TOGETHER

WE CAN....

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Introduction

Developments in technology, standards implementation, and legislative demands open avenues for school librarians to transition to leadership roles focused on learning (Todd and Kuhlthau 2005). More than ever, the concept of leadership for learning resonates with school librarians. "Library media specialists are in the right place at the right time to play a significant role in the transformation of teaching that must occur in K–12 education" (Zmuda and Harada 2008, 18). The school librarian has an understanding of the curriculum and has access to ongoing professional development to learn new skills and concepts.
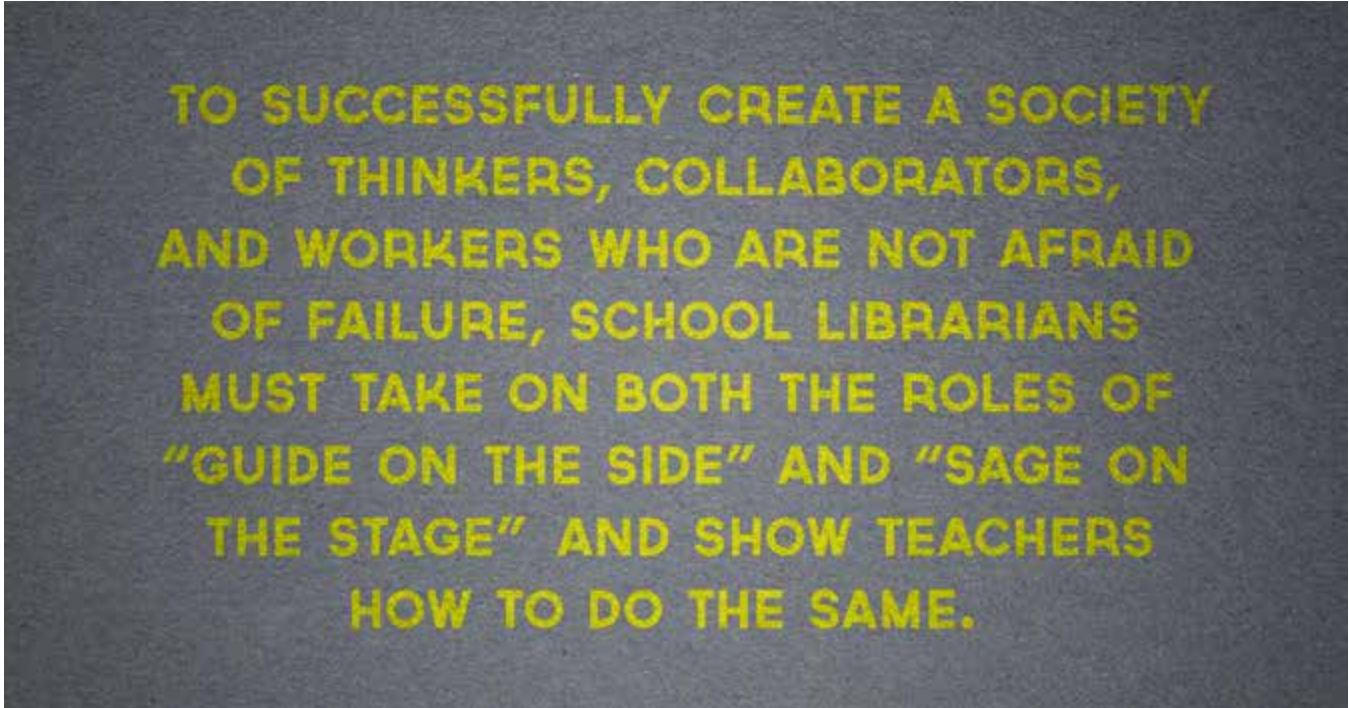
School librarians today find greater opportunities to influence with purpose through modelling leadership and through instructive, facilitative, supportive ways of mentoring staff. This circumstance enables the visionary librarian to be a guiding force within the school. The shift seen in education over the past two decades, with new and expanded access to technology and other digital resources, has presented challenges to the traditional classroom teacher. This shift can be addressed through a combination of identifying practitioner needs and meeting those needs through partnerships with graduate educators and programs.

School reform to accommodate student needs and take advantage of emerging resources has become a nationwide focus. Personalized learning and other pedagogical efforts abound in schools today but depend first upon education of the teacher. Student learning is dependent on teacher learning; therefore, reform often begins with teacher education and/or professional development. It has been a challenge for schools to meet teachers' needs for information about and personalized training on effective use of new technology. School librarians who have ongoing training to develop and hone new skills can fill this gap with librarian-led professional development targeted at specific needs of identified teachers.

How can a school librarian lead? What types of professional development can the school librarian present that will be most effective for teachers? School librarians teach and lead classroom teachers, helping teachers effectively integrate 21st-century skills into instruction for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Teachers are preparing children for jobs that have not yet been created, a circumstance that places a staggering weight on teachers and school librarians. To successfully create a society of thinkers, collaborators, and workers who are not afraid of failure, school librarians must take on both the roles of "guide on the side" and "sage on the stage" and show teachers how to do the same. However, as pointed out by Vishwas Chavan, "Early on in my professional career, I realized that you can't develop

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all the competencies you need fast enough on your own" (2012). Thus, we recognize the significance of partnerships as school librarians make it a personal mission to "teach the teacher." Partnerships with graduate school educators can be a rewarding place to start.

One of the most difficult roles, especially for young beginning school librarians, can be that of teaching the teachers. New librarians recognize the many skills their fellow teachers already have. It can be intimidating to think that they, beginning librarians, who may not have much (or any) classroom teaching experience, can offer experienced, seasoned teachers something they don't already know. However, if school librarians are to be full collaborative instructional partners who model, share, and promote effective principles of teaching and learning with other educators, librarians must acknowledge their own roles, engage in professional development, and offer professional development to other educators.

It is important for graduate schools to prepare future school librarians for *all* their roles, including leadership in professional development. The efforts of graduate educators to provide intentional, strategic, and ongoing opportunities for students and practitioners to develop in-service training sessions or training tools will help school librarians feel prepared to step into the roles of facilitator and professional development leader as they advance through their careers in school librarianship (Dotson and Dotson-Blake 2015). Additionally, if graduate school faculty members maintain contact and interactive partnerships with practitioners—especially school librarians who have recently begun their careers—

the novices will get continued and ongoing support; the graduate educators will gain insights that allow them to become even better instructors of pre-service school librarians; and university facilities and resources will be more widely used. Interactive partnerships among graduate educators and novice school librarians support both entities in multiple ways. Of course, the ultimate beneficiaries will be K–12 students. Helen Keller described this mutual support well: "Alone we can do so little; together, we can do so much" (Blaydes 2003, 112).

Reality of Practice

School librarians in North Carolina are rising to the challenge to meet the needs of teachers and students. For example, in the 2014–2015 school year all Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools implemented Google Apps for Education. The Google Apps for Education suite includes Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Forms, Google Calendar, Google Sites, and Google Classroom. Teachers and staff were not familiar with all these applications, and an opportunity presented itself for librarians to become the in-house experts at their schools. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) offered professional development courses on the Google Apps for Education; these classes were offered over the summer as well as throughout the school year. To begin the process of becoming a technology leader, school librarian Christine Clark went to her principal, explained the new Google Apps for Education push, and asked to be allowed to attend the training sessions. In return, she would provide professional development at the school level

every two weeks and also on a by-appointment basis.

After attending the training, offered both online and in lecture format, Christine first used the applications in her own school library while working with fourth-graders. Each CMS library was given thirty Chromebooks, thus allowing 1:1 in the school library. At the point that Christine felt comfortable with all the Google Apps for Education, she took on the role of school technology leader, presenting professional development on the Google Apps for Education to all staff at staff meetings, before school, after school, and by request. Since this was a hands-on learning experience, staff were able to ask questions and leave with new ideas and skills to implement in classrooms with the ten Chromebooks allocated to each classroom.

As the staff became more familiar and comfortable with Google Apps for Education, Christine began introducing other ways classroom teachers could use technology in their classrooms. She created an open line of communication about technology, thus making this professional development ongoing. While the Google Apps for Education suite continued to be the major focus for professional development for the staff at her elementary school, Christine also presented professional development on other resources, supported by her ongoing interaction and conference attendance with her former graduate school educators.

She experienced and then shared with other educators at her school resources, tools, and strategies to support and enhance teaching and learning: Kahoot!, Compass Learning, Genius Hour, flipping the classroom,

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Blendspace, Nearpod, e-book resources, Chromebooks, iPad apps, and websites and online research resources accessible via the Chromebooks and iPads. Christine also, in partnership with graduate program conference planners, supported her graduate program by sharing her presentation with alumni and attendees at a conference sponsored by the university where she had earned her master's degree. She found that her role as school librarian increasingly included providing professional development focused on technology and serving as the technology leader in the school, mirroring some aspects of what she saw in graduate-level librarian educators.

The Process

How did Christine develop her process? She had already developed the "bones" of her process as a result of her professional graduate training at East Carolina University where all students are required to identify a need for professional development for school staff. Thus, for all training Christine delivered, she began with a question that reflected a need of faculty members,

administrators, or students. For example, teachers in her school had been exposed to Google Apps for Education, but it was apparent that the staff at her elementary school still needed more hands-on training to use Google Classroom effectively. Following identification of the need, Christine delved into her own research and self-development (from conferences, professional learning networks, Twitter chats, and partnerships with other professional technology and school librarians around the country). She improved her skills, giving her the confidence she needed to teach the teachers. She became consistently active, both participating in and facilitating sessions at the annual East Carolina University Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit, North Carolina Reading Association Conference, North Carolina Association of Elementary Educators events, and CMS district professional development.

When Christine felt fully prepared to teach the veteran teachers in her school, she created interactive presentations on Google Classroom and shared these with her faculty, initially at staff meetings. These

presentations included step-by-step directions, as well as hands-on activities that allowed the teachers to leave with something they could immediately use in the classroom, a practice that research shows to be the most meaningful for effective professional development. Research proves that teachers learn through interaction with peers within a nurturing environment (Tienken and Stonaker 2007) and that teachers also appreciate new knowledge that can be immediately applied in their own work environment (Brown, Dotson, and Yontz 2011). These professional development sessions satisfied those needs as teachers gained skills and knowledge to meet the demands of teaching to comply with district mandates. Christine gained the satisfaction that comes from having developed the skills and knowledge to teach and lead others. She also has the knowledge that, as a result of her ongoing personal training and partnerships with other professional librarians, her impact upon the students through daily interaction as well as teaching their teachers has been—and will continue to be—significant.

Christine's involvement in the graduate program and ongoing partnership with graduate school educators at East Carolina University enhanced her level of confidence and supported her efforts in becoming the technology leader at her school. The evaluation instrument used by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for school librarians (referred to as "media coordinators") highlights the school librarian's role as the technology leader in the school and the need for ongoing learning to support this role. This state-level emphasis on technology leadership is an additional impetus for beginning school librarians to teach teachers who have more experience—who may, in fact, have been teaching for twenty-five years—and offers some comfort to novice school librarians who may be hesitant about stepping into the role of technology leader. Christine admitted that enacting the role was intimidating, but, because of her interactive partnership as a student, practitioner, planner, and presenter with graduate professors, she was encouraged, supported, and prepared to fulfill this obligation.

Moving Forward

Using technology in the classroom for learning is no longer new and innovative; it is expected and even demanded. Teachers may not be as comfortable with technology as their students are. Nevertheless, K–12 teachers still have a responsibility to employ technology tools in multiple ways to teach and foster students' development of 21st-century skills and enhance researching, learning, and creating. School librarians can be instrumental in the process. However, just as students' and teachers' needs are changing, so

are the needs of school librarians. Collaborative partnerships with opportunities to hone skills and strengths and to discover new resources are more important than ever before.

Graduate-level educators working with school librarians can open doors and provide these opportunities and resources. One example of support is access to teaching resources centers in

university libraries, which facilitate teaching and learning initiatives. Christine was encouraged to use the teaching resources center at the local university, which provides resources and services to educators at all levels. Additionally, opportunities to share action research by practitioners and graduate-level faculty working together offer a view into the perspectives of each, along with the new information discovered that can be put into practice.

These partnerships directly support goals expressed in professional literature. In *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (2009) and in *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* (2010), the significance of teaching to support learning is emphasized. Specifically, Standard 1: Teaching for Learning from *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* addresses this concept. The American Association for School Librarians suggests that an important mission for school librarians is to ensure personal growth through ongoing exposure to conferences, journal articles, webinars, presentations, and membership in professional organizations. School librarians are expected to exemplify the vision of being lifelong learners. They must intentionally commit to and model this behavior for their stakeholders. School librarians who actively build partnerships with other professional educators and work and conduct research with graduate-level educators will always have significant information and practices to share.

Implications

School librarians who work in partnership with graduate-level educators in action research, presentation development, and sharing experiences find opportunities to mentor and model for each other. Through these partnerships, both are able to broaden their own personal experiences, increase their range of impact, and continue to learn, each enriched by the perspectives of the other. For graduate-level educators this sharing with and learning from practitioners is especially important in today's rapidly changing school environment.

Fortunately, research proves that school librarians and graduate-level educators are, in fact, doing this sharing (Brown and Dotson 2007; Dotson, Dotson-Blake, and Anderson 2012; Dotson and Grimes 2010; Oakleaf and Owen 2010). Further, in addition to the more-traditional forms of personal development, which include conferences, retreats, workshops, and classes, school librarians are rapidly turning to electronic discussion lists, blogs, webinars, wikis, Nings, and other evolving online tools and resources, making it easier than ever to maintain contact after graduation (Brown, Dotson, and Yontz 2011; Warlick 2010).

As school librarians are in many cases the representatives sent from their schools to resource- or technology-related professional development sessions, they have an obligation and an opportunity to return to the school and share the new information, methods,

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practices, and theories. These experiences and personal learning activities can be enhanced with continued coordinated partnerships with graduate-level educators seeking both to gain knowledge from the field and also to support the preparation and professional success of their students.

Conclusion

In our age of accountability in education, professionals within the school community must strive to assess their own impact and share their individual professional work for the academic success and development of students. To this end, school librarians are well positioned to enhance and support the academic success of students by moving beyond the library and toward teaching the teachers. The prepared and confident school librarian is a professional with a unique skill set and a strong position at the heart of school progress. It is important that confidence and the ability to lead school-wide professional development are engrained in the school librarian's professional identity. These attributes can be strongly supported by ongoing involvement and partnerships with leaders in library science graduate programs. Together, we can do so much.

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