

FEATURE



THE PAST INFORMS OUR TODAY

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The day an individual steps into the role of a school librarian, they enter a collective that is passionate about creating change while also safeguarding a lasting vision. A mentor kindly suggests how to collaborate with a reluctant classroom teacher. A library coordinator or district leader provides direction with policies for selecting library materials. A district or state library organizer invites discussion about funding and equity across the area. National leaders in AASL advocate and publish library standards and data. School librarians consistently hold to core values of collaboration, learning, equity and inclusion, access and literacy amidst changes in the landscape—technology, materials, school expectations, and student needs.

Influences of the Past

School librarians of the past influence our decisions and roles today. In the mid-1960s, Lillian L. Batchelor, former AASL President, instituted 166 elementary school libraries in Philadelphia. Not unlike school librarians of today, she understood the importance of providing access to resources for all children in the school district (Miller 2003, 15). Her influence went beyond these schools, as she was a leader in AASL and shared her ideas to colleagues in publications and conferences. In an ALA publication she shared how a school librarian can work with administrators to present at a faculty meeting, demonstrating how to utilize library resources (Batchelor 1963).

In the 1980s and 1990s Michael L. Printz was another influential school librarian. He started an “author-in-residence” with authors working one-on-one with students and their writing. As a Best Books for Young Adults committee chair,

he championed student voices by asking his students to record their opinions about the novels. His positive influence with his students and leadership with colleagues led to the creation of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature (Miller 2003, 195–96).

Ruth V. Bell, former library director and contributor to the 1988 edition of *Information Power*, was an advocate for the importance of school library programs. Involved in her district, state, and national organizations, her leadership contributed to her district twice being named by ALA the school library media program of the year for both large and small districts. Her influence is felt still within her school district as the library program continues to focus on the goals of literacy, flexible scheduling, and collaboration in every building.

These school librarians are but three examples of many others that came before us. While we may be in awe of the magnitude of their work, we are continuing their momentum through interactions with students, teachers, colleagues, and our professional organizations. They had a vision for how the school library can positively impact students, and we carry that vision forward today.

Keeping the Old with the New

At the beginning of my school library career, I was given the second edition of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. *Information Power* focused on the school librarian’s role in “teaching and learning, information access and program administration.” Nine information literacy standards were included with indicators and standards in action. The nine standards encompassed information literacy, independent learning, and social responsibility (AASL and AECT 1998, 8–10). The program administration chapters included ten principles and goals to assist in

meeting each principle. The details were practical and helpful for a first-year librarian as I referred to the book throughout my early career and still refer to many principles today.

For instance, the principles listed gave me courage to ask my principal to add the librarian to the building’s leadership team and to sign me up for various district committees to guarantee a librarian’s perspective was provided. I was given a vision of how I can be helpful to classroom teachers by learning new technology and instructional tools to enhance lessons. “The school library media specialist takes a proactive role in promoting the use of technology by staff, in determining staff development needs, in determining staff development explorations, and serving as a leader in staff development opportunities” (AASL and AECT 1998, 52).

Over twenty years later, similar visions and goals from *Information Power* remain influential. For example, *Information Power* included the school librarian’s role as leader. Currently, the AASL vision statement emphasizes the leadership role: “Every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian” (AASL 2022). As *Information Power* had, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* published in 2018 emphasize the school librarian’s instructional role. Other examples include standards that encourage collaboration among peers, ethical use of information, and recognizing the importance of multiple viewpoints (AASL 2018).

While some of the terminology has changed—information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and so on—we remain focused on embedding skills that help students become better consumers of information. We continue to develop

instructional opportunities that challenge our students to evaluate quality sources from various media. Access to digital sources and millions of available websites fuels our passion to work with students to become critical evaluators of information.


In 1988 Marilyn L. Miller, former AASL President, articulated the importance of the school librarian's roles in instruction and collaboration:

Good school librarians work closely with teachers to integrate information seeking and use activities into curriculum units that are designed to deliver content as well as to equip students to locate, evaluate, and use effectively a broad range of resources: print, audio, video, tactile, and now electronic data systems. (Miller 1988)

Today, we may send e-mails and edit documents online to develop a lesson, but as always, the librarian and classroom teacher are stronger when working together to enhance learning opportunities.

Sharing with Others

In mentoring new librarians, I am passing the vision of our past to the next generation of librarians to adopt for today. I share the "why" along with the "how." For example, when discussing how I create instructional webpages with links to our

A woman with a backpack is shown in profile, looking towards a river with stone steps. The background is a vibrant, textured illustration of a forest scene with a river and stone steps. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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databases and helpful tutorials, I am also discussing the importance of providing access to students with a variety of needs. When assisting in designing a lesson on keyword searching, I reach for the library and content area standards. This is not unlike what I did years ago when students were searching in a card catalog. Today, we design lessons incorporating similar standards, but students are using up-to-date resources such as an online database or search engine.

The AASL conference is another opportunity for school librarians to share knowledge and learn from one another. As a new librarian, I attended sessions presented by veteran school librarians who shared their experiences and best practices. With colleagues I discussed what I had learned and how to implement best practices in our buildings. While I learned from each session, I was most impacted by the collaborative and shared mindset of the group. I recognized that my actions as a librarian in my one building impacted my colleagues in my district, state, and nation. School librarians fight to hold on to—or advocate for—flexible scheduling, adequate staffing, adequate budgets, and more.

From message boards of the past to Twitter hashtags of today, school librarians are sharing with colleagues new learning and best practices. Through blogs and publications, school librarians invest in each other to be better at what we do. A shared understanding exists between

librarians that we are stronger together. When a school librarian struggles to find a resource or becomes frustrated by the lack of collaboration in the building, other librarians create and share resources to provide support.

Twenty years ago I worked in a library with a large circulation desk, shelves full of books, a reference section, and many large computer desktops. Currently, I don't have a circulation desk, my reference materials are online, and students carry laptops to and from class. The space is different, but we continue to be the largest classroom in the building, a safe haven for those that need it, and a gathering place to study or meet friends or find the best book. It is also a place to sew, 3D print or play a game of chess. As technology changes, student needs change, library spaces change, and the school librarian adapts to remain relevant



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while able to stay consistent with a foundation that continues to stand strong over time.

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