

Teacher-Librarians as Literacy Leaders

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Top 10 Things to Know/read/do about Literacy Leadership

1. Modeling and Promoting a Love of Learning, Including Learning About & For Literacy

- ❖ **Literacy is a cornerstone of lifelong learning and at the core of a school library program's mission.** (Achterman, 2010, p. 67)
- ❖ Being a literacy leader requires us to “gain a deep understanding of the reading and writing process, of the best practices for teaching literacy skills across the curriculum, of the role technology plays in literacy instruction and learning, and of best practice in the ways school librarians contribute to literacy gains” (Achterman, 2010, p. 76). This can be a daunting endeavor to begin, but Achterman reassuringly suggests to simply start, to jump in and read something about it, and “to acknowledge that literacy leadership requires an ongoing commitment to one's own literacy education” (2010, p. 76).

Recommended Readings For and About Literacy:

Canadian School Libraries. (2018). Fostering literacies to empower life-long learners. *Leading learning: Standards of practice for school library learning commons in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://lsop.canadianschoollibraries.ca/fostering-literacies/>.

- Useful to review standards regarding literacy.

Krashen, S. (2011). *Free voluntary reading*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

- Excellent compilation of research on the benefits of reading, and specifically giving students frequent, short chunks of time to read their choice of text strictly for pleasure.

Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- A teacher who is a passionate advocate of getting students to read! Unfortunately, she focuses on building extensive classroom libraries and does not make much mention of school libraries, but teacher-librarians can make use of, and powerfully support, her principles for building literacy in the classroom.

Recommended by Achterman (2010, p. 76):

For current thinking on literacy issues:

- International Reading Association journals (*The Reading Teacher, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Reading Research Quarterly Online*)
<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/journals>
- National Council of Teachers of English (*Language Arts, Voices from the Middle, English Journal*) <http://www2.ncte.org/resources/journals/>
- National Reading Conference (*Journal of Literacy Research*)
<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jlr>

For school library programs and literacy:

- American Association of School Librarians (Knowledge Quest) <https://knowledgequest.aasl.org/>

2. Collaborating to Support Literacy

- ❖ According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013), “literacy is a shared responsibility” (p. 4) so it lends itself well to collaboration.
- ❖ The classroom teacher, school librarian, reading specialist, literacy coaches, Language Arts curriculum director of department chair, special education teachers, principal, team leaders, etc. (Morris, 2013, p. 8) can collaborate to make a literacy team that creates and supports literacy goals.
- ❖ Literacy goals are better addressed when everyone works together, uses their strengths, and has a specific, clearly defined role:
While the librarian has specialized knowledge of interesting materials that help students engage in the learning process and the reading specialist has specialized knowledge about determining students’ instructional reading level, the classroom teacher holds specialized knowledge of the students engaged in the learning process. (Parrott & Keith, 2015, p. 14).
- ❖ Dees, Mayer, Morin, & Willis, (2010) state: **“utilizing the ‘whole school’ view, the librarian is in a key position to contribute to the development of strong professional learning community through professional development and technology integration”** (p.10). This bird’s eye view is a powerful asset in finding meaningful and strategic places to collaborate on literacy.
- ❖ “Effectively introducing a new literacy concept or strategy into a classroom teacher’s lesson creates ripples far beyond what takes place in that single collaboration” (Achterman, 2010, p. 78), benefiting teachers and students even beyond the immediate classroom. In fact, “[a] school librarian who weaves a deep understanding of literacy issues into frequent instructional collaborations with teachers will influence literacy instruction among entire teaching staffs and contribute to the literacy gains of hundreds or even thousands of students each year” (Achterman, 2010, p. 79).

3. Growing and Using Our Knowledge of Learners

- ❖ As a teacher-librarian knowledge is important, but what is even more important is understanding who our learners are, and how to approach learning experiences with them: **“the learning opportunities we design need to be grounded not only in knowledge and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, but also in intentional consideration of who our learners are and what experiences will enable them to learn, adapt and achieve literacy success”** (Ontario, 2013, p.3).
- ❖ Lawrence (2014) explains that mobile devices have kept students connected to the world at every moment. Changes in technology will continue to affect the way literacy is perceived, instructed and explored.
- ❖ Parrott and Keith (2018) note that when we differentiate learning based on student interest,

ability, and learning style, “the learning potential for students skyrockets” (p. 14).

- ❖ Teachers also have different learning styles and levels of readiness for more “risky” and new or different literacy strategy suggestions, so teacher-librarians must take this into consideration when considering what to recommend (Achterman, 2010, p. 78).

4. Employing Effective Literacy Strategies

- ❖ Teacher-librarians can use literacy strategies to expand learning pathways and improve student’s reading skills (Morris, 2013, p. 8). Teacher-librarians can also collaborate with classroom teachers in implementing various strategies, whether co-teaching in the classroom or parallel teaching in the library, or offering suggestions and support for literacy planning.
- ❖ **“As a literacy leader, the school librarian is ready in collaborations with teachers to ask questions and suggest strategies that allow classroom teachers to integrate literacy instruction seamlessly into the content of their courses”** (Achterman, 2010, p. 78).

Examples:

- ❖ Literature Circles – students are in small groups; each small group reads a different text; students take on a role (such as read aloud person, note-taker, question generator, or question answerer) to build their reading comprehension skills (Morris, 2013, p. 8).
- ❖ Sticky Notes – students use colour coded sticky notes and follow teacher poster to flag different text features in book, or different sections in Dewey, etc. (Morris, 2013, p. 10).
- ❖ Paragraph shrinking – students read paragraph aloud to one another; students shrink paragraph to 10 words that most describe the “who” and “what” of the paragraph (Achterman, 2010, p. 75).
- ❖ QR Codes – teacher-librarian creates QR code for relevant physical books in library so students can use devices to extend their experience with book by watching linked videos, reading websites, etc. (Lawrence, 2014, p. 67).
- ❖ Literacy Stations – co-teaching teams navigate physical spaces based upon students’ needs and learning styles, such as: computer station, STEM station, writing station, visual arts station (Parrott & Keith, 2015, p. 15-17).
- ❖ While there are many sources on this, some further reading strategies are available at:
 - <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentssuccess/thinkliteracy/files/reading.pdf>
 - Thorough explanations and lots of recommendations. These printable posters are at the end of the document (although they are not very colourful):

Before Reading

Ask Questions



What can I ask myself *BEFORE* reading to help me understand this text?

- ↳ What do I already know?
- ↳ I wonder if...
- ↳ What do I need to know?

Communication

During Reading

Ask Questions



What can I ask myself as I read this text to help me understand?

- ↳ Does this make sense?
- ↳ How does this information connect to what I already know?
- ↳ What does the writer say about...?
- ↳ What does the writer mean by...?
- ↳ I still need answers to the question...

Communication

During Reading

Understand the Text



At a tricky part in the text, I...

- ↳ pause to think about...
- ↳ take a closer look at...
- ↳ break the text into "chunks".
- ↳ summarize as I read.
- ↳ discuss what I have read.

Communication

During Reading

Make Inferences



How can I read between the lines?

- ↳ Based on what I have just read, I now realize...
- ↳ The evidence that supports my thinking is...
- ↳ I can now conclude...
- ↳ I think... because...

Communication

During Reading

VISUALIZE



To better understand while I was reading...

- ↳ I pictured what... might look like.
- ↳ I created a mental image of...
- ↳ I used the images to help me...

Communication

During Reading

Make Connections



How can I use what I already know to help me understand this text?

- ↳ I already know about...
- ↳ This text reminds me of...
- ↳ This compares to...
- ↳ This text is different from... because...
- ↳ This section made me think about...

Communication

During Reading

THINK TO READ



When I get to an unfamiliar word or section, I...

- ↳ look at photographs, diagrams, tables, or charts...
- ↳ reread for meaning.
- ↳ use context and clues for hints.
- ↳ stop and return.
- ↳ pause and ask questions.

Communication

GOOD NOTES

During Reading



To take good notes I...?

- ↳ look for the main idea(s).
- ↳ use words I understand.
- ↳ limit the number of words + phrases, details, sentences.
- ↳ organize with headings.
- ↳ use symbols, colours, and marks to organize.
- ↳ review, add, and revise.

Communication

After Reading

Ask Questions



What can I ask to help me better understand this text?

- ↳ What does the writer mean by...?
- ↳ Why didn't he/she...?
- ↳ What have I learned?
- ↳ I wonder if...

Communication

After Reading

Find the Main Idea(s)



What is/are the main idea(s)?

What is important?

- ↳ The most important thing I remember about this text is...
- ↳ The main message is...
- ↳ The text was mainly about...
- ↳ Clues, words and features that helped me understand the text were...

Communication

After Reading

Think About the Text



How do I put all the pieces together?

- ↳ The message of this text is...
- ↳ The purpose of this text is...
- ↳ These ideas relate to... because...
- ↳ This text may be biased because...
- ↳ This text doesn't deal with...

Communication

5. Passionately Promoting Reading

- ❖ “Literacy leadership is still very much about doing all the things within the school librarian’s range of influence to help students read, read more, read better, and read for a lifetime” (Achterman, 2010, p. 67).

Suggestions:

- ❖ “Currently Reading” Sign – Lawrence (2014) states: "one easy way to promote a culture of literacy beyond the physical walls of the class is for students to publicly see teachers read" (p. 67). To help make this more visible, give each classroom teacher a “Currently Reading” laminated sign for their classroom (Lawrence, 2014, p. 68).
- ❖ Reading/Book Displays - There are innumerable ideas for this, but specifically for making

teacher reading more visible, there could also be displays set up in the library or around the school with pictures of staff members reading, potentially as a contest to figure out who is hiding behind each book! Or “My Top Picks” recommendation displays in the library can show students what their teachers have enjoyed reading.

- ❖ Library Programs – teacher-librarians promote literacy through library specific activities, programs and special events (Achterman, 2010, p. 70). These programs also need to be promoted, such as with QR codes sent home on parent-teacher interview night that describe library programs (Lawrence, 2014, p. 68).
- ❖ Reader’s Advisory and Book Selection Guidelines – for example, having student choose one “just right” book (at the student’s reading level) AND a “free choice” book (Morris, 2013, p. 10), not just selecting from one category or the other. Students can be supported with finding both of these through thoughtful questioning and knowledge of the collection and the learner.
- ❖ Booktalks and Book Clubs – teachers model their love of reading with enthusiastic book pitches, talks, or sells (Achterman, 2010). Book clubs can be set up in a variety of formats, including as online forum book discussions (Lawrence, 2014, p. 67).
 - Resources for booktalks (from Achterman, 2010, pp. 69-70):
 - Nancy Keane's Booktalks -- Quick and Simple:
<http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/>
 - Many books by Joni Bodart
 - University of Central Florida’s database of book trailers
<https://www.digitalbooktalk.net/>
 - YA Books and More, by Naomi Bates, a school librarian, with print reviews and trailers: <https://yabooksandmoreblog.wordpress.com/>, and her guide to creating high interest digital book trailers:
<https://naomibates.blogspot.com/2008/07/how-i-create-digital-booktrailers.html>
- ❖ Use Data to Inform - Infographics or quick quotes posted in staffroom lounges and preparation rooms, added to newsletters or bulletins, or even a quick quote at the bottom of the teacher-librarian’s emails that changes periodically can help draw attention to the importance of free reading for fun. Krashen (2011) is an easy source to draw quotes from, and there are ready-made infographics available online such as:

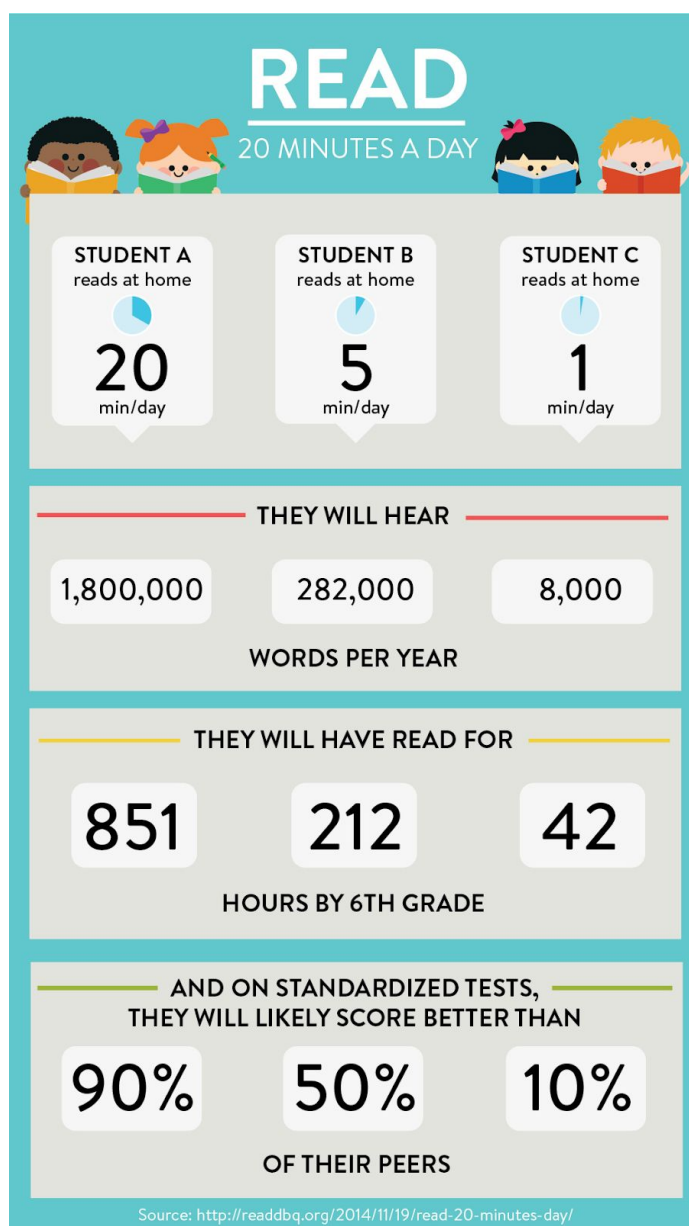


Image retrieved from:

<https://www.wcpo.com/brand-spotlight/how-reading-20-minutes-a-day-impacts-your-child-amazon-kindle>

6. Growing the Library Collection in Context

- ❖ As literacy leaders striving for the goal of “every reader his book,” the school librarian educates the school community about the need to collect for every segment of the school population, pushing back against the inclination to restrict the collection to the lowest common denominators of interest and standards of acceptability. (Achterman, 2010, p. 73).
- ❖ Every school, class, and teacher is different, so one of the first things to do is understand one’s context (Achterman, 2010), including school literacy goals (Morris, 2013). What resources are needed in order for the collection to best serve the curriculum and the community, and how does that compare with what the library collection currently contains? **Ensuring the collection**

matches the context is an important part of supporting literacy initiatives. Achterman (2010) points out that weeding down to a small collection of relevant books will show need for funding and can improve circulation. Moreillon (2017) also notes the importance of accessibility, which Achterman (2010) suggests includes allowing students to take out many books at a time and facilitating 24/7 access to digital content.

7. Technology: Using Technology to Support Literacy, and Building Awareness of New Literacies

- ❖ “[T]echnology has fundamentally changed the definition of literacy, and school librarians are among those at a school site best positioned to lead explorations and help school communities consider the ramifications of that change, as well as to develop educational approaches that effectively exploit technologies and build new literacy skills” (Achterman, 2010, p. 79).
- ❖ Technology is the intersection of information literacy and literacy, as they both target: identifying important questions, locating information, analyzing information, synthesizing information, and communicating information (Achterman, 2010, p. 81).
- ❖ Technology showcases students literacy skills, not just limiting them to traditional methods: “Using the iPads lets the kids answer the questions and create a response at their own level of thinking not at just the level of their handwriting” (Laidlaw, O’Mara, & Wong, 2015, p. 72).
- ❖ Technology is another way to connect with students and staff to help build a culture of literacy and to expand the library’s reach beyond its physical walls (Lawrence, 2014).
- ❖ *To learn more about multiple literacies and how to support them, please see this link: <http://www.21stcenturyschools.com/multiple-literacies.html>*
- ❖ *To learn more about having an online Teacher-Librarian presence, please see this link: <http://ilsop.canadianschoollibraries.ca/fostering-literacies/>*
- ❖ *To help with keeping up-to-date with new literacies, check out The New Literacies Research Lab: www.newliteracies.uconn.edu*

8. Making Connections

- ❖ Achterman (2010) states: **“as a literacy leader, the school librarian needs to develop a vision of literacy that both aligns with the goals of the broader school community and pushes that community forward”** (Achterman, 2010, p.68). These connections should not simply be to what students are learning, but to how they are acquiring information and how they utilize it. Making connections between the mission statement of the library, the school and the district will continue to align the larger focus of the school, since “frequent communication of that vision to others helps the school community maintain literacy as a primary focus of its own larger vision” (Achterman, 2010, p.68).

- ❖ Dees, Mayer, Morin & Willis (2010) state: "...as a school librarian, the goal should not be to create a standalone lesson on a skill you feel needs to be addressed, but to look at what students are learning and what teachers are teaching in the classroom and see where your knowledge and skills can fit into that plan" (p.12).
- ❖ Teacher-librarians as literacy leaders should be able to connect staff and students with:
 - ❖ texts (This is a great book for you/your class, because...)
 - ❖ other staff/students (Talk to _____, they have similar ideas as you. Or, _____, just did a unit on that and can help you focus your scope and sequence).
 - ❖ the world (If you have the students do _____ it would extend your project to a global level).
 - ❖ media (Here are some websites and databases that match your curriculum. You could use this medium to showcase your students skills).

9. Assessment that supports literacy.

- ❖ The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013) notes the importance of assessment for, as, and of learning. They suggest educators set goals and parameters for success with students, and include self and peer assessment as well. All of these things involve students more in the process so that they know what is expected and have a better chance of improvement in their literacy skills.
- ❖ A practical online assessment tool: TRAILS (Tool for Real-Time Assessment of Information Literacy Skills), from Kent State University (www.trails-9.org). TRAILS focuses on five areas: "developing a topic; identifying potential sources; developing, using, and revising search strategies; evaluating sources and information; and recognizing how to use information responsibly, ethically, and legally" (Lawrence, 2014, p. 69).

10. Communicating *About* and *For* Literacy

- ❖ **Whatever we do, we need to communicate effectively with students, our library community, and especially our staff. Patrons will not make use of services of which they are unaware.** Morris (2013) notes that if the teacher-librarian lets staff know their plans, it is more likely that collaboration can happen, and by communicating what we learn about literacy, we can support new initiatives. Achterman (2010) points out that literacy changes rapidly as new online tools are created. Teacher-librarians need to be aware of these things so we can raise awareness of the latest tool that shows research-based promise or the most current issue to address to promote critical literacy.
- ❖ By communicating about literacy regularly with staff, we can keep this important topic at the top of their minds (Achterman, 2010, p. 68-69).

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