

# what flavor is your school library? the teacher-librarian as learning leader

WHEN RESULTS OF THE OKLAHOMA STUDY (MILLER, 2006) CAME IN, THE RESEARCHERS WERE IN FOR A SURPRISE. USING NANCY MILLER'S *TIME AND TASK TRACKER* (2005), UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ELLEN DUECKER, BOTH PROFESSIONALS AND CLERICALS IN 14 OKLAHOMA SCHOOL LIBRARIES DOCUMENTED TWICE DAILY FOR 15 RANDOM DAYS WHAT THEY DID WITH THEIR TIME.

The first finding was gratifying: Professionals and support personnel do quite different things during their day. As in the earlier Alaska study (Lance, Hamilton-Pennell, Rodney, Peterson, & Sitter, 1999), support personnel keep the organization running but do not reach into areas where academic achievement is affected. The professionals all concentrated on professional tasks but were not uniform in their school library program focuses. That is, they emphasized quite different program aspects. Based on this finding, it seems that the Oklahoma professionals exhibited behavior common all across the United States; in other words, there does not seem to be agreement among teacher-librarians about their role in education. Even with the existence of national and state standards for school library programs and that of national standards for teacher-librarian certification, no one unified program focus has emerged over the last 50 years.

## FIVE FLAVORS OF LIBRARY PROGRAMS

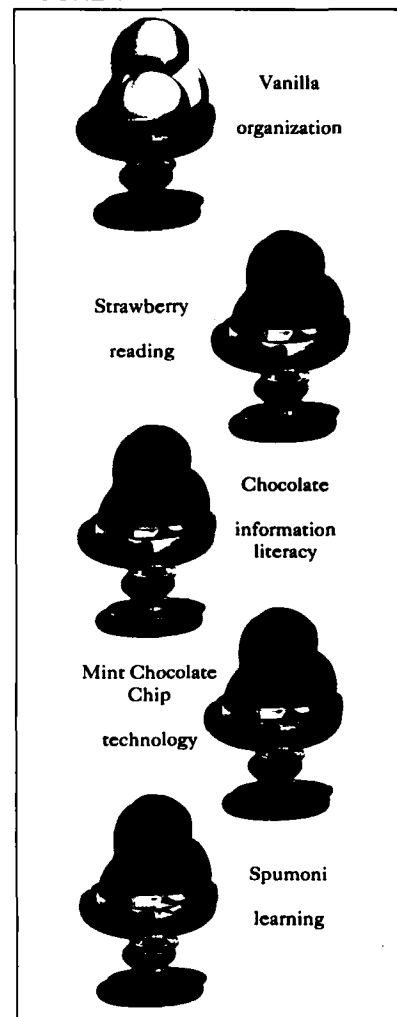
In the 1960s, the library field fractured into library ladies and audiovisual guys. More recently, the division has been between the teacher-librarian and the technology coordinator. But within these two major categories, there seems to be five major flavors of program focuses, labeled as ice cream flavors in the Figure 1.

The particular ice cream flavored program adopted by teacher-librarians seems to depend on one of three factors: the professor or mentor originally encountered by the teacher-librarian, the personal philosophy of the teacher-librarian, or the requirements of the school organization in which the teacher-librarian is functioning. In any event, consider the advantages and disadvantages of each of the major flavors.

The vanilla-flavored *organization* school library consists of a wonderful service facility with a great collection, an array of multimedia and computer equipment, and a super reference staff. "We are here to help you!" they advertise, but you must come into our doors

or log onto our networks. Many affluent independent schools often have "academic libraries" on their campuses and are most inviting of patrons who wish to come to use their services. The downside of this vanilla-flavored school library is that many potential patrons never show up. In addition, there seems to be a

FIGURE 1



Program Focuses

by david loertscher

widespread belief among administrators that the organization or support-supply function of a school library can be handled by a paraprofessional at a much-reduced cost. Thus, there is the trend to replace pro-

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There seems to be a widespread belief among administrators that the organization or support-supply function of a school library can be handled by a paraprofessional at a much-reduced cost. Thus, there is the trend to replace professional teacher-librarians with support staff, particularly in elementary schools.

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The strawberry-flavored *reading* school library program centers on reading literacy. Here we find the professional who instills the love of reading into every student who will be captivated by book talks, reading initiatives, and a schoolwide reading culture. These professionals fit their programs into whatever reading skills program is being taught in the school, with the objective of helping every child and teen become an avid and capable reader. The positive benefit of a reading focus is its direct impact on achievement, à la Krashen (2004). The downside has been the major expansion of technology and information so that other emphases in school library programs demand attention. Many schools are so focused on the skill of reading that they hire reading specialists or literacy coaches rather than teacher-librarians to boost achievement, and they never mention the love of reading or a lifelong reading habit. The requirements of No Child Left Behind have not helped the strawberry-flavored school library program to expand. In some cases, school library collections suffer as permanent classroom collections are built.

The chocolate-flavored *information literacy* school library program developed in the early 1990s with the issuance of various information literacy models and the national American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology's *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998). With the explosion of

is saying what to me for what reasons and in what medium?" coupled with a systematic teaching of the research process became the central focus of many school library programs. The upside of this emphasis has been a competition with Google and the realization by many that the Internet, although free, does not contain the best information. The downside of this flavor has been the formulation of courses in information literacy at every grade level, which is disconnected with the curriculum of the school. This downside will be strengthened by the existence of a national information literacy test, with professionals claiming jobs on the basis that they must prepare students for the test.

The mint-chocolate-chip-flavored *technology* school library program centers on the "if you dazzle them, they will come" idea. Many schools have a veritable graveyard of various tech gizmos dating back to programmed instruction—for example, the single-concept 8-mm loop film and other dazzling devices presumed to cure the ills of education. I am tempted to say, "If you dazzle them, they will come, but will they stay?" Those who have succeeded with this flavor have a reliable technological infrastructure to the point that, when faced with creating a learning experience, teachers and teacher-librarians experience a transparent technological foundation upon which to build. The concentration is on learning rather than on the machine or software itself. The downside of this flavor's emphasis is that networks are often down and equipment is often out of date. The unreliability forces teachers into a low-tech mode.

## BOOKMARKIT



BETTY  
WINSLOW

### JUNIOR FICTION

#### HERE COMES TROUBLE

**Capt. Hook: The adventures of a notorious youth.** J. V. Hart. Ill. Brett Helquist. Laura Geringer, 2005. \$15.99. 0-06-000220-4. Grades 5–8. James Matthew, the despised illegitimate son of Lord B., turns Eton's tradition-laden halls upside down as he parades his eccentricities, bests upperclassman Arthur Darling at every turn, falls in love with a young Suitana, and discovers his destiny.

**The diary of a killer cat.** Anne Fine. Ill. Steve Cox. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. \$15.00. 0-374-31779-8. Grades 3–7. Tuffy uproots flowers, fights vet visits, and brings home dead birds and mice, so when the next-door neighbor's rabbit turns up dead, everyone blames him. But did he really do it?

**Dreamhunter.** Elizabeth Knox. Penguin, 2005. \$19.00. 0-374-31853-0. Grades 7–8. In this intense story, 15-year-old Laura tests for dream-catching ability and a career of giving others wonderful dreams. Then Laura's famous dreamcatcher dad disappears, and she discovers that dreamcatching is being used for evil. Can she change it?

**Notso hotso.** Anne Fine. Ill. Tony Ross. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. \$15.00. 0-374-35550-9. Grades K–3. Anthony is not a fussy dog, but he gets pretty upset when he breaks out in a rash and no one else thinks it is an emergency. Then the vet shaves him to look like a lion. Let the fun begin!

**Princess for a week.** Betty Ren Wright. Holiday House, 2006. \$16.95. 0-8234-1945-2. Grades 4–6. Roddy wants a dog, so his mom's offer to keep Princess for a week thrills him. However, Princess is actually a girl, whose fearlessness keeps getting her—and Roddy—into trouble.



**KATHLEEN  
ODEAN**

> YA FICTION

**TOUGH TIMES IN THE PAST**

**Blood on the river: James Town, 1607.** Elisa Lynn Carbone. Viking, 2006. \$16.99. 0-670-06060-7. Grades 5–8. Based on historical research and real people, this fascinating novel follows the fortunes of Samuel Collier, an orphan who worked for Captain John Smith on the voyage to Jamestown and in the new colony. Samuel's headstrong attitude proves to be his strength and weakness as he faces perils, grand adventures, and a world new to him.

**Copper sun.** Sharon M. Draper. Atheneum, 2006. \$16.95. 0-689-82181-6. Grades 9–12. In this powerful page-turner, an Ashanti teenage girl sees her family murdered before she is kidnapped to be a slave in the American colonies. Her story of courage, friendship, and brutal treatment—including rape—alternates at points in the book with that of a White indentured girl on the same plantation.

**Homefront.** Doris Gwaltney. Simon & Schuster, 2006. \$16.99. 0-689-96942-1. Grades 5–8. Even though Virginia is far from any battles, life changes dramatically for Margaret Ann during World War II. Her brother and brother-in-law enlist, facing possible death. Her British aunt and cousin come to stay, and even her favorite boy, Bobby, seems different. As the years pass, likeable, outspoken Margaret learns and grows in this wonderful novel.

**Weedflower.** Cynthia Kadohata. Atheneum, 2006. \$16.95. 0-689-86574-0. Grades 5–8. Twelve-year-old Sumiko, her younger brother, older cousins, and aunt must leave almost everything dear to them when they are put in a Japanese interment camp in Arizona during World War II, despite being U.S. citizens. This absorbing novel brings the camp, with its deprivations and its displays of courage, vividly to life.

The final, spumoni-flavored *learning* school library program focuses on the learner and achievement. Here, the teacher-librarian concentrates on developing collaborative client relationships and transforming tired units of instruction into exciting learning experiences that have lots of reading, information literacy, and transparent technology components. The advantage is that two adults—the teacher and the teacher-librarian—team teach a learning experience, and the percentage of students who achieve the learning unit objectives increases. The downside is that many teacher-librarians have never been able to establish a steady stream of clientele or have not had the necessary training in instructional design.

One might argue, with some success, that every teacher-librarian should build a particular flavored program as a response to the philosophy of the school. In fact, many accrediting bodies require that the various auxiliary programs created in a school fit the school model. In this case, a vanilla-flavored program might be drizzled with toppings of strawberry or chocolate as needed. Others argue that the school organization is so flawed that even a superstar teacher-librarian cannot hope to fix the problem. There are many stories of restructuring, government intervention, state takeovers, and unfunded mandates, and there will be more as schools struggle to meet No Child Left Behind targets.

There is blame enough for teacher-librarians who—for whatever reason—have been unable to burrow their way into the center of whatever flavor program they construct. Everyone can cite schools that brag of reading programs but never mention the school library; virtual schools that have technology but no teacher-librarian; schools where critical thinking is emphasized but information literacy is ignored; and schools claiming great constructivist principles but ignoring the benefits of a strong teacher-librarian. The downside of a divided effort over the years is the result that the role of the school library in education is ignored.

**SPEAK THE LANGUAGE**

How do teacher-librarians move into the center of the curriculum—the real heart of the school. Dr. Allison Zmuda (2006), the

2005 keynote speaker at the Treasure Mountain Research Retreat No. 12, in Pittsburgh, PA, gave us a challenge. She said that if we wished to push toward the center, we must speak the various languages of our clients rather than expect them to understand our jargonistic eloquence. We should, as a first step, speak the dialects of reading; social studies; science; and the many curricular movements, such as constructivism, understanding by design, and international baccalaureate schools, just to name a few. Our first attack skill, to claim a role on the center stage, is to speak regularly in those dialects. One thing is certain: If the trend of underfunding education continues, there will be few of us around for the push.

Not all is dismal, however. Many ask what states or regions have figured out the best ways to illuminate the benefits of the school library program. Indeed, the research of Keith Curry Lance and Ross Todd keeps adding to the pile of evidence that we are doing something right, even though we might not agree on a central program thrust. Although no state or region seems to have a corner on success, individual teacher-librarians do. In other words, much of our success depends on those who are able to reach up out of the mud puddle of technological breakdown or unshelved books to make a difference. Many of these folks are honored in their state library or technology associations and at the national level.

Returning to the question of how the teacher-librarian can push to the center of the curriculum, I argue that the spumoni-flavored program has the best shot of making the most difference. I have argued this since 1982 (see Loertscher, 1982) when the taxonomy for the school library program first appeared in *Wilson Library Bulletin*. Since that time and across many changes in education, it seems that when we focus on the learner first—rather than on the needs of the organization—other elements of the program come into perspective.

**THE LEARNING LEADER  
CREATES A SPUMONI-  
FLAVORED LIBRARY**

Spumoni is a great ice cream because three distinctive flavors and colors are skillfully

blended in such a way that, even though they are separated, the combined taste is absolutely delicious. Likewise, teacher-librarians who successfully implement the spumoni-flavored school library program report stimulating and marvelous careers. Permit me to illustrate how this flavor is created.

The spumoni-flavored school library program is headed by a learning leader known throughout the school as a learning expert in the information- and technology-rich world. Teachers realize that every time they create and teach a collaborative learning unit with a teacher-librarian, a higher percentage of learners succeed. The smart teachers get on the teacher-librarian's calendar. Others . . . well, good luck. Consider the following characteristics of the teacher-librarian as learning leader:

- The learning leader speaks the language of curriculum and its various dialects of reading, social studies, science, or whatever curricular program is popular in the school.

- The learning leader has the ear of the administrator who not only verbalizes support but also eliminates organizational obstacles to a spumoni-flavored school library program.

- The learning leader knows how to collaborate in the best sense, can work with teachers of almost any educational stripe, and can entice a steady clientele for team-teaching.

- The learning leader can transform learning experiences in an information- and technology-rich environment so that the result is a "high think" no matter whether the learner is gifted, speaks little English, comes from a different culture, or is a motivated learner (key term: *differentiation*).

- The learning leader pushes the agenda of wide reading, just-in-time information literacy skills, and wise use of technological applications into each learning experience.

- The teacher and the learning leader halve the teacher-pupil ratio so that each learner receives the appropriate amount of attention—thus, the key to a higher percentage of student success. During the unit, the role of the teacher and the teacher-librarian has become one and the

same. Both are helping the learner master content knowledge and information and technology skills.

- The learning leader documents and reports the success of collaborative units, providing data that demonstrate the link to achievement (key terms: *data mining, rubrics, authentic assessment*).

What does a learning leader's day look like? Perhaps a better question is, what does it not look like? A learning leader does not spend the majority of the day solving organizational snags in the print world or as a tech fix-it whiz kid; those roles are assumed by paraprofessional assistants. Instead, the learning leader concentrates the majority of the day on soliciting clients, planning and transforming units of instruction, team teaching the learning activities, assessing student performance, and assessing the entire program impact.

Let us look at a real example. Janice Gillmore-See has a strange title in her school—*information literacy teacher on special assignment*. She has no responsibility for the library but spends her days working with grade-level teams on enhancing learning units. She is also a student in the master's degree program at San Jose State University,

The first graders use all types of resources in the school library to study various presidents in depth, and the result is a presidential parade that attracts many parents—some to the school for the first time. But does the unit end there? Not if Janice expects a good grade in her graduate class! No, Janice realizes that when each first grader is a mini-expert on a single president, that first grader now has the background knowledge to think. So, the first graders do Venn diagrams comparing presidents, and they write and do analyses of what it takes to be a president and whether they might be president themselves one day. The result? Teachers are surprised that the children can tackle sophisticated learning activities. Perhaps, their expectations of the students have been too low. And Janice learns many new teaching strategies from the experienced teachers. The fifth graders gain a new sense of confidence in their own abilities. All learn that, although not every first grader succeeded, a higher percentage did and that more practice collaborating would fine-tune the process and create a trail of successful experiences over time. Which students gained the most? All students make gains, of course, but fourth-

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San Jose, CA, and is taking the instructional design class. As a requirement for the class, Janice decides to work with a team of three first-grade teachers. She has not worked with this team before, because she believed that first graders were not mature enough to understand information literacy.

The unit to be taught in the classroom is about U.S. presidents. The teachers welcome a new face and new ideas to the planning session because they are bored with the previous method of worksheets and brief discussion. The major obstacle is the number of children who are learning English. So, as the learning activities are redesigned, each teacher will have a coteacher, and a group of struggling fifth graders will be recruited as learning coaches.

quartile and English learners seem to make the most progress.

Can we afford this expensive model of education? The retort is, in a flat world (Friedman, 2005), can we afford not to provide such a model? Some may have the luxury of spending all day, every day, on collaboration, whereas others learn how to spend a chunk of the day doing it while managing the school library. But what can a professional teacher-librarian do regardless of whether the choice of flavors is spumoni or not? Perhaps persuade every flavor program to at least dabble in spumoni? Can we have a scoop of spumoni on top? Can we all have a trail of evidence that, when we are involved, the percentage of learners who succeed rises? Of course, we can.

## BE A LEARNING LEADER IN YOUR SCHOOL

Do we make a difference as a profession? Do you make a difference as a teacher-librarian in your school? Consider the following techniques that are well-known throughout the field:

- Prepare yourself as a learning leader by understanding cognitive psychology, curriculum, instructional design, technology, and how to create high-think learning experiences (see Figure 2).

- Establish a learning community in your school and study the best professional practices leading to high achievement.

- Link your program to some initiative in the school, but tweak it so that high-think is part of the mix. In other words, cleverly position your program as an essential element in the school agenda.

- Build a repertoire of successful collaborative units where a high percentage of learners succeed. Start with one, then two, and so on.

- Document the success of the collaborations with the teacher partners, jointly presenting to whoever will listen to the results. This is particularly important for those in the profession who are the only professionals in several schools—the most frustrated group we have in the field.

- Write or present your successes in articles, news reports, and conferences that are non-school-library centered with your teacher partner. Ask the principal to be a copresenter or coauthor.

- Nominate supportive administrators for awards, in the library world, the world of curriculum, the local community, and for any other heroic badge you can think of.

- Constantly talk about making a difference for individual learners. Use every trick in the book and then some to push every child to be all he or she can be and then more. This kind of child reads a lot, is a critical thinker in the world of information, and is an efficient learner in the world of technology.

Think spumoni. Dream spumoni. Taste spumoni. You will love it as a teacher-librarian. If you are an administrator, hire a teacher-librarian who loves spumoni. If you are a teacher, hog the time of the teacher-

**If you are an administrator, hire a teacher-librarian who loves spumoni. If you are a teacher, hog the time of the teacher-librarian. After all, it is your students who need to achieve.**

### FIGURE 2

What does a person functioning as a learning leader have to know to be effective? Here is a preliminary list.

An effective learning leader knows the best of

- cognitive psychology;
- curriculum;
- instructional design;
- assessment;
- library science;
- technology; and
- a cognate field of choice.

#### Questions to ponder

- How should the credentialing of a teacher-librarian be changed to produce more learning leaders?
- Should teachers getting masters degrees get degrees as learning leaders?
- What would happen in a school where heads of departments, grade-level team leaders, or even just a regular classroom teacher had a degree in learning leadership? Suppose there were 10 teacher-librarians/learning leaders in a single school? How would that work?

#### The Effective Learning Leader

librarian. After all, it is your students who need to achieve.

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