free Web that contain information about synthetic polymers.
4. Create a hypothesis and ask questions about brownfield (industrially polluted) sites in Connecticut.
5. Interpret population charts and research human population dynamics in developed and developing countries.

These assured experiences have helped improve student performance on the CAPT test. The percentage of SHS students meeting state goals on the science portion of CAPT has increased to 80.7 percent (2008) compared to 75 percent the previous year.

Working together, the library media specialists and classroom teachers give common assessments to all students, thereby documenting student proficiency in the skills taught during the assured experiences. While classroom teachers feel responsible for content assessment, they understand the need to assess information and technology literacy and are appreciative of the help in assessing these skills that the library media specialists are providing. The evidence from these common assessments drives curriculum and instruction. These assessments identify the specific skills that need reteaching, providing a road map for improving instructional practice in the library program.

We recently evaluated our library program to determine if we were providing opportunities for students to meet state and national standards in information and technology literacy in all disciplines. When we reflected on our program evaluation, we recognized the need to implement assured experiences in world language, English, and health. Evaluation results also allowed us to see the need to increase the number of teachers who collaborate with us in non-assured experiences and offer a choice of research product in addition to PowerPoint presentations. Evaluation also revealed a need to help teachers create inquiry-oriented assignments to replace topical research assignments, and finally, to continue to implement the three common assessments that we created in 2007–2008.

We learned that teachers welcome help with CAPT preparation. To duplicate the success we have had with increasing collaboration with science teachers, we will be investigating how we can help English and health teachers prepare for CAPT. The CAPT test includes a reading comprehension section. We promote free voluntary reading of our up-to-date fiction collection as part of CAPT test preparation.

We are attending department meetings and making suggestions for integrating information and technology skills into the English and world language curricula. During 2008 we worked with the ninth-grade curriculum social studies and science teams during the professional development days. We will work with the tenth-grade teams during 2009. Participating on the curriculum teams helps us market our program. To better meet curriculum needs, we are using an interactive database to allow teachers to suggest books, print magazines, and DVDs for the collection. Our goals are to have teachers feel the library collection meets their curriculum needs and to increase library use.

We support differentiated learning. The analysis of lesson plans indicated a need for differentiation in research products. The vast majority of library lessons require a PowerPoint presentation. We are working with the K–12 Technology Integrator and her assistant to advocate the use of Web 2.0 products, such as Voice Threads (<http://voicethread.com/#home>), Google Docs and Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net> so that students can demonstrate their knowledge using participatory applications and invest in the final product they choose to produce at the end of their research.

Encouraged by the research of Keith Curry Lance, who demonstrated a relationship between library programs and student achievement (Lance 1994; Lance, Welborn, and Hamilton-Pennell 1993), we seek to justify and promote our library program by providing evidence of the positive impact of our library activities on improving student achievement. For many years, we have self-evaluated the SHS library program in our annual report.

"Participating on the curriculum teams helps us market our program. To better meet curriculum needs, we are using an interactive database to allow teachers to suggest books, print magazines, and DVDs for the collection. Our goals are to have teachers feel the library collection meets their curriculum needs and to increase library use."

experiences to all freshmen and all sophomores in social studies and science classes. These assured experiences provide students with the opportunity to meet and master state and national standards in the content areas and in information and technology literacy.

Faculty members questioned where these important skills would be suggested in the curriculum and who would be responsible for assessing them. The question of balancing time devoted to information and technology literacy skills vs. content skills is an ongoing concern for classroom teachers. Working with our principal Neil Sullivan, we met with department heads and identified the specific information skills and technology skills that we would integrate into specific content area lessons.

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using the criteria in Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (AASL and AECT 1998): “Learning and Teaching” (chapter 1), “Information Access and Delivery” (chapter 2), and “Program Administration” (chapter 6). The evidence we collect from these evaluations continues to guide and improve our program.

The 2007 annual report is available on our library website <www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/page.cfm?p=306> (accessed September 14, 2008). Since the 2008 application for AASL’s National School Library Media Program of the Year Award required program evaluation using the guiding principles in Information Power, we used the completed application as our annual report for 2008. The NSLMPY application process reinforced our belief that our evidences of both program outputs and student learning outcomes contribute to our successful program.

A chart with a complete listing of the evidence we used to show that our library program met each of the NSLMPY criteria is available on our library home page <www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/page.cfm?p=43>. We hope this chart will help you identify the documents you can use as evidence (for example, a mission statement, a strategic plan, a library webpage, and a procedure manual). The chart also shows the data we thought was necessary to collect to evaluate our program (for example, statistics on the level of collaboration with teachers, circulation, library use, and library resources, including number of computers, books, seats). By showing what type of evidence we collected to substantiate the outputs and outcomes, this chart served as a roadmap to simultaneously complete the NSLMPY application and to evaluate our library media program—as it could for your program!

“…we seek to justify and promote our library program by providing evidence of the positive impact of our library activities on improving student achievement.”

Maureen M. Snyder, a mother of two, resides in Canton, CT, with her husband John. Her professional responsibilities as media specialist at Simsbury High School warrant her keeping abreast of the latest technological gadgets, wonders, and gadgets. She is an avid reader and writer. Having published academic articles, she currently is collecting rejection letters for kidlit books she has written. Next year she will be an empty nester sending her youngest daughter off to Northeastern University in Boston and planning a wedding for her eldest daughter Erin, a new media design artist. Maureen is entering her 32nd year in education this fall.

Janet Roche is entering her 39th year in education with K–12 reference as a library media specialist for thirty-three years and as a social studies teacher for six years. She is past president of the Connecticut Association of School Librarians. Janet is looking forward to her son’s marriage next summer. As Janet begins her final year in education this fall, her daughter begins her first year as an elementary art teacher. Sandra Jyles is the media technology specialist for the Hospital School, a Pre-K–12 public school in the Chapel Hill– Carrboro City School System. Located at the University of North Carolina Hospital, she received her MLS from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has worked in both public and independent school settings.

Awards Ad

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Works Cited


The principal’s desk is a crowded place at the end of the year. Memos from the superintendent, school board meeting minutes, parent messages, and reports on many aspects of the school and its functions make the desk appear to be the school’s dumping ground. Among these reports is the librarian’s annual report—a summation of the year’s goals, results, statistics, and recommendations for the next year. Will the principal take the time to read it? Does he or she care what it contains? Is it worth the time to compile it at all? The answers to these questions depend on how effectively the annual report presents the evidence of a successful school library program.

Why Submit an Annual Report?

Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning lists “ongoing assessment for improvement” as Principle 6 and sets the following as goals (two of the six) subordinate to that principle:

“Use both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., both statistical information and observations and interviews) and both input and output measures to collect and analyze assessment data.”

“Report the results of program assessment on a regular basis to teachers, students, administrators, and other community members” (ALA and AECT 1998, 109).

The librarian’s annual report to the principal proves adherence to these goals and to the principle of ongoing assessment for improvement. By presenting the information gathered over a year, as well as a thoughtful analysis of it, the librarian not only performs a self-evaluation of his or her own goals (Stein and Brown 2002), but also provides a status report to the principal that positions the library program among other branches of the school that routinely file annual reports. As a tool for program assessment, the annual report helps the librarian determine how well the program meets the information needs of the school patrons.

In addition, communication between principals and librarians is critical for the success of the library program (Hartzell 1997, Hartzell 2003, AASL and AECT 1998, Kachel 2006). About program administration duties Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning lists the following goals for the school library media specialist: “Report regularly to administrators and others regarding the programs’ holdings, services, uses, and finances,” and “Report regularly on the program’s plans, policies, and achievements to teachers, the principal, other administrators, and parents” (ALA and AECT 1998, 115).

Compiling an annual report allows librarians to present evidence of the best practices in any of the four roles of the school library media specialist: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. The annual report is an integral part of the communication that educates the principal about the library’s impact on student success and the library’s goals and progress towards its mission. The report gives the principal a knowledge base of library program operations and equips the principal to talk with the librarian as a fellow program administrator about both the library’s and the school’s mission and goals.

The baseline for library record keeping often consists of detailed accounts and accurate records of spending, services, and holdings. According to Betty J. Morris the librarian’s review and evaluation of these records at the end of the year serves as the basis for reporting the scope and nature of the program, its needs and future plans, and
that these records also become a tool to prompt reflection on the ‘hidden strengths and weaknesses’ in the program, and indicate areas for possible change or improvement (2004, 536). Since the annual report is a document meant to summarize the work completed and also enumerate the future goals for the library, it is likely these detailed accounting records would not be in evidence in the actual annual report, although their inclusion in an appendix creates a self-supporting document.

In the library media specialist’s role of program administrator, the creation of a reflective and inclusive annual report is a much truer measure of best practices than a set of budget expenditure totals and circulation statistics that are valuable only in context. Much like the school’s annual “report card” from the state (of Texas), the librarian’s annual report is a snapshot of the library’s vital statistics, long-term and short-range goals, and accomplishments. Taking the opportunity to reflect on the year’s goals and on whether or not they have been met, and then further reflecting to create new goals, is not only a professional responsibility, but it is also a reckoning of best practices in library administration. Submitting a professional annual report is one way the librarian demonstrates collaboration with the principal and highlights their administrative partnership.

What Does an Annual Report Contain?
A number of authors (Morris 2004, Stein and Brown 2002, Toor and Weisburg 2007) identify key aspects to consider when writing an annual report for the school library, including:

1. Financial statements of purchases, including books, materials, and equipment
2. Use of the physical space of the library by classes and individuals
3. Links the library program can make to students’ academic achievement
4. Instructional projects with teachers
5. Participation of librarian in professional development initiatives, curriculum coordination, professional learning community, etc. (See www.sla.org/sla/aasl/ aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/ kqarchives/vol32/322/Abrilock.cfm for other suggestions.)
6. Circulation statistics
7. Inventory records
8. Budget considerations for the future
9. Progress toward the current year’s goals
10. Goals for the following year

The annual report presents data using the smallest units available (that is, daily or monthly) and also makes use of visual aids, such as graphs, tables, or charts when appropriate (Morris 2004). In addition to statistics and data in visual formats, the report may include narrative passages to explain the aspects of the library programs that are better represented in words than in charts or numbers. Some examples of these accomplishments that read well in narrative form are student project descriptions or special contributions by other library staff (Toor and Weisburg 2007).

In This Man Wants to Change Your Job Michael Eisenberg describes the business concept of strategic planning, which he says is “results oriented” and familiar to decision makers. He reveals that often librarians fail to document their work in a way that shows true accountability because their documentation is based on inputs, or the “building blocks of the library program—the staff, resources, information technology systems, facilities, and budget,” instead of the outputs of “services, instruction, and resources that the program provides to students and faculty” (2002, 49). When librarians do document outputs, it is usually with circulation statistics that are often misleading numbers, especially in libraries where use of electronic materials is high.

Eisenberg suggests that librarians promote the outputs and outcomes of their efforts because those with the power to make decisions about programs are interested in what the results of programs provide for students. He says that librarians benefit from focusing on documenting “three primary activities: information literacy instruction, reading advocacy, and information management” in their reports (Eisenberg 2002, 49). Since the library’s best practices are often measured in these outputs, it follows that library media specialists should not only keep track of them, but also report them in the annual report to the principal. Reporting outputs is a substantially stronger choice when providing documentary “three primary activities: information literacy instruction, reading advocacy, and information management” in their reports (Eisenberg 2002, 49). Since the library’s best practices are often measured in these outputs, it follows that library media specialists should not only keep track of them, but also report them in the annual report to the principal. Reporting outputs is a substantially stronger choice when providing documentary evidence of the librarian’s work as teacher, instructional partner, and information specialist.

To make the annual report as readable and useful as possible, Meg McGaffrey (2005) suggests using a writing style free of jargon, and other experts suggest brevity, proper spelling, and businesslike prose (Stein and Brown 2002). Writing the report in this manner facilitates presentation of the library program in a businesslike style familiar to principals. Gary Hartnell, a former principal, adds that to further aid the principal in receiving the annual report well, librarians will benefit from learning whether the principal prefers “ terse or elaborate communications” (2003). Hartnell advises librarians to tailor the annual report to the personal style of the principal to improve the likelihood that the information will be assimilated and easily understood. In addition, he cautions librarians to learn if their principals prefer written or oral communication, and advises that the librarian first deliver the report in the principal’s preferred mode, and then follow up by repeating the information in a secondary mode.

What Does an Effective Total Communication Plan Look Like?
The annual report should be the precursor to a joint assessment tool. According to Doug Johnson’s article “A 13-Point Library Media Program Checklist for School Principals” (1999), thirteen checklist items should be evaluated by the principal and the librarian together. Among the items that would appear in a typical librarian’s annual report are descriptions of the collection, level of collaborative planning with teachers, amount of instruction from the librarian, use of databases and other electronic tools, goals, financial concerns, and both formal and informal evaluation. Johnson also suggests that the evaluative questions about the library program be framed in such a way that both the principal and the librarian can actively evaluate the program as part of the entire district’s program, as well as an entity unto itself, in service to the school community. Although it is an integral part of the communication plan for principals and librarians, the annual report is only a part of a plan for optimum communication between the two.

By itself, the annual report is insufficient communication between the librarian and the principal because their relationship is different that of the classroom teacher and the principal. Librarians’ roles and principals’...
roles share some commonalities. According to Morris (2004), librarians and principals share the ability to see the full spectrum of instructional possibilities. Both work with students and teachers in all subject areas, keep a budget, and work with all the staff every day. Their similar goals and parallel working conditions make them ripe for a strong partnership. Since a strong partnership benefits from the constant communication of goals and progress made toward them, librarians must strive at all times to keep their principals up to date on the evidence of best practices in the programming and the services of the library. Toor and Weinberg suggest that librarians consider all communications with their principals as important ones that will affect the principal’s opinion and respect for the school library media program and the management work of the librarian. In addition to formal exchanges and the librarian’s reports and memos, the authors suggest either e-mail or informal chats with the principal to address minor issues or to quickly answer questions (2007).

As a result of his extensive research on the principal-librarian relationship and levels of interaction between the two, Gary Hartnell reminds librarians that communication results in visibility of the library program, which then becomes effective advocacy. “For the librarian, like everyone else in organizational life, recognition and influence depend on whether people believe the librarian can help to make them, or something they value, successful” (Hartnell 1997, 26). Meeting regularly with the principal not only helps the librarian to get library concerns heard, but also allows the librarian to see where he or she can fill in gaps in the principal’s understanding (Kachel 2006). A continuous give and take of information provides the librarian and the principal numerous opportunities to understand the priorities and goals of the other, which helps each of them to work together towards their common goals.

For librarians who make the effort to keep in close communication with their principals month after month during the school year, the annual report can be the crowning glory to a year of hard work. It reveals the statistics behind the daily work both inside and outside the library’s walls, it shows progress toward long-term goals, and it showcases the best practices honed and expedited by the library staff. The annual report and other regular communication with the principal are highly recommended by library advocates as a way to increase the principal’s knowledge of the workings of the library, as well as the principal’s understanding of the contributions librarians make to the school community. A total communication plan fosters a spirit of collaboration between the principal and the librarian, and gains visibility and respect for the library program. In addition to executing best practices, keeping track of them, and reflecting upon them, communicating with the principal about best practices, goals, and accomplishments in the annual report help to keep the school library accountable and growing.

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Works Cited


As the last days of June melted into summer, students looked forward to the joys of Cape Cod days: beaches, boating, boiled lobster, and books. A tradition of summer reading had been established over several decades at my high school, and teachers liked to think that their students would read at least three books. I had collaborated with English teachers to update the reading lists for each grade. My enthusiasm for promoting summer reading was beginning to wane, however, as I overheard familiar refrains.

Struggling student: “I hate to read! Why do we have to read in the summer?”

Ninth grade honors student: “Why can’t I read a book from the 10th grade list?”

Boys: “There aren’t enough books about sports and real stuff.”

Girls: “There aren’t any Nicholas Sparks books on the list.”

Low achievers complained about the classics; high achievers wanted more choices; and everyone complained about writing book summaries.

I decided to explore what other schools were doing. An article I read about a research study of summer reading lists (Williams 2002) reported that young adult titles comprised only 18 percent of all list titles, even though studies show that adolescents consistently choose young adult or contemporary adult novels over traditional titles. Among the fifty-seven lists studied, two did not list titles, merely giving a reading assignment; the remaining fifty-five lists contained from three to three hundred titles, usually organized by grade level. Annotations—mostly oneliners or short summaries—appeared on twenty-seven lists. Commonly, summer reading lists did not reflect student input: 45 to 92 percent of the titles were fiction, even though research studies report that boys prefer nonfiction (Gurian, Henley, and Trueman 2001).

I saw many similarities between the Williams profile of summer reading and BHS reading lists. I wondered what the English teachers thought about our summer reading lists. When I listened, I found out that they were just as dissatisfied as their students.

Traditional teacher: “I don’t believe the writing assignment ensures that students read the books, but I feel I have to make them accountable so they will read. Summer reading should be rigorous, based on the curriculum. Most of all, I want my students to read good literature.”

Progressive teacher: “I’m not comfortable giving a grade the first week of school for summer writing assignments. Summer reading should be fun. I would like to see more diverse reading lists and would even consider non-graded lists.”

I feared that I would be opening a can of worms because of this lack of consensus. I feared that teachers would think I was challenging their
professional judgment. Would I destroy good relationships I had worked so hard to build? I began to doubt whether summer reading really mattered. Was this battle worth fighting? I went to the research once again and learned that “the long summer vacation breaks the rhythm of instruction, leads to forgetting, and requires a significant amount of review when students return to school in the fall” (Cooper 2003, 2). Research findings consistently reported that (1) student learning declines or remains the same during the summer months; (2) the magnitude of the change differs by socioeconomic status (Malach and Rutter 2003). The “faucet theory” (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 2000) suggests that opportunities to learn and access educational resources are turned on during the school year for all students. As a result, learning gains made during the school year are remarkably similar for students from different social and economic backgrounds (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997; Heyns 1978; Murnane 1975). However, when school is not in session during the summer and the faucet is turned off, there are inequalities in educational opportunities and outcomes (Alexander, Entwisle and Olson 2001; Cooper et al. 1996). A meta-analysis of thirty-nine studies (Cooper et al. 1996) revealed that all income levels showed lower reading comprehension scores after summer, and disadvantaged children showed the greatest losses, with a loss of three months of grade-level equivalency during the summer months each year, compared with an average of one month loss by middle-income children when reading and math performance are combined. Children with special educational needs (Sargent and Fuller 1987) and those who speak a language other than English at home may experience a greater negative effect from an extended period without practice.

I knew I had to do something. I shared this evidence with the English department chair. The evidence was the engine that set the wheels in motion. He asked me to work with five English teachers to revise the reading lists. However, the vigorous vs. recreational reading controversy still worried me. I thought about going to the research again, but was daunted by the vast amount of reading research. When I looked in my own library, I found The Power of Reading (Krashen 2004) that summarizes research about Free Voluntary Reading (FVR). Summer reading. I discovered was a type of FVR called extensive reading, whereby students read independently and there is (or should be) minimal accountability.

FVR has been shown to have a strong positive effect on second language learners (Elley and Mangubhai 1987, Elley 1991, Elley 1998, Mason and Krashen 1997). It has been shown to result in more reading and better writing (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988; Poultethwaite and Ross 1992; Kim 2004). Free reading in both second and foreign languages confirms that those who read more do better on a variety of language acquisition tests (Stokes, Krashen, and Karchner 1998; Lee, Krashen, and Gribbons 1996). Soler’s research (1986; Kaplan and Fakhnide 1981; Gradman and Hanania 1991; Constantino et al. 1997). Other benefits of FVR address aliteracy, or the lack of motivation to read. The work of Csikszentmiháli defines flow as the state of deep but effortless involvement in an activity. Reading “is currently perhaps the most often mentioned flow activity in the world” (Csikszentmiháli 1991, 117), indicating that free voluntary reading is enjoyable.

Lastly, studies support the finding that the best readers read more (Ravitch and Fins 1987, West and Stanovitch 1991; Fillback and Krashen 2002). I was gratified to find so much evidence, which I shared with the members of the reading list committee. I knew I was taking a risk when I asked them to base their decisions about summer reading on research, rather than on perceptions or opinions, but I was convinced that evidence would point the committee in the right direction. The committee accepted the following guidelines:

• “People who say they read more read better” (Krashen 2004), therefore the primary purpose of the summer reading program is to encourage students to read more. To encourage students to read more the primary purpose of summer reading is reading for fun.
• Summer reading offers choices because choice is an important element in reading engagement (Schraw, Flowerday, and Reiserer 1998).
• Summer reading means freedom; students who read more are more likely to enroll in college.

The result of the committee’s work is a summer reading website, now in its third version, at www.barnstable.k12.ma.us/bhs/Library/SummerReadingProgram.htm

- Reading Reponse offers choices of methods, including blogging, writing, drawing, and crafts. Students may take advantage of summer reading programs at Amherst and Stanford Universities, and incoming seniors may read the book (or books) recommended on college websites of their choice.
responses would include writing activities” (Kim 2004b, 185).

- In addition, student projects can accommodate multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993) and thinking styles (Stenberg 1997) by providing options for reading responses that are graphic, visual, and auditory, as well as written.

- Reading response projects can reflect activities students enjoy in their leisure time and are ground-ed in reading response described as the aesthetic stance in transactional theory (Rosenblatt 1978).

- Reading choices can include non-fiction since boys prefer it (Gurian, Henley, and Trueman 2001).

- The summer reading program can be web-based because almost all members of the “Net Generation” are using computers by the time they are 16 to 18 years of age. In fact, 96 percent of children aged 8 to 18 have gone online. At home 74 percent have access, and 61 percent use the Internet almost daily (Jones 2002). In a study that altered text instructions in an assignment to a graphic layout, there were fewer refusals to do the assignment and post-test scores increased (Prensky 2001). Since the Net Generation is not only attracted to image-rich environments, but is more comfortable with them, the summer reading website is visually attractive with lots of colorful graphics.

My experience with rethinking summer reading is a journey through the action research cycle

The action research cycle begins when I observe and recognize a problem in my practice (Cycle 1). This is an exploratory phase when I reflect upon the problem, talk with students and faculty, and read the research literature about summer reading and FVR. I begin to formulate a plan by serving on a committee and by using research evidence to help the teachers form guidelines for the action to be taken, such as re-designing summer reading. I develop a deeper and more specific understanding of the problem in the context of my own school as I collect evidence from students and staff about their reading preferences. The plan includes the conceptualization of summer reading as a Web- and research-based activity. For example, decisions about how summer reading will look are based on research. My intervention is collaborative, with a high degree of communication, which helps me to gain consensus and buy-in from English teachers. Action is the use of evidence, which results in multiple graphic-enhanced, non-graded reading lists and in unconventional reading responses. The action in Cycle 1 continues with the implementation of the summer reading website.

In ordinary practice, this would be the end of the story. However, action research is never-ending; the revised summer reading program becomes the object of new reflections. Is it working? Do students like it? What do teachers think? How can it be improved? Cycle 2 begins with these reflections (figure 5). Informal, anecdotal evidence, however, is not good enough to answer these questions because perceptions are not always accurate. For example, I am now working at a university but am very interested in how the program worked, or didn’t work. I contacted Sharon, who shared the perceptions of the English teachers: the web-based program was a huge success. It was well-received by most students based on anecdotal evidence. However, a survey, or questionnaire, conducted by Ya-Ling Lu (my colleague from Rutgers University) and me, revealed that male students (14 percent) had a higher non-participatory rate than girls (4 percent) (Lu and Gordon 2007). We shared this data with Sharon, who added a new reading list, *Guys Eyes Only*, which featured titles boys prefer. Sharon not only used published research to choose the titles but also surveyed BHS boys to find out what they liked to read.

Another research finding that challenged perceptions identified a trend that continued in the second year of the program. While the participatory rate school-wide was 90 percent, low-achievers had a non-participatory rate of 33 percent, compared with 10 percent for average students and 0 percent for honors students. This evidence led to collection of data by the researchers using focus groups of low-achievers to talk about why they hated to read. The focus group members were part of homogeneous English classes comprised of low-achievers.

These two sets of data about participation rates according to gender and academic levels are the evidence for revision; they point to interventions or to plans to address identified problems and deepen understanding of these problems. Although Ya-Ling and I are researchers, the methods we used to find out about differences in participation rates are accessible to the practitioner. When applied to a large enough group of students, surveys, interviews, and focus groups yield valuable evidence that can drive successful decision making. If you would like to find out how Ya-Ling and I conducted our research and what else we learned about BHS summer reading, you can access the first two articles listed at the top of this article.

Kemmis has described action research as “a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. It is most radically empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively...sometimes in cooperation with outsiders” (Kemmis 1985, 44). If you would like to learn more about how to do action research, you can access the third article listed at the top of this article, which documents an action research project in the Londonderry, New Hampshire, school district. Action research is a powerful tool of
Are you happy with your summer reading program? Does it need to be brought into the 21st century? You may want to look at Shin and Krashen’s latest book, *Summer Reading: Program and Evidence* (2008). Is there some other problem in your practice you would like to solve? If you have answered either of these questions affirmatively, you have taken the first step in becoming an action researcher who has a story to tell—a story that offers solutions rather than endings.

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**Works Cited**


Anthony, Karl C., and Doris R. Entwistle. 1995. *Doing Research on a Daily Basis:* Through Evidence-Based Practice, the Library by Knowledge. This means reading the evidence that is waiting to be generated. Evidence helps them to make meaning of what they are doing on a daily basis: through reflection and action they can ensure continuous improvement. However, action research cannot be done in a vacuum; it is nourished by knowledge. This means reading the relevant research literature and generating evidence from practice.

Gingerbread house

**Gingerbread house**
The study of banned books provided the students an opportunity to engage with literature on a number of levels, generating text-to-self connections by involving students in a discussion centered on their own rights. Over the course of the project, systematic research proved student engagement and intellectual growth; this proof went beyond anecdotal evidence of the project’s impact on students. Evidence generated by the students demonstrated that they were capable of insight into text and that they saw the value of access to a range of materials. Because the nature of the assignment was a sharp departure from the established course of study, that data demonstrating intellectual growth was important in confirming the relevance to the English curriculum of a study of censorship.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a theoretical framework with origins in the medical field; EBP offers a range of opportunities to explicate the work of information specialists. As a research paradigm, EBP is concerned with outcomes rather than outputs, using data from professional practice to support theories developed by qualitative methods. In education evidence-based models provide a framework for action research in the classroom. This study uses EBP in the high school context to support an increasing emphasis on intellectual freedom issues, a core value of the school library media program.

Statement of the Problem

AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner describe students, members of a democratic society, as responsible for demonstrating respect for the principles of intellectual freedom (AASL 2005). In the state of Alabama the existing curriculum presents freedom of speech within the context of the Bill of Rights, without explicit instruction in censorship or book banning issues. At a rural high school a classroom teacher and library media specialist, using anecdotal observation, identified the existing gap in the course of study. The instructors designed a nontraditional research assignment to involve twelfth-grade students in a dialogue about the relationship between freely available information resources and the exchange of ideas within the broader community. Booth describes the formulation of questions that are at the center of evidence-based practice. The research question in this case is one Booth would class as prediction, as it seeks “to predict an outcome under specific, predefined circumstances” (2006, 355).

After instruction in freedom of speech and an independent censorship case study, what do twelfth-grade students think and feel about intellectual freedom issues?

The data generated could offer evidence to gauge whether the participating students were able to articulate diverse points of view on the topic, demonstrating tolerance for a range of viewpoints necessary to function in a multicultural society.”

Evidence of Student Voices
Finding Meaning in Intellectual Freedom

Wendy Stephens
Westhwaite.net

As a library media specialist and former English instructor, I was surprised to learn little literary analysis was attempted in the language arts classes at my rural Alabama high school. Career profiles and author biographies were mainstay topics for the twelfth-grade research papers. An emphasis on improving reading comprehension had lead students to believe that meaning was absolute. As a way to introduce the idea of literary analysis, I collaborated with an English teacher to develop a research project centered on challenged books, which was used with a twelfth-grade class of mixed ability levels.

During the two-week unit, the class discussed freedom of speech issues, the controversy surrounding a book from the American Library Association’s list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books (ALA 2008) and participated in whole-class reading on intellectual freedom issues. The unit was designed to make use of state subscription databases for research into three different areas: the book’s critical reception, the reportorial coverage of community controversy, and the response to the challenge. That research provided each student with a case study of intellectual freedom issues, and the class discussion exposed students to a range of text and community objections.

At the end of the challenged books project students were asked to provide feedback on the unit in the form of a response journal. The responses served as the evidence of student learning, which allowed for grounded theory analysis. The students independently investigated the controversy surrounding a book from the American Library Association’s list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books (ALA 2008) and participated in whole-class reading on intellectual freedom issues. The unit was designed to make use of state subscription databases for research into three different areas: the book’s critical reception, the reportorial coverage of community controversy, and the response to the challenge. That research provided each student with a case study of intellectual freedom issues, and the class discussion exposed students to a range of text and community objections.
increasing awareness of censorship issues and student engagement. This sociologically-derived approach provides a sense of students’ thoughts and emotional engagement surrounding intellectual freedom after research into specific cases of book banning.

**Limitations**

The grounded theory qualitative approach was chosen because, as students in their journaling recollect their own baseline knowledge, many students have little knowledge of censorship as a contemporary issue. Those who had not been exposed to the project and participated in the class discussion might not have had enough information to formulate a statement about the intellectual freedom issues involved in challenging books. For this reason it would have been difficult to contrast the opinions of the class that had received the direct instruction with those of other students. The

**Evidence-Based Practice and School Libraries**

As an online peer-reviewed scholarly journal Evidence Based Library and Information Practice and an increasing number of monographs devoted to EBP in librarianship demonstrate, constructing meaning in this way can inform decisions about the scope and focus of a library program. In November 2007 School Library Journal’s third summit focused entirely on the role of evidence in school library media programs. Ross Todd is a vocal proponent of the use of evidence from an advocacy viewpoint: “The value of a school library can be measured. Learning outcomes, as well as personal, social, and cultural growth, can be documented” (2008, 40).

**Students and Censorship**

Research into censorship often involves use of holding metrics to determine systematic exclusion. This approach might be said to reflect the attitudes of keyword selectors more than the viewpoints of the library patrons. Sarah McNicol’s approach is unique in looking at young people’s attitudes towards censorship through focus groups. She interviewed groups of young people (coordinated by cooperating librarians at school and public libraries) and recorded student responses to specific texts surrounding specific issues, such as cursing, sex, and drugs (2006).

**Data Analysis**

In her primer on evidence-based practice, McNicol described deriving data through a textual method, “asking individuals to create texts that will later be analyzed” as “an effective way to examine patron behavior without relying on individuals’ memories of past events” (2007, 20–21). The journal entries that provided the data for analysis were collected from each of the sixteen students participating in our study. As with much data collected through an evidence method, the journals provided rich and detailed information about the students’ thoughts on freedom of speech and book challenges. The organization of the data employed open coding to develop categories for the students’ cognitive and affective responses based upon the subjects’ own language. Open coding allowed for creation of a system of meaning that was neither too broad nor too narrow to describe the students’ perspectives. The data analysis was an iterative process involving the systematic distillation of the representation of every element of each reaction, using a constant comparative method. In the initial transcription as many as three separate sentiments were included in a single sentence. For example, one student wrote, “If I were a writer and my book was banned, I would be so mad, but after this unit, I realized what an author feels when a book you wrote or love is no longer there to read.” Initially, this sentence was coded as “authorial empathy / affective response / metacognition / affective response.” This process produced an unwieldy number of “statements” since duplicate categorization favored the perspectives of students who wrote at greater length. Computing the instances of each theme would disproportionately represent those students’ opinions. After the student journals were coded, duplicate categorizations within a single student’s response were removed to provide an overall sense of the reaction common to the class. After the initial categorization of ideas, many themes emerged with similar underlying meaning. For the final analysis, the initial specific and descriptive categories were combined. For example, three categories with essentially the same underlying meaning were collapsed into a single indicator. Separate categories had been established to indicate expressions of enjoyment and pleasure, assignment to those categories was derived from the student vocabulary and usage. Those two categories had much in common with a third category affective response, though it was used for a negative as well as for a positive reaction. The emotional nature of all three categories indicates they are fundamentally a similar sort of reaction to the unit.

The majority of the student commentary could be expressed in six categories: metacognition, affective response, value of information sources, age-appropriate concern, authorial empathy, and respect for diversity of opinions. While authorial empathy has much in common with affective response, authorial empathy was retained because of its direct relationship to two authors’ essays used as instructional materials in the unit of study.

**Findings**

Three themes occurred in the majority of the student responses: metacognition, affective response, and value of information sources. The dominant theme was that of metacognition, with three of four students conveying in their journals that they had “learned,” using that verb or a synonym. This is the measurement that is directly related to student outcomes. Seventy-five percent of the class was aware of learning; this self-reporting demands awareness and circumvention on the part of the student journaling. Within this category, 52.75 percent of the students wrote explicitly that they “did not know” something prior to the unit of study, see figure 1. The high frequency of comments like this indicates the existence of a gap in the existing curriculum. The students had not been exposed to the ideas of censorship as part of social studies lessons on the Bill of Rights or freedom of speech. A second cluster of student responses, 68.75 percent, expressed an affective response. The students “liked” the reading, “though it was interesting,” or “enjoyed” the class discussion. Two students were palpably angry about book banning.
Age-appropriateness was a concern expressed by 43.75 percent of students, but it was always in the context of younger children. “I think some books should be banned from little kids until the age of like 12, but not banned entirely,” said one student. The concern with younger children echoed the findings of McNicol, who found in her study of UK teens, “the majority of teenagers felt that there were books that younger children should not be allowed to read (2008, 12).”

Thirty-one and a quarter percent of students emphasized maintaining access to a range of information as a way to respect diversity of opinion. No one student expressed sentiments in all six categories; see figure 2. Like all evidence-based practice, findings are specific to the population.

The rate of occurrence of the six themes among the students’ journals can be deceptive. The absence of a theme does not preclude student agreement with that sentiment, but instead reflects what students identified as the central meaning they had personally derived from the unit of study. If the students were questioned directly about their attitudes toward each of the themes, it would provide another data source to contrast with this more organically generated journal evidence.

This exploratory analysis demonstrated that the unit of study met tangible learning objectives that had not been covered elsewhere in the curriculum. The journal process suggests that students want to explore intellectual freedom in music and film, as well as in books, and any further study would include both observational and objective attitudinal instruments to allow triangulation of data. In this instance, the student journal provided a mechanism for assessing student understanding and growth. Todd describes these as “knowledge-based outcomes, which are ‘far more meaningful than library outcomes that track, for example, the number of users or the size of the collection’ (2008, 43). A traditional research assignment would have resulted in higher circulation figures. (Each student checked out only the book on which his or her research was focused.) Though the circulation numbers, a traditional measurement of library “value” were not boosted by this project, the student-generated data verifies the significant cognitive and affective impact of the project. The results also reveal the need for a school-wide systematic approach to instruction in censorship and intellectual freedom issues valuable to 21st century learners.

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**Sequential Art Books & Beginning Readers:**

**Introduction**
Comics and graphic novels are being incorporated into upper elementary and middle school classrooms based on the novels’ popularity and ability to stimulate interest in voluntary reading. Their format—combining words and sequential images—may hold power for an even younger audience. As beginning readers struggle to decode new words in books, they often turn to pictures for clues and contextual information (Samuels 1967, 337). Graphic novels, with their myriad pictures, are being created for young children and considered as a potential format to help scaffold beginning readers’ efforts. With this in mind, we wondered whether there was any evidence that these books were actually serving this function, and our study showed that, regardless of their potential, the current selection of books were of little value for beginning readers to read alone.

**Developing Print and Visual Literacies**
Learning to read is a process that develops throughout childhood. Beginning before a child is even capable of recognizing and decoding print. By understanding the abilities specific to different ages and levels, educators and librarians are able to scaffold children’s reading with appropriate literacy experiences. According to Jeanne Chall’s model of reading, literacy begins at birth and progresses through six stages of increasing mastery and fluency (Indrisano and Chall 1995). Mastery is gained by repeated encounters with concepts and objects, both in real life and in pictures. Steinman, Lefevre, and Kimbrough posit that the more children have these encounters, the more likely they are to associate “printed words and the objects they represent” (2006, 40). This visual literacy, the capacity to decode pictures and their meaning, is of equal or perhaps even greater significance when dealing with beginning readers and graphic novels.

Visual literacy develops substantially earlier than a child’s ability to decode text. Children are able to recognize and interpret iconic images, such as logos, long before they are capable of decoding alphabetic symbols (Steinman, Lefevre, and Kimbrough 2006). Still, making sense of visual images is a learned process (Randhawa and Coffman 1978) that involves cultural conventions, prior experience, and personal idiosyncrasies. Debbie Abiblock (2008) proposes a model of visual interpretation of photographs that includes: the photographer’s purpose, the viewer’s response, the content of the image, the techniques involved in creating it (style, structure, genre, etc.), and the various contexts (social, cultural, political, economic, as well as the format in which the image is embedded). While research is beginning to clarify the elements involved in decoding an image, we still do not know the step-by-step process by which we interpret visual data.

According to Jean Piaget (1969), preoperational children (ages 2–7) are very likely to focus on the more centralized and prominent image within any given context to the detriment of the background and other surrounding details; however, children can learn to draw cues from the background and setting to assist in their interpretation of images. At this age, children also tend to interpret images literally and are unable to infer content that is not actually depicted (Higgins 1980). They may also rely more heavily on examining picture cues rather than on decoding text, which leads to incorrect interpretation or misconceptions (Samuels 1967). The more exposure children have to visual images, the greater their visual “proficiency” becomes.

**Stage 0**
Pre-reading (birth–6 years): Basic association with books, their format and content; concept of story and visual representation; practice reading

**Stage 1**
Beginning (6–7 years): Making sense of formerly arbitrary letters and letter sequences, and connecting them with sounds

**Stage 2**
Conformation and Fluency (7–8 years): Developing an automaticity with reading through increased speed and accuracy of word recognition

**Stage 3**
Reading to Learn (8–14 years): Fluency changes reading motivation from acquiring skills to gaining content knowledge

**Stage 4**
Multiple Viewpoints (14–18 years): Critical analysis of content and form possible due to ability to see different points of view

**Stage 5**
Construction and Reconstruction (18+ years): Using text to develop a personal world view and concept of self

**Jeanne Chall’s Model of Reading**

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As a format, sequential art (that is, comic books and graphic novels) has been one of the more maligned forms of literature, especially when it is aimed at young readers. Labeled as anything from tasteless to dangerous, these volumes have incurred complaints criticizing both their social and literary merits. While there have always been groups wholly against comic books and literature, sequential art has enjoyed a small but extremely loyal following of consistent readers, particularly among adolescents. Intrigued by the colorful illustrations, the often heroic characters, and the action-packed stories, some young people have found this genre a particularly attractive niche for their reading pleasure.

Sequential artists must make five primary decisions in creating their work: choice of moment, frame, image, word, and flow (McCloud 2006). These choices help guide the reader toward the meaning intended by the artist. Though the text can certainly be poignant and effective, the constant stream of images is what sets sequential art apart from other types of literature, and that is where its power lies. Claudia McVicker notes that sequentialart has the potential to extend our understanding of textual communication by "creating understanding of unknown factors in the text’s language" through its ability to visually convey meaning and details (2007, 85).

A study done by the Research and Development Committee of the Association for Library Service to Children found that sequential art as a kind of narrative, "the reader must figure out how both the text and the images combine into a cohesive whole, involving not only traditional reading skills but also a new literacy skill" (2006, 50). This combining of literacies creates a whole new reading experience, one that is to be recognized and seriously considered as a potential tool for helping children’s development in both traditional reading and the reading of the images all around them.

Methods
This project examines the text and pictures contained in a sequential art format that are intended for beginning readers. The sample of books was drawn from the limited selection of sequential art books currently available for beginning readers. These included texts from the two comic lines marketed specifically to this reading group: Phonics Comics and Toon Books. The publisher of Phonics Comics (InnovativeKids), levels their books: Level One (beginning), Level Two (intermediate), and Level Three (advanced) beginning readers. We selected a convenience sample of four of the fifteen available titles, ensuring that we included at least one title in each “level.” Raw Junior, publisher of Toon Books (The Little Lit Library), has specifically designed its comics to be appropriate for beginning readers. As the corporate website claims, “Each book in the collection is just right for reader of the youngest age, but perhaps more remarkable: this is the first collection ever designed to offer newly-emerging readers comics they can read themselves” (Toon Books 2007). Of the three books available in this line, we selected one title (Briny and Penny in Just Pretend) based on its availability.

We also included the Elephant and Piggie series of books by Mo Willems (from Hyperion Books). While the Willems titles might also be considered picture books, they do contain many characteristics of sequential art, such as the use of frames, speech bubbles, and a narrative text overlays within frames, that make them a useful addition to the study. We selected four of the six available titles based on their immediate availability.

Because the intent of this study was to determine whether pictures could help beginning readers decode unrecognized words, sight words were excluded prior to analysis. These sight words were defined as words from Dolch’s vocabulary list (preprimer through second grade) and plurals of those words that differed by only one letter (Answers 2000 Ltd. 2008). For example, the sight word “want” was excluded, along with the variation “wants,” but “wanted” was presumed to be decoding.

After sight words were removed the individual frames of each book were analyzed to discern the connection between the remaining words and their corresponding images. Words were considered decodable by the pictures when there was an iconic or common symbolic representation within the immediate frame. For instance, if the word “apple” and a clear image of an apple occurred within the same frame, the word was considered decodable and marked “Y” for “yes.” An example of a common, symbolic representation a young child might know was a smiling character using a calculator, the word “happy.” Words with no pictorial representation were marked “N” for “not decodable”, any word that had marginal or unclear representation was coded as “Y”.

Our analysis rested on the assumption that children look only within the same frame as the text to make sense of a word. It is plausible that beginning readers actually look at other pictures on the page—perhaps even other pages—to help them decode hard words, but there is, to our knowledge, no research on how beginning readers actually read comics, so we assumed the need for a direct representation within each frame.

A second issue is that once a child has decoded a word, it is plausible that subsequent occurrences of that word should be automatically understood. We found no research describing the number of repetitions necessary for children to remember difficult words. (Individual differences in recognition and recall make it hard to generalize.) Therefore, we chose to treat each frame as a unit and each word as unique, regardless of whether it had occurred previously in the story. Regarding each frame as individual allowed us to assess the extent to which these comics supported early readers through the use of immediate pictures. The exceptions to this were the names of characters and places specific to individual stories. Since these names cannot be visually represented in an illustration, we coded each first occurrence as “questionable.” Subsequent occurrences were analyzed based on whether the illustration depicted the character/place when the proper name was present.

To check the validity of our coding, we had a second coder analyze two of the books to determine intercoder reliability. We found a raw score of 88.7 percent agreement between the coders, yielding a Cohen’s Kappa of 0.79, which accounts for the possibility of chance agreement.

We then looked at each word at its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) to see whether certain types of words were more decodable than others. Finally, we compared the two most decodable books with the two least decodable ones and analyzed only the first occurrence of each word under the assumption that words should be depicted the first time they are introduced to a reader.

Analysis
All of the books used for the study contained some words that were represented pictorially and some words that were not. Words that had been represented pictorially accounted for 6.7 percent of the words analyzed; however, this figure is artificially high due to the coding of all initial occurrences of proper nouns as “questionable.” When considered as a group, only 39 percent of the non-sight-words in these books were associated with a recognizable image within the same frame. Some books were more successful than others in representing words. Mo Willems’ There Is a Bird on Your Head scored the highest of the books used for the study—74 percent of non-sight-words were decodable based on the associated picture—and Nora Gaydos’s Pony Tales was second with 52 percent. The books with the lowest percentages were Hiro: Dragon Warrior (24 percent) and Today I Will Fly (25 percent); see figure 1.

Figure 1. Percentages of decodable words in books analyzed.
In addition to pictorial representation, we classified each word by its part of speech: nouns, pronouns, proper nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and conjunctions. Pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions appear to be underrepresented because these parts of speech were disproportionately identified as "eight words" and therefore removed before analysis. Of those remaining words, nouns were the most common part of speech used in books, followed by verbs, adjectives, and proper nouns. Conjunctions, prepositions, and pronouns were the least common; see figure 2.

Some parts of speech were clearly represented more frequently and successfully than others (see figure 3). Proper nouns were the most represented with 67 percent deemed identifiable after their first introduction within the text. Part of this success rate could be accounted for by the inherent nature of this type of word. Proper nouns are often associated with a particular image specific to the story, such as a character, making it natural for the reader to connect a name with an image. It is also very likely that a name will be represented by its corresponding image within the same frame, although this is certainly not always the case. Other than proper nouns, nouns were the second most represented word type with 44 percent. Nouns, as a word type, often represent concrete physical objects, making them easier to convey pictorially. In other parts of speech, which may account for this higher percentage. While 25 percent of interjections were identifiable, there were only 47 occurrences of this word type, so a few identifiable ones had a marked impact on this percentage. Twenty-three percent of adjectives were identifiable, due predominantly to the recurrence of adjectives relating to color and size.

Only 7 percent of adverbs were pictorially recognizable within the frames. This low picture/text correlation for adverbs is most likely due to the role of this part of speech as a verb or action modifier. Conveying movement or action through a static image is difficult (only 15 percent of verbs were considered identifiable), and communicating visually how an action occurs is even more complicated.

First Appearance of Words
As mentioned earlier, it is possible that readers would not take each frame as an isolated occurrence, but instead rely upon repeated encounters with words that they had previously decoded. Visually scaffolding the first occurrence of a word, then, becomes extremely important. We analyzed the depiction of the first occurrences of words to see how the two most decodable books and the two least decodable books and the two least decodable ones compared, see figure 4.

While the two "best" books did average 53 percent, the two "worst" averaged only 24 percent of words depicted when they were first introduced. In each of these cases, these percentages were lower than the words' overall percentage of representation. This finding suggests that readers' initial decoding was done with little visual scaffolding.

Conclusions
Based on this analysis, we conclude that these sequential art books do not provide adequate visual support to enable beginning readers to decode difficult text. Creators of graphic novels for beginning readers do not seem to give conscious attention to pairing, clearly and unequivocally, each difficult word with its corresponding image. This claim is supported by the fact that the creator of the book with 74 percent of words represented also designed the one with only 29 percent of the words depicted. While one of the series claims that "strong picture cues" are intentionally used in their books to assist readers, this does not seem to be the case. Though this disparity suggests that there is an understanding of the theoretical value of direct picture/word relationships, we feel more attention must be given to creating these connections in practice.

Though our selection of sequential art books did not provide thorough visual scaffolding, it is certainly possible to do so, as evidenced by the 74 percent representation in Willem's There is a Bird on Your Head. In fact, even within this small sample, opportunities for depicting words were missed. For instance, in Hero, Dragon Warrior, a character referenced seven "jubes," but the picture accompanying the text portrayed only five stones. The following considerations may increase the ability of beginning graphic novel readers to make sense of difficult words independently.

Remain in the Present
Stories often refer to previous events in the story (flashbacks) or discuss what might happen to characters in the future (foreshadowing). Take, for instance, the statement "Eric will go to the store." The structure of this sentence is very common and at first might appear to be relatively straightforward to illustrate, but it is extremely difficult to convey pictorially within the frame in which it is said. The nature of the sentence expresses what will happen, not what is happening at the moment, so the illustration will most likely show Eric, or a completely different character who is speaking of Eric, doing something other than going to a store. References to the past provide a similar challenge. It is therefore helpful when constructing comics to attempt to keep most events in the present, with alternate statements like "Eric is at the store" or "In the store, Eric..." Illustrated thought bubbles may be a good technique for showing these temporal changes.

Describe the Positive
While portraying the past or future within a frame is difficult, illustrating negative sentences is equally challenging. It is possible to show what is being done, but it is very difficult to show what is not. A declaration such as "Latasha did not wear sandals" will inevitably show Latasha either barefoot or wearing a pair of shoes that are something other than sneakers. Such depictions do not provide any decoding support for the keyword "sneakers." If this sentence had been phrased in a way that such as "Latasha wore sandals," providing picture cues to assist in the decoding of "sandals" would be easy.

Talk Less, Do More
Lengthy conversations between characters should be avoided whenever possible if the desire is to facilitate a child's decoding of the text. These dialogues tend to involve references to past or future events that, as stated before, are difficult to depict. Also, during these scenes there is nothing to illustrate but the act of talking, which conveys nothing new to the reader about what is happening within the text. An image of two characters chatting, regardless of how interesting their conversation might be, provides few useful picture cues. Sequential artists should also use close-up shots of the faces of characters sparingly, unless portrayal of an emotion or facial feature is important, as a close-up reduces a frame's ability to offer other visual cues.

Complying with all of these guidelines while maintaining an interesting and coherent story would be exceedingly difficult, however, attention to these guidelines would increase the effectiveness of the pictures in supporting beginning readers as they struggle with unknown words. We hope that designers of sequential art books for beginning readers will pay closer attention to some of these issues as publishing houses further develop this market.

Figure 2: Instances of parts of speech—totals for all books analyzed.

Figure 3: Percentages of decodable words within parts of speech.

Figure 4: Percentages of decodable first instances of words.
The study’s conclusion for school library media specialists is that these graphic novels do not provide enough scaffolding for beginning readers to read alone. These texts are valuable, however, if teachers and librarians provide extra support for the beginning reader. Reading these books with children and reading them aloud to children are both effective means of using existing collections of sequential art books with this age group. In these interactions, caregivers can use comics and graphic novels to best advantage with children.

Further Study

While this study found that a small sampling of sequential art books designed for beginning readers were largely unsuccessful at generating explicit word/picture connections, there are other issues for future research in this area. Eye-tracking studies could illuminate how young children “read” sequential art books, perhaps challenging the assumptions on which this study rests, and such studies could expose the relative importance of pictures and words in sense-making. Further study on the role of repetition in word recall and recognition would help develop more sophisticated methods for analyzing word/picture correspondence. We hope this study will spark further interest in analyzing this increasingly popular literary and artistic format, so that educators and librarians can use comics and graphic novels to best advantage with children.

Sarah Stanley is a Master’s degree student in Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is interested in children’s literature and public libraries, she is an avid reader of graphic novels, and she finds this format particularly useful in getting children and adults to read similar materials.

Brian Sturm is an associate professor at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He conducts research and teaches in the areas of literature for young people, storytelling, children and technology, and public library services to youth. He is NOT an avid reader of graphic novels, as he finds the format difficult to read, but he is fascinated by their potential with visually literate and multiskilling young people.


Introduction

The subtitle of the guidelines for school librarians, Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (AASL and AECT 1998) reflects school library professionals’ view that partnering with teachers and other educators is vital to enhancing the learning process, and the book devotes a chapter to the importance of collaboration. Yet one of the most common complaints among school librarians is that many teachers are either not interested in, or are resistant to, such professional relationships.

A primary factor that interferes with these partnerships is the absence of any discussion in most teacher education programs of the role of school librarians (Asselin and Doiron 2007), Eisenberg and Lowe 1999, Hartzell 2002, O’Hanlon 1988, Small 2002). Without an understanding of collaboration’s impact on student learning, pre-service teachers have no motivation for pursuing this practice as they enter the profession.

Without an understanding of collaboration’s impact on student learning, pre-service teachers have no motivation for pursuing this practice as they enter the profession.

Since the teacher education program at William Paterson University of New Jersey lacked such discussion, a faculty member in the secondary teacher education program and I (the university’s education librarian) initiated a collaborative project to raise awareness of the role of the school librarian in student learning and of the resources available through the school library. Using a new undergraduate teaching methods course that integrates technology and various literacies (language arts, media and information literacy) we developed an assignment to make a connection between curriculum and the school librarian.

The pre-service teachers were required to prepare a curriculum unit that incorporated teaching literacy and technology skills, in addition to teaching content, such as social studies or art. The University’s education librarian introduced them to an array of print, non-print, and online curriculum resources available from the University Library that are also likely to be available from secondary school libraries and public libraries in New Jersey. Next, the pre-service teachers interviewed practicing school librarians to identify strategies and resources that they would recommend if the curriculum unit were to be taught in that school. Then the pre-service teachers prepared a slide presentation to report on what they learned from the interviews. The presentation was to be designed for an audience of fellow teachers, so the pre-service teachers would consider what would be of interest to their future colleagues.

Realizing that most pre-service teachers have limited knowledge about school libraries, a list of thirteen suggested interview questions was developed and made available to them. These questions focused not only on the services and resources of the school library, but also on the role of the school librarian in teaching and learning information skills. Only one of these questions, “What would you like other teachers to know about the school library?” was required for the interview. A list of school librarians who were willing to participate in the interviews was made available, but most pre-service teachers found a librarian on their own.

This article will focus on the presentations created by the pre-service teachers after the interviews, not on the responses of the librarians.

The Findings

The nineteen slide presentations revealed observations regarding the images the pre-service teachers chose for their presentations, the questions that they chose to ask the librarians, and the misinformation some of them collected.

Despite the request that they interview a school librarian, several pre-service teachers interviewed a public librarian. Some pre-service teachers may be unaware of different types of librarians, or perhaps they waited too long and were unable to reach a school librarian on the weekend before the assignment was due. At least one pre-service teacher approached a university librarian who was aware of the assignment and refused to be interviewed.

The images selected for the presentations, for the most part, reflected stereotypical images of libraries and librarians. The title of this article was adapted, with permission, from the presentation prepared by one of the pre-service teachers. His reaction to hearing that he had to conduct an interview was to make a connection with the 1994 film, Interview with the Vampire, based on the novel by Anne Rice (1976). Using a promotional image for the film, he changed the title and used the adapted image for the title slide of his presentation (figure 1). This pre-service teacher used a creative question and answer format for his slides, but used a stereotyped image of the librarian, as well as a faceless image of himself (figure 2).

Most images used in the presentations were obtained from the Microsoft Office Clip Art collection. These were often images of women with books, as well as piles of books and shelves of books. Acknowledging that many libraries are now automated, there were a number of illustrations related to computers.
The nineteen pre-service teachers used most of the suggested questions; see table 1. Of the eighteen questions, six focused on resources, four focused on information literacy or research skills, two focused on instruction, and the last was a general question about the school library. All but one of the pre-service teachers asked question 13, “What would you like other teachers to know about the school library?” This was the required question.

Of the six questions about resources, all pre-service teachers asked question 3, “Should I let my students use Wikipedia as a source? Why or why not?”

The other questions about resources that were asked were question 1 and 2. Both of these were asked by sixteen pre-service teachers. It is unknown if this frequency was due to the placement of these questions at the top of the list, or if the interviewers were genuinely interested. It was hoped that by asking question 1, “What resources would you recommend that students use for this assignment?” the pre-service teachers would learn more about school library resources available on their topic. It was anticipated that question 2 about primary sources would be mostly of interest to history majors, but pre-service teachers in other academic subject areas also asked this question.

Questions 4, 5, and 6 seemed to be of limited interest to most pre-service teachers. Question 4 may not have been selected if the pre-service teacher did not know what a subscription database is, or if he or she thinks that Google is an adequate tool for all research. Since most students are not asked to use scholarly resources until college, question 5 (asked by the fewest pre-service teachers) may not seem important for secondary school. With the advent of the Web, most students have easy access to what seem to be ample resources on any topic, making question 6 seem less significant.

Three of the four questions regarding research skills (7, 8, 9, and 10) were of great interest to the pre-service teachers. Two of these questions (7 and 8) focused on citation skills. Question 7 helped clarify that students can begin learning the citation process at a young age, but learning these skills is a developmental process. Since most of these educators are focused on teaching content, being responsible for teaching citation skills was a new concept to them. This may also be the reason that question 9 about copying and pasting was of great interest. This question pointed to the need to teach note-taking, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills. Question 10 was among the least frequently asked questions. Since this was a two-part question (“What would be a good way to teach students to learn how to refine their search strategy? To evaluate the sources they find?”) it is difficult to determine whether the pre-service teachers did not think that refining search strategies is important, or that they were not concerned about evaluating Web sources. This question covers two separate topics and should have been divided into two questions.

The questions about instruction (11 and 12) included one of the most frequently and least frequently asked questions. The popularity of question 11, asked by thirteen of the pre-service teachers, indicated some curiosity about the role of the school librarian in the learning process. The lower use of question 12 seems less significant. It is suspected that since they were not going to actually present to an audience of teachers, those instructors did not feel it was necessary.

A positive interview experience resulted in this comment, “I'm sure my students would be interested in the number of stereotyped images. It is hoped that these changes will encourage more meaningful interaction between the school librarian and the pre-service teacher, and reduce the number of stereotyped images.”

One pre-service teacher reported that the school librarian suggested using the “InterOffice library” and the county library. Apparently these two pre-service teachers were not familiar with Interlibrary Loan, and the librarian did not explain this concept clearly. The county in which this school is located has no county library; however, there is a city library.

Despite instructions to design their presentation for an audience of fellow teachers, most pre-service teachers’ presentations simply reported the questions asked and the responses. It is suspected that since they were not going to actually present to an audience of teachers, those instructors did not feel it was necessary. Several reported being impressed by the variety of resources available. One commented, “When I become a teacher, I am going to teach my students how to search, what to look for, what it means to plagiarize, and that the library is a great place for reading and personal time to find a good book.”

A positive interview experience resulted in this comment, “The information Ms. C. provided not only covered this assignment, but also helped me—as a teacher and as a student. As an aspiring teacher, now I know how important it is to have a relationship with your school’s media specialist, because let’s face it—teachers don’t know everything!” Yet another pre-service teacher became more aware of the challenges that young students experience when doing research. “[I] discussed how the students going into sixth grade are intimidated, anxious, and overwhelmed about doing research on the Internet. Because of these limiting abilities it takes a long time for students to research, and they get discouraged.”

Conclusions Overall, the presentations indicated that all pre-service teachers developed an understanding that the school librarian can play a valuable role instructing their students about finding and evaluating resources, and providing assistance in teaching effective research and citation. The lower use of question 12 seems less significant.
skills. A significant theme through most projects was the importance of consulting with school librarians on assignments to improve student learning. Additional findings indicate an awareness of the importance of evaluating sources of information, monitoring steps in the research process, and teaching citation skills.

Pre-service teachers whose presentations contained stereotypical images of librarians seemed to limit themselves to images from Microsoft Office Clip Art. Those who used other resources to find illustrations usually avoided these stereotypes. Some pre-service teachers included images from book and magazine covers, many used images related to computers, and one included a photo of a singing librarian. This may indicate that the use of stereotypes was primarily by pre-service teachers who were less proficient with finding and inserting images from the Web. The exception was the pre-service teacher whose work illustrates this article. His technical skills are very strong, and it is suspected that his use of stereotypes was tongue-in-cheek, gently poking fun at a profession that he really respects.

This collaborative assignment has been used in three successive semesters. During the most recent semester a brief survey of the pre-service teachers was administered at the beginning and end of the semester to identify whether there was a change in pre-service teacher perceptions of school librarians. Preliminary results indicate that school librarians are viewed more positively after the interview.

The collaboration between the faculty member and university librarian continues, serving as a model to pre-service teachers in this class. Next semester the pre-service teachers will be required to include a research project in their curriculum unit assignment. One of the purposes of including a research project is to encourage more discussion about how to help students develop research skills. During the interview pre-service teachers will be required to ask the school librarian about problems that secondary students might encounter when trying to complete the research project. As before, the pre-service teachers will get suggested interview questions, but fewer, clearer questions will be provided. Taking photographs of either the school librarian or the school library will be encouraged. It is hoped that these changes will encourage more meaningful interaction between the school librarian and the pre-service teacher, and reduce the number of stereotyped images. The university librarian will be involved in the grading of the curriculum units.

While follow-up research should be conducted to see if these aspiring teachers are more likely than their future colleagues to collaborate with their school librarians, the logistics of conducting a longitudinal study may be beyond the means of this investigator.

Interestingly, the pre-service teacher who provided the title for this article plans to apply to the school library media specialist program at William Paterson University. Interviewing a school librarian was one factor that influenced his decision. Whether others are as deeply influenced by this assignment is yet to be determined.

Evidence-Based Practice

One of the purposes of including a research project is to encourage more discussion about how to help students develop research skills. During the interview pre-service teachers will be required to ask the school librarian about problems that secondary students might encounter when trying to complete the research project. As before, the pre-service teachers will get suggested interview questions, but fewer, clearer questions will be provided. Taking photographs of either the school librarian or the school library will be encouraged. It is hoped that these changes will encourage more meaningful interaction between the school librarian and the pre-service teacher, and reduce the number of stereotyped images. The university librarian will be involved in the grading of the curriculum units.

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Charlotte Save date

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During the seemingly interminable germination time, we worried. Would our seeds live up to the promises on their packages? Would we be able to nurture them properly? And then, one day, the leaves popped up, and with our ongoing care, they developed into plants. One summer day, we looked out, satisfied to find plants heavy with tomatoes and moonflowers greeting the dusk.

We thought of this metaphor last October when we first pored over the new AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner (AASL 2007). Like the seed catalogs, the standards create a vision of more meaningful learning, deeper comprehension, and stronger engagement between learners and literature and information. The standards unfold into four strands that, in turn, blossom into skills. Dispositions in action, responsibilities, and self-assessment that specify what learners need to be able to do. As teacher-librarians discussed these at conferences, on listservs, and in blogs, they expressed some of the same worries that we did as gardeners: “What will happen if we fold them into our work?” “Can we nurture them in our learning gardens?” We want the standards to bear fruit in the form of greater student achievement and more systematic integration of our school library programs in our learning communities. But, as was heard in many discussions among our peers, we first had to tackle the elephant in the room: “Dispositions? How do we assess those?”

Dispositions for the 21st Century Learner

If we are indeed to prepare youth to be independent lifelong learners, then they “must gain not only the skills but also the disposition to use those skills” (AASL 2007). In the new standards, dispositions are listed along with skills, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies in each of the four sections. While the skills, responsibilities, and self-assessments are familiar to teacher-librarians, dispositions, at first glance, seemed to introduce unknown ground.

Dispositions can be defined as the set of problem-solving skills that a student calls on when he or she is faced with an unfamiliar situation or challenge. A student’s disposition toolkit has utility in and beyond school, as the dispositions are characteristic of authentic, real-world learning. These are some of the keywords from the “dispositions in action” sections of the standards: initiative, investigating, confidence, self-direction, creativity, questioning, adaptability, emotional resilience, persistence, flexibility, productivity, leadership, teamwork, curiosity, motivation, openness, and critical stance. Unlike students of the past, who could rely on a relatively stable world of work upon graduation, today’s graduating students are entering a world full of unknown opportunities, challenges, and potential pitfalls. Just as a flower seed contains food to sustain the nascent plant until it can reach sunlight, students need a robust cognitive toolkit to help them navigate a rapidly changing world. We know that even the most gifted learners can stumble and fall if they do not have the confidence, adaptability, or emotional resilience that 21st-century life requires to actualize their life goals.

Teaching for Dispositions

Just as tomatoes rely on wire frames to flourish instead of flop, students need skilled professional educators to guide their development of dispositions. If your school culture includes character education, Costa and Kallick’s Habits of Mind (www.habitsofmind.net), or a program such as Peacebuilders (www.peacebuilders.com), you will already be using these terms with students as they learn through the library program. One way many teacher-librarians can help build students’ understanding of these terms is by creating a bibliography of children’s and young adult literature in which these dispositions or life skills figure prominently in the protagonist’s character or in the story’s plot. A to Z: Subject Access to Children’s Picture Books (Lima and Lima 2005) is one reference resource that can help teacher-librarians create such a bibliography.

For example, perseverance is a strong theme in the life stories of Helen Keller, Lou Gehrig, and Wilma Rudolph; their biographies reflect their mastery of that disposition. Many classic fiction books for younger students, such as The Little Engine that Could (Piper), Charlie Needs a Cloak (dePaula), or Ramona and her Father (Cleary), are more recent stories such as Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type (Cronin) and Clorinda (Kinerk/Kellogg), illustrate this character trait. For older students, Nightjohn (Paulsen), Catherine, Called Birdy (Cushman), and Out of the Dust (Hesse) are compelling novels of perseverance. Teacher-librarians can create text sets focused on various dispositions and share them with classroom teachers or co-facilitate literature circles in which students explore these themes.

TEACHING and ASSESSING the Dispositions:

A GARDEN OF OPPORTUNITY

We love the advent of spring, when seed catalogs nestle in our mailboxes. The catalogs beckon with glossy promise. Plant the seeds, and you, too, can grow heirloom tomatoes the size of your fist or mysterious moonflowers that show off only after the sun has set. Last spring, we hurried to buy seed packets, buried their kernels of promise in fresh dirt, and waited.
When teachers and teacher-librarians collaboratively plan lessons, they can emphasize the importance of dispositions by folding social skills into lesson objectives. In a small group inquiry project, one of the criteria by which students self-assess and educators assess students’ process might be their ability to take initiative or to use teamwork. Co-teaching provides an opportunity for educators to model a real-world example of teamwork in action.

Dispositions integrate naturally into thoughtful instructional design. When we work collaboratively to develop inquiry-based research or guide students in literature comprehension activities, we can design lessons that give students practice with curiosity, critical thinking, perspective, questioning, persistence, and flexibility. We can help students determine when to persist with a difficult topic or when to redirect and consider alternative paths. When we conference with students and help them navigate a roadblock, we can give guidance about the attitudes and behaviors that will help them move forward in their school projects—and in life.

Assessing the Dispositions
How do we assess a student’s behavioral toolkit? One important step is to distinguish between assessment and evaluation. Wiggins and McTighe state, “By assessment we mean the act of determining the extent to which the desired results are on the way to being achieved and to what extent they have been achieved. Assessment is the umbrella term for the deliberate use of many methods of gathering evidence of meeting desired results . . . Assessment is the giving and using of feedback against standards to enable improvement and the meeting of goals” (2006, 6). In other words, the goal of assessment is to help students and educators examine student work and compare it to the standards. If gaps in understanding or mastery are discovered, educators use that feedback to guide future instruction and assistance for that student.

Formative assessment, or gathering data to help teachers improve their instruction, is particularly powerful, and it helps students measure their progress against the standards. If we keep our focus on formative assessment, we can identify many opportunities in which the teacher-librarian can help students gauge their progress in dispositions, as well as in their academic skills. In fact, many teacher-librarians have practiced formative assessment for years. Observations of a student’s response to being guided toward a new resource or additional keywords when the first were unsuccessful, comments on social skills during students’ group work, exit slips or interviews, oral or written reflections, and a show of hands during storytime are all examples of formative assessment. There is no exchange of grades, yet both students and educators get meaningful feedback.

Self-assessment and assessment are intertwined in the new standards. Self-assessment, in which students reflect on their process and product, can give them practical experience in evaluating their mastery of specific skills, dispositions, and responsibilities. During a unit of study, a small group and the educators may keep a simple monitoring sheet on which social skills and responsibilities are listed alongside academic skills. A simple rating from 0 (not evidence) to 5 (exemplary) can serve as a quick check of students’ practice of specific dispositions in action. Students in small groups may be asked to assess their group’s performance according to a rubric and then be asked to corroborate their scores by providing evidence from their group work. In schools where citizenship grades are assigned, these scores may be reflected on students’ report cards or they may become part of a narrative that educators share with families to describe the social growth of the learner.

Integrating formative assessments into our practice is an essential first step. Another key is to be explicit about dispositions when we see students demonstrate them. Educators can observe and discuss student growth in terms of dispositions. When we bring students into that conversation, which can be as simple as, “I noticed how you persisted with that problem until you figured out a solution,” we are saying, “Your behaviors are not accidental. Persistence is a good tool—stick with it!”

Conclusion
This school year, let’s commit to planting some new seeds in our library programs. As we begin to implement AASL’s Standards for the 21st Century Learner, let’s make connections with the traits we know will help students succeed. Let’s highlight the dispositions, as well as skills, responsibilities, and self-assessments in our collaborative lesson planning and teaching. Then, along with our classroom colleagues, we can watch our student seedlings grow. This fall can be a time for all of us to blossom together!

Judi Moreillon is the teacher-librarian at Emily Gray Junior High–Tanque Verde High School in Tucson, Arizona. She also teaches for the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona. She’s the author of Collaborative Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension: Maximizing Your Impact (ALA Editions, 2007) and two published books for children and families. Her website is <http://storytrail.com>.

Kristin Fontichiaro is a school library media specialist for the Birmingham (Michigan) Public School and an adjunct lecturer for the School of Information at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is the author of Podcasting at School and Active Learning Through Drama, Podcasting, and Puppetry. She blogs about school libraries at <http://blog.schoollibrarymedia.com>.

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Should I apply for National Board Certification?

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Our congratulations to Gail Dickinson, the creator of this column, who has accepted the position of Editor at LMC (Library Media Connection) <www.linworth.com/lmc>. Beginning with the next issue, Mary Jo Paterniti, virtual professor, consultant, and writer, will be providing us to make “Tough Choices.”

What does the field say “National Board assessment measures what an accomplished library media specialist should know and should do in the context of their daily work. ASSL members are encouraged to pursue National Board certification as a way of demonstrating their accomplished practice and as a means of professional development” (ASSL 2005)

The View from the Ivory Tower

Looking back over the decades of school librarianship, there have been three major change points. First, the Knapp School Librarians Project professionalized and modernized school librarianship by focusing school library preparation on the job tasks in the school library (Sullivan 1966). Second, the Library Power project in the late 1980s (AASL and AECT 1988). In the same way, I believe that National Board certification, married with the 1998 Information Power (AASL and AECT 1998), will change librarianship. We may be seeing the high water mark of the teacher-librarian, cast as a National Board Certified Teacher.

Jumping Down from the Ivory Fence

Candiates who attempt the rigorous NBPTS process note that it is one of the most worthwhile professional development experiences they have ever had. That’s high praise from educators who are batten with a multitude of professional development opportunities on a variety of topics. The four portfolio entries and six assessment center exercises are scored by trained assessors. The process is the same for any teaching specialty, and that’s what makes the distinction of NBCT so valuable. It’s a way to prove our status as accomplished teachers, taking our place in the ranks of those who have successfully completed the process. It’s one of the few times that the school library media specialist and the classroom teacher are considered equal. The process is time-consuming and rigorous, and the chance of failure is high. In spite of all that, however, it’s worth it.

Read More About It


If you are new:

If you are approaching your third year as a certified teacher, you are approaching the threshold of eligibility for NBPTS certification. In some ways, this is the perfect time to go for it. Your certificate is R–15, and so is the NBPTS process. You can remember at least some of the quality literature from pre-school through high school. Your textbooks may still be in print, so you can refresh yourself on theory and best practice. But you are still inexperienced. Maybe this is not such a good idea after all.

YES

It is a chance to prove your worth as a teacher. You will earn the respect of your administrators, faculty, and the entire school community. Go for it!

I’m new. One of the anomalies about the NBPTS process is that it requires three years of experience as a licensed teacher, not necessarily three years of experience as a school library media specialist. You will need to decide if you have enough experience to perform well in the portfolio entries. On the other hand, your content knowledge for the assessment center is as fresh as it will ever be. Your experience as a teacher may compensate for your inexperience as a librarian. Go for it!

I’m new. The NBPTS process will rejuvenate you and give you a needed surge of energy.

I’m new. You learned about the NBPTS process in library school and it sounded exciting. As a new professional in the field, you are proud of the equal status that school library National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) have with other board-certified teachers. But for you, it seems just a little too much. After years of study to get to where you are now, you need a break in terms of time, money, and personal space. Maybe in a few years, after you have your job firmly under your belt, you’ll think about it again. Wait. It will still be a good idea, but for another time.

NO

Better not. Maybe wait. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) process is expensive to pay for by yourself, and there is no guarantee of success. Perhaps you will find other ways to prove your worth.

I’m new. I’m mid-career. In mid-career, you want a new challenge. Because of the videotaping requirements in all subject portfolio entries, you are spending some time each year helping other teachers complete the process, and receive the kudos rewards. It’s time to turn now. True, you will have to hone up on reading the literature that is outside of your school level and refresh your knowledge of school library best practices, but this is just what you need to recharge. Go for it!

I’m mid-career. By mid-career, you have learned to pick your challenges carefully. You know your job and find it fulfilling. You see the promise of National Board Certification, but you are not sure that the intense effort is worth the time that you will spend away from the daily non-teaching activities of the job or your home life. You have considered it carefully, but you decide that you will not pursue it at this time.

The worst that can happen if you go for it: You will not achieve certification on the first try, or maybe not the second, and maybe not even the third. It’s public, in front of your students, their parents, and your colleagues. Colleagues are passing all around you, and you know you are a better teacher than most. You started this to prove your worth, now you feel that you have no worth to prove.

The worst that can happen if you decide not to attempt certification: Chicken! You had an opportunity to model courage and positive risk taking for your students, and you blew it. Your credibility when encouraging them to try again, even in the face of failure, is now zero. Your colleagues are in a club of excellence that you cannot join. You may have good reasons for passing up this opportunity—but it still eats at you.


For more information about the NBPTS process, visit <www.nbpts.org>.
Two decades ago, I attended a meeting with one publisher and seventy-five children’s book authors. When a colleague griped that she was invited to fewer than ten school or library visits each year, I blinked and swiveled in my seat. Was everyone really nodding? My own experience had been that I must limit my bookings to one hundred sessions per year! I raised my hand and suggested that the would-be presenters create workshops that provided empirical results. (I might have called them “evidence-based practices,” had I been familiar with the term back then.) I didn’t get past mentioning my one hundred bookings before the authors turned indignantly toward the publisher. “They are assuming,” I realized, “that the poor publisher is responsible for arranging my bookings!” I was waving my raised hand to explain, when the publisher called out, “Anyone can have that many bookings if she does them for free.” A collective gasp filled the room. “Ohhh!” everyone muttered, turning disdainful eyes on me. “Free.” The publisher was mistaken. While I do donate time and resources, I wouldn’t consent to doing anything for free without those one hundred visits, which were then, and still are, well-paid. What hard-won knowledge would I have shared had I not decided to defer during that contentious meeting? I would have advanced the conviction that I had formed as a result of repeat visits to schools and as a homeschooling mom. I would have explained how evidence has been my best “booking agent,” providing proof of successful learning for both students and teachers. By the end of any of my one-hour workshops, my goal is that everyone, without prompting or group brainstorming, will show that he or she has understood an approach to writing that falls just askew enough of the typical student writing to the conclusion that mom is “wonderful.” They needn’t use all of the six senses—one or two will do. What does a “wonderful” mother sound like? Name it. What does a “wonderful” mother sound like, feel like, etc? Name it! If a reader could see or hear or feel a mother while she is being wonderful, some what he would be experiencing. Even the youngest children end up writing things like, “When I came home crying, my mom’s mouth made an ‘O.’ She dropped the phone, and ran to touch my forehead. She asked me, ‘What happened to you, Pumpkin-Puss?’”

The lesson also convincingly explains why it may be banal and counterproductive to summarily ban words like “nice” and “good.” The problem is not that we need better adjectives; the problem is that adjectives do not give “the picture.” Nouns do. Further, I discourage the common practice of group brainstorming, in order to avoid students’ appropriating each other’s voices. Instead, I reserve brainstorming for modeling before they put pen to paper and for editing after they’ve expressed their individual thoughts.

When presenting this lesson in workshop form, I follow the paradigm below, having the participants end with independently written pieces. Of course, when I am working with pre-writers, I adopt visual prompts, discussion, and child-dictation.
My workshop participants will independently reproduce the strategies I teach—as many as six times. That’s evidence.

The practices I employ are summarized below.

I begin with a brief, verbal diagnostic to understand the students’ typical use of the two parts of speech on which we will focus: nouns and adjectives. I then distribute identical objects (always something that will be eaten at the end of the lesson) to each member of the class, in order to engage their five senses and intuition. “If you were to write about how this feels,” I say, “what words would you use?” From the ensuing exchange, I establish a jumping-off point for best reaching the group. Typically, novice writers weaken their descriptions by depending on adjectives. I also come to understand the technical things, like whether I should begin by using vocabulary like “naming word,” before reminding them that it is called a “noun.”

The lesson proceeds into verbal proofs, disguised as lively games, to elicit strengths and deficits. I will think, for instance, of something familiar to them, but will not name it. Instead, I try to communicate it by using only adjectives, often more than twenty, to describe the object. The students brainstorm dozens of guesses but are rarely convinced that they have guessed what I am trying to communicate. This exercise inevitably leads them to the correct conclusion that their dependence on describing words is actually frustrating their efforts to express themselves authentically.

Together we create a written model to reinforce their strengths and to correct any deficits. In another group brainstorming session, the students progress from general to specific nouns, continuing to guess the person, place, or thing for which I have provided many adjectives. This exercise reinforces my claim that the adjectives did not create as precise a picture in the reader’s mind as did the nouns. The model remains visible on the board, a reference to the strategies they will incorporate in the next phase.

We move into independent work to provide evidence of the students’ understanding of the precepts taught. Now, using each person’s “experimental test object,” that is, the edible object I first distributed, we proceed into a period of silent, individual “top secret” work that takes the students through the five senses (figure 3). They create either prose or sense memory poems using the device of listing the senses and naming what the object is (literal expression) or what it reminds them of (figurative expression). The end of the piece will answer an inviting question such as, “If this object could speak its ‘mind’ just once, what would it say?” While students’ writing will include adjectives as helpers, writers will strive for the nouns that clearly and immediately convey their intentions. Even though the writers are following the model on the board, each student’s piece will be unique because the model treats of an entirely different subject.

Finally, the students read their work aloud to share their progress. We maintain the tone of respectful fun as each student reads his work, often astonishing his classmates, himself, and his teacher. The class and I ask questions, and offer suggestions based on the workshop ideas. I hear comments like, “I never knew Brandon was such a great writer!” Well, now we know. He has presented a believable case of evidence, and it has enabled him to offer indisputable evidence of his own learning.

Joséphine Nobissò has published almost four dozen books, three of them pseudonymous adult novels, and the rest, beloved and enduring children’s books. Almost all of her work has been translated into several other languages, and some of it originates in foreign countries. Each year, to raise revenues and repeat performances, she conducts 100 writing workshops, illustrated book talks, professional writer workshops, and staff development sessions. She is an NCEA “Distinguished Graduate,” and a Delta Kappa Gamma “Friend of Education” for “someone outside the profession who has given outstanding service to promoting quality education and for providing outstanding service to the education of others.” Six authors have dedicated their books to José (pronounced “Józey”), or have cited her in their acknowledgments. Her book covered in this article, Show: Don’t Tell! Secrets of Writing, (Gingerbread House 2005) has won six citations, among them the Global Learning Initiative Award for the world’s single “Best Book with Educational Application,” and this title has fared well in other sectors, too: kids, when it was selected as an IRA/CBC Children’s Choices book; the general public, when it was chosen as an American Booksellers Association’s Book Sense “Pick of the Lists”; and by parents, with its Parents’ Choice Award.

Joséphine Nobissò homeschooled her daughter from grade 6, and believes that good homeschooling is a case study in the very soul of evidence-based practices.

Librarians in New York State nominated her for the 2008 SLMS/NYLA Knickerbocker Award, which went to Richard Peck. “As well it should have,” says Joséphine Nobissò. Visit her at <www.josephinenobissos.com>.
The following PBS resources are designed to help teachers gain background and instructional strategy knowledge through both informal and formal professional development resources and opportunities.

It’s My Life: School
(http://pbskids.org/tismylife/school/index.html)
Resource Type: Article
Grade Range: 3–8
Help kids cope with the stresses of school with articles and advice on topics such as test stress, time management, cheating, and making the transition to middle and high school.

Helping Teachers Grow
(http://pbs.org/teacherline/catalog/courses/INST330)
Resource Type: Online Course
Grade Range: K–12
Learn about teacher Rafe Esquith’s methods for classroom management and helping students achieve success through six levels of moral development.

Informal Professional Development: Online Community
PBS Teachers Connect
(http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect)
Resource Type: Online Social Network
Grade Range: Pre–K–12
Explore and join PBS Teachers’ new online community for educators interested in exchanging ideas, resources, and instructional strategies to promote the integration of digital media and technology in teaching and learning.

Informal Professional Development: Articles, Videos and More
AdLit.org: All About Adolescent Literacy
(http://www.adlit.org)
Resource Type: Articles and Multimedia
Grade Range: Grades 4–12
Discover resources for educators of struggling readers and writers in grades 4 through 12. The site includes research-based articles, instructional material for classroom teachers, an Ask the Experts feature, a blog by a librarian and children’s book reviewer, tips for parents, book recommendations, exclusive interviews with top authors, and a free monthly e-newsletter.

¡Colorín Colorado!
(http://www.colorincolorado.org)
Resource Type: Articles and Multimedia
Grade Range: K–12
Explore a bilingual website designed for educators of English language learners. The website gives teachers the information they need to be more effective when working with children for whom English is a second language.

Independent Lens: A Touch of Greatness
(http://pbs.org/independentlens/touchofgreatness/lessons.html)
Resource Type: Videos
Grade Range: K–6
Learn about the strategies and philosophy of Albert Cullum, one of the most influential educators of the 1960s and 1970s; he inspired generations of students to achieve excellence.

Focus on Professional Development
PBS Teachers Staff
(http://www.pbs.org/teachers)

The Merrow Report
(http://www.pbs.org/merrow/tv/index.html)
Resource Type: Articles and Videos
Grade Range: K–12
Learn more about a wide range of overarching education topics, such as school reform, learning standards, social promotion, and school funding.

PBS Parents: Guide to Going to School
(http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool)
Resource Type: Articles
Grade Range: Pre–K–5
Help parents help kids succeed in school with articles and tips on talking with kids about school, the secrets of social life, and the parent-teacher partnership. Also see a grade-by-grade guide on what and how kids learn.

PBS Parents: Guide to Understanding and Raising Boys
(http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisingboys)
Resource Type: Articles and Videos
Grade Range: K–12
Learn how to help boys feel confident, succeed in school, and grow up resilient and responsible. Find practical and effective strategies to help them feel safe, achieve academically, and grow into happy, responsible young men.

PBS Parents: Guide to Understanding and Raising Girls
(http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisinggirls)
Resource Type: Articles and Videos
Grade Range: K–12
Discover more about a girl’s inner and outer worlds. Find out how to help her grow up powerful, self-confident, and self-aware— with a critical eye towards the messages the media is marketing to her.

P.O.V.: The Hobart Shakespeareas
(http://www.pbs.org/parents/pov2005/hobart/fox.html)
Resource Type: Article
Grade Range: 3–5
Learn about teacher Rafe Esquith’s methods for classroom management and helping students achieve success through six levels of moral development.

Reading Rockets
(http://www.readingrockets.org)
Resource Type: Articles and Multimedia
Grade Range: Pre–K–4
Explore how young children learn to read, why so many struggle, and what we can do to help them. The website includes an archive of articles, interviews with children’s authors, a daily headline service, two blogs, and much more. The Reading Rockets project also encompasses programs produced for PBS, including 4 Tales of Two Schools and a series called Launching Young Readers.

Formal Professional Development: Online Courses
PBS TeacherLine offers over 100 professional development courses for educators, including the instructional strategies listed below. Visit (http://www.pbs.org/teacherline) for a full listing of TeacherLine’s professional development course offerings.

PBS TeacherLine: Inquiry-Based Learning in the Classroom
(http://www.pbs.org/teacherline/catalog/courses/RDLA150)
Resource Type: Online Course
Grade Range: K–8
Meet No Child Left Behind requirements for research-based literacy and reading instruction by analyzing in-depth studies of the use of phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition to develop the skills required for students in kindergarten through eighth grade to expand vocabulary, improve comprehension and fluency, and gain independence.

PBS TeacherLine: Using Assessment and Evaluation
(http://www.pbs.org/teacherline/catalog/courses/INST95)
Resource Type: Online Course
Grade Range: K–12
Delve into the full array of assessment and evaluation tools, including rubrics, journals, formal and informal assessments, and portfolios.
Bound to Stay Bound Books INC.