



Instructional Leadership

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“As librarians, we have the opportunity to shape the future of our profession, one life at a time.”

--Carol A. Brey-Casiano, librarian and former ALA president.

Article Summaries

Article #1: “The New Librarian: Leaders in the Digital Age”

My First article on Instructional Leadership was from Digital Promise and chronicles the transformation of the Vancouver Public School (VPS) system from a traditional paper book library system to the innovative, dynamic system it is today. I wanted to start with this 13-page article because they are apparently doing something right, and after reading their story I felt a definite paradigm earthquake take place in my mind. Let me tell you why. Librarians of the VPS school system *do not have defined roles*. Yes, I know you must be as shocked as I am. And some librarians do not even have libraries! They have more what looks like “learning hallways” or “research alcoves.” It all stems from one of their core values as expressed by Mark Ray, a librarian who emerged as their district’s director of instructional technology and library services:

“What we need to do first is redefine what teacher-librarians are doing to support student learning. My strategy has been advocacy based on results rather than on some platonic form of what the library should be,” he said. “It’s not waving a flag for school libraries. It’s about how they support student learning” (2014, p. 10).

VPS began their journey in a place back in 2005 when, like so many schools, they were being threatened with cutting the library program to save money. A teacher-librarian cohort banded together and came up with a plan to reassert their relevance in the district. Something vitally important came from this: The new title “teacher librarian” was defined, and the title is now part of Washington State statute acknowledging the core teaching role of librarians in addition to library management.

New Roles for Teacher Librarians in Vancouver

- Leading digital citizenship
- Guiding digital content decisions
- Coaching teachers in educational technology
- Building new courses
- Curating educational resources
- Teaching beyond the library
- Supporting 1:1 implementations
- Promoting Common Core

The truly impressive and exciting thing that I mentioned before is that roles change from campus to campus. Each TL is finding a niche in their school and morphing to the informational needs of the community. For example, Discovery Middle School designed a learning space to support project-based learning. The library was part of a large flexible space called the “Toolbox” that houses a computer and science lab and an adjacent pottery room. And at iTech Prep, the library is more difficult to recognize. Librarian, Katie Nedved, works more out of a corner which is primarily the lunchroom. Because students all carry their own digital device, this arrangement allows them to access resources during leisure time (hence the proximity to the lunchroom).

Within these flexible floor plans, librarians come in and help students navigate vast online digital tools, which are so much greater than any library space can contain. This is a key point because in the past without someone to show them, the students barely tapped into this information goldmine. In the year iTech opened without a TL, logs showed that students accessed the libraries’ digital resources only 400 times. After hiring a skilled TL, who showed students how much information was available to them, they logged on more than 7,200 times before springtime of the first year. Nedved says regarding her mobile style of teaching:

“Although I would love to have a full library, this actually works for the type of work I’m doing” (p. 9).

VPS Superintendent Steve Webb considers teacher-librarians among the district’s visionaries, and he gambled right believing so. Student engagement is up, absenteeism and disciplinary problems are down in his district. In a city with wealth and poverty, Webb believes these digital learning tools “have the potential to be the great equalizer in public education” (p. 12). And VPS is counting on teacher librarians to make that happen.

Article #2: “Manifesto for 21st Century Teacher Librarians”

The second article I read by Joyce Kasman Valenza was the kind that whacks you over the head and leaves you reeling. This is one for the permanent file . . . no, on second thought, I will probably hang it on the wall of my office for the rest of my life. Such is the impact it had. I will be spending the next few months just mining through all the references she cited there. Indeed, the article has been reprinted and circulated several times to ensure that many people get to see it.

It all began with a seminar where Ms. Valenza (2010) was asked by a young school librarian: “We’re all doing different stuff. The other school librarians I know are not doing what I am doing. Some maintain websites and blogs; others do not. Some have seriously retooled; others have not. In the 21st century, what does a school librarian do” (p. 1)? I’m not sure the young librarian expected an eight page response!

Ms. Valenza begins the piece by acknowledging that “Well into the 21st century, it is clear that the concept of *modern* teacher librarian practice is not clear. There is no textbook for what effective practice looks like in continually morphing information and communication

landscapes” (p. 1). She goes on to break down the 21st librarian’s job into twelve categories that should be a part of every new librarian’s training:

1. Reading
2. Information Landscape
3. Communication, publishing and storytelling
4. Collection Development,
5. Facilities, your physical space
6. Access, Equity, Advocacy
7. Audience and Collaboration
8. Copyright, Copytheft and Information Ethics
9. New Technology Tools
10. Professional Development and Professionalism
11. Teaching and Learning and Reference
12. Into the Future

Her bullet-point formatting comes at you fast and pointedly in manifesto styling and calls you to action. For example, her section on Audience and Collaboration looks like this:

- You recognize that the work your students create has audience and that they may share newly constructed knowledge globally on powerful networks. You help them see that they have the potential to make social, cultural, and political impact.
- You recognize that learners may share their ideas and participate in dialogs beyond the walls of the library or classroom.
- You exploit *the cloud* as a strategy for student collaboration, sharing and publishing.
- You share with students their responsibilities for participating in social networks.
- You see teleconferencing tools like Skype as ways to open your library to authors, experts, book discussion, debates, and more. Consider starting by examining Skype an Author Network.
- You use new tools for collaboration. Your students create together. They synthesize information, enhance their writing through peer review and negotiate content in blogs and wikis and using tools like GoogleDocs, Flickr, Voicethread, Animoto and a variety of other writing or mind mapping and storytelling tools.
- You help students create their own networks for learning and extracurricular activities (p. 4).

A great article! She covers everything from Creative Commons licensing to Questia researching tools in an overview type fashion. And although I felt like I was being kicked in the pants all the way through it, her writing was clever and interesting, and I will forever be grateful for the many resources she lists all in one place. One of my favorite lines was: “You see the big picture and let others see you seeing it. It’s about learning and teaching. It’s about engagement. If you are seen only as the one who closes up for inventory, as the book chaser, and NOT as the CIO, the inventor, the creative force, you won’t be seen as a big picture person” (p. 7).

Article #3: “Librarians as Teacher Leaders: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities”

This more academic article by Laura Saunders (2011) takes a close look at the theory, practices, and perspectives that defines a teacher librarian as an “instructional leader.” She states that “Research on teacher leadership has identified sets of skills, knowledge and behaviors that tend to characterize teacher leaders into three realms: personal, interpersonal, and organizational” (p. 265).

One important *personal trait* that makes a teacher librarian a strong leader is that they tend to take responsibility for their own continuous learning and professional development. Such teachers epitomize life-long learning by constantly updating their knowledge and skills through a variety of learning opportunities. Recognizing the rapid changes in technology and expanding teacher roles, teacher librarians push themselves in areas of learning growth and do not wait for such offers to cross their doorstep, but actively seek out personal development opportunities to keep current in their changing field.

A second key trait is innovation and that teacher leaders are characterized by their willingness to take risks. These librarians have a “strong sense of self,” are not easily intimidated, and will often voice their ideas and concerns openly. Indeed, one study Saunders

quotes states that the same vision found in corporate leaders is also held true for librarians. These are traits of vision, communication, self-confidence, and trust. My favorite part is what she writes on risk-taking: “. . . being able to create an environment where it is alright to fail, as the second most important of the nineteen qualities needed by instructional librarians” (p. 266).

An *interpersonal trait* that defines the teacher leader is their ability to interact successfully with colleagues and peers, and the willingness and ability to work collaboratively was the most widely identified and impactful characteristic of the teacher librarian. Saunders suggests this trait as “relational leadership,” and that building these connections with colleagues is the key factor in the effectiveness of the teacher leader. Most successful were those who were proactive about working with others in designing lessons, tailoring instruction for the classroom, and building relationships with the various departments on campus. I really liked what she said concerning how teacher leaders need to gain the trust of their colleagues in order to be able to exert influence, and that “their ability to understand, empathize with, and manage the feelings and emotions of others as an important skill for teacher leader” (p. 267).

The last trait Saunders puts forth is *organizational understanding* and this just means the teacher librarian understands how their school institution works and can navigate within that culture to effect change. Teacher leaders are team players, and as such, they learn quickly about the environment they work within, discerning quickly the district’s chain of command and spheres of influence, often connecting with various departments to garner support for new programs or implementing needed change. Once again, she says, organizational understanding tends to draw on relationship-building skills for bridging new relationships with those we serve.

Laura Saunders ends the article powerfully by saying it appears that the time is ripe for academic librarians to seize the opportunity and “become aggressive and dynamic participants in

the campus community's teaching, learning, and research agendas" (Rader, 2004, as cited in Saunders, 2011, p. 271). And as far as a personal philosophy statement, she says it the best:

“Instructional Leadership refers to a teacher’s influence beyond the classroom environment to initiate change among peers, administrators and within the institution.”

—Laura Saunders, visiting professor at Simmons College

Instructional Leadership roles in our school

There are three tiers of Instructional Leadership that I can see. Tier #1, at the highest level, is the administrative team that structures staff development. These are our district and school leaders. They create opportunities for teacher and student growth, guide the direction of the school, interject into the other two tiers much needed information on specific students, policy, committee participation, certification, events . . . there are too many items to list here. Their job is huge and having a good team at the helm of a school makes the most difference. They are the ones that create a climate for risk-taking, making it okay for the rest of us to voice our opinions, grow as educators, and enrich our school. The principal at Skyview is a really good manager in this regard. Just yesterday she had team meetings in the library all day on instructional collaboration between the disciplines and applying some new standards set forth by the district/state. I enjoyed hearing all the ideas bouncing around.

Tier #2 are the instructional coaches, Megan Sanders and Pam Lewis, that work within the grade levels with all new teachers, professional development, group projects and lesson planning. I love to see these two ladies in action. Yesterday the band teacher needed help incorporating a musical concept in her classroom and Megan suggested several ideas that use very specific musical “language” to help test students’ understanding. I was pretty amazed at

how she knew all that, not being a music teacher. But that's her job. When any teacher needs input on how to develop lessons, she's there to help. Pam does the same thing, but she's entirely in charge of helping with technology as she's the Innovation Specialist for the whole district. Just today I observed her collaborating with a language arts and math teacher. They are presenting a travel lesson in class next week and incorporating time/distance mapping concepts, and Pam was called in to guide them with iPad apps like iPhoto and SoundCloud to create blog tours of destinations. Here is her website called [Edtechlove](#). Both ladies show up at multiple team meetings throughout the week to support teachers and learning, Pam specifically with the iPad teams and Megan with all others.

Tier #3 are the PLCs, or Professional Learning Communities that are built into the daily schedule as an all-teacher support system. The PLCs are used to communicate updates, strategies and trainings, such as Google drive, which my TL taught on this week. The PLC meeting schedule looks something like this:

Monday: Content and Standards

Tuesday: Meet by subject—language arts, history, enrichments etc.

Wednesday: Small teams—4 teachers per team/4 cores

Thursday: RTI—response to intervention. Counselors come in and discuss kids who are struggling and also run trainings on sensitivity, behavior strategies and more.

Friday: Optional coaching help with Megan, Pam, Sped, or ELD leads.

So now I come back to the video introduction to this report. I realized from the interviews of my colleagues the themes that kept emerging: collaboration, knowledge of content, positive relationships, advocating with leadership, sharing successes, helping others grow, coaching through issues of practice, and connection with others are all embodied in Skyview's philosophy of Instructional Leadership.

Analysis of my progress as an Instructional Leader

To answer this question I built a chart based on the Basic level of Quality Standard V Colorado's Teacher Evaluation Rubric and my participation currently as a Library Assistant at Skyview Middle School. Forgive me if this seems long and boring! But I think it would help me frame out what I actually do in the context of my position, and will also show me what I need to do in line with an action plan:

Element A: Teachers demonstrate leadership in their schools.

Attribute	Yes, No, Some	Participation	Needs improvement in
Participates in school activities expected of all teachers.	Some	As an assistant to the TL, I am not expected to be involved at the same level as teachers. I am often invited to do so, though, and are welcome to go beyond my duties as an assistant.	There are staff projects and meetings I can attend. Recent invite: High Reliability Schools collaboration. HRS is the High Reliability Schools process that we are completing this year for our level 1 certification. This level deals with school climate and safety and building collaboration. Time commitment: Meets for 4 weeks/7hrs training.
Works collaboratively for the benefit of students and families.	Yes	The library is all about working collaboratively. It may be just replacing the laminator roll, or it may be teaching a lesson on how to search for a book from the library website. I have 7 aides, all at different levels. I have to lead them in growth as well. One may be designing candy canes for the wall, while another designs a display, and still another, a website. So really everything I do is for the benefit of students and families.	My job seems so entwined with everyone else on campus. I really want to work hard to make sure the library is a useful and enriching space for teachers. I haven't mastered this by any means. There is still so much work and organization to be done. And so much more relationship building to be accomplished.
Supports school goals and initiatives.	Yes	One of the goals of our school and D49 is to raise leaders. Their motto is: Best District to Learn, Work and Lead. Skyview	No improvement: I completely support the goals of Skyview. I think they have a lot of good policies in place like anti-bullying campaigns, WEB and

	<p>has character training in the form of the acronym REACH—respect, excellence, achievement, character, honor—I post this in the library and it’s taught everywhere, even their homeroom time is called “REACH” time.</p> <p>Confer regularly with staff and administration to improve teacher working and student learning conditions. This may be small, but I completely reorganized the teacher workroom so it’s more open and fire-standard compliant.</p>	<p>MAG leadership roles for kids. Also, the district has a 5 Big Rocks metaphor that encompasses their daily vision that I really like. It’s based on Covey illustrated that if you fill your life with the small things, trivial things, then you might not have room for what’s really important, what he called the big rocks. But if you first fill your life with what’s most important – the big rocks – and add other things around them, the medium-sized rocks, and finally work in the pebbles, everything better fits together. their BIG rocks are <u>Trust</u>, <u>Community</u>, <u>Best District</u>, <u>Portfolio of Schools</u>, and <u>Every Student</u>.</p>
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Element B: Teachers contribute knowledge and skills to educational practices and the teaching profession.

Attribute	Yes, No, Some	Participation	Needs improvement in
Shares expertise with colleagues	Some	<p>I feel my job is as a resource teacher in media and information use, so I often share book recommendations, teaching strategies, and media use.</p> <p>Mostly my interaction is with my TL and I share daily my opinions and expertise on running library programs.</p>	Time constraints keep me from sharing my teaching expertise with teachers. This is something I am working to alleviate with increased aide support.
Supports the work of colleagues	Yes, definitely.	<p>Team teaching</p> <p>Mentoring new teachers on resources available in the library.</p> <p>Teaching students digital media, reference, computer tools and more.</p>	Leading professional growth activities.

Actively participates in activities designed to improve policies and procedures that affect school climate, family partnering and student learning.	No	I support and teach policies, but I am not actively involved in the policy-making process on campus. The upcoming HRS panel would be a good start for me as I pursue a leadership degree.	Participation in district-wide decision makings process. Input into policies and procedures that affect school climate.
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Element C: Teachers advocate for schools and students, partnering with students, families and communities as appropriate.

Attribute	Yes, No, Some	Participation	Needs improvement in
Advocates for students with families and other significant adults using a variety of communication tools and strategies.	Some	<p>Good examples of this are directly posting articles on the library website that advocate for literacy and library/student needs.</p> <p>Broadcasting Lab has a great connection with families in our community. If there is an issue to be dealt with, they will do an episode and it's put on the website and facebook pages and sent out in the newsletters as well. Some topics: Bullying Cliques Harvest of Love Blackmail Jealousy Handling Arguments and so much more!</p>	<p>Contribute to school and /or district committees to advocate for students and their families</p> <p>Having a vision and a plan for the library program that is then matched to the agenda and priorities of stakeholders.(AASL)</p> <p>Advocate for students and the school to external agencies and groups, like PTSA, or for funding sources like grants and donor's choose.</p> <p>Involvement in government agencies to advocate for school, students and teachers.</p>

Element D: Teacher demonstrates high ethical standards.

Attributes	Yes, No, Some	Participation	Needs improvement in
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Maintains confidentiality of student records as required by law.	Absolutely!	Have access to student records in Infinite Campus.	None.
		Often personal information comes my way in the form of learning plans, reading levels, passwords...I shred anything that isn't used.	
		Conversations about students are confidential and not shared with anyone not involved in child's learning circle.	
Adheres to standards of professional practice.	Yes	Demonstrate ethical behavior, honesty and respect for others through daily interactions and teaching.	More teaching of Digital Citizenship in the library computer lab! After everything that has happened at Canyon City High school last week and the poor choices students made with texting, it's pretty clear we cannot do enough in this area.
		In the library I have to manage a lot of expensive materials. If something is being misused or even stolen (yes!), I have to sometimes confront people on it and take appropriate action.	
		Teach digital citizenship and ethical use of digital media in the computer lab.	

Concluding thoughts on leadership

The nature of this report has been investigative from the start. I learned a lot about the infrastructure of my school that I didn't know previously, like details concerning PLCs and what the principal really did on a daily basis. I thought she mostly disciplined kids, like my principal did in second grade when I decided to leave campus in the middle of the school day and go to the grocery store with a fellow classmate. Watching her for just one day was very enlightening! In reality she is connected to so many people: parents, kids, staff, teachers, the district, and even the higher echelons of the government.

In a number of articles I read while soaking my mind on the topic, including the three cited above, I kept running into one word: “ubiquitous.” I began to think the universe was trying to tell me something. In the dictionary it is used to describe little ants: everywhere and all over the place. Or maybe a better analogy would be that the Teaching Librarian is an entity with many tendrils, reaching into all aspects of the learning community. Carol A. Brey-Casiano (2008), a former ALA president, said it well in her 10 steps to Being a Great Library Leader: “I have always believed that the mark of a good leader is one who can articulate a vision for his or her organization and then motivate others to share and accomplish that vision” (p. 47). She goes on to say that truly great leaders are the ones who sincerely care about the people around them and “as a leader you can never say thank you enough, but even more important is the idea of serving the people you are leading. Being a leader can be a very humbling experience” (p. 47).

Passion is great. Knowledge is helpful. But Instructional Leadership can only work by serving others and helping them become their best. John Buchan said it nicely: “The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.”

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