



Is There a Teacher-Librarian Worldview?

THIS WE BELIEVE . . .

Ann Dutton Ewbank and Judi Moreillon
Ann.Ewbank@asu.edu and info@storytrail.com

In the process of co-editing this issue, "Advocacy: A Test of Character," we found an undercurrent that links the authors who contributed to this issue of *KQ*. Each one shares a perception that what they do to advocate for school libraries and librarianship is bigger than simply performing their on-paper job description well. Each author in this issue describes the proactive stance he or she takes in order to advocate for both the profession itself and the services that students and colleagues receive through their school libraries or university programs. It is clear that all the authors in this issue feel a responsibility to go above and beyond their immediate work environment to advocate for the profession at large.

We wonder if this sense of responsibility emanates from a shared worldview. Do we, as teacher-librarians, have a collective set of beliefs and values that underpin our work? How does our worldview influence our work as advocates?

A worldview is composed of beliefs, values, and perceptions. It creates a lens through which individuals, organizations, and institutions analyze and evaluate their experiences and the world around them. Our worldviews are initially formed within our family, where caregivers—whose nurturance we depend upon—teach us our heritage language and culture in the environment in which we grow. In the process of teaching us competence in our culture, they imprint us with a worldview (Hymes 1972). As we grow, venturing into the larger world, we look for confirmation of our perceptions and begin to notice similarities and differences between our worldviews and those of other people. When

confronted with discrepancies, we sometimes reassess our beliefs, modify our values, and reintegrate them into our worldview. Sometimes we ignore or resist disconfirming influences or evidence and remain firm in our convictions, even in defiance of logic and "reality." Worldviews affect interactions between and among people every day.

As we think beyond our individual perceptions, we wonder about the worldview of our profession. We have wondered aloud (on more than one occasion) about whether or not there is (or should be) a teacher-librarian worldview. If there is one, of what beliefs and values does it consist? How do we learn it, and how do we pass it on to the next generation? How does it influence the way we perceive the world, and how does it influence our practice of teacher-librarianship? We have come to the conclusion that we do share a worldview that we believe may be unique to teacher-librarians. It includes a set of beliefs that originate in our philosophies of teaching and librarianship, beliefs that influence our practices and our involvement in our professional associations. With acknowledgement of the National Public Radio framework "This We Believe," we share what we believe about a teacher-librarian worldview in the dialogue that follows.

Ann Dutton Ewbank: *Judi, you and I seem to share many of the same ideals in terms of the importance of school libraries. We both insist that full-time professionals with graduate-level course work in library science should be teaching in libraries and administering library programs. What are some of your core beliefs about school libraries?*

Judi Moreillon: *School libraries are, first and foremost, about access to ideas and*

information for all of the library's stakeholders. I entered library school as a classroom teacher who loved literature, storytelling, extended research projects, and technology. I wanted to work in the library with students at many different developmental levels, with all the students in the school. I wanted to be where the great resources were located. As I filled out my application, I certainly didn't think of the library profession in terms of its core beliefs.

In library school, I learned to value the First Amendment, intellectual freedom, and the right to read. In the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights" <www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/statementsif/librarybillrights.htm>—adopted in 1948, amended in 1961 and 1980, and reaffirmed in 1996—these rights are guaranteed to all library users regardless of their age.

I learned that librarians serve our democracy by protecting these freedoms for our library users. On our school faculties, where we are frequently the only teacher-librarian, we have a particular responsibility to defend the right to read of the youth in our charge. As nonvoting members of our society, young people need advocates who will stand up for their access to ideas and information. I believe this is a unique responsibility of teacher-librarians.

ADE: *I, too, share the belief that teacher-librarianship is political. I think that many people who enter the profession after being classroom teachers at first believe that the library is a kind of safe haven, free from the stresses of having to defend their teaching methods, dealing with parents, and butting heads with the school and district administration. The reality, however, is that being a teacher-librarian puts one at the crossroads of political work, from the building to the national level. Deciding what gets purchased with a small budget may put a teacher-librarian in a political situation. A book challenge is obviously a political decision, involving the question of a student's right to know and how the curriculum and the pursuit of independent reading are addressed through library resources. At the national and state levels, No Child Left*

Behind (NCLB) and school financial accounting definitions that classify teacher-librarians outside of the instructional category of classroom teachers have a direct impact on the quality of library programs.

Historically, school libraries have not been included in the curriculum as “mandatory” (included as essential to education). In my mind, every decision a teacher-librarian makes is a political one. When teacher-librarians choose to be silent on issues that may put them at odds with the powers-that-be, they are making political decisions not to engage the learning community in critical dialogues.

JM: In the present political climate, our silences are particularly conspicuous. What happens when our core values bump up against malpractice in teacher-librarianship? For instance, when the library is used to provide teacher planning time, or to teach reading to a select group of students rather than serve the entire school, or when teacher-librarians are removed from libraries to teach in classrooms as substitute teachers, what is lost? Equity!

ADE: Equitable access is a cornerstone of our democracy and a hallmark of our work as teacher-librarians. Along with our building-level administrators, we share a global view of the learning needs of the school, but our methods for meeting those needs may be in conflict with some of the practices that are currently in vogue. In our schools, it is our mission to serve the literature and information needs of all members of our learning communities at the point of need, and to provide all with access to resources throughout the school day and beyond. Our inclusive worldview requires us to affirm the rights of every student, classroom teacher, administrator, or parent to resources and to instruction that can help them learn and achieve. This belief permeates our work with all the stakeholders in our library programs.

JM: But we know that physical access to information is not enough. Students must be able to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate it critically and competently, and use

it accurately and creatively. In *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998), *Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning* (ILSSL) 1, 2, and 3 speak to our role in helping students go beyond physical access to intellectual access.

ADE: What you describe is reminiscent of Jeffersonian ideals in education—the idea that in order for democracy to flourish, the citizenry needs to be intellectually engaged. I believe that the best way to learn is through inquiry, where

Every decision a teacher-librarian makes is a political one. When teacher-librarians choose to be silent on issues that may put them at odds with the powers-that-be, they are making political decisions not to engage the learning community in critical dialogues.

the students determine what is interesting and relevant and then access information through the resources of the library, as you said, at the point of need. ILSSL support this belief, particularly Standards 4–6, regarding independent learning. To me, it is evident that teacher-librarians have embraced the idea that learning is a lifelong process; that discovery and inquiry are valued. These ideas are not new; John Dewey and his followers have been advocating for an experiential curriculum for more than a hundred years.

JM: I agree, Ann, but in the reality of NCLB, in which curriculum standards reign supreme, teacher-librarians must help classroom teachers negotiate these limitations. We have a role in collaborating with our colleagues to design, implement, and assess lessons and units of

instruction that are based on mandated learning objectives, but require students to evaluate and synthesize information and to think critically about the content of their learning.

We also can make it our mission to integrate the ILSSL social responsibility standards (7–9) in our collaborative teaching. As teacher-librarians, we are mindful of the use and production of knowledge in a democratic society (Standard 7). We recognize that information is, indeed, power and offers learners access to greater life choices if they master these skills. We also strive to model the standards of ethical use of information (Standard 8) and demonstrate collaboration (Standard 9) in our joint work with classroom teachers.

ADE: This is why it is so important to preserve teacher-librarian positions in schools across our nation. We have an integral role in student learning and achievement that matches the current agenda of education stakeholders, including principals, district superintendents and school boards, state lawmakers and superintendents, and state and national legislators. Perhaps the reason why we have not yet influenced the worldviews of many decision-makers is that we have not framed our advocacy efforts to align with stakeholders’ perceived needs. If our worldview includes equity of access through which all children and youth are given opportunities to learn, achieve, and become productive members of society, how do we effectively influence education decision-makers to incorporate our worldview into their own?

JM: Perhaps we can more effectively apply the advocacy principles recommended by “cognitive activist” George Lakoff (2004). When we engage with others who don’t share our views, we must respond by reframing issues in terms of values. We must speak in terms of what we believe. In considering issues of equity, activist teacher-librarians must think outside their own school environments.

This reminds me of a 2004 Arizona initiative called *No School Left Behind @ your library*®. Along with a group of teacher-librarians

from have and have-not schools, we created an illustrated PowerPoint presentation that showed the vast inequalities in library resources and programs among schools in southeast Arizona <<http://storytrail.com/present/noschoolleftbehind.htm>>. At the extreme ends, our slides shared the resources of an elementary school in an affluent urban community with 40,000 items; a full-time, professional teacher-librarian; a full-time assistant; and many adult volunteers. We also shared photographs of an elementary book room in a small, low-socioeconomic town near the United States-Mexico border. The books in this school were not organized on the shelves, the computers were not even plugged in, and the library staff consisted of a volunteer who came in periodically to shelve books. Seven of us presented this information to members of the Arizona state legislature and were then invited to share it with a group of legislators who call themselves "The Children's Caucus." Our efforts resulted in media coverage of our intent to influence decision-makers regarding the critical role of teacher-librarians, library resources, and school library programs in students' learning. For us, this was and still is an issue of social justice.

ADE: Gail Bush and Clara Sitter recently co-edited an issue of *KQ* that focused on envisioning a tenth ILSSL standard: "The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and seeks opportunities to use knowledge to create a more socially just and humane world" (Bush 2006, 19). But before our students can master this envisioned standard, we must engage in practices that indicate our own mastery. I am

particularly struck by the following: "Students assume leadership roles in collaborating with others to identify information problems, seek viable solutions, and follow through to ensure an effective plan that will have the positive result of the betterment of society" (Bush 2006, 20). Replace the word "students" with "teacher-librarians," and the statement identifies the action needed to promote the teacher-librarian worldview. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world."

This, we believe, is the shared worldview of teacher-librarians. Our lens, formed in library school and honed through practice, is a political one through which we perceive the world and our place within it. As you read this issue, please ponder these questions: How does each of the authors in this issue interpret this worldview and give it voice? Where am I in this conversation?



Ann Dutton

Ewbank is the Education Liaison Librarian at Arizona State University at the West campus in Glendale. A former

teacher-librarian and classroom teacher, she is currently President of the Arizona Library Association. Ann also is a member-at-large of the American Library Association Council and a member of AASL's Task force on *No Child Left Behind*.



Judi Moreillon is a literacies and libraries consultant and author of *Collaborative Strategies for Teaching Reading*

Comprehension: Maximizing Your Impact (ALA Editions, 2007). She is a member of the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force. A former teacher-librarian, classroom teacher, and teacher educator, Judi is currently the Director of Business Development and Product Management for *Star Bright Books* in New York.

Works Cited

American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). 1988. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Chicago: ALA.

Bush, Gail. 2006. "Envisioning Information Literacy Standard 10." *Knowledge Quest* 34, no. 5 (May/June): 19-21.

Hymes, Dell. 1972. "On Communicative Competence." In J. B. Pride and J. Holmes, eds., *Sociolinguistics*, 269-93. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.

Lakoff, George. 2004. *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives*. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Publ.