





THE PARADOX OF OUR PROFESSION

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Times Change, But Core Principles Endure

Our profession has gone through an evolution since its inception in the early 1900s. Fortunately, as school librarians, we hold strong to unwavering core principles that remain true throughout time. Our students today are tech-savvy consumers of information. With smartphones and tablets galore at their fingertips, they have access to all the knowledge of the world. Arguments at the dinner table are quickly settled by a few seconds of Google searching. To showcase everything they know about a topic, students can put together movies and presentations in just a few minutes. Now that students have all of this access to technology, why are school librarians still important?

We questioned middle and high school students and asked them to reflect upon their experience in our school libraries. Some of their reflections are scattered throughout this article. Unexpectedly, students did not comment on the glitter of the 21st-century school library. No one talked about makerspaces or emerging technologies. They instead spoke to our core professional values, the golden threads that keep our foundational fabric strong and make our profession essential. Librarian core values are integral to teaching the whole child. They complement content-area standards by providing students with guidelines to address ethical and service issues. In this article, we explore the core values that continue to sustain us through the education evolution.

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Value 1: School librarians create sanctuaries for our students.

It is a chaotic world for our students today. They are consumed with the pressures of school, friends, bullies, and technology distractions.

There is, however, a place where wary students can take refuge: the school library! Libraries offer these stressed-out students a place to be calm and to be themselves. School librarians create a caring and warm environment where students have a place to explore their passions and have their point of view honored. We create a place different than any other in the school. School libraries give students the freedom to be *people*—not just students. School librarians build spaces where students feel like they belong even if they do not fit into the stereotypical social groups at school.

Being able to take a few moments away from the nonsensical lesson plans and rambling crowds of teenagers. It is not that I don't love learning or value my friends, but recently I have found myself stretched thin and high strung. A few days ago, I started spending my lunch period in the library, which was one of the best decisions I have made in a while. After settling down away from other people and taking my time to recharge, I have found that my attitude has completely taken a turn for the better. The staff are kind and comforting. The library has changed my life because it lets me be by myself for a few

moments and indulge in a book. After my visit to the library, my attitude has improved dramatically and my school performance improved.

— Anne

Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs states that the physical space of the school library “serves as an intellectual gymnasium with multiple, flexible spaces that accommodate a variety of learning tasks” (AASL 2009, 34). Our libraries offer comfortable and happy places where students have time to wonder, study, or socialize with friends. Students gather in our lively libraries to read magazines, play games, and drink coffee. School librarians offer programs that bring the school together, whether it be through a battle of the bands concert, a poetry slam, or a salsa festival. Our efforts reach out to every nook in the school community.

When I went to elementary school, the library was always a refuge from the hyperactive mess that was lunch and recess. I became good friends with the librarian and made other friends in the debate club which met in the library. I was also a part of the technology club which was run by the librarian and also often met in the library. Without the library, I might never have found my interest in computers, and it definitely helped me enjoy and look forward to school every day.

— Angus

Through bright displays in our school libraries, we introduce students to new books and genres they may not otherwise have discovered. Students are encouraged to read banned books when learning about censorship or go on blind dates with books for Valentine's Day. We challenge our students to expand their scope of the world. School libraries open hearts and minds.

In elementary school, I went to the library to relax, and I loved being able to take books home. It allowed me to read far more than I would have on my own.

— Amanda

School libraries also celebrate the accomplishments of the school, often showcasing student art, athletic trophies, and academic awards. Students can come into the library space and feel pride in their school. We have areas for students to create and share with others. Our book and gaming clubs bring together people from many social groups, help build relationships, and create opportunities for students to learn from each other.

Dating back to 1899, Melvil Dewey understood the importance of librarian-patron relationships. In a *Library Journal* article he wrote about what characteristics an ideal librarian should have: “To my thinking, a great librarian must have a clear head, a strong hand, and, above all, a great heart” (Dewey 1899, 14). School librarians are invaluable adults in our students' lives. We develop

SCHOOL LIBRARY. NO ONE TALKED ABOUT PROFESSIONAL VALUES, THE GOLDEN PROFESSION ESSENTIAL.

strong relationships with our students, often becoming their confidants, counselors, and friends. Students do not feel judged in this environment. School librarians capitalize on this feeling of goodwill by taking time to know students on a personal level. The wide breadth of knowledge school librarians have provides endless topics for discussion with students. School librarians help to guide students through school and life experiences, aiding in their success. Our openness to diversity and fight for equality show students the school library is a safe place for all. Students trust us. Through these personal interactions, we build global citizens who value diversity and culture.

The library has always been a safe place for me to escape to when life was just too hard to handle. You have the Internet, the novels, and the people. You can always know that you have people to confide in.

— Derek

Value 2: The school librarian is a collaborator and instructional partner.

Since the early 1900s when school library standards and guidelines emerged, the need for qualified librarians who work as instructional partners has remained the same. In 1918 the National Education Association (NEA) published a report on the condition of school libraries. In this report the school librarian was seen as a professional and “under no circumstance should be expected to do clerical work”

and “should have the ability to work for and with teachers” (NEA 1918, 12). This report is evidence that school librarians have a rich history collaborating with teachers to up the instructional game in the school. Instructional partnerships transform learning by integrating literacy skills and core dispositions into curriculum content. In an elementary school collaborative library activity, students studying about the weather were asked to determine when a tree fell on the librarian’s house. To determine the approximate time, students explored general information about the weather from digital and print resources. They researched how hard the wind blew each hour and whether it was raining. Next, at the whiteboard they created a graph by plotting the wind, temperature, and rain. Most—though not all—the students decided that the time of day when the wind was the strongest and the rain the hardest was when the tree fell on the house. Students then summarized their findings in a written paragraph. The lesson covered curriculum material about the weather, literacy skills involving print and digital resources, and the disposition of employing “a critical stance in drawing conclusions by demonstrating that the pattern of evidence leads to a decision or conclusion” (AASL 2007, 5). We know students are inspired by engaging learning opportunities like the lesson just described.

The library taught me that knowledge can be obtained in many ways. We are not limited to just worksheets or lectures. Instead, we have the opportunity

to use databases, books, and the kind librarians who work to answer our questions. The library is a valuable asset to the school, and I think more people need to realize how much of an impact it has on students and teachers.

— Gina

Collaborating with teachers and partnering for lesson delivery are possible because instructional design is embedded into the school librarians’ professional training. Since the first reports by the NEA in 1918, through publication of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* in 1988 and *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* in 1998, to our current professional standards, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*, the school librarian consistently is defined as an instructional consultant and instructional partner. Our latest set of professional standards calls for increased collaboration and indicates the importance of our anticipating teachers’ needs and driving information to them (AASL 2009, 16). Connecting library outcomes to curriculum learning measurements by means of instructional partnerships is a continuous thread in school library standards since the early 1900s. The medium for instructional delivery may change, but the principle that the school librarian is a curriculum partner has not.

Value 3: School librarians prepare students for lifelong learning.

Reading is still fundamental. By bringing reading alive, school librarians still teach students to love books and celebrate stories and authors. Students love stories and enjoy reading in spite of the fact that so many are over-scheduled with extracurricular activities and school work. We truly believe students who read succeed. School librarians know there is a book for every reader and a reader for every book. We never limit readers' curiosity; we do invite them to explore everything the library collection offers. Reading opens students' minds to different ideas and helps them walk a mile in another's shoes. By bringing students and books together, we create students with a social conscience who are empathic as they progress on life's journey. When we open books, we open eyes.

The school library has allowed my knowledge of reading to expand beyond the normal classroom. My school library is a gateway for my imagination to explore the stories I want to know. It has changed my way of thinking for the better.

— Mitchell

Today's students are curious. They will spend hours trying to find their way through a video game, happily failing over and over again until they get it right. Through their work in school libraries, students learn to

transfer this disposition of emotional resiliency to the information-seeking world. We show them how to embrace and grow from feedback to get better at a task rather than feel criticized.

Through implementation of AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, students learn the skills they need to inform their life choices. School librarians encourage students to consider diverse and global perspectives, connect with their communities, build leadership skills, and become confident global citizens. We inspire them to participate in the public conversation and engage in vigorous debate over today's issues, thus preparing them for the future.

We know learning is not just memorization. School librarians demonstrate how to research deeply and show students mastery is within their grasp. Students learn how to adapt and follow where the research leads them. Many are overwhelmed with a ton of information but lack the skills to evaluate it and toss out the fiction. We give them the tools to assess resources and find truth in the haze of information. It is important that students identify their own misconceptions and bias. By teaching students how to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources school librarians encourage students to not only know what they believe to be true, but also why they believe it. School librarians create opportunities for students to develop their personal core beliefs and passions, and then share them positively with the world.

The library has helped to change me in many ways. It has encouraged the use of paper sources and research. It also has taught me many valuable lessons in the art of writing correctly and for success. Our school family should be able to learn valuable lessons in the library that can apply to anything from writing a resume [to] writing a report for a company. The skills that someone learns in the library can carry them through whatever job field they go into.

— Caleb

Value 4: School librarians protect students' right to information.

Over the years, the format and delivery of materials and resources have evolved. As each new format and delivery system comes into existence, librarians look toward established values, policies, and concepts to provide insight on how to manage emerging information resources. The ALA Code of Ethics was developed in 1939 as a roadmap for selecting and organizing information. Amended most recently in 2008, it describes the type of service we provide to ensure equitable access to library users. Through the library core values of democracy, public good, intellectual freedom, confidentiality, and privacy, students are introduced to good citizenship (ALA 2004a). School librarians understand a democracy is dependent on citizens who are well informed on all viewpoints about a

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topic. We believe that in the school library students require access to information on varied topics that express differing viewpoints so learners may frame authentic research.

The library, any library, brings opportunity and even freedom. Many book worms (like myself) use books as an escape from life. They can bring out other perspectives, ideas, and help. They bring endless information you couldn't get, or at least couldn't completely trust over the Internet.

— Katlyn

Through inquiry, our students fulfill the basic premise of democracy: citizens with access to valid information make informed decisions. ALA's Freedom to Read Statement maintains, "The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them" (2004b). This statement was originally completed in 1953 as a joint effort of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council and has been updated periodically through 2004. It powerfully states the importance of providing library resources that are balanced. Students have a right to read and research information, vet the information, create knowledge, and share their ideas. School library programs led by qualified librarians provide exploration that expands students' perceptions and enables them to analyze information to form decisions.

The library is a useful resource for me to get new books to broaden my knowledge. It has also helped me with my researched essay studies for

my English class. I love this library and everything it's about. #doitforthekids.

— Lofton

AASL's 1969 *School Library Bill of Rights* stated it is the responsibility of the school library program to "provide materials which reflect the ideas and beliefs of religious, social, political, historical, and ethnic groups and their contribution to the American and world heritage and culture, thereby enabling students to develop an intellectual integrity in forming judgments." The unique role school libraries play in intellectual freedom is providing the opportunity for students from all backgrounds to read materials they might otherwise not be able to afford or have access to. We level the playing field between the haves and the have-nots.

Reading has shaped the person that I am today, and libraries have been an incredible way for me to gain free access to books.

— Molly

A core belief of intellectual freedom is the student's right to privacy and confidentiality. The ALA Code of Ethics protects users' rights to confidentiality and privacy. What this means for school librarians is our students should feel safe and free to explore issues of concern to them. It is our responsibility to protect these rights for students. We must stay current on state and federal laws that protect student privacy and understand that gray areas exist. Where gaps exist, it is important to create local policies to strengthen student privacy rights (Adams 2011). By adhering to the ALA Code of Ethics, school librarians ensure students' rights to access information and learn.

Value 5: School librarians know advocacy is essential to library program growth.

Advocacy is not new to school librarians. Advocacy is personal. To promote the greater good for users, we have always advocated for our programs. Advocacy is defined on AASL's website as the "on-going process of building partnerships so others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library program. It begins with a vision and a plan for the library program that is then matched to the agenda and priorities of stakeholders" (2014). Librarians use this definition to form an advocacy plan to address critical issues like fighting for access, budget, and relevant materials.

Since school library programs impact the entire community of learners, we must understand when and how to generate advocates. Daily library activities and instructional experiences provide school librarians with opportunities to identify advocates. We must share with our stakeholders how free reading, reading for information, and school library programs provide students with opportunities to think, create, share, and grow.

The school library has changed me in many ways. The biggest way I can think of is how it has given me an infinite amount of knowledge at my fingertips. Libraries are beautiful.

— Zachary

History shows that speaking for ourselves is not the best solution to providing for the school library program and learning needs of students. The most effective advocacy plan is to have others speak for the program. Parents, community members, teachers, and students are all effective advocates because they draw from personal experiences to explain the library's importance to them.

The school library has changed me by allowing me to research with actual books, not just the computer. I love being able to look at books at the school library because there are so many varieties of genres. I can find anything I want there and if something is not there, I can request it from another school. The school library has made me a more avid reader, for which I am grateful. Also, the librarians here are awesome! They are willing to drop everything to help with whatever I need. Overall, school libraries really help me develop as a student, both academically and just in general.

— Rachel

These advocates need information, and the school librarian must educate them. The AASL website contains numerous links to toolkits and information about how to create and maintain stakeholder

support. Fortunately, the AASL website also provides links to research and statistics, reports, position papers, and white papers to assist librarians with advocacy education. These documents provide librarians with concrete tools to show how the school library is critical to evolving educational mandates. Though there are global requirements for school libraries, each library program has specific needs to enhance and assist students.



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Adams, Helen R. 2011. "The Privacy Problem." *School Library Journal* (April 1). <www.slj.com/2011/04/librarians/the-privacy-problem> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ This article explores the issue of privacy for minors: what the law says about privacy for minors and what it does not say, when it is okay to overstep student rights and when it is not. The article includes insights into how the digital environment impacts student privacy. The article ends with thirteen ways for school librarians to protect students' privacy rights.

American Association of School Librarians. 2009. *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. Chicago: ALA.

▮ *Empowering Learners* advances school library programs to meet the needs of the changing school library environment and is guided by the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action*. This book provides national guiding principles for school library programs; it focuses on building a flexible learning environment with the goal of producing successful learners skilled in multiple literacies. Defining the future direction of school library programs is the purpose of AASL's newest set of guidelines.

American Association of School Librarians. 2007. "Standards for the 21st-Century Learner." <www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/AASL_Learning_Standards_2007.pdf> (accessed December 9, 2014).

▮ AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* offer vision for teaching and learning to both guide and beckon school librarians as education leaders. The standards are designed to shape the school library program and serve as a tool school librarians can use to shape the learning of students in the school.

American Association of School Librarians. 2014. "What Is Advocacy?" <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/definitions> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ Advocacy is defined on this webpage, which differentiates between advocacy, public relations, and marketing.

American Association of School Librarians. 1969. "School Library Bill of Rights (1969)." <<http://ethics.iit.edu/ecodes/node/3755>> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ The document is based on the Library Bill of Rights and focuses on the school library environment. Six specific rights are documented.

American Library Association. 2012. "ALA Resolutions." <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/ala-resolutions#2012> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ At its June 2012 meeting the Council of the American Library Association passed a resolution in support of school libraries and librarians. The resolution was initiated by ALA Councilor Sara Kelly Johns, school librarian at Lake Placid (NY) Middle/High School and a past president of AASL.

American Library Association. 2008. "Code of Ethics of the American Library Association." <www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ First adopted in 1939, the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association states the values to which we are committed and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in an ever-changing information environment. The eight principles of this code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making.

American Library Association. 2004. "Core Values of Librarianship." <www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/corevalues> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values that define, inform, and guide our professional practice. These values reflect the history and ongoing development of the profession and have been advanced, expanded, and refined by numerous ALA policy statements. Among the topics to which these core values relate are: access, confidentiality/privacy, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, and social responsibility.

American Library Association. 2004. "The Freedom to Read Statement." <www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/

[statementspols/freedomreadstatement](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/statementspols/freedomreadstatement)> (accessed November 24, 2014).

▮ ALA (and many other organizations) take the position that freedom to read is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. This article is a summary of seven propositions to protect the constitutional guarantees of essential rights and the responsibilities that accompany these rights. The pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. The statement issues the challenge that every American community, to preserve its own freedom to read, must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate. The statement indicates that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

Dewey, Melvil. 1899. "The Ideal Librarian." *Library Journal* 24 (1): 14. <<http://books.google.com/books?id=8j8DAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA14.c>> (accessed December 4, 2014).

▮ This article states core characteristics that Melvil Dewey thought all librarians should possess. He explained that when teaching library school courses he gave five lectures on the technical qualifications of a librarian, but they are all overshadowed by the core values a librarian must inherently have. He believed librarians must have a clear head, a strong hand, a great heart, be diplomatic, and be the type of people who would lay down their lives to save others. He then went on to say he believed most of these great men would be women.

National Education Association. 1918. *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes*. Washington, DC: National Education Association, Department of Secondary Education.

▮ In 1918 this report stated that for the first time administrators saw that the library is the very heart of the high school. This report was created to discuss the importance of the school library and to talk in definite terms to boards of education when planning junior and senior high schools; it was also an attempt to provide school library standards. A 1920 version of the report was published by ALA and is available at <<https://archive.org/details/standardlibrary00nati>>.