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INFORMATION LITERACY

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Beginning with the 2015–2016 Legislative Session at least five bills have been introduced focusing on media literacy, “civic online reasoning,” and/or fake news. These bills highlight lawmakers’ potentially confusing use of terminology and their lack of knowledge about existing California Department of Education (CDE) resources which address these issues.

In response to these legislative efforts, the CDE has begun an internal collaborative discussion across divisions, focusing on information literacy. Our collaborative discussions have addressed the following:

• Bringing a renewed focus on the Model School Library Standards (both internally and externally) while also exploring other CDE resources that exist to help teachers increase their students’ information literacy skills

• Promoting information literacy as a shared responsibility among educators school-wide

• Integrating information literacy instruction in presentations to the field

One outcome from this collaborative dialogue was the development of the presentation - *Information Literacy Uniting Disciplines Using the Model School Library Standards*. This presentation has been shared at the 2017 STEAM Conference, the 2018 CSLA Conference, and the 2018 CUE Conference. In this presentation we address head-on the use of competing terminology – “media literacy,” “digital literacy,” and “digital citizenship,” demonstrating how the common thread among these terms is information literacy.

To define information literacy, we draw upon the American Library Association definition: “Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

In today’s world, students have access to an unending supply of information from the Internet, periodicals, books (including self-published books), and social media. Our students need help learning how to sort the good information from the bad, and learning how to determine reasonable information, to become critical thinkers - in other words, learning how to think.

As this issue goes to press, education leaders will be gathering in Sacramento at the CDE’s first Media and Information Literacy Summit. This is a direct outcome of our collaborative discussion and CSLA is one of the partners in the Summit. The theme is the Curious Skeptic. The Model School Library Standards provide the foundation and serve as a cross-disciplinary set of standards that focuses on developing media and information literate students. While it might be everyone’s responsibility to support students in developing the ability to think critically, more than any other educator, school librarians possess the unique skills to foster information literate students.

Let’s keep this conversation going as we read and reflect on this issue of the CSLA *Journal*. How are you promoting literacy in your community? I know we have many influencers among us, and I encourage you to submit articles to the CSLA *Journal*, *Newsletter*, or Blog. It takes us all working together to transform teaching and learning for all our communities.

I appreciate your efforts on behalf of California’s students and am proud to serve alongside you this year.
When I was working in the school library I told people the best part of my job was I learned something new every day. From a student examining the economic implications of ecoterrorism, to the teacher seeking new pedagogical techniques to engage in the editing process, my day was spent working across the curriculum to help answer questions. Being a teacher librarian was being a lifelong learner.

When I began to consider the use and creation of information and what information literacy truly was I came to believe that information literacy was the true Uber-literacy. Information is at the core of everything we do, and how we exist in our world. I was put in mind of the Jarawa tribe in India who survived the December 2004 tsunami based on information and knowledge shared through stories, and an awareness of the land. Or the ability of Lebron James to drive to a basket, contort his body, and hang in air while the ball drops through the hoop. In modern society the ability to read and write is the most basic literacy need, but still there are ways information is conveyed beyond the alphabet and this is both based on information and provides information. And so the concept of information literacy began to align with my favorite thing about being in a library – it crosses all disciplines, it is something new and different with each experience.

This issue of the journal represents the varied nature of information literacy. Articles explore the impact of models on administrators’ understandings of school librarianship, challenge you to trust students in inquiry, discuss working with community in both reading and grant activities, and introduce to authorial process in interacting with the natural world to create beautiful picture books. And in one instance, to ask – are we doing this right? A question we should always be asking.

I hope you enjoy this grab bag of articles and find something new. I know I did.
When did you first learn about credentialed teacher librarians? Chances are you most likely worked with one in the past, and this shaped your idea of the role of teacher librarians in California’s schools. My experience is a bit different. I’m a California native; I have had the opportunity to live in several different parts of the state and have thus experienced a variety of California schools both as a student and an educator. However, not once do I remember encountering a credentialed teacher librarian in either of those roles.

I cannot recall a time when libraries did not play a significant role in my life. I was a bibliophile from an early age, devouring the books I found when frequenting my school and local public libraries. I volunteered for summer library programs, proudly represented my local library in the region’s annual parade, spent my recesses and breaks with my nose in a book, and crushed the competition in reading contests. I loved that the library provided resources on almost any informational topic I wished to research and a seemingly never-ending source of engaging fiction books that enabled me to explore new places and ideas.

Despite this love for the library, I did not seriously consider pursuing librarianship as a career. As I reflect upon my early library experiences, I believe this is because I do not recall ever encountering a professional librarian. As a student, I attended K-12 public schools in the counties of San Bernardino, Modoc, Lassen, Solano, and San Diego in the 1980s and early 1990s. There were no credentialed teacher librarians in any of the six public schools I attended. Though I frequented the local public libraries, I do not recall ever engaging with a librarian that held a Master’s in Library and Information Science.

What I do recall is interacting with paraprofessionals, volunteers, and clerks that sat at circulation desks, checked out stacks of books to me, and answered my occasional question (which generally involved some version of “How can I get more books?”). Almost all of these individuals were pleasant, helpful, and seemed to enjoy their work. However, many of them served in part-time or volunteer positions, so it appeared to me that this was not a career that required advanced education or one in which an individual could make a living. Since I had a great passion for learning and sharing knowledge with others and working with children, I instead decided to pursue a career in teaching.

I attended college in southern California, majoring in Liberal Studies and completing a teaching credential program in 1997. I do not recall learning about credentialed librarians during my teaching preparation program, and I had very few interactions with the individuals that staffed my college’s library. Including my student teaching experiences, I spent nine years teaching at the elementary level in five different K-12 school districts in the counties of San Diego, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles. At each of my school sites, the library was staffed with only a part-time or full-time paraprofessional. These experiences served to reinforce the perception of librarianship that I developed as a K-12 student.

In 2000, I decided to pursue a master’s degree. At that time, I was living in San Diego County and options were limited since online degree programs were in their infancy and few were available. Though there are many colleges and universities in San Diego County, not one of them had a program focused on library science or school librarianship at that time. As such, I selected and completed what I considered to be most appealing from those that were available: a master’s degree in education focused on educational technology. I found that I greatly enjoyed using technology to engage, enhance, and extend students’ learning experiences.

By 2005, I was living and teaching in Los Angeles and unfortunately found myself burned out on classroom teaching. I was considering a career change when my mom called to tell me she had decided to go back to school to finish her bachelor’s degree. She thought she would like to become a librarian, so she asked me to research degree programs for her. I happily took on the task, and was surprised to find that there were no bachelor’s degree programs available in library science; one could obtain either an associate’s degree or a master’s degree. It was at this point that I finally learned there are distinct levels of education and professional roles available within librarianship.

While conducting my research, I came across a program entitled “Library Media Teacher Credential” (which was the official title for the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing’s Teacher Librarian Services Credential at that time). Given my experience, I was very surprised to find that a credential existed for a librarian position in California K-12 schools. In reading the description of the position, I was excited to see that it encompassed everything I loved about education: teaching and learning, books, and technology—my dream job! I was also angry; why had I not learned about this in my teaching credential...
...he had worked with a dynamic library media teacher who was deeply integrated into the instructional program. Why had I never encountered one in any of the schools I attended or in which I worked? I quickly jumped on edjoin.org to see if there were any positions available and was amazed to find that there were several throughout the state. I then broadened my search to locate other library media teacher credential programs and found five others within the state (there are now only four teacher librarian credential preparation programs). Two were completely online, including the one I originally located.

It just so happened I was already enrolled in a doctoral program at that particular university, so I decided to put that program on hold and requested to switch to their fully online library media teacher program. I completed half of the program while continuing in my position as a fifth grade teacher and the rest after moving to the Central Valley to take a library media teacher position at a high school.

I found the library media teacher position was indeed the best teaching job in K-12 schools! However, almost no one I worked with understood my role (I was the first full-time library media teacher to work at that site). Like me, most had not ever encountered a library media teacher nor had they been educated about that specific role in their teaching or administrative preparation programs. Their perceptions and expectations were generally limited to the prevailing cultural stereotype: librarians are “keepers of the books” that sit at circulation desks, check out materials, and shush patrons. Just one educator had prior knowledge of the instructional role of the library media teacher: the principal who hired me. In his previous school district, he had worked with a dynamic library media teacher who was deeply integrated into the instructional program. His perception of the role was shaped by that experience, and because of this, he created a vision and provided strong support for me to serve as an instructional leader at our school site and throughout the district over a period of eight years.

As you can see, my perceptions and those of my principal were shaped by prior experiences with librarians. These experiences partially influenced my decision to research administrators’ perceptions of the instructional role of the teacher librarian for my doctoral dissertation. I ultimately wanted to understand why so few credentialed teacher librarians are employed in California’s K-12 public schools. Given that the roles of an instructional coach and teacher librarian appear similar in nature, and many more instructional coaches than teacher librarians have been hired or utilized to provide instructional leadership within the implementation of the California Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (California Department of Education, 2013), I sought to examine how the roles compare in practice from the perspective of the decision makers: administrators.

The following excerpts from my study, A Collective Case Study to Examine Administrators’ Instructional Leadership Perspective of the Role of Instructional Coaches and Teacher Librarians in California Public Schools, highlight the key findings and implications for teacher librarians currently working in the field. The full study can be accessed here: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1663 (2018)

Key Findings

- Administrators acknowledged that they are incapable of providing sufficient instructional leadership by themselves. They value having another instructional leader on site to provide teachers with embedded instructional support, one that possesses particular dispositions and is able to encourage them to meet their instructional goals.
- Administrators’ personal values influence their decisions to select and utilize instructional coaches or teacher librarians to provide instructional leadership. Prior experience with either role has both positively and negatively impacted their ability to understand and work with individuals in these roles.
- Administrators consider instructional coaches to be extensions of themselves as instructional leaders in English Language Arts (ELA) and teacher librarians to be resources that can be called upon to provide occasional instructional support in ELA.
- Administrators lack knowledge and understanding of the instructional role of the teacher librarian. They primarily learned about teacher librarians through prior experience in working with one.

Implications

Teacher librarians currently employed in California schools need to be cognizant that an administrator’s understanding of the teacher librarian position will be primarily shaped by his or her experiences with them. As such, teacher librarians must strive to establish a mutually supportive relationship with their administrators. Strategies to accomplish this include:
In order to provide a positive model of the teacher librarian profession and function as an effective instructional leader, teacher librarians must also strive to remain current in the field and continually work toward fulfilling the Model School Library Standards for California Public Schools Program Standard of delivering at least 20 hours of instruction per week (California Department of Education, 2010).

Concluding Thoughts

In reflecting upon the results of my research, I found that the experiences of my participants closely aligned with my own. In conclusion, models are powerful. Therefore, teacher librarians must make a concerted effort to present a positive model of the instructional expectations of the profession to their administrators and colleagues since those individuals will carry that perception on to their next assignments. This will positively or negatively influence their future decisions to select and work with teacher librarians as instructional leaders.

References


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It is no secret that students require information literacy (IL) skills and knowledge for both academic and personal growth. To engage in the IL experiences they need in the K-12 school learning environment, students require regular instruction and guidance from the building IL expert, the teacher librarian. Such necessary experiences are not likely to come from classroom teachers who are trained content area experts, not information and research specialists. Such necessary experiences are not likely to come from public and academic librarians who are not trained to work in the school environment. (Waiting until college to provide information literacy experiences and instruction makes no sense since children begin to use information when they are born.) Berg, Malvey and Donahue (2018) explain the preparedness teacher librarians provide students that public and academic librarians are not qualified or able to do given training, time, and circumstance. There is no workaround for regular student access to learning with a certified teacher librarian. How then can we ensure that students get the information literacy guidance they need?

Information literacy opportunities for students permeate the school experience. Nearly everything students are asked to do at school includes work, and sometimes play, with information. The issue is whether these experiences are managed effectively and with focused attention to student cultivation of effective strategies and knowledge development. Are students learning digital citizenship when allowed to use their phones to research in history class? Do students know how to read laterally to evaluate information sources? Can students use information to create new work that demonstrates their understanding? Are students effectively presenting their work to a wider audience beyond the classroom teacher? How are students cultivating pleasure reading for a lifetime of learning and enjoyment?

The effective application of IL skills and understandings requires students to learn how to:

1. ask essential questions (see Right Question Strategy from The Right Question Institute) that will guide queries for academics and life (The Right Question Institute, 2018);
2. access quality information and support materials for knowledge development;
3. curate information and resources for specific purposes;
4. synthesize information for use in creating new work;
5. present new work and knowledge to an authentic audience (beyond the school librarian and classroom teacher);
6. regularly read self-curated materials.

How does the teacher librarian, as the school information literacy expert, ensure that students are guided in this critical learning? This is a tall order for even the full time teacher librarian, managing just one school building of students, nevermind those hired to support larger numbers, spanning multiple buildings. Nevertheless, we must work towards what we know is best for students, right now and in the long term. Strategizing and also chasing serendipitous opportunities in and around school can generate rich student learning experiences. Following are a few ideas to consider stretching to fit your own unique teacher librarian position.

Find Chinks in the Curriculum Armor

Identify those open-minded, buoyant colleagues, and look for chinks in their curriculum armor as you chat in the parking lot, locker bay, break room, football game, baby shower. Sleuth out a sweet spot or three. Where can you offer an in-library or in-classroom mini-lesson for science students on how...
to effectively engage with the interactive human body systems website, or perhaps a guided reading session for students during the social justice unit? You might offer to come into the music room with an extra set of ears to help facilitate small group discussions about readings on upcoming visiting performers, or maybe invite the wellness teacher to bring her students in to learn how to synthesize and share content on social media bullying.

You can supervise students engaged in literature circle discussions in the library (and no, you do not need to have read the book!). Students would benefit from learning how to use Flipgrid (2018) to share thoughts with peers on their latest favorite book or series. Such experiences can suggest additional opportunities for the teacher librarian to connect with students on information literacy practices throughout the existing curriculum. Teachers can begin to understand the rich opportunities to engage with the teacher librarian that do not require enormous preparation or the development of a new set of lesson plans.

**Teach in the Whole School Arena**

Bring enriching information literacy experiences to students and teachers through scheduled library and classroom lessons developed in collaboration or independently in alignment with classroom curriculum. This can happen through administrative support of formal teacher librarian-classroom teacher collaboration. In this case the teacher librarian might be tapped as part of the school leadership team to attend grade level, subject area, or committee meetings in order to establish embedded instruction. This can happen if you invite yourself to those meetings with offers of specific or general support. It can also evolve more organically through identification of the chinks in the curriculum as described above. In either case, aim to teach whenever possible. Be seen delivering instruction in the classroom and in the library. Share your teaching experiences whenever and wherever possible. You are the information literacy building expert, the “learning engineer of the school.” The faculty, administration, student body, and larger school family need to know that so you become the go-to person for all-things-literacy-related. This is how you build up more teaching business, your expertise, and your value to the community as an information leader. Be visible by being active.

**Remain Alert, Spy and Wonder Aloud, to Yourself and to Others**

To spy the chinks in the curriculum armor and develop successful classroom connections, it almost goes without saying that you must remain poised to act, ready to leap for the next opportunity to engage in teaching and collaboration. Be a careful, compassionate, and responsive listener, in all the school-related spaces: the staff room, faculty and committee meetings, playing field, district office, PTA meeting, grocery store. Figure out the needs of the community in and out of the classrooms, meeting rooms, and public spaces. Consider where your expertise is needed. Sit and act on a variety of school and district committees. From an array of school and community related spaces you can helpfully engage in troubleshooting sometimes directly and other times with others or just by wondering aloud. Might it be the right time to establish a parent book group or a student tech team? Maybe the fourth grade teachers could use support in introducing Google Classroom (Google, 2018) for the upcoming geology unit on environmental human impact. English and reading teachers are always on the lookout for improving student pleasure reading support. How can you engage students in learning about and participating in creating the school district’s edible garden? What book promotion programs could be run through the library this term?

All this is really no small order. Your information literacy and instruction expertise is needed in all parts. It’s a matter of proactively discovering those entry points and offering timely dynamic services. As you survey your current situation, what opportunities do you see? What opportunities can you create with others? Chart the possibilities and set your intentions. Draft a plan of action(s) and make your first moves. Grow your student information learning engagements to make a difference for students and the whole school community.

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**REFERENCES**


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**SHELLY BUCHANAN**

Shelly Buchanan, M.S. Ed Tech, Ph.D., lectures full time at San Jose State University iSchool. She has taught in every K-12 grade level (except tenth grade!) as an English teacher, Spanish teacher, or Teacher Librarian. The author of content area readers and teacher literature guides (Teacher Created Materials), Shelly is currently writing Student Driven Inquiry: Give the Kids the Keys! (ABC-Clio).
Media Literacy: What Hath We Wrought? Responses to danah boyd

Mary Ann Harlan, Nadine Loza, and Angie So

During the 2018 South By Southwest (SXSW) festival, researcher danah boyd gave a talk on media literacy as the keynote of SXSW EDU. Click here to watch her keynote talk. (2018, March 7). To read her written piece click here. (2018, March 9). I shared this media literacy story with my San Jose State University (SJSU) students and asked for their response. https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-03-07-danah-boyd-how-critical-thinking-and-media-literacy-efforts-are-backfiring-today. Below are two of their responses, as well as my own. Please watch or read the boyd talk or written piece before reading the responses below.

Dr. Mary Ann Harlan, SJSU iSchool Professor

In 2016, I watched with increasing frustration and horror as my Facebook news feed filled with sensationalistic and misrepresented information, not to mention flat out falsehoods. Snopes and Fact Check was a daily stop – I appreciated how information was put in context so that I could understand how viewpoints were being shaped, opinions were formed, and also the nuances and complexities of the world around us. In other words I learned how knowledge was being created. And lest you think I am only talking about the election during that year, Philando Castile and Alton Sterling were shot by police officers igniting protests; Standing Rock demonstrations were occurring; and there was a mass shooting at a night club in Orlando; – all issues of high emotion causing an outpouring of conflict on my Facebook.

Much has been said regarding the growing division among Americans and social media’s contribution to it. I don’t need to reiterate common myths (and there is plenty of evidence it is a myth). But here is what I think matters for us, for librarians and teachers of information literacy. Many of the people sharing items that made my skin itch while immediately heading to Snopes are my librarian friends. I fell victim a time or two (Standing Rock activism mostly). We are information professionals; we know better. It did not escape my attention, by the way, that it took time to unravel some of the more complex stories and sensationalism. (Nor did it escape my attention that my millennial friends were less likely to engage in this practice – although hardly immune). I have the benefit of working a flexible and solitary schedule, and a deep professional interest in information practices like sharing information, so I was able to take time to use multiple sources to research context, and yet still….

When I first read danah boyd’s musing on media literacy and its role in the 2016 election, it struck a chord. boyd’s main concern at the time was that media literacy was too shallow as it was taught in schools and contributed to a distrust of the authority of the fourth estate. I wondered about how information literacy intersected with her concerns about how we are teaching information literacy, and the unintentional messages it sends.

I thought back to how I taught evaluating sources, the context in which I placed source evaluation, and the desire to provide a silver bullet source (“just use the databases”) because of the limited time I had to teach information evaluation. I remembered trying to get students to understand that information is inherently biased, and that it was their personal responsibility to address that bias. But through what lens are they evaluating bias? In school we focus on facts and evidence; it is a foundational construct. But when facts are being used to shape knowledge into sensationalistic opinions best promoted by memes, how do we approach the issue of context and nuance?

I considered what I had learned about information practices in the ensuing years, about how we cognitively dismiss information and therefore the source if it does not align with our beliefs. I thought about how we approach academic information-gathering and use as a completely different activity than personal information-gathering, and without direct lines drawn do not see the connections. Then I had several amazing conversations with Tasha Bergson-Michelson, librarian at Castelleja School, and received an article for the CSLA Journal from her student Sarah Zoroufy about source literacy (Summer 2017).

It was a pleasure to return to boyd and see how her thinking has also evolved. boyd returns to the idea of knowledge construction as an epistemological concern; how we shape our knowledge is based in our beliefs about knowledge, and a construction of truth. What does that mean for our approaches to information literacy – and is this our domain? Yes - much more so than the media literacy domain, I would argue.
Today, there are increased calls to implement media literacy curriculum in schools. This urgency is in part due to a rapidly changing relationship between American citizens and the media itself. Today’s media landscape has provided a complicated environment for students to navigate. Accusations of “fake news” from the top levels of our government, the persecution of journalists around the world, and social media’s role in politics have made this landscape much more difficult for young people to comprehend. In a country where freedom of the press is upheld as a fundamental aspect of American democracy, many educators fear that the message students are receiving about the media is being distorted. “Breaking news” seems to confirm these fears. Government intelligence agencies have confirmed that Russian agents have played a role in spreading media hoaxes during the 2016 presidential election. Social media giant Facebook is under scrutiny for allowing partisan data mining companies to harvest user information without their consent. Also concerning is increased corporatization of news organizations and the decline in the number of students enrolled in university journalism programs.

Educators, politicians, and academics are struggling to come up with a solution to combat the rise of “fake news.”

These events have left many educators struggling for ways to help students unpack complicated discussions around the news and media. Although teaching media or information literacy in schools is not new, the discussion and role that the media is playing in American society and politics certainly is. To illustrate this urgency, some state legislatures have already drafted legislation that would mandate the teaching of information literacy. For example, in California, Senate Bill 947 would mandate that public schools teach information literacy in grades 1st through 12th. Despite these attempts, there does not seem to be a consensus about how educators should go about teaching media literacy, and whether or not past and current efforts have been enough. Information media is defined by the American Library Association as, “...a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (2018). The California Department of Education has determined that an information literacy curriculum would encompass teaching media literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship (2018).

Recently, at a talk given at the South by Southwest education conference in Austin, Texas, danah boyd argued that the teaching of media literacy and critical thinking in schools has not sufficiently prepared students to navigate the contemporary media landscape. In fact, she argues that it has actually harmed student’s ability to recognize various viewpoints, and has preached a dogmatic approach to critical thinking that has led to increased polarization in our country. She states, “Right now, the conversation around fact checking has devolved to suggest that there is only one truth. We have to recognize that there are plenty of students who are taught that there is only one legitimate way of thinking, one accepted worldview” (2018, March 7).

But is this the fault of teaching media literacy in schools? I would argue that the issue is not that there has been too much teaching of media literacy, but not enough. In order to combat the rise of “fake news,” students must be given a comprehensive information literacy program, starting at the earliest grades. In the state of California, there is currently no mandated curriculum on information literacy. The Common Core and the Partnership For 21st Century Learning, adopted by the state, does include a framework for teaching media literacy, however, without a mandate from the government, it is unlikely to be taught in a rigorous way. In order for an information literacy curriculum to “work”, students need to be taught about professional journalistic standards, and why robust, neutral news organizations are important in a democratic society. Students need to be empowered to think critically about the media they consume; they must be taught to think critically about perspectives, not simply to question others’ viewpoints. The best professionals to teach these skills are certificated teacher librarians, a field that has been systematically deprofessionalized in California for years. Finally, students need access to a variety of print and electronic resources through a well-funded school library, staffed with a certificated teacher librarian and a paraprofessional to work with him or her.

In order for democratic principles such as freedom of speech and the press to thrive in our society, information literacy is not a curriculum that should be given secondary status. It should be treated as an integral part of teaching literacy, civics, and other topics considered essential for 21st century learners.
Is it not rather ridiculous to blame a color blind man who has only known the existence of black and white his entire life for not knowing the colors of the rainbow? Essentially, a parallel situation is occurring in American classrooms, which spurred danah boyd to proclaim “how critical thinking and media literacy efforts are ‘backfiring’ today” (Wan, 2018). According to Wan’s article, boyd, a researcher at Microsoft and the founder and president of Data & Society, delivered in her SXSW EDU speech the following confrontational points:

1. Many of the forms of critical thinking that we’ve introduced into American education are ‘backfiring’ right now.

2. What is the correct approach and what is media literacy if no one trusts the media?

3. Right now, the conversation around fact checking has devolved to suggest that there is only one truth. We have to recognize that there are plenty of students who are taught that there is only one legitimate way of thinking, one accepted worldview. (Wan, 2018)

Media literacy set aside for a moment, I believe that the main punchline is that third observation – students are only being taught to see black or white, disregarding all of the other existing colors (a.k.a. perceptions) in the world!

Who remembers studying about pilgrims and Native Americans in social studies in elementary school? Most, if not all of those history lessons that you may recall were probably from the pilgrims’ and the settlers’ perspective. What about the Native Americans then? What about their perspectives? Or going back in history to the time of the Red Scare and the Cold War, history shows that Americans feared communists and communism – a fear that rose and spread from society’s climate, governmental propaganda, and the power/weapon struggles of the time. What many probably did not realize though was that (as unrealistic, overly ideal, and impractical as the applications may have been), the philosophy behind communism is rather actually Utopian, all depending on perception. Again, the emphasis lies in perception. For every story, current event, history, etc., in every situation, there are many different points of perception. The point of focus may be the same, but every different point of perception will ultimately capture a different story, leading to different sets of opinions.

Regarding the sections of Wan’s post where boyd feels lost, questioning the correct approach to media literacy, as boyd indicates checking facts and sources are not enough, and also questioning media literacy when the media can't be trusted leaves me wondering the following: ’would not all this be sort of solved if students are, from very early on, educated to realize and check on the different perceptions and points of views existing and involved in any situation?’ (Wan, 2018).

If students (and generally everybody) had the knowledge and skills to seek out and understand multiple different points of views, practicing empathy, in addition to always fact and source checking, would not these combined skill sets act as a level of “human-literacy” that can be applied to any information medium? Cannot this explained approach to critical thinking solve the backfiring that is happening these days?

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Mary Ann Harlan is an Assistant Professor and the coordinator of the Teacher Librarian Program at San Jose State University. In Spring 2018 she asked students in a School Library Media Programs and an Information Literacy course if they wished to respond from an information literacy perspective to an article on media literacy. These three students are planning on being school or academic librarians and have an interest in teaching information literacy skills to a variety of students.
Combining Writing and Photography to Create Powerful STEM Books

Sneed B. Collard III

When I arrived at the woodpecker nest, I thought I’d missed my chance. It was getting late in the season and as I set up my tripod; the nest appeared deserted. “Shoot, the babies have probably fledged and dispersed,” I told myself. Nonetheless, I pointed my zoom lens at the empty hole and sat down on a nearby curb to wait. My ears scanned for the sounds of woodpecker calls, and every few minutes, I glanced up at the nest. Nothing.

After twenty minutes, I contemplated heading back home, but looked at the hole one last time. “No way,” I whispered. From the hole protruded what looked like a pencil-thin stick. I thought I was imagining things, but quietly rose to peer through my camera. “That’s not a stick,” I confirmed. “It’s a beak!”

Moments later, a head appeared—the head of a baby Pileated Woodpecker! My pulse raced and I began firing off frames, but the fun had just begun. Soon, a second baby emerged next to the first. Five minutes later, I heard the raucous call of one of the parents as it swooped in to feed its young and right then, a third baby poked its head from the hole.

During the next half hour, I took more than a hundred photographs. In doing so, I not only obtained key images—including the cover shot—for my book *Woodpeckers: Drilling Holes & Bagging Bugs* (2018), I made important observations that would help me bring these fascinating subjects to life. It was an experience that captured the synergy between images and text in creating powerful science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) books for kids—a synergy I and many other writers rely on.

Photographic Beginnings

I am not the world’s greatest photographer. Back in my early days as a writer, I struggled to take a sharply-focused photo—never mind one with proper lighting and composition. In the early 1990s, however, I invested in a new autofocus camera with zoom and macro lenses. It was one of the smartest moves I ever made. Instantly, my photo quality took a giant leap and for the first time, I started thinking about writing not as an independent process, but as something integrated with attractive, informative images.

As an author, taking my own photos offers two advantages. First, I do not have to share my book royalties with an illustrator! More important, my photos influence and inform the topics I write about. When I decided to write *Sneed B. Collard III’s Most Fun Book Ever About Lizards* (2012), for instance, I wanted to introduce my topic by highlighting a typical lizard species under the heading “Meet Joe Lizard.” With more than six thousand lizard species scampering across the planet, however, how would I ever choose just one?

Photography played a vital role. Camera in hand, I began photographing western fence lizards around my home in southern California. I got great pictures of their brilliant blue side markings, camouflage, and even how they regrow their tails after being attacked. Knowing that I had these photographs helped guide my “Meet Joe Lizard” chapter with confidence because I knew that I could illustrate what I was writing about. Taking and studying the photos also raised new questions in my mind—questions that I had to answer through deeper research. As a result, the chapter ended up tightly choreographed, with the photos complementing the text. It also offered a better, more satisfying discussion for young readers because of the further research that the photographs inspired.
The Digital Age

After I moved to Montana, photography grew even more important to my work as, conveniently, camera equipment continued to improve. About five years ago, I decided I wanted to write a book about woodpeckers, and called a local woodpecker expert, Professor Richard Hutto ("Dick") at the University of Montana. I asked if he would be willing to take me out into the field to teach me about woodpeckers and he graciously agreed. Before going out with Dick, however, I knew that I would have to upgrade my camera equipment if I were to have any hope of photographing woodpeckers—or any other birds—for myself. Again, I took a deep breath and forked over thousands of dollars for a state-of-the-art digital camera with high-quality 100-400 mm lens.

Equipped and ready, I went hiking with Dick in a recent burn area near Missoula. Dick did indeed start teaching me about woodpeckers, but he also began telling me a fascinating story about how woodpeckers and dozens of other bird species depend on burned forests to survive. When a fire burns a forest, Dick explained, wood-boring beetles descend upon and lay their eggs in the dead wood. Soon, billions of beetle grubs are munching their way through the forest and for woodpeckers, this is the feast of a lifetime. Black-backed, Hairy, Three-toed, and other woodpeckers swoop into the forest and start gobbling up beetle grubs. As they do, they chisel out nesting and roosting holes for themselves in the burned trees. This, in turn, opens up the forest for chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, and other species that require tree cavities to nest in.

As soon as I heard this story, I set my woodpecker book plans aside and instead focused on the importance of forest fires to wildlife. Once again, being able to take my own photos made all the difference. New camera in hand, I was able to document Dick at work in the forest, the spectacular stages of plant regrowth after a burn, the harmful effects of so-called “salvage-logging,” and most important, the actual birds that thrive in the burned forest. All of this resulted in one of my most effective STEM books, *Fire Birds: Valuing Natural Wildfires and Burned Forests* (2015).

Could I have obtained these photos from other sources? Maybe, maybe not. Taking the photos myself, though, helped me write with more confidence. It strengthened my writing voice because I knew exactly what my words and the photographs would provide to the reader. Taking and using my own photos also helped me incorporate elements of personal observation and authority to the book that would otherwise have been a struggle.

Progress through Patience

But what about the woodpecker book that I mentioned at the beginning of this article? Well, though *Fire Birds* prolonged its release by three years, the delay proved to be highly beneficial. I had originally intended to buy many of the woodpecker photos I would need from other sources. While I was still working on *Fire Birds*, however, my eleven-year-old son, Braden, and I began actively pursuing birding as an activity. In 2016, we did a “Big Year,” trying to see how many bird species we could see in the United States and Canada in a calendar year. The next year, our family spent five weeks in Ecuador and Peru. The result? Braden and I together were able to observe and photograph more than two dozen species of woodpeckers. These
photographs did much more than illustrate woodpecker facts. They helped dictate the very shape of the book, helping me choose which topics and species to write about and, again, allowing me to write with the passion and enthusiasm that young readers deserve.

Reviewers’ favorite feature of Woodpeckers would not have happened at all without our photographic efforts. As I was selecting photos for the book, I lamented the fact that photos of certain species just did not make the grade, either because the birds were too far away or branches partially obscured their faces. Then, I had an idea. Why not add a Photo Bloopers spread and include some of the “bad” photos there? And that is exactly what I did. I wrote up an explanation of how difficult it is to photograph birds in the wild and short descriptions about the “blooper” species I included. This blooper feature has proved so popular that I plan to include it in future books, too.

Even with today’s incredible digital photographic equipment, taking publishable-quality photographs requires skill and patience. Every time I go out, I run up against limitations in my equipment and my abilities—things I must learn to work around. Photographing wildlife in particular takes patience, and for that reason, it’s important to plan ahead. I now think about STEM books three, four, five years in advance, knowing that it will take me time to locate and photograph the subjects I will need. As difficult as it can be, the effort is hugely rewarding. In my career, there are few things more satisfying than flipping through a book filled with both my words and pictures or those by my kids. Even better, I know that by taking my own photos, I am delivering a superior product to thousands of young readers whom I hope will become as excited about science and nature as I am.

References

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Sneed B. Collard III has written more than eighty award-winning books for young people, ranging from picture books to novels to science books. His recent STEM book, Hopping Ahead of Climate Change: Snowshoe Hares, Science, and Survival was a finalist for the AAAS/Subaru/SB&F Prize for Middle Grade Science, a Junior Library Guild selection, and a Eureka! silver medalist. He is also the co-author of Teaching Nonfiction Revision: A Professional Writer Shares Strategies, Tips, and Lessons (Heinemann, 2017). Sneed is a popular speaker at schools and offers a variety of entertaining assemblies, writing workshops, and professional development workshops. To learn more about him and his presentations, look up his website, www.sneedbcollardiii.com, or email him at collard@bigsky.net. Also check out and share the new birding and photography blog by Sneed and his son, Braden, at www.fathersonbirding.com.
Here in the East Bay Area of California, we have noticed that our students are so busy with school work and extracurricular activities they often do not have time for free choice reading. Our challenge is how to get a non-school issued book into the hands of our teens without overwhelming them. The six librarians in our three closely-knit towns came up with a plan: we collaborated to form a one-community, one-book teens read program.

The inaugural year of this successful program took careful planning among the three Contra Costa County librarians, the three teacher librarians at the local high schools, plus other library staff and high school teachers. In our area of California, we are lucky to have fully staffed libraries in our high schools and county library branches! The idea to reach out to more teens sprouted between my colleague, Geneva Moss, who runs the city of Moraga’s county library branch, and me, teacher librarian at Campolindo High School library in Moraga. She had run some fun after-school programs hosted in our high school library which prompted the idea that we should try and reach more students, not just the handful of students that came to those programs. She had done a one-town, one-book event with small children where they all read the same book. Many county libraries run programs like these to encourage reading across the community. We thought that we could try something like this for our teens and include their middle school siblings, their parents, and any other community members who wanted to be involved. Our sister communities agreed to partner with us on this, making it a tri-community-wide program.

The book selection process was fun. We all came to our first meeting, about nine months before the launch of our program, with three book ideas. We had reviews and summaries ready to share with our fellow librarians. After our persuasive pitch to the group about our chosen books, we narrowed the selections to four books. We took some time to read all four titles and created an online survey to ask some of our teens which book they thought would make the best community read. After much deliberation we chose the YA historical fiction novel *Salt to the Sea* by Ruta Sepetys (2016), which is about the single greatest tragedy at sea when more than 9,000 men, women, and children died in a wartime torpedo attack.

The fact that this book was being republished in paperback also helped our voting for it. Buying multiple copies in paperback meant we would be able to purchase more books to give to our community and teens. Some of our reasons for choosing this book included the appeal to teens and its connection to U.S. History themes in both the 8th grade and 11th grade curricula. Also, we knew we could plan programming around the themes found in the book that would appeal to our students and local history buffs. I contacted author Ruta Sepetys on her website and Twitter and she ended up Tweeting along with us the entire time we were planning and running our program. The students were starstruck that she “mentioned” us on several occasions!

Funding for such an event seemed doable because the county libraries receive donations from their Friends of the Library groups; however, our schools do not have that kind of unrestricted money to fund books and extra programs like this. So, I applied for, and received, a grant from the California Teachers Association’s Institute for Teaching (2018) to fund our program. Each year this special section of our teachers’ union provides over 100 grants for California teachers. With the award of a $5,000 grant, we were able to purchase about 500 paperback copies of the book, a few audio books, t-shirts, food for programmed events, and some money for venue fees, which we didn’t end up using due to the generosity of our county library community spaces.

Marketing for our event was free. Instagram and Twitter posts were easy and messages were easily reposted by my “friends” and “followers.” The local newspaper ran an article. Our city’s monthly mailer included our event. A local community member who runs the city’s iKind program printed flyers, posters, bookmarks, and stickers that we put on the cover of each book. We sent emails and placed blurbs in the daily school bulletin. Teachers made suggestions and promised to do a class book talk, which would include parents and pizza. Of course, word of mouth quickly spread, too. We had tremendous community spirit with 50 people beyond the school community participating and we did manage to make a new handful of students excited about the prospect of reading a book for fun.

By coming together with my like-minded librarian colleagues we created a much-loved school-wide and/or family-wide conversation about literature. I encourage you to do the same! Reach out to your city and county librarians. Their expertise and view of the community- and its needs - will open your eyes to what more you can do.
SARAH MORGAN

Sarah Morgan is a long time California educator. She began her career teaching 5th grade in the Central Valley and is now located in the East Bay Area. She is the teacher librarian at Campolindo High School in Moraga, CA. She is also a member of the adjunct faculty at Fresno Pacific University and a doctoral student at Grand Canyon University. She plans on coordinating many one community, one book programs for years to come.
In January 2018, I worked with middle school students to write a Donors Choose Student-Led Project grant (DonorsChoose, 2018). Within a week of teaching a grant-writing lesson to the middle school students, I was asked by several high school students if they could write a grant too. I shared the student-led project form and six young men have completed their own grant applications. Several wanted comfortable seating for their classrooms. Myckel designed a Reading Nook, including a lava lamp for his project! We have a program that focuses on African and African American history, so Demere wanted to add new books. (He also asked me if there is a way to write a grant for him to start his own business, so I am researching internships for him!)

The students at this school have many challenges. I am amazed and excited by their enthusiasm, creativity, and energy in writing student grants for their classes.

Middle School Grant-Writing Lesson

- The rationale for middle school research lesson: Life skills and writing
- My specific student learning objectives: Verbal participation
- What I hoped or expected students to do or say: Ideas for their classroom, confidence in their ideas

I reviewed the lesson and had five or six samples of items (printed from Amazon) that students might like for the classroom. I had briefly met with students the week before and felt that they needed some concrete examples. I wrote three grant prompts on chart paper and included space for grant items and for the grant title. Students were asked to identify their need, the resources necessary to fill a need, and why it was important to their school. Students also had the Donors Choose student form to read and take notes as they discussed the grant-writing process.

Students used oral skills as well as critical thinking. They developed the various parts of the grant which includes a description of the students, the project, and what the donations will fund. They were able to articulate a clear plan, make choices of furniture for each grant and were thinking of other ideas for future grants. Letting students come up with grant ideas then write the grant puts students first. Their needs vary and this gives them a chance to voice specific interests.

The students finished two grants in one 45-minute class period! They were excited about selecting comfortable furniture for their class. When the question came up, “what if the grant is not funded?” one student replied he would have to re-read and rewrite it!

Brief Guidelines for Writing Student-Led Grants with Donors Choose

As you begin planning for a grant, develop a description “snapshot” of your class. Here is the description I start with and then add or subtract, depending on the grant.

Our school serves school students grades 7 through 12 and is located one block from City Hall. Students live in many areas of the city. For the most at-risk students, those with habitual truancy, significant behavior issues, and histories of suspension and expulsion, the goal is to change behavior so that these students will stay in school and earn enough credits to graduate. This year we are creating a series of classes for “life skills” where students can choose projects and activities that include history, science, literacy, and art. Grant-writing helps students to be clear about the descriptions of what they want, how they will be leaders, and why the class needs these chairs.

Students Start with What They Want

- “The current chairs in our class are hard and uncomfortable. They hurt my back.”
- “I will be able to relax in comfortable chairs.”
- “We would like to get two bean bag chairs and two Lil Duo chairs for our classroom because we only have old, hard chairs now.”
- “I will help the class take turns sitting in the new chairs.”
- “If any of the new chairs or bean bags get dirty I will clean them off.”
• “We will let all the students in our class take turns and use these new bean bag chairs and soft chairs.”
• “We really, really don’t like to sit in the old, hard chairs and it makes it difficult for me to focus in class.”
• “These will be better chairs and then we will have a choice of which chair to sit in while we work.”
• “When I am comfortable I can focus better on class work.”

Successful Grants This Semester

• Comfortable Chairs Help Me Focus $239
• C is for Couch $228

Current Student-Written Grants Waiting for Funding:

• Manhood Project-African American History Books $168

When we get the books I will take advantage of all these books. I will take heed for my learning experiences. All the students need these books because it teaches us something different in history and expands our mind.

• We Need A Couch! $273

We need a reading area so we can read and chill. And then our class will be famous for our couch and graphic novels on our bookshelf.

• Our Comfortable Classroom $621

I am trying to accomplish that we get a comfortable couch and bigger bean bag chairs. We were lucky that someone donated some bean bags but we are a high school and need bigger bean bags! We need a couch for our circle so we can be relaxed when we talk in the circle.

• Reading Nook $471

We need something that brings the whole class together in a positive way. Also it is very, very uncomfortable to sit on the old, broken, wooden chairs in our classroom. It will be very, very relaxing to be able to sit on comfortable seats when we are trying to chill. –Myckel

Useful links for Donors Choose

Donors Choose Student-Led Project-https://www.donorschoose.org/students

Reference


KAY E. HONES

Kay Hones has been a teacher librarian in the San Francisco Unified School District since 1987. Currently she works in three continuation high school libraries each week. She is a National Board Certified teacher, working as a support provider for National Board candidates at Stanford and as an adjunct professor, teaching master's candidates at National University. She was the first teacher librarian to receive a “20 to Watch” award in 2008 from the National School Boards Association.
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