

WHERE PEDAGOGY MEETS TECHNOLOGY

Teacher-Librarians are the New Connectors in Schools



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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction,
Managing Resources*



As a principal, do you see librarians as part of the future or part of the past?

This was the core question I posed in my 2016 TEDx talk, “Changing the Conversation About Librarians.” In Vancouver Public Schools, the answer is the future, due in large part to principals and teacher-librarians (TLs) working collaboratively to meet student needs. Administrators seek teacher-librarians as partners in school improvement, innovation, and instructional leadership. I connected with two VPS principals, April Whipple at Peter S. Ogden

Elementary and Jim Gray at Skyview High School, to explore how and why they work effectively with teacher-librarians to meet student and teacher needs.

VPS teacher-librarians helped lead, teach and support innovation in student learning in a number of ways over the last decade. This work was first documented in a 2014 case study by Digital Promise. Subsequent articles in the Hechinger Report, Education Week and School

Administrator further explored how teacher-librarians have been connected to strategic work including digital citizenship instruction, educational technology, and recently, explorations of making, coding, and robotics.

Building and sustaining relationships between librarians and administrators, both at the building and district level, is a key component of this effort. In this 2013 article, I explored my partnership with former



principal Kym Tyelyn-Carlson. I'm excited to further explore the connection between principals and librarians with April and Jim. Let's start with them sharing a bit about their libraries and teacher-librarians.

April Whipple: Our library is the center of our school, literally and figuratively! Thanks to teacher-librarian Mary-Catherine McElroy, the media center is the hub of our building and it is always full of energy and activities. Students learn coding through Code.org starting in kindergarten. All grades receive lessons in digital citizenship. Our library supports a number of clubs: a Kindness Club to work on service projects of the students' choice, an after-school Mischief Managed Club for students who have read Harry Potter books, and a Makerspace Robotics Lunch Club in partnership with our makerspace teacher, Rob Harsch.

Mark Ray: Jim, tell us about your high school library and teacher-librarian, Traci Chun.

Jim Gray: Traci is a superstar. Her library is a safe place for students to go to before school, during lunches and free time to read, work and play. It is a resource for teachers to collaborate with the ITF (Instructional Technology Facilitator) and teacher-librarian to create new learning activities for kids and it's the tech center where staff, students and community can go to for questions and tech fixes.

Mark: Both of you spoke to collaboration between the teacher-librarian and other teachers.

April: Mary-Catherine collaborates with grade level teams to design lessons for their library instruction and she partners with our makerspace teacher on project-based learning opportunities for students.

Jim: TLs must be an integral part of the connection between information, technology and learning for people in the building. Traci is the connection point between teachers looking to match pedagogy with technology.

Mark: What about collaboration between you and your teacher-librarian?

April: I trust Mary-Catherine and I trust her judgment. We communicate openly. We don't need to agree on everything, but we need to share our opinions and reasoning and listen to each other. My TL knows I am open to hearing all ideas. We can't implement every idea, but I always want to hear them.

Jim: Traci has always had a vision of where and what the library could be. She is fearless and does not wait for direction to make things happen. She has been an integral part of

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the intentional culture building, professional development planning and mission creation of Skyview over the past three years. This partnership allowed her to be creative and innovative while still being laser-focused on our core objectives as a learning community.

Mark: In addition to words like innovation, you both also referenced reading and literacy.

April: The number one goal is to create a culture of life-long learning and a love for reading and exploration throughout the entire school. This is essential for encouraging the growth mindset needed to create successful adults.

Jim: The teacher-librarian is a “pied piper” as it pertains to kids and reading. Reading is so essential to communication and learning. We can never let go of that.

April: I fear we will move too far away from actual books. This is essential for elementary schools and cannot go away. We still need a focus on primary literacy skills for our earliest learners.

Mark: You also both talked about the library as makerspace. In VPS,



teacher-librarians were asked to take the lead on exploring ways in which making and coding can be offered to all students. I know Traci is leading professional development to her librarian peers, recently introducing Spheros to TMs as part of a district-wide implementation of these rolling robots.

Jim: Traci also converted her library computer lab into a makerspace and received a Digital Promise grant that included an HP Sprout and 3D printer. I think TMs can play an essential role continuing to connect teachers and students with resources that create learning for future careers and lives.

April: Mary-Catherine received a grant to promote animation at Ogden. As a result, all students are creating stop-motion animated films

in collaboration with our TL and our Instructional Technology Facilitator, Michelle Byrne. The students started with ABCYA.com then moved into iMotion, Green Screen App and iMovie for music & sound. Our upcoming family night will feature some of our students’ work.

Mark: You earlier spoke to culture and relationships, among students and adults. How important is the teacher-librarian as a connector?

April: A TL needs to be able to connect with all students in the school and all teachers. The relationship they have with each student is essential in encouraging a love of reading and learning. The relationship they have with each teacher is essential in collaborating and setting the culture of literacy in all classrooms.



Jim: They must be able to relate to both adults and students of all ages. TLs need to have curiosity, a sense of humor, and patience.

April: TLs need to model a growth-mindset, be a lifelong learner and have a passion for literature and technology.

Mark: Some of your peers may be jealous of you.

April: Not all TLs are ready to take on these new roles. My TL is ready for the challenge and sprinting ahead, but I feel some librarians feel this isn't necessarily what they signed up for. Some administrators and teachers lack understanding of what teacher-librarians can bring to the table.

Jim: I think it's necessary to clearly define the role of the TL but still allowing for creativity in function.

Mark: How did you evolve your thinking as a principal? How do you think your librarian had to evolve?

April: I think our TL was born to take on this role. She is naturally interested in technology and open to diving into new concepts and learning new things. I appreciate that none of my ideas are too crazy for her. She is always willing to try things out. In the end, I know she loves our students and wants only the best for them. If we are both coming from that same perspective, we are always able to work together and move forward for our "why"... the kids!

Jim: It is essential that we establish and are clear with our "Why" as a building. We must have a common foundation of our mission together. This allows everyone to work, create and grow in a common direction to the best of our abilities. We need to create and implement a culture of innovation for students and teachers. The library is a place to play, read, learn, research, and explore...a one-stop shop.

Mark: Recognizing that not all principals have such great

Both April and Jim acknowledge that they enjoy a special — but not necessarily unique — relationship with their teacher-librarian. Reflecting on my years as a librarian, trust and rapport with my principal was the essential first step to all the good things that happened as a result of our relationship. For those seeking to leverage the leadership of your teacher-librarian, here are some first steps.

CULTURAL

I Don't Understand You – Most librarians don't really understand what principals do. And most principals don't understand what librarians do. Plan a genuine, non-evaluative visit to begin closing the understanding gap.

Us v. Them – Right or wrong, many principals and librarians perceive an adversarial relationship, often due to previous experiences. Acknowledge this as you work to build trust and rapport.

Leadership v. Leadership – Librarians perceive themselves as leaders in their library. Administrative leadership requires a different skill set and habits of mind which they may not recognize. Understand this context as you work with them.

Share a Growth Mindset – Find common ground in a growth mindset, being mutually honest about risk, uncertainty, professional stretches, etc.

OPERATIONAL

Invite Them to the Table – Librarians LOVE to be part the solution. And they often feel left out. Identify ways in which they can be a productive voice on teams and projects.

Find a Fast Win – Reach out to your librarian to help with a small project which aligns to familiar library priorities. Keep the scope and timeline compact. Work together for a successful conclusion.

Stretch in Neutral Ground – Take the next step to identify a common challenge, ideally focused on students. This can be a bigger stretch, such as making or digital citizenship. Frameworks like the Future Ready Librarians Framework and ISTE Standards for Students provide a third point document to explore together.

Validate Collaboration – Authentically recognize collaborative work and leadership through words or actions. Combine both intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcements.

relationships and superstar teacher-librarians, what are some first steps you'd recommend to begin building a principal-librarian partnership?

Jim: As a leader, embrace the idea that in this journey, you will not have all the answers and may fail from time to time (or more often). When we go through this mindset with others, we grow a spirit of innovation and the courage to look at learning in a

whole new way. Begin the partnership with a strengths-based approach together. What are we good at now? Finally, do something together! Find a conference (CUE or ISTE) or pro dev opportunity to go to together. These events can be transformational in their impact on our practice. (They were for me.) By exposing ourselves to outside thoughts, ideas and practices, we create emotions that can be powerful motivators. ■