LIBRARIANS AS LEARNING LEADERS:

CULTIVATING CULTURES OF INQUIRY

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What is the business of libraries if not to cultivate learning? Having raised this rhetorical question, I hasten to add that the challenge for librarians to assume the mantle of leadership requires serious thinking about what this really means. Let me begin by identifying several core beliefs that I share with respected educators. These beliefs frame my reflections in this chapter:

- Learning is not about raising test scores. It is about building a foundation of responsible, reflective, rigorous, and resilient thinking (Costa 2008; Marzano, Waters and McNulty 2005).
- Accountability includes the actions of adults, not merely the grades and scores of students. This requires a critical examination of what we offer students and how we offer it as a community of providers (Reeves 2006).
- Leadership is not an isolated or isolating activity. It succeeds only in a culture of team-ness (Fullan 2003, Elmore 2000).

In this chapter, I expand on the following major points with the hope that my comments generate spirited and meaningful dialogue amongst readers:

- Critical dimensions of thoughtful learning
- Qualities and dispositions of learning leaders
- Librarians as potential leaders in learning

CRITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THOUGHTFUL LEARNING

Learning involves building one's own understanding about the world. It is a nonlinear and messy process that requires invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. Reflection is essential for meaning making and dialogue must be encouraged within a community to engender further thinking (Fosnot and Perry 2005). The following dimensions of learning overlap; at the same time, they provide important perspectives on what's essential for the learning leader to know.

1. Learning is *not just about facts*: it encompasses more than cognitive knowledge. Factual knowledge and skills are certainly critical; however, they are only part of the fuzzy ball defined as learning. Learning is not a fixed world of knowledge that the student must come to know. Instead, it is dynamic, constantly morphing, and filled with both uncertainties and possibilities. The sum total involves the learners' "emotions, bodily sensations, ideas, beliefs, values, character qualities, and inferences [they] generate from interactions with others" (Costa 2008, 23). Jean Donham (2007) makes an important distinction being *learning* and *being learned.* While the latter will remain a critical component of the curriculum, she maintains that "the development of dispositions toward learning and skills to continue to learn will be of utmost importance in [students'] lifetimes" (9).

In establishing the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (AASL 2007), the American Association of School Librarians recognized the complex, holistic nature of what we expect learners to demonstrate. The student as the owner of his or her learning must assume responsibilities and engage in self-reflection. Schools as learning organizations (Fullan 2003) must support a culture of inquiry that ultimately challenges

students “to question, struggle with possibilities, and create personal meaning from sharing knowledge and learning with others” (Zmuda and Harada 2008, 86).

2. Learning *goes beyond comprehension*: it requires demonstration of critical understanding.

In his work with Harvard University’s Project Zero, David Perkins (1992) maintains that understanding is not a state of possession but one of enablement. He states that when we understand something, we not only possess certain information about it but we must also be “enabled to do certain things with that knowledge” (77). Barbara Stripling (2007), long an advocate for deep learning through libraries, views learning for understanding as developing the skills and dispositions to interpret and interact with the world. She stresses that both process and content must be addressed for learners to acquire the conceptual and thematic knowledge embedded in the various disciplines (the *what* of learning) at the same time that they develop abilities to demonstrate this knowledge in different contexts and transfer it to various learning environments (the *how* of learning). These processes include the abilities to connect, observe, analyze, challenge, interpret, and infer. Over time and through practice and reflection, learners develop reasoned approaches to meeting their information needs.

3. Learning should be *hands on and minds on:* it requires active intellectual engagement.

Art Costa (2008), who has written extensively on habits of mind, aptly says that learning is “not a spectator sport” (22). He maintains that education should be about “thinking to learn and learning to think” (22). Learners *think to learn* by connecting with relevant and generative questions that provoke more questions and stretch the imagination. They *learn*

to think by labeling and identifying cognitive processes. They begin to question their own and others' assumptions and employ such strategies as thinking maps and visual tools to make their learning explicit and visible (Hyerle 2004). This learning requires a safe, nonjudgmental environment where instructors urge students to seriously think about their own thinking and assess their own performance (Costa 2008).

4. Learning demands *connections:* it requires construction of knowledge that is personally meaningful.

Real learning has very little to do with traditional schooling practices that often result in mindless regurgitation and the mechanical completion of term papers. Instead, it has everything to do with the learner's steady building of personal knowledge through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and self-examination. This notion of learning reflects a constructivist theory that envisions learners obtaining information from their senses and through contact with the larger culture to shape a personal view of the world (Clarke 1990).

Constructivist learning, which draws on current studies in cognitive psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, is frequently messy and recursive because knowledge construction requires sifting of information, selective combination of elements, and comparison of new information with prior knowledge (Fosnot and Perry 2005, Clarke 1990). Learning from this perspective

> . . .involves both the process and result of questioning, interpreting, analyzing information; using this information and thinking process to develop, build, and alter our meaning and understanding of concepts and ideas; and integrating

current experiences with our past experiences and what we already know about a given subject. (Marlowe and Page 1998, 10)

Instructors assume a key role in encouraging connections between impersonal, abstract concepts and issues existing in the student's world. They "pose problems of emerging relevance to learners, structure learning around big ideas or primary concepts, seek and value students' points of view, adapt curriculum to address students' suppositions, and assess student learning in the context of teaching" (Brooks and Brooks 1993, viii).

5. Learning is about *thinking together*: it involves a social process of making meaning.

Constructive dialogue and problem solving within a community are key to a learner-centered process of concept development and decision making (Fosnot and Perry 2005). Clear and respectful dialogue is essential if our goal is to build "a more thought-filled world where we search for ways to care for one another and learn together . . . to value the diversity of other cultures, races, time perspectives, political and economic views, and show greater consciousness of how humans affect Earth's limited resources" (Costa 2008, 24). Instructors help to nurture these collaborative relationships when they purposefully design opportunities for groups to view issues from multiple perspectives, encourage the critical exchange of new found knowledge, and provoke deeper and more creative questions that fuel new investigations.

QUALITIES AND DISPOSITIONS OF LEARNING LEADERS

If learning requires the elements described in the above section, what must a leader in learning believe in and demonstrate? There are numerous theories of leadership;

however, two in particular that resonate with the notion of leadership in the context of learning are *servant leadership* and *instructional leadership.* Robert Greenleaf (1977) states that this form of leadership emerges from a desire to help others. Such leaders don't have to be at the top of the hierarchy but they are positioned at the center of the organization, i.e., they maintain contact with all aspects of the organization and the individuals within it (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty 2005). The central dynamic is nurturing others within the organization. Critical skills possessed by servant leaders include "understanding the personal needs of people within the organization, being a steward of the resources, developing the skills of colleagues within the organization, and being an effective listener" (Marzano, Waters and McNulty 2005, 16-17).

Like servant leaders, instructional leaders serve as resource providers and instructional resources, perform as effective communicators, and maintain a visible presence in the educational community (Smith and Andrews 1989). They encourage and promote collaborative efforts among teachers and foster coaching relationships (Blasé and Blasé 1999). As mentors, they employ research-based principles of adult learning. They also believe in action research as a systematic method of inquiry that is problem focused and context specific (Gordon 2007).

The attributes embedded in the servant and instructional leadership models are relevant for leaders in the learning context. Here are some of the critical actions and beliefs of learning leaders who walk the talk and model by example.

1. Learning leaders facilitate the creation of a shared vision and mission regarding student learning.

Leaders must be able to create not just personal visions but shared visions (Bennis 2003). For learning leaders, a mission centered mindset focuses on student achievement. Such a mindset requires a "collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes" (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty 2005, 99).

It's critical to note that the mere statement of a vision or a mission is inadequate. Improvement begins only when the mission "becomes a disciplined mindset that drives the purpose" for all stakeholders in a school community (Zmuda and Harada 2008, 2). To cultivate this mindset, a leader must work collaboratively with other members of the community to achieve thoughtful consensus on critical questions about learning. These questions include:

- What learning matters to students? What will they find interesting, challenging, and valuable?
- How should learning be designed to encourage the use of cognitive and metacognitive skills to develop reflective abilities?
- How might learning be developed to help students maintain mastery goals, take risks, and view errors as inherent in constructing personal knowledge?
- How might we balance students' choice and control over selection of the subject, the approach to the problem, and the artifacts generated while at the same time providing enough structure so that novices won't be overwhelmed?
- How might we facilitate collaborative work and ensure productive interaction among students?
- What might be the desired outcomes for students in terms of the process and the

product? How might we involve students in effectively assessing for learning?

2. Learning leaders understand and apply the learning theories that serve as the foundation for their vision.

To gain a deep appreciation for the roots of current thinking about learning, leaders must be familiar with the works of the scholars that have shaped 21st century reform efforts. For example, they realize that John Dewey's (1972) works on active learning and transfer have had a profound influence on a holistic approach to how students learn best. They value Jerome Bruner's (1971) landmark treatises on education that stress the notion of children as active problem-solvers and the curriculum as a spiral that revisits basic ideas and builds upon them until the student demonstrates mastery of the ideas.

Leaders also apply Jean Piaget's (1995) research on the cognitive development of children in their own work in classrooms and library media centers. They test the validity of his theory that early development involves processes based upon physical actions and that later development progresses into more abstract changes in mental operations. At the same time, leaders build on Piaget's notion of equilibration, i.e., that all children try to strike a balance between assimilation (applying previous knowledge) and accommodation (changing behavior to account for new knowledge).

They also carefully study Lev Vygotsky's (1986) perspective on the influence of societal factors on the individual's capabilities as well as his findings about the role of mentors in guiding young learners to achieve their fullest potential. They are familiar with Vygotsky's work on cognitive development as subject to the dialogic interplay between nature and history, biology and culture, and the individual and society (McGregor 2007). They test his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which

places instruction at the heart of development, enabling a child's potential for learning when working with more knowledgeable others.

Major learning theories that are central to student learning have emerged from the work of educators and scholars such as the luminaries cited above. I briefly discuss two related theories here. The first is *constructivism,* which has been influenced by the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner. I introduced constructivism earlier in this chapter and I return to it here. Constructivism is not a cookbook of how-to strategies but a way of thinking about learning. It places value on the accommodation of existing thinking and the assimilation of aspects of the new experience. The development of thinking involves steps that build successive experiences with the world and that connect ideas with a real-life community. Teaching is a process of facilitation, of guiding participation with more experienced partners, and designing for learning through contextualized and interactive participation (Kuhlthau, Maniotes and Caspari 2007).

The second theory is *social constructivism*. While it is related to constructivism, this theory focuses on thinking and learning through social interactions that inform personal constructions of meaning. Influenced by Vygotsky, social constructivism underscores the importance of language in not only eliciting ideas but also in shaping them. For students, guided participation with more experienced others and the gradual reduction of the instructor's presence would be of highest priority.

3. Learning leaders must know the research underpinning meaningful learning.

Ross Todd (2007) states, "Research informing practice, and practice informing research is a fundamental cycle in any sustainable profession" (64). Learning leaders must invest the time to carefully examine what research says about how real learning occurs. They

share their findings with colleagues to make informed decisions about teaching and curriculum and provide them with opportunities to "know the research" (Ross 2007, 64). Here are some examples of the research spanning four decades:

- Active learning methods are superior to teacher-dominated approaches in measures of academic, affective, and skill learning (Slavin 1989, Sharan and Sharan 1989/1990, Darling Hammond 1993, Secules and Cottom 1997).
- Teacher expectations are key in raising the quality of student achievement (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968).
- Use of consistent and regular forms of assessment must be used to inform immediate and decisive interventions (Reeves 2006).

Studies that have dealt specifically with the incorporation of thinking in the curriculum have generally reported that thinking skills accelerated the learning gains of participants (McGregor 2007). Investigations of an experimental or quasi-experimental nature revealed that students, who developed these skills, outperformed those in control groups.

Scholars in education have also conducted meta-analyses of research to formulate generalizations about the impact of critical thinking in the curriculum. Cotton (1991), for example, summarized findings from 56 research studies and reviews, largely in the United States, that examined the incorporation of higher-order thinking skills in a range of subjects. He indicated that in almost all of these studies, students improved their performances on SAT and other tests as well as in general classroom assignments. These skills included analysis, synthesis, evaluation, predicting, making inferences, formulating

hypotheses, drawing conclusions, elaborating, identifying assumptions, determining bias, and recognizing logical inconsistencies.

Current scholars are raising fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge and whose knowledge counts (e.g., Gadsden 2008; Sperling and DiPardo 2008; Larsen-Freeman and Freeman 2008; Nasir, Hand and Taylor 2008; Duschl 2008). They are challenging long-standing assumptions about domains of knowledge being fixed and known. Whether in the arts or sciences, history or languages, international educators state that learning disciplinary knowledge entails more than acquiring basic skills or bits of received knowledge. They agree that the boundaries and practices of academic disciplines are fluid and negotiated (Kelly, Luke and Green 2008). Their findings have profound implications for what is being taught and how it's being taught in today's school systems.

How do learning leaders keep abreast of this research and literature? They begin by knowing the research in their specializations. For school librarians, it means reading, reflecting, and acting on statewide studies and compilations of research on literacy learning. Scholastic, for example, provides updated versions of capsulated research in "School Libraries Work." Refereed journals such as *School Library Media Research* and *School Libraries Worldwide* provide access to scholarly articles that allow leaders to develop "an empirical basis for making and justifying decisions, and for identifying gaps on which continuous improvement programs can be built" (Ross 2007, 66). It is also critical to know about the research being conducted in the larger educational arena. Effective starting points would be the publications and conferences sponsored by such organizations as the American Educational Research Association and the Association for

Supervision and Curriculum Development. Bringing this research to the attention of colleagues in the school community is a crucial responsibility of the learning leader.

4. Learning leaders engage students and peers in thoughtful inquiry.

Leaders seek to support learning, not control it. They further inquiry, not orthodoxy. June Gould (2005) states:

> They continuously evaluate themselves, their students, and the system in which they teach. They collaborate with their students and encourage them to collaborate, not to compete, with one another. They become planners, models, guides, observers of development and facilitators and challengers to children's existing personal models of the world. (108)

Learning for such leaders is not about finding instant answers and easy solutions. It's not about covering the curriculum between the covers of a textbook. Instead, learning leaders invite students and professional colleagues to "experience the world's richness, empower them to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, and challenge them to understand the world's complexities" (Brooks and Brooks 1993, 5). They encourage deeper investigations when the presence of new information prompts people to rethink their prior ideas.

5. Learning leaders believe in the synergy and power of learning communities and teamwork.

Current paradigms of leadership have shifted from leaders as single individuals to leadership being shared by teams of individuals (Fullan 2003, Elmore 2000, Spillane 2006). Creating and sustaining teams requires that educators view leadership as a distributed, interactive web of leaders and followers who periodically change roles as the

situation warrants. Learning leaders must use processes that "enhance communication among members, provide for efficient reconciliation of disagreements, and keep members attuned to the current status of the community" (Marzano, Waters and McNulty 2005, 100).

The concept of a *learning community* overarches this notion of distributed leadership. Such a community believes in similar goals and shares mutual interests. Members collaborate over time to exchange ideas and find solutions (Lave and Wenger 1991). What holds them together is a common vision, a sense of purpose, and a real need to know what each other knows. In pursuit of these goals and interests, they employ a common set of practices, work with the same tools, and express themselves in a common language. They use one another as sounding boards, and teach and learn from each other. In short, they are partners committed to jointly improving practice.

Through the above mentioned activities, they move progressively toward similar beliefs and value systems that include the following agreements:

- Focusing on *significance*: teams address questions that truly matter and lead to deep, positive impact on learning and practice.
- Demanding *quality*: they hold everyone accountable for processes and student learning results.
- Fostering *integrity*: they cultivate an environment of trust, openness, and respect.
- Practicing *ethics*: they demonstrate fair, just, and compassionate understanding in their actions (Marzano, Waters and McNulty 2005, 105).

6. The bottom line: learning leaders model the behaviors and attitudes they wish to inspire in others.

Rather than assuming the stance of the expert delivering most of the content, leaders invite their professional colleagues to "uncover, discover, and reflect on content . . . through inquiry, investigation, research, and analysis in the context of a problem, critical question, issue, or theme" (Marlowe and Page 1998, 11). They design learning for meaningful transfer and application by providing clear information with descriptions and examples of the goals and the performances expected. They allow for practice where learners engage actively and reflectively. They supply informative feedback through clear and thorough counsel. By so doing, leaders help others discriminate between the relevant and the irrelevant, and to look at issues from different perspectives (Marlowe and Page 1998).

Richard Elmore (2000) and Douglas Reeves (2006) elaborate on the following behaviors and attitudes that define leaders as inquirers:

- Being analytical: they challenge the status quo with terminology that is clear and vivid.
- Being relational: they build trusting and empathetic relationships.
- Being reflective: they think critically about lessons learned, record small wins and setbacks, and document conflicts between values and practice.

In short, they model the excitement and rigor of inquiry in their work with the other members of the learning community. They are persistent seekers who ask the hard questions: What did we actually learn today? Whom did we nurture? What difficult issue did we confront? What progress did we make? Where do we go from here?

LIBRARIANS AS POTENTIAL LEADERS IN LEARNING

Might school librarians be potential leaders in learning? They are certainly in positions of opportunity! As many library educators have noted, school librarians work with the entire school community. They may not be experts in every single curriculum area; but they are uniquely situated to gain a critical overview of the entire curricular landscape. However, to be acknowledged as big picture experts, librarians must also have knowledge of current educational trends, emerging technologies, new resources in diverse formats, and community connections (Hughes-Hassell and Harada 2007). In addition, they must be able to identify both teacher and student needs. The following examples are snapshots of librarians functioning as learning leaders. The names and schools are fictitious; however, each example is a composite inspired by actual practices.

Snapshot 1: Librarian as a model teacher of thinking strategies.

Carla has been the librarian at Ocean View Elementary for five years. Over this time, she has steadily built her relationships with the teachers at the school. At this point, more than half of the grade level teachers are working with her on a research-related project each year. She nurtures these relationships by attending grade level curriculum meetings when possible, examining curriculum maps that the teachers are producing, and attending staff development sessions with them. At the same time, she maintains an RSS that helps her keep in touch with relevant research and learning-related news on the web. By engaging in these types of activities, Carla realizes that substantive learning requires teaching for "conceptual coherence" (Stripling 2007, 41). She wants students to understand how and why events happen and what motivates decisions. She also encourages students to appreciate that issues are never black or white, and that

understanding conflicts from multiple perspectives affords a fuller understanding of how things come to be.

In her teaching, Carla models a range of thinking strategies that help students move toward deeper as well as broader understandings. Her repertoire includes the following strategies that she has culled from the literature (e.g., Tomlinson 2008, Ritchhart and Perkins 2008, Taggert 2005):

- When she and a teacher introduce a new unit, Carla provokes curiosity by using a technique called *see-think-wonder*. Using artifacts, demonstrations, and media to stimulate engagement, they challenge the students with the following types of questions: What do you see? What do you think about that? What does it make you wonder?
- They create *word walls* in the library and classroom where students contribute vocabulary that help them grapple with concepts and ideas in different disciplines.
- They design a range of *graphic organizers* for different learning purposes, among them, *fishbone maps* to show causal connections, *T charts* to distinguish pros and cons of issues, *mind maps* to visually connect ideas and supporting details, and *grids* to compare multiple sets of data.
- They engage the students in *role playing* to demonstrate their understanding of different perspectives on issues and problems.
- They encourage students to create *dialogue journals* that help them assess for learning. They recognize the importance of cultivating student voice and the value of responding to students with appropriate and timely feedback. The students ask

themselves: What was exciting? What was difficult? What might be the best next step? Why? How might the teacher and librarian help me?

- Importantly, they model a *think aloud technique* that makes students realize that adults don't come up with instant answers--they fumble, experiment, and learn from failures.

What Carla has discovered is that if she is willing to take the lead in experimenting with the techniques mentioned above--and teachers observe her interaction with the students--they begin to see new instructional possibilities. Carla explains:

> The library is like a fishbowl. When I teach, I let the teachers know that I welcome their constructive advice about what I might do better with their students. The teachers really start watching what I am doing when they realize that I sincerely want their feedback. Many of them provide terrific input, which I thank them for and use. But what is really rewarding is that they also learn about additional ways to develop thinking. They tell me, 'I never used that approach or technique before but I really like what I saw you doing. I want to try it in my classroom.' These types of exchanges help all of us to grow!

Snapshot 2: Librarian as an active researcher.

Darlene has been a librarian at Pacific Rim Middle School for ten years. The curriculum focuses on an integrated core of subjects, i.e., language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. Teachers in these disciplines plan as teams and work with students in large, flexible blocks of time. They focus on "blended curriculum topics" and welcome Darlene's involvement in the students' projects. Darlene, in turn, seizes this opportunity to be part of the teams. She discovers that while the teachers are enthused about students

"conducting research," they have limited understanding about research as a process. They are unaware that students need guided support in key phases of their research projects. One team works especially well together and appears open to suggestions that improve the learning and teaching environment. Darlene feels very comfortable with the members of this team and she proposes that they think about the following big questions that drive their work: What do we want students to be able to accomplish in their research projects? What help will they need to demonstrate achievement of these goals? How can we tell if students have succeeded? She volunteers to serve as the coordinator for this work and the teachers are willing to participate if she takes the lead.

What Darlene is attempting is an exciting dimension of leadership that requires not only knowledge of existing research but engagement in research that connects directly with practice. *Action research* is a "systematic approach to problem-solving and understanding phenomena in depth that can be woven into the fabric of everyday work patterns and routines" (Gordon 2007, 162). The research questions are relevant because the findings are immediately applicable to the workplace . Action research employs the same methodologies as formal qualitative research and "must meet the same standards of validity and reliability although findings are not usually generalizable from sample to population because sample sizes are generally small" (Gordon 2007, 163). This form of research is sometimes referred to as *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action* (McGregor 2007).

As the facilitator, Darlene works with the team to refine their research questions. By reading and discussing various works, including Kuhlthau's investigations on the Information Search Process (2004), they gain considerable insight into the complex

nature of the process. They also brainstorm possible techniques and intervention strategies they might incorporate at different phases of the research process. Importantly, they discuss the criteria to assess learner outcomes and the instruments they might use to conduct the assessments. Darlene works with the team to draft a tentative timeline for the action research that synchronizes with the work of the students. While Darlene maintains overall responsibilities for keeping things moving, the teaching and assessment are divided amongst the team. She creates a wiki workspace where the team members jointly edit specific lesson plans connected with the unit, work on drafts of the assessment tools, and collect and comment on assessment results.

The team discovers that the most effective interventions are focused on the following: (1) more time spent on the presearch phase for students to acquire sufficient background knowledge; (2) direct teaching to help students identify relevant from irrelevant details, detect bias in information, and evaluate web sources; and (3) involvement of students in self assessment at checkpoints throughout the process. The critical insight for teachers on the team is the notion of <u>research as a process</u>. In her culminating log, one of the teachers reflects:

> I have to admit that before we collaborated on this unit with Darlene, I always skimmed through stuff at the beginning. I didn't really think about the importance of the presearch phase. Actually, I didn't KNOW about the presearch phase. I never really thought too much about the fact that the students might not understand the assignment. I never considered that they didn't have a big picture about the general topic. I never gave them time to examine the quality of their questions. I just assumed that they could get the information they needed without

spending any time teaching them how to do this well. I guess what I am saying is that I never really saw this whole thing as a PROCESS for my students.

A second teacher acknowledges:

> I came to understand the power of action research. It isn't something done in an ivory tower. It is practical and real. We observe what students are doing, involve them in assessment, study the results, and improve things as we work. I know we wouldn't have done this without Darlene. She was the catalyst and the cheerleader. She kept asking the hard questions, like: What is the data telling us? How do we make this better? What would happen if? Are there other approaches? What else might we do?

Snapshot 3: Librarian as a builder of professional learning communities.

Sam and Marilyn are co-librarians at Paradise Valley High School where faculty and administration are experimenting with the formation of professional learning communities. Sam joined the staff twelve years ago and Marilyn two years ago. They share common beliefs about improving student performance through project-based learning. They proactively seek opportunities to collaborate with teachers and maintain a visible presence on the campus (e.g., Sam is on the school's vision team and Marilyn serves on the technology committee).

At Paradise Valley, faculty members recognize that most of the staff development in previous years has been haphazard and ineffectual. As one of the administrators wryly observes: "We tend to jump on the latest bandwagon and the wagons change every year." At the beginning of the school year, teachers determine the major issues to be studied within the different professional learning communities. Faculty members select the

community they wish to join. One of the communities deals with collaborative problem solving for students. Sam and Marilyn volunteer to jointly facilitate this particular community because they have been addressing the same topic with feeder school librarians in their neighborhood (i.e., elementary and middle schools that "feed" into Paradise Valley). The essential question for this community is: How can we foster productive and responsible interaction among students?

As co-facilitators for this particular community, Marilyn and Sam stimulate inquiry and reflection on the research relevant to group learning processes. To cultivate respect and trust amongst colleagues, they target the following goals:

- Mutually agree on outcomes that are clearly focused on what matters to the community.
- Allow for all members to contribute their ideas; encourage diverse and contrary opinions.
- Collectively consider possible strategies and actions to promote effective group work and carefully analyze the strengths and weaknesses in the process.
- While implementing strategies and actions, provide opportunities to assess whether the strategies are working as expected and whether modifications might be necessary.
- Establish clear and supportive lines of communication.
- Invite reflections and evaluations from all participants. Some of the questions they ask are: Are the strategies being employed successful? Would a different approach be more effective? What conclusions can we reach?

The two librarians concur that leading a learning community stretches them as professionals. Marilyn states:

> We are finding out how isolated most of us are in a school. We close our doors and we don't know what others are doing. In this professional community, we open the doors and this can be intimidating for many people. Sam and I are discovering how important it is to make everyone feel comfortable and trustful. We learn how it's critical to focus on the students, not ourselves. We move away from what we have traditionally done to what actually works! It's an eye-opening experience for all of us.

Sam adds:

> Marilyn and I have to be cheerleaders, coordinators, and catalysts. We really prepare hard for the meetings because we want quality time spent on clearly focused goals for each session. We also have to be sensitive to what's going on in the school and use this information to address current and potential problems. This has been intense work but it has also been exhilarating!

Snapshot 4: Librarian as an advocate for evidence-based practice of student learning.

Lorraine and Paige are librarians at two different schools in the state. They have seven and fifteen years of experience in their respective schools. Their common bond is that they are officers of the state's school library organization. In their leadership capacity, Lorraine and Paige have been studying state reports on student achievement. With increasing alarm, they realize that nowhere in these reports is there mention of the library's role in student learning. They form a small study group of librarians to

determine how best to approach this problem. They conclude that libraries must engage in evidence-based practice—what Todd (2003) describes as the "day-to-day professional work that is directed toward demonstrating the tangible impact and outcomes of sound decision making and implementation of organizational goals and objectives" (7).

After several sessions brainstorming ways to approach this task, the group decides to develop *evidence folders* (Harada 2006, Harada and Yoshina 2005). They approach this task in the following manner:

- *Determine school goals and priorities.* They recognize that the administration will invest most of the school's human and financial resources to meet the targeted school priorities. Identifying these goals, then, is a critical first step in strategic planning.
- *Determine the library's contribution to the goals.* By carefully identifying the major direction of the school program, they also decide where to channel their time and resources. By doing this, they emphasize the value-added nature of what they have to offer.
- *Identify specific learning targets.* They teach a wide spectrum of skills in their respective programs. Because they work with entire school populations, it would be impossible for them to formally assess every lesson taught. They recognize the need to be selective. Questions that help them make workable decisions include: Which learning targets are most directly related to the school's goals? How do the library's targets match the classroom's learning goals? Which classes or grade levels might be most willing to collaborate with the library?

- *Establish criteria to measure student achievement of the learning targets.* They realize that in assessment-focused instruction, instructors must start with an idea of what the students should demonstrate at the end of the learning experience. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2007) have popularized the term “backward design” (146) to describe this important concept in curriculum planning. The criteria should be stated so that they are understandable not only to the instructors but also to the students.
- *Devise assessment tools.* They use a range of techniques and instruments including rubrics, rating scales, checklists, and logs. Whichever tool is used, the criteria must be clearly stated so that both students and instructional teams can apply them to determine levels of achievement.
- *Collect and analyze the data.* By systematically collecting the data and figuring ways to summarize and analyze the information, they use the results to drive improvements in learning and teaching. The group finds that a useful technique is to enter the data on a spreadsheet. This allows them multiple options in terms of formatting, sorting, calculating, and presenting the results.
- *Communicate the results to different stakeholder groups.* The same assessment data can be packaged and presented in formats appropriate for different stakeholder groups including students, teachers, parents, and administrators. With students and parents, the critical focus is the individual student’s progress and accomplishments. Instructional partners need the same student-by-student accounting; at the same time, they also require class profiles of this information.

Administrators, however, desire broader summaries where the data might be aggregated by grade levels or by courses.

Lorraine and Paige also decide to move to another level of leadership by designing a course on evidence-based practice for school librarians. They collaborate with the university and the state department of education to design the course as a tri-organization initiative. The course is offered as a three-day summer institute with follow-up work in the ensuing school year. This extension into the school year is conducted online and through videoconferences.

CONCLUSION

Learning leaders recognize that schools are places of growth for adults as well as children. As leaders, they have a commitment to continual improvement for everyone. This means that thinking about learning is not enough. It must be acted upon.

In schools that are learning organizations (Fullan 2003), all participants become aware of critical and generative thinking and how such thinking is cultivated. They believe in the fulfilling capacity of inquiry for others and for themselves. They recognize that conflict, uncertainty, and diversity are inherent in the learning and change processes (Kaser et al. 2006).

Can school librarians step forward as such leaders? Do they have the vision and the drive to challenge the status quo? Do they embrace the moral imperative to assist all students in developing and refining their personal models of the world? Can they be the go-to persons for research-based evidence? Can they ask tough and thoughtful questions about how research interfaces with daily practice? Do they possess the resilience and tenacity to deal with dissent and resistance and to move groups toward positive action?

I believe that librarians are not only ready but that librarians are vital lifelines to learning. From countless conversations and visits with educators across the nation, I have come away with inspiring accounts of librarians as negotiators, enablers, and catalysts, who acknowledge problems and work toward solutions that strengthen attitudes, knowledge, and skills in the teaching-learning environment. Allison Zmuda and I concluded in *Librarians As Learning Specialists* (2008) that the power of the librarian to contribute to the school has "never been more vital, more feasible, or more exciting than it is today" (117). If learning is a long and fascinating adventure, librarians are ready to blaze the trails!

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