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**Learning Commons
Professional Development
Administration
Collaboration
Booktalking
Inspiration**

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NOTEBOOK



Year of the Learning Commons

David V. Loertscher and Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux

In this issue of *Teacher Librarian*, we announce the Year of the Learning Commons that begins in April of 2015 and ends in May of 2016.

This initiative invites everyone interested in any aspect of the learning commons concept to celebrate, present, write, advocate for, and demonstrate how the transformed school library moves toward the center of teaching and learning in the school. Check out the website at:

<https://Sites.google.com/site/yearofthelearningcommons>

Transforming the traditional school library that is the center of resources and consumption into a vibrant center of knowledge creation, creativity, inquiry, and the center of high tech information and experimentation is a wonder to behold. As the transformation happens in schools we have visited, a whole new sense of excitement and interest arises from students, teachers, administrators, and the community. It becomes a model worth advocating for as this century of rich information and technology marches on.

Drs. Loertscher and Marcoux examine the state of the Learning Commons (LC) through their recent survey results. They report on what is happening presently in terms of the Learning Commons and offer suggestions for future work as a Learning Commons. The examples they offer can be customized as well as emulated when looking at your own Learning Commons. This feature article is followed by an elementary school's journey to become a Learning Commons. It is colorful, interesting, and full of amazing ideas about how to develop your own LC.

Of course any LC can't materialize without the partnerships and collaboration of many constituencies. This is not only evident in the aforementioned article by Steele, but reinforced emphatically by the subsequent article. Ellis and Jacobs-Israel talk about the New York School Library System and the benefits they receive as a unit rather than as individuals. They work under a mandate to not only provide relevant professional development offerings, but also work concertedly on communication with each other.

Resources for the Teacher Librarian

David V. Loertscher & Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux

Authentic Learning in the Digital Age: Engaging Students Through Inquiry by Larissa Pahomov (ASCD, 2014, 196 p., \$26.95. ISBN: 9781416619567.

Many teacher librarians know about the Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia where Chris Lehman is the principal and our author is a teacher. Chris is a great believer in inquiry and has fashioned a school around this idea. Every January they hold a conference where all kinds of presentations are made from around the country dealing with inquiry. Joyce Valenza has presented at the conference many times and this reviewer has done so, too. The best thing at these conferences is to talk with as many students as you can possibly encounter during the two days. They are amazing! They come from all over the city; have to be interviewed by a group of students before they can be accepted; and, they value their education. The one problem they have at this school is they have a terrible library and no librarian. The last librarian they had spent the year trying to catalog the books. Chris knows that he should have a librarian but obviously has never found one that really knows inquiry and can co-teach successfully. He does have an excellent technology integration specialist. Now to this book. It is amazing. It should be read by every high school teacher librarian who should ask on every page: "How would I co-teach alongside this expert in inquiry?" I would like our very best teacher of inquiry to inner city kids who has a teacher librarian credential to match wits with Larisa in a conversation about great inquiry during a library conference. One of the keynote speakers last year at the conference was the founder of High Tech High in San Diego. In all the HighTech schools there are no librarians and no other specialists. Why? Because this organization goes into a school, fires all the specialists, and uses their salaries for their consulting and PD training of the faculty. In my interview with this speaker, he stated that ordinary classroom teachers are trained by their organization to be their own librarians, their own technology integration specialists, their

own...name any other specialist you can think of. So there you have it...teacher librarians...you don't amount to anything that can be taught to a teacher in a few short sessions! Could that be true? I happened to attend a session taught by a High Tech High School in Texas. After his session, I went up and said to him, "I understand that you have been trained by this organization to be your own librarian, tech whiz, etc. Is that true?" His answer was, and I quote, "I wish every day that I had my old librarian Carolyn Foote back to teach alongside me! They give us a few tips and we are on our own!" After the meeting, I emailed Carolyn who is legendary in Texas and complimented her. Again, I repeat...this is a book that every high school teacher librarian needs to read and think about and think about and think about. You are reading the words of a fine teacher of inquiry. What could you contribute?

Rollins, Suzy Pepper. **Learning in the Fast Lane: 8 Ways to Put ALL Students on the Road to Academic Success.** ASCD, 2014. 175 p. \$26.95 ISBN: 9781416618683.

Ms. Rollins is an experienced and obviously successful teacher with unmotivated learners who suffer every day with remedial work that is unlikely to succeed either in raising test scores or helping kids succeed either in life or in school. She uses direct teaching methods and helps the teacher get students motivated, understand clear and relevant learning objectives, master vocabulary, and get the confidence to get going and keep going toward successful mastery. But, our teacher has never worked with the librarian down the hall; hasn't the foggiest notion about rich information resources, exciting projects, rich information resources, and most of all a great co-teacher right down the hall. So, we meet again a method for the isolated teacher in the isolated classroom, and if you would only do my 1,2,3,4,5, and 6, the magic would happen. Is this book really worth reading? Teacher librarians know all about teachers who take risks to co-teach alongside them. They also are mystified by the wall that separates Rollins' classroom from the library learning commons. How do we pry the lid of the classroom open? First, I think we try to understand a person like Rollins who has her technique down pat and then look for interventions that would increase her method first, as we start to bend it into a more collaborative stance. Does that make sense? We often say that teachers like Rollins should not be part of our effort because we would be just watering rocks. And, while she is not the type to work with our efforts at the first round of our program or even the second round of efforts, she poses a challenge that is very tempting with which to engage. It will take friendship and trust as we move in on this unsuspecting great teacher to make her even greater. Read this book? I would say only if you have a disciple in the crowd of teachers or a principal touting her method. Otherwise, there are plenty of other teachers with more open and willing attitudes to engage.

Mardis, Marcia. *The Collection's at the Core: Revitalizing Your Library with Innovative Resources for the Common Cores and STEM*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 147 p. \$ 45. ISBN: 9781610695046.

This is an unorthodox review, but here it goes:

Dear Dr. Mardis: What a welcome book connecting library collections to STEM and CCSS. Your bibliography of open educational resources is worth the price of the book! You know your stuff and I hope folks buy it. However, let me tell you a story. Many years ago, I was on an accrediting team for a high school. It was back in the days of the "library" lady and the AV guy (those were the days when it took a manly MAN to thread the 16mm projectors). Our friendly AV guy had this cubbyhole office where he had the latest in AV equipment like the sound filmstrip projector, the 35mm camera, I think even a Polaroid camera, phonograph players, and other dazzling stuff. He was a very lonely fellow. He said to me: "I send out notices in the teacher mail boxes telling them that I am willing to help with all this wonderful equipment that will REVOLUTIONIZE EDUCATION! But, no one ever asks me to help! So, he sat in his office all day; hope alive. Your book reminds me of the namby pamby reference librarian who used to sit behind the desk hoping that folks would just ask. They would use words like "I am a resource; I am able to support what you do; I am willing to help." And, we expect them to flock to our doors. I want you to write an additional chapter; no, an article for *Teacher Librarian* entitled: STEM, STEAM, and CCSS: Librarians, Take the Bull by the Horns! I am the kind of librarian that co-teaches. I am your partner, not your helper. We plan together! We assess together! We teach every bit of the way together! Our library "steams" right into the middle of teaching and learning, dear classroom teacher, and together, every single one of your students will steam ahead in STEM! I guarantee it! We are going to showcase to our school what real STEM looks like, feels like, and acts like; and, then it is full steam ahead with the rest of the faculty. (Now, dear reader, if you have gotten that far and

you are this kind of great library leader, Dr. Mardis and I would like to spotlight and celebrate you and put you on the cover of *Teacher Librarian* with your great record of success! Just email me at reader.david@gmail.com or contact Dr. Mardis). Meanwhile, enjoy this introduction to STEM and OER.

Sullivan, Margaret L. *High Impact School Library Spaces: Envisioning New School Library Concepts*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 125 p. \$50. ISBN: 9781610698153. Margaret Sullivan is an expert designer and brings her talent into the design of a learning commons space that turns the entire space into a very active consumption and creation space. This is simply the best book today on physical space and it is valuable because it provides so many choices for teacher librarians, architects, teachers, and students to think about. We urge flexibility of spaces, moveable furniture, and more attention to makerspaces than our author treats. An additional resource is the Physical Learning Commons "Quick-Mooc" available at lmcsource.com to start and continue the conversation. More and more administrators are questioning what to do with library spaces that don't attract patrons. With Margaret's advice, the opposite happens in every reinvented space we have seen: everyone wants to be there at the same time. We also suggest that companies other than Bretford be consulted for lots of furniture ideas. There are often a number of furniture dealers at the largest of the library conventions, so you can see and compare across brands. Also, remember that renovating the physical space is just half of the task. Library websites must be reinvented just as drastically into participatory learning communities. *The Virtual Learning Commons* by Loertscher and Koechlin will help in that quest. Buy this book if you have any renovation dreams. Start the conversation.

Orr, Cynthia. *Crash Course in Readers' Advisory*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 125 p. \$45.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610698252. Still a very important skill set for any teacher librarian is the role of being a read-

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Tell us what topics you would like to read about, and we will seek to publish articles on those topics. Other comments and suggestions are welcomed, too.

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From understanding about the culture of Tibet to the beliefs of the Tibetan people, this would be a valuable tool.

ers' advisor, whether for student or faculty. Orr presents a plethora of basic ideas about how to effectively do just this. Of particular interest will be the chapters covering reader profiles and tools to use in giving advice to readers. Both, however, have to be carefully examined to see if what is suggested is appropriate for your readers. For instance, some of the reading lists can be for adult rather than children, and developmental appropriateness needs are to be considered. If you aren't sure how to do this work, this tome will help you ease into this type of role. If you already do it effectively, this book will be too basic for you.

Alman, Susan and Swanson, Sara. *Crash Course in Marketing for Libraries 2nd edition*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 177 pp. \$45.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610698702. Marketing anything library is important. This book offers strategies for marketing programming, building needs, community investment in the library. Certainly more tailored to the public library, this book does cover issues that are pertinent to school libraries and how to connect effectively with various constituencies. Up to date yet traditional tools are considered. Has start-up information and review considerations. Worth a look – good appendices and index. Recommended.

Jaeger, Paige and Ratzer, Mary. *Think Tank Library: Brain-based Learning Plans for New Standards, Grades K-5*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 110 pp. \$45.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610699907. Very interesting read. Concepts about how to "transform" a library from a traditional environment to a more active, inquiry, collaborative library are explored and techniques are recommended. Easy to implement with sample (and usable) lesson plans provided as well as connections to stan-

dards information. The professional gets a great understanding as to how brain-based learning looks and can work in a library. While not overtly mentioned often, there is an overt connection between the library and the classroom regarding learning techniques. Great templates and suggestions given. Excellent bibliography which shows how long these considerations have been a part of learning. Co-planning, of course, is paramount to the success of this and is highly recommended in this book. Definitely worth a read and use. Highly recommended.

Yuan, Haiwang and Kunga, Awang and Li, Bo. *Tibetan Folktales*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 185 pp. \$40.00. ISBN: 9781610694704.

This reviewer knows little to nothing about Tibetan culture, let alone folktales. As such, this collection would be of great value to this reviewer if needed in the school community. From understanding about the culture of Tibet to the beliefs of the Tibetan people, this would be a valuable tool. Clearly, however, some of the folktales and information in this book are for more developmentally mature learners. One could tailor a presentation or connection to this culture by taking information from this tome and developing age appropriate recipes, games, crafts, etc. Information, such as that chanting is oft used for resisting temptation, would make for an in-

teresting parallel to what in other cultures might be used to resist temptation. Well done, good index with plenty of insights into what might be good connections to today's learner.

Haven, Kendall. *Writing Workouts to Develop Common Core Writing Skills: Step by Step Exercises, Activities, and Tips for Student Success, Grades 7-12*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 120 pp. \$42.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610698689.

So much is being couched in the context of the Common Core. Many of the writing strategies offered in this book are ones that should have been in place long before the Common Core was installed in schools. For instance, the five steps of effective writing should have long been a part of writing techniques. What is helpful is the connection these techniques and other issues have to the Common Core. The activities offered are good ones that can be incorporated regardless of the standards active in a school. The tips in the "Big Three" area are interesting and can be used with any developmental age of a student, and perhaps early writers/readers. However, it is important to note that there is a research process known as the "Big 3" that is quite different than this one and could be misconstrued either way if this title is used. Helpful for someone lost in the plethora of writing concerns for learners.

Kaaland, Christie. *Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Recovery in School Libraries: Creating a Safe Haven*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 190 pp. \$55.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610697293.

It can happen! When it does, and not just weather related issues, this book talks about how the teacher librarian can plan

Many of the writing strategies offered in this book are ones that should have been in place long before the Common Core was installed in schools.

an important role in helping students stay safe. The book contains good checklists as well as interesting role-playing scenarios. For instance, identity theft is explored as a scenario in a way that alerts students to the issue and why people are concerned. This type of interest in preparedness makes for good planning as well as engaging interest. Issues from physical (author is from the state that last year suffered a massive landslide and impacted many libraries) to electronic ones are explored. Well-prepared and substantial collaboration from FEMA has written this book. Can be used with elementary or secondary age students as various scenarios are developmentally flexible. Recommended.

Intner, Sheila and Weihs, Jean. *Standard Cataloging for School and Public Libraries, 5th edition*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 295 pp. \$55.00 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610691147.

In the case of most school libraries (and some small public libraries) cataloging isn't the priority it was in years past. This type of book offers some interesting explanations for why certain practices are done the way they are done. This is helpful in understanding and facilitating information with students and teachers. More of a true cataloger's tool, this book does offer some concepts about how to categorize elements of information that are helpful regardless of your role in the library. Good resource for library science students and anyone who wishes to review how cataloging happens. One of its helpful features has to do with management of a collection. Questions about an interactive/collaborative concept regarding information need to be carefully addressed given current theories of curriculum and learning practices.

Nichols, Joel A. *Teaching Internet Basics: The Can-do Guide*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 140P. \$45.00[paper]. ISBN: 9781610697415.

Mainly aimed at public library settings, there is much that can be learned in this book by school professionals. The list of courses will date, but give an idea of what can be learned (and not all of it is com-

pletely truthful) by moving into the online world of instruction. This is where the professional can be a facilitator as much as an instructor, partnering and collaborating with other professionals to expect and frame best practices of research and contribution online as well as offline. Many of the activities suggested can be tailored to the audience known to the professional, and extended by seeing what can be offered as enhancements to the lesson. Digital literacy is literacy, period. The same tenets need to apply. Help students and colleagues be discerning as well as "literate" users of any form of information. This book helps do this.

Haven, Kendall. *Writing Workouts to Develop Common Core Writing Skills: Step by Step Exercises, Activities, and Tips for Student Success, Grades 2-6*. Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 120p. \$42 [paper]. ISBN: 9781610698665.

Interesting title using the term "workout" for how to develop Common Core writing skills. This book is a collection of techniques to use while teaching young writers about writing. If you need a formula to teach writing skills and have students effectively work on forming good, cohesive sentence structure, this book has some great ideas worth noting. There is a formula for what is called "effective" writing that is compacted into five steps. While these are focused on primary grades, they offer foundational concepts for writing effectively at other ages. However, the post discussions of many of the examples given could be strengthened. Perhaps this is the part most concerning about this book - the sharing and collaborative nature that writing can bring could be strongly emphasized. If you need help with teaching writing from a structured point of view, this book has good ideas. Otherwise, work more on the engagement of students regarding the content of their writing and follow it with some structure techniques that help them convey their enthusiasm/passion for the topic.



LOSS AND GRIEF

Bedford, Martyn. *Never Ending*. Random, 2014. 304 p. \$16.99. 9780385739917. Grades 8 up. Shiv, fifteen, is dealing with grief and guilt after her brother's death, for which she feels responsible. Chapters that reveal how he died on a family vacation in Greece alternate with chapters on Shiv's current stay at a psychological treatment clinic in an intense therapy program for teens. This suspenseful, emotionally challenging story explores hard issues with sensitivity.

Caletti, Deb. *The Last Forever*. S&S, 2014. 336 p. \$17.99. 9781442450004. Grades 13 up. After Tessa's mother dies, Tessa's dope-smoking father takes the junior out of school for a road trip from Southern California to Washington state, where she meets her paternal grandmother. When her father leaves abruptly, Tessa gets to know her grandmother, makes friends with an attractive boy, and tries to nurture a precious rare plant her mother left behind.

Hubbard, Jenny. *And We Stay*. Delacorte, 2014. 240 p. \$16.99. 9780385740579. Grades 9 up. After a tragedy at home in the midwest, Emily transfers to a girls' boarding school in Amherst, Massachusetts. Writing poetry and becoming friends with her roommate help Emily heal from her losses, which are slowly revealed in a third-person narrative. Emily's poems reflect the school violence, suicide, and abortion she's experienced, while references to Emily Dickinson enrich this quiet, compelling story.

Lockhart, E. *We Were Liars*. Delacorte, 2014. 240 p. 9780385741262. \$17.99. Grades 8 up. Cady, seventeen, is an unreliable narrator as she looks back on the summer she was fifteen and fell in love. Her wealthy, dysfunctional extended family summers on a private island where Cady suffered an accident that summer. She can't recall at first what caused it and what else—clearly dramatic—happened. A powerful tale, with echoes of *King Lear* and themes about love, wealth, and forgiveness.