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Looking for ways to create a dynamic school library program that does not place boundaries on the learning lives of students, this paper explores the role of the school librarian as an essential link between students and teachers in schools and the learning environments in the community beyond. Building from John Dewey's arguments that waste in education is due to isolation and that once children begin to attend school, they are required to set aside "the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in [the] home and neighborhood," as well as David Carr's vision of the school library as the cultural institution that resides within the school, this paper's goals are: to describe an alternative approach to the school library program; to illustrate connections and learning experiences with cultural institutions within the community and beyond; and to develop the image of the school library as a cultural institution itself.

Headings:

Museum-Library Relations

School Librarianship – Aims and Objectives

School Libraries – Lifelong Learning

School Libraries – Independent Learning

THE KEYSTONE CONNECTION:
DEVELOPING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AS A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

by
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Many thanks to Pam Munoz Ryan who graciously granted permission for the use of her poem as one the thematic devices in the paper.

Introduction

Looking for ways to create a dynamic school library program that does not place boundaries on the learning lives of students, this paper explores the role of the school librarian as an essential link between students and teachers in schools and the learning environments in the community beyond. Building from John Dewey's arguments that waste in education is due to isolation (78) and that once children begin to attend school, they are required to set aside "the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in [the] home and neighborhood," (89) as well as David Carr's vision of the school library as the cultural institution that resides within the school (*Horizons*, 220), this paper's goals are: to describe an alternative approach to the school library program; to illustrate connections and learning experiences with cultural institutions within the community and beyond; and to develop the image of the school library as a cultural institution itself.

This paper seeks to show that school librarians are uniquely positioned to function as intermediaries between the school and the community and have the potential to create environments where students can fuse together the required learning that goes on in schools with learning that is driven by individual interest. It also seeks to develop a new lens through which to view the profession and the school library, and to suggest a program that will be more inspiring and relevant in the lives of students, that will prepare them better for success in post-secondary education, and that will have more influence on their lives in the community as lifelong learners.

The form of inquiry this paper will use is an exploration of selected scholarly works and an integration of theory derived from those works into a description of a professional practice for the school library program.

Rationale

My studies in library school began with an intense focus on archives and, by extension, cultural institutions. I learned about amazing collections of pulp fiction, comic book art, vintage tobacco and soap advertisements, first editions of Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* and saw the handwriting of Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain, hand-made marbled endpapers, and even vintage chocolate bars hidden away like treasures, rarely unearthed except by scholars. In archives and rare book libraries, as I walked through opulent reading rooms, the echoes of my heels reminded me that there aren't very many people present to be disturbed by my boisterous shoes. The very air in these grand spaces smells of centuries; voices seem to murmur from books wishing to tell someone new their stories. Just the fact of being in a library or archives or museum makes one a time-traveler in many ways and in the presence of such works I follow my thoughts back to childhood, which was rather bereft of cultural exposure, not by any lack of institutions in my area but by lack of opportunities to visit and learn in such places.

It is only as a graduate student that I know about cultural institutions and the treasures they hold. And it is only now that I know that these places were made for me and these collections assembled for my use, as they are for every person. I ponder and feel sorry for myself: "What if as a child I had known such places existed? What if I had known that there were archives? What if I had been taken to special collections libraries, botanical gardens, and museums? What if someone had told me that these were places

meant for me to use, that the people who work here want to help me? What if someone had shown me ways to use the materials in the collection and how to think about them? How much different would I be now? How much better would I be able to make connections, find information, and conduct thoughtful research? How much more excited would I be about learning? How much more likely would I be a lifelong learner?

Concerned that today's kids might be missing out on the same things I did and intrigued by the potential of the school library to open these doors for students to archives, special libraries, museums, and other institutions of the kind, I turned my efforts to the library that resides in the school. As I found myself unexpectedly again walking hallways and lurking around in school libraries, I started to get the feeling that something special was missing. Awash in technology, information skills, reading programs, curriculum alignment, and struggles to convince teachers of the necessity to collaborate, neither school libraries nor the field's literature seemed to look very often toward communities and cultural institutions as partners in the effort to nurture the learner and provide meaningful situations for the child to ask questions, look for treasures, and find stories relevant to his own life.

Yet, by looking at research conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, every year museums and other cultural institutions increase the amount of resources they devote toward creating programs directed at K-12 students (*Survey*, 4). Such surveys imply that the opportunities are there. No one in the school could be better situated than the librarian to take advantage of those opportunities, form alliances with the cultural institutions in the community, and pool resources to create a learning

environment full of inspiring experiences that could make not only classroom learning pertinent to the lives of students but also foster the wonder of the independent learner.

The school library is a temporary cultural institution in the lives of students. However, the museums, the public libraries, the botanical gardens, the special collection libraries, the archives, and other cultural institutions are permanent. They serve not only the K-12 student but the individual in all walks and all stages of life. In this paper I will describe the unspoken duty of school librarians to ensure that their students experience community cultural institutions, know how to use them, and have opportunities to engage in the wonder that these places afford. The student's experience with these institutions should extend naturally from their experience with the school library into worlds where the voices of slaves speak aloud, where love letters from WWII soldiers to their cherished ones are read, where 35 different kinds of rosemary are smelled, where a Calder mobile swings from the sky, and where the vintage candy bars are kept, but not eaten.

Methodology

This paper is an exploration into a way of school librarianship that is rather bereft of research or literature. A literature review explores pertinent perspectives of the role of the school librarian and the school library; classic and modern educational theories; theories of museum education; and the origins and developments of thought in lifelong learning.

Building upon the research, the latter portion of the paper explores the role of the school librarian as connection between school and cultural institutions. It examines the need to develop the idea of the school library as cultural institution and provide a place where formal education is balanced with education that enables lifelong learning. Finally, this paper suggests many ways a school librarian can weave the idea of the school library as a vital member of both the school and of the cultural institution community into the fabric of what is considered the best practices of school librarianship.

In this paper, I have intentionally reverted to the old-school label of school librarian rather than media specialist. My personal belief is that the term media specialist strips the position of the ideals of librarianship and creates the sense that the media specialist is something other than a librarian. It seems to cast the school librarian position in a light that suggests it is unequal and does not belong to the group of contemporary positions of university and public librarians, museum professionals, and other cultural institution members.

The main concepts in this paper focus on the school library, cultural institutions, and independent education in an effort to allow students to create themselves as lifelong learners. The meanings of these terms are explored within the context of the scope of this paper.

School Library. In the lives of many students, the school library may be the friendly (or lonely) place where the books are, where stories are read aloud, where email is checked, the Web surfed, and where materials are gotten for homework assignments. *Information Power* affirms that it is the place for “creating a foundation for lifelong learning” by using information literacy standards (AASL, 1) and that its mission is to “ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information” (6). *Information Power* continues to helpfully spell out information literacy standards in terms of indicators, levels of proficiency, and standards in action. In “Living on One’s Own Horizon,” David Carr invites us to consider the school library from a more liberated perspective with a thoughtful proposal that “libraries are places where learners are destined to become free to live on their own horizons; they are our most lasting institutions for the exploration of possible worlds” (220). He explains that in the school library “multiple realities can be discovered, expressed, and grasped” and in this place students can “look at anything for as long as necessary and as deeply as necessary in order to get lost, find a useful way, and make it into a path for the mind” (220).

Could we not equally apply Carr’s definition of the school library to that of the cultural institution? I believe so, and certainly, Carr does as he refers to the school library as the cultural institution that lies within the school (220).

Cultural Institution. A good museum, as with a cultural institution (and often these terms can be used interchangeably), “attracts, entertains, arouses curiosity, leads to questioning and thus promotes learning,” wrote John Cotton Dana, an early voice for the partnerships between schools and museums, in 1916 (*Bridges*, Hein).

Looking again to Carr, he offers an insightful definition of a cultural institution that determines the technical:

1. The presence of a collection
2. A systematic, continuous, organized, knowledge structure
3. Scholarship, information, and thought (*Promise*, xiv-xv)

and reaches into the deeper meaning that “...cultural institutions are places *to hold* and preserve objects and texts, *to expand* the boundaries of public knowledge associated with these artifacts and world and *to open* the possibilities of learning in the contexts of everyday life” (*Promise*, xiii).

For the student, “the cultural institution, whatever its form, assists the free explorer of the emerging senses. It does this without external evaluations, impersonal curricula, artificial boundaries, constraining agendas, or ringing bells. This informality permits serendipitous discoveries and unplanned knowing to change the learner’s mind” (*Horizons*, 220).

Independent Learning. The term independent learning, often used interchangeably with terms such as informal, self-directed, or free-choice learning, is key in the development of lifelong learning skills. In “Libraries and Librarians in the 21st Century: Fostering a Learning Society”, IMLS director Robert S. Martin explains that is only recently in the history of education that we have come to believe that learning can

happen only in such rigid structures as the public school. In truth, “we learn in three different sectors. We learn in the school. We learn in the workplace. And we learn in the home and community”. Learning in the home and community, he tells us, is what has become known as free choice learning (669).

This type of learning, the kind that is inclined to happen during visits to museums and other cultural institutions, while watching television, listening to the stories of relatives, and ideally can be combined with more structured learning in the school library, “tends to be nonlinear, is personally motivated, and involves considerable choice on the part of the learner as what to learn, as well as where and when to participate in learning” (*Museums*, Falk, x).

The early evolution of independent learning has been shaped by such education philosophers as Rousseau, Hebart, Pestalozzi, and, perhaps most significantly, John Dewey. In 1975, Malcolm Knowles added his voice to the ranks with *Self-Directed Learning*. A leading figure in adult education in the second half of the twentieth century, Knowles described his view of an individually motivated style of learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (18). Knowles echoes Dewey when he asserts that this style of self-directed learning does not happen in isolation but is a result of collaboration between learners and their teachers, mentors, and other learning helpers.

With his work in adult education and self-directed learning, Knowles was a founding voice for what is known as lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning. Intrinsicly linked to the notion of independent learning is the concept of lifelong learning. In the education community, one might come across this term in nearly every conversation. But what does it mean really?

While the idea of lifelong learning could be traced back to the times of Plato, it was first fully described early in the twentieth century by Basil Yeaxlee as well as Eduard Lindeman. In an article describing the origins of lifelong learning, Mark Smith quotes from the conclusion of the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction held in 1919 which included Yeaxlee and other influential adult education scholars of the time, “adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.”

Lindeman points out in 1926 that “the whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings. This new venture is called adult education not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity, defines its limits” (4-5).

Over the years, this early concept of adult education gradually emerged into lifelong education and, finally, into lifelong learning. And, if the literature and the voices of educators are to be trusted, is one of the main aims of the K-12 educational institutions today.

In *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi presents lifelong learning as a mechanism for freedom. He proposes that “ideally, the end of extrinsically applied education should be the start of an education that is motivated intrinsically...it is to understand what is happening around one, to develop a personally

meaningful sense of what one's experience is all about. From that will come the profound joy of the thinker" (141-142).

Literature and Movement Review

If truth be told, there is not much in the literature to help the school librarian who is attempting to expand the interpretation of the school library's mission to include forming lifelong learning connections between students and the cultural institutions within the community. However, one can find a great deal of information about the efforts of and collaborations between museums, archives, public libraries, and other cultural institutions striving to provide educational support and programs to the schools. So far, school libraries have not been included in these collaborative relationships or have not yet stepped up to the plate to get involved. There is very little experience shared in our publications for school librarians extending the library and its collection beyond the physical boundaries of the school to incorporate the diverse holdings in the community's cultural institutions that exist to serve students.

In the last decade or so, we have seen a great increase in the educational outreach programs from cultural institutions to the schools. Simply by taking a look at projects funded by Institute of Museum and Library Services grants one can see evidence of this trend. In 2004, IMLS granted funds to: the American Clock and Watch Museum in Bristol, Connecticut for the expansion of their programs, which included the creation of a teacher's advisory committee to develop curriculum-based tours; the Cascade County Historical Museum to create a mobile museum to take exhibits and programming information to students in rural schools that are rarely able to visit a museum; the Fort Worth Public Library, coordinating with art organizations and a story-tellers' guild, to

bring the richness of local history to students in classrooms by teaching them to tell their own stories about local art and artifacts; and many other cultural institutions reaching out to inspire students and teachers and their shared classrooms.

The idea that schools and cultural institutions are natural partners is not a new one. John Cotton Dana, an early advocate for making libraries and museums more amenable to the general public, initiated school lending programs in the Newark Museum. He regarded museums as “educational institution[s] set up and kept in motion—that [they] may help the members of the community to become happier, wiser, and more effective.” In an article written in 1916 and recently republished in *The New Museum: Selected Writings of John Cotton Dana*, he imagined “school museums” that would develop collections that would be available for loan to schools that were closely tied to the curriculum, assembled by museum staff closely collaborating with schools and teachers. He envisioned extensions of the museums popping up in many accessible locals, including the school (*Bridges*, Hein).

Working at much the same time as Dana and with many of the same principles -- but on the school side of the equation--John Dewey fostered a movement and philosophy that emphasized learning through experience, free from strict subject boundaries. Not only did his students at the Chicago Laboratory School visit the Columbian Field Museum each week but he also envisioned in *School and Society* a school designed around the library and the school’s own museum. Dewey saw the museum providing experiences to complement the information in books, which is “all important in interpreting and expanding experience” but “harmful as a substitute for experience” (Dewey, 100). Dewey points out in *Experience and Education* that in schools books are

primarily used as “the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material” (327). Instead of imposing learning from above and from the outside, he argues that the teacher act more as a guide to the student, preparing real experiences (such as those a student might encounter in a museum or other cultural institution) rather than relying solely on information in books. These experiences would “have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems...by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment” (355).

Educational experiences do not only take place in schools and are not only designed by teachers, as Cremin points out in *Public Education*. He defines education “as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort” (27) in which there is a “multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate” (29) beyond schools including libraries and museums as well as family, church, radio stations, and uncountable others.

Howard Gardner’s vision of education reflects Dewey’s perspective that students deserve experiences that allow them to “explore rich environments and to play out their emerging understandings in meaningful contexts” (Gardner, 252). He delightfully suggests enrolling students in museums instead of, or in addition to, schools in *The Unschooled Mind*. He proposes that “while schools have become increasingly anachronistic...museums have retained the potential to engage students, to teach them, to stimulate their understanding, and, most important, to help them assume responsibility for their own future learning” (202).

Preceding the movement of the past decade to form educational alliances between schools and cultural institutions, in 1984 Hilda L. Jay and M. Ellen Jay wrote a book entitled, *Developing Library-Museum Partnerships to Serve Young People*. This work is an early champion for museum and library collaborations that serve students. It acts as a primer for these types of joint ventures and addresses creating museum programming that approaches curricular needs in the schools. It even suggests listing items from the museum's collection in the library's card catalog, which serves as an example of extending collection beyond physical boundaries and spaces.

In the early 1990's, David Carr began publishing articles that thoughtfully examined the relationship between cultural institutions and the learner. Of particular influence on this paper is his article "Living on One's Own Horizon: Cultural Institutions, School Libraries, and Lifelong Learning." In this article, Carr examines the need for cultural institutions and libraries, particularly school libraries, to provide places for students to ask questions, explore their wonder, and use information that is relevant to the context of their own lives, free from the constraints of impersonal curricula. While a school library must support a school's curriculum, it also has an obligation to the student to provide opportunities to explore topics that exist beyond those boundaries. He approaches the school library as intermediary setting existing between the goals and functions of the school and a cultural institution, addressing the school library as the cultural institution that lies within the school and stressing that "...librarians in schools have a particularly important challenge to demonstrate the library as an empowering link to a world of experience, thought, and information that lies well outside the school" (*Horizons*, 220).

In *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, John Falk and Lynn Dierking explore the notion of free choice learning as it happens not just in the museum but in a variety of experiences and places. "Learning is at its peak when individuals can exercise choice over what and when they learn and feel that they control their own learning." This book builds a contextual model of learning that is constantly ebbing and flowing through time being influenced by personal contexts, physical contexts, and socio-cultural contexts. By looking at the way learners learn and how their individual learning experiences are shaped, this book creates a framework for museums to make learning meaningful through exhibits, programs, and other educational opportunities in a way that will help visitors make sense of their worlds.

Another contributor to the annals of museum education is George Hein. In *Learning in the Museum*, he draws upon the works of education philosophers such as John Dewey to examine ways that museums can provide environments, experiences, and exhibits that are relevant to learners both physically and intellectually, as they individually construct their own knowledge. Hein's work challenges museum professionals to consider their exhibits and collections from a constructivist perspective and ask themselves questions about what has been built into a museum experience that fosters discussion, opportunities for reflection, contains attractions for different sorts of learners, and challenges learners to grow just beyond their intellectual comfort levels.

The Majesty, the School Librarian: The Keystone Connection

*A library is a temple,
Which abodes the priceless treasure.
Librarians are the majesties,
Who loan the jewels of measure.
They welcome to the kingdom
The young and old of reapers
And reign among the riches
As wondrous keystone keepers.*

This poem by Pam Munoz Ryan, a celebrated children's author of such stories as *Esperanza Rising*, written for her children's school librarian upon retirement and presented at an American Association of School Librarians in October 2003, paints an image that captures the potential magic and wonder that a school librarian can cultivate for students in the library. This image of majesty is rather more pleasant than the less appealing impression conjured up in a candid appraisal made by one middle school student quoted in *The Digital Disconnect*. Preferring to use the Internet to research poetry than to consult with her school librarian, she said that the Internet "made looking for ... poems a whole lot easier than having to go up to some strange librarian who was enjoying her Diet Coke and would do just about anything to get these people out of the library to go on her break. The Internet is like having a virtual librarian minus the bad attitude and [bad] breath" (Minkel, 29).

While most school librarians probably do not see themselves as unfriendly soda pop-drinking recluses with unattractive attitudes and breath and would relish the opportunity to help this student in her poetry-seeking endeavors, what do such comments

say about the perceptions that students may have of the school library and their “majesties,” the school librarian? Statements such as this one and Mary Chelton’s finding that many post-elementary school librarians primarily focus on rules and checking passes rather than assisting students positively with information questions (99), remind us that school librarians must be constantly mindful to make the school library—at all grade levels—not just an inviting place to explore that vast array of resources and tools available to our students, but also relevant in their lives now and in the future.

School librarians have long struggled to define and stress the importance of their role in the school to students, to teachers, to principals, to parents, and, perhaps, in some instances, even to themselves. Trying to create a balance of technology and curriculum with information skills and pleasure reading, it could be very easy to lose sight of the marvel that a school library can pass on to students and teachers as expressed in Ryan’s poem by creating: rich collections that draw upon other institution collections; experiences that invite students to go beyond their comfort levels; and an environment that welcomes a student to linger and think awhile.

Good libraries, like the good classrooms described in Frank Smith’s *To Think*, “make thinking possible and worthwhile, because imaginations can run free” and abound in “interesting topics and event to think about” (127). By welcoming students and teachers into a kingdom of information riches that stretches further than the school library’s collections and walls and into the community in which they live and learn, school librarians can take on a role in the life of the school that does not exist in isolation: in forty minute class trips to the library or five minute rushes to check out a book for

homework or pleasure reading. Such isolated acts have little chance of opening the doors of inquiry that lead students to finding new meaning in the worlds available to them.

This line of thought echoes Carr's charge that "librarians in schools have a particularly important challenge to demonstrate the library as an empowering link to a world of experience, thought, and information that lies well outside the school" (*Horizons*, Carr, 220). But this statement also holds two other important keys for the school librarian seeking to connect students to experiences that free them to ask their own questions. "Librarians in schools" helps remind us that we are librarians first and serve the function of the school second. As a librarian, we function to help our users, the students, explore and find the information that addresses their individual needs, whether or not it is aligned with a mandated curriculum. The other important keyword in this statement is "empowering". Empowering goes hand in hand with being a librarian first and foremost, particularly in school setting where students may feel helpless and restrained from exploring topics, perspectives, and ideas that are relevant to themselves.

Leading students to paths of discovery that will inspire the lifelong learner in them cannot happen in isolation. The school itself, if not collaborating openly with the community in educating students, can very often be isolated from the events that are shaping its students. The library in the school can find itself even more isolated if it is not actively engaged in forging avenues for students to a variety of learning experiences. Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Robert S. Martin proposes that "if we can posit that librarians, archivists, and museum professionals are not separate and

distinct professions, but rather different facets of single unified profession, we will find that our ability to serve the needs of our communities is strengthened” (670).

Are we, as school librarians, isolated from this group, better able to serve our community of students on our own or might we not be able to find a way to create a more important impact on our students by considering ourselves keystone members in the group of cultural institutions as well as the school? What if we share a common goal to create environments and situations to allow students and learners to learn both formally and informally?

The School Library as Cultural Institution

*A library is a temple,
Which abodes the priceless treasure.*

By viewing the school library as a member of the community of cultural institutions, we open ourselves to an opportunity to show students and teachers that the resources and services we offer extend much farther than a roomful of books and computers located somewhere within the school. While students may leave us behind in a few years, school librarians have the ability to open doors for them through which they may constantly return as they progress through situations when new information and deeper meanings are required. These doors can lead not only to pre-selected resources that support a school's curriculum and information skills to develop expert seekers, finders, and users of information and technology, but also to other worlds where information can be discovered and knowledge cultivated. These should be seen as environments that encourage the asking of questions, tell stories from a variety of perspectives, and create meaning in a unique life. But first we must strive to create that environment ourselves in our own school libraries, which hold the keys to these doors and find a way to make it meaningful, important, and relevant to students.

In Carr's article "Living on One's Own Horizon," he stresses that "At their best, cultural institutions and schools are both settings that can nurture the intellect, both places where new messages can be heard... and they can inspire the flow of knowledge among generations" (219) and "...cultural institutions are the only environments existing primarily to nurture life on the horizons of one own thoughts. They are places for

conducting inquiry, incubating the tentative, experimenting with critical thoughts, exploring information without the mediation of a teacher, and testing one's own limits as a learner outside the reach of a school" (218).

As teachers lose more and more of their freedom to support students in a journey of spontaneous inquiry due to the pressures of standardized testing, it becomes even more important that the school library maintains and develops an atmosphere for students following the path of their own question, trailing wonder, and discovering the new. This does not mean ignoring school library's mission to support curriculum; it means that we provide alternatives and sideroads that allow students to find out more than the correct answer and ways to relate this new information to their own lives. While this may have traditionally been the purpose of museums, public libraries, and other cultural institutions that lie outside of school walls, we must remember that students need a way to get there, not just physically but mentally and foster this spirit of learning as a norm rather than an exception. We must begin to think of the school library as a blend of school and cultural institution that provides a path to unrestrained inquiry and free-choice learning that complements what the students are required to learn in their classrooms and propels them in directions that expand and eliminate their limits.

While we work together with teachers to reach their goals, it is important for the school librarian to help students realize that learning goes on everywhere and is not limited to a classroom with the teacher dictating information to be learned. Learning can happen in other contexts and at the student's will. One way to foster this idea that will help in the creation of a lifelong learner and strengthen inquiry and awareness of independent learning opportunities is by creating alliances with the community's cultural

institutions, drawing upon their resources, programs, and alternative learning experiences, and becoming a member of their group.

There is no question that in the past decade especially, museums and other cultural institutions have been reaching out to the schools to form alliances. Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Robert S. Martin in “Libraries and Librarians,” argues to his audience of museum and library professionals that “the responsibility for learning is not and should not be the exclusive preserve of formal education institutions. It is a community-wide responsibility. Lifelong learning should be a continuum—with formal and nonformal learning opportunities complementing one another. Learning does not start at the schoolroom door, and it does not stop there either” (670). He asserts “...we need to go beyond our now-traditional notions of ‘education’ and embrace a bold new vision of learning. We need to think beyond our institutional boxes and develop a seamless infrastructure for learning across social agencies and organizations that create, maintain, and provide access to resources that support learning” (671).

As museums and cultural institutions reach out to share their resources with schools and invite teachers and students to enrich their learning lives with programs, exhibits, and experiences that include real-life artifacts from the past and present, perspectives not told in textbooks, and tangible marvels that can turn rote learning in the classroom into a significant experience and memory that influences the life of the student, is it only up to individual teachers in isolation to be aware of these resources available to them and find ways to take advantage of these benefits for the students in their own classroom? Martin continues on to stress that “as we move forward in this 21st

century...We need to develop facilities that recognize, embrace, and encourage the collaborative and social nature of learning. We must create learning environments that empower student learning, enabling them to turn information into knowledge. We must extend these lessons from the realm of the university to all levels of formal education, from kindergarten to the research university” (671).

We are strategically positioned, as school librarians, to facilitate the entry of students and teachers to this world of information and cultural resources that our communities are endeavoring to provide to the schools. Being aware of what is available in our community through cultural institutions, establishing relationships, and providing opportunities for collaborative learning situations should not be left to the harried devices of singular teachers, but seen as part of our collection development process, programming, and overall mission.

Though students are provided with learning opportunities that provide a hands-on experience that extend beyond the walls of school more often in the elementary school by the time they reach the middle and high schools, they are trapped in classrooms. Figures from the *True Needs, True Partners* IMLS study show that elementary school students, and, particularly fourth graders, are the most often served in museum programs. Integrating the real life experiences and resources that cultural institutions have to offer students to give meaning and excitement to their learning, though, should not be a “special occasion,” but tend towards the norm. It should not cease or become a rarified event once a student has graduated from elementary school...might this not give the student the impression that the learning that goes on in cultural institutions is not deemed useful or beneficial to them anymore? As a student graduates to higher levels of learning

and prepares for a life in the university and community, these institutions should become even more relevant to their intellectual lives. Do students know how to use a library with a Library of Congress classification system, a college special collection library, or even know what an archives is? Do they know they can and how to use a museum, a botanical garden, or a historical society for their research or to follow up on an interest? Where do they learn how to ask questions, how to learn, and how to find and use information in these places, if not magically? As a partner between the schools and these lifelong cultural institutions, the responsibility cannot lie solely with the student or the classroom teacher. As a trained professional, exploring the answers to these questions resides well within the school librarian's area of expertise.

Perhaps, the school librarian's bible, *Information Power*, hints at this responsibility by advising that "authentic learning for today's student is not bound by the textbook, the classroom, the school library, or the school. By linking students with the unlimited learning opportunities available throughout the learning community, the school library program provides a bridge between formal, school-based learning and independent lifelong learning" (122).

Through the lens of viewing the school library as a cultural institution, just one of many in the community, and that it belongs to a group that includes museums, archives, public libraries, gardens, parks, zoos as well as belonging to the school, the school library can broaden its horizons, make itself more relevant and vastly more interesting...to teachers, to students, to principals, to the community, to the parents, and, I suspect, to the school librarian.

What Can A School Librarian Do? Creating a Kingdom

*And reign among the riches
As wondrous keystone keepers.*

Creating a school library kingdom that communicates the riches that the many worlds of learning may be no easy task but is sure to be exciting for everyone it affects: the students, the teachers, the school at large, the community, and even the “royal majesty,” the school librarian.

When thinking about ways that we can revolutionize the school library and develop it as a cultural institution that begins in the school and branches out into the community, it bodes well to remember that “schools have no boundaries. The ‘library’ is not a place; rather, library is everywhere. This means that school library media specialists should not be cloistered within the walls of the library and within the constraints of scheduled library time. Beyond the school environment students will need to make library skills part of their daily lives” (Lowe 31).

Environment.

The school library should first and foremost be an inviting place for students to spend time wondering. If we expect to open doors for students, ours should always be open.

When students enter our shared kingdom, they should feel welcome and like it might nice to stay awhile. Provide alternatives to institutionalized seating. Wouldn't you rather seat yourself in a scruffy, overstuffed chair or stretch out on a colorful rug with a bright cushion than sit upright in an institutional chair? Plan for both formal and

informal areas that can accommodate the individual learner as well as learners in groups and classes. Find places and outlets where the overhead fluorescent lighting can be supplemented with the softer, golden light from table and floor lamps.

Fill your kingdom with specimens from the natural world that invite investigation: plants, fresh flowers, terrariums, tiny living creatures, planets, and galaxies. Create a mobile of hand-made butterflies swirling to the sky and a trail of shiny beetles marching across the wall. Cover the walls with framed pictures, posters, and maps that inspire questions and further research.

Let your imagination run wild, but thoughtfully. While your students should be surrounded with numerous and ever-changing options for exploration and there should always be something different, something new to excite questions and stimulate free-inquiry, make sure that, just as in a well-organized and attentive cultural institution, there are tools at hand to help the learner follow his or her question: plaques describing the item and provide context, books and websites for more information, pamphlets, informational handouts, etc.

Mark your sections well. Post big signs that guide students toward fiction, biographies, and other topics. Don't just leave it at that. Post teasers and notes all over library that highlight special items in that section, that ask questions that lead to students to make connections, and that suggest other resources that invite them to other areas of the collection, the librarian, or other information source.

Many elementary school libraries have comfort areas, plants, and animals to arouse the students but it is important that junior high and high school students have these

special features in their school libraries as well. We all take joy and feel inspired in a delightful atmosphere, not just younger children.

A Collection of Cultural Institutions.

Create your own museum. Designate an area, even a corner as the school museum. Like all good museums, the exhibits should change frequently and provide contextual information to the items on display. This area can showcase the history of the school's football team, images of graduating classes over the years, a natural history display of fossil, rocks, and minerals, or an interactive exhibit of simple but revolutionary inventions. Encourage students and teachers to bring in their own collections for presentation in the school museum. Work with local museums and other cultural institutions to arrange for collections that may be available for loan for a special feature.

Develop an art gallery. Set aside a wall or an area in the library for artwork that is also curated. The artwork in the gallery could not only feature the works of art classes and collections of works by individual students but also local artists may enthusiastically respond to your offer to display their works and to arrange for them to make a special visit to discuss the work and the practice of being an artist.

Grow a garden. Work with a nearby botanical garden or a local gardening expert to create a botanical garden. While this project could take place anywhere on school grounds, ideally, the garden would be just outside an accessible library exit and include benches and areas for students to enjoy a natural area.

Construct your own special collection. Separated from the main body of the collection, a special collection can offer students an opportunity to explore in-depth a particular genre or them. While a collection of state-related books may facilitate

classroom studies and projects, collections of vintage children books or graphic novels and comic books may capture the independent interest of students.

Not just book exhibits...interactive or value-added exhibits. Get the books out of those dusty, old, and often, locked glass cases (use those for the museum) and set up accessible book exhibits that actually invite students to pick up the book, thumb through it, and check it out. Have some knowledge about what is on display and include summary and reader recommendation cards. Complement non-fiction books with hands-on items that a student can handle and manipulate. Provide leads to additional information and other items that may interest the student. The school library's exhibits do not need to be confined to the library but can find places for themselves all over the school.

A lot of thought is invested in making a museum, a botanical garden, an art gallery an attractive, compelling, and constantly evolving experience. The school library should reflect these qualities.

Publications.

Website. These days one of the first places a student goes for information is the Internet. A school library must have a website. The website should be constantly updated reflecting what new items have been added to the collection, what is on exhibit in the museum and art gallery, and what special events will be taking place, and what guests will be visiting the library in the weeks to come. The website should also be a virtual portal to local cultural institutions and for quality information on the Internet. Begin a collection of great websites that complement the curriculum and are interesting sources of information. Annotate these websites so that teachers and students know what

they can expect to find and how to use the site. Create online pathfinders that include both websites and materials from your collection as well as those from the public library and other nearby cultural institutions for those big projects that come up year after year in classes.

Publish a newsletter. The newsletter can contain much of the same material as the website, noting special events and new acquisitions. Mail it home to parents, make it available in the library and other areas in the school, and create a subscription service that allows it to be sent via email.

Advertise. Advertise your special events and exhibits all over the school with posters and brochures, articles and press releases in the school and local newspapers, messages over daily announcements and in fliers that go home to parents and teachers.

Partnerships.

Teachers. From the very beginning of the school year, school librarians must find out what teachers have planned for the upcoming year and visit them regularly to learn what has changed and what they have going on in their classrooms and keep track. Often times, unless they need a group of books assembled around a particular theme, need a video arranged, or have a technical problem, they won't consult with the school librarian or ask for assistance with their classes. While building a relationship with a teacher, the school librarian may need to be the one doing the outreach and constantly offering assistance and ideas.

When asked for a bibliography or a collection of books on a particular topic, deliver them personally and spend some time in the classroom. Invite the teachers and

their class regularly to the library by creating opportunities to broaden and deepen the classroom experience.

Teachers often find themselves in pockets of isolation and experience stress from a demanding and challenging curriculum as well as from testing pressures. It is likely that a school librarian will often face resistance in efforts to provide a richer learning experience for students by suggesting more “library time”. It is thus essential not to keep the school library’s philosophies, visions, and goals a secret. Hold workshops and discussion groups with teachers about free-choice learning and how it contributes to the aims of lifelong learning. Take time to explain the goals for the school library and how it can help them and their classes individually. Just as teachers must model learning strategies to their students, the school librarian must model strategies to both teachers and students that allow a learner to control his or her own learning destiny while finding ways that this can be done within the constraints of a necessary but regimented curriculum.

Students. In developing the school library program, students can be our best partners and allies. As school librarians, we should not attempt our projects in isolation but with the consultation and assistance of students. Developing clubs and drawing upon the forces of library volunteers and students, we can create a team of curators, marketers, writers, and artists who will make the library program successful. Draw upon the strengths of students to develop the website and newsletter. Give them ideas and guidance for curating the collections in the museum and the art works in the gallery. Commission them to create the butterfly mobile and other works of art. Have a group that is responsible for the botanical garden and others who write the suggested reading

blurbs that pepper your collection and exhibits. Communicate with them what you are trying to do and ask for their help.

We may often forget our primary purpose is to serve students in all of our planning of what is good for them. Each student is completely individual and deserves the most warmth, generosity, and respect possible. Every action we take as school librarians should seek to provide them with the most and best opportunities we can create. By involving them in the process and in our program, it cannot help but ensure a school library that is rich and meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Cultural Institutions. In her article about outreach and lending programs that will allow kids to visit a museum in the school library, Blenz-Clucas points out that “a natural liaison in the school-museum connection is the school library media specialist. In addition to providing special programs and displays of museum objects in the library, the media specialist can act as the link between museums and teachers by keeping informed about the different resources and programs that are available and by providing museum directors with information about the school’s needs at all grade levels” (150).

Find out what cultural institutions are in your area and get in touch with all of them. These institutions include not only zoos, museums, public libraries, and historical societies but also the libraries in the universities, their rare books libraries, special collections libraries, museums, archives, etc. Discover the scope and content of their collections and look particularly for areas that are directly related to curricular topics but also keep aware that many areas may be interesting on an independent level. Keep up to date on programs, events, and special exhibits.

Determine who is in charge of educational programming in each cultural institution and work on building relationships with these people as well as others in the institution with whom coordination is possible. Developing these relationships may create great opportunities to collaborate to develop educational programs that may better serve the needs not only of teachers and a curriculum but the students as well.

Keep a supply of their brochures and posters on hand and put them on display and available in the library and throughout the school—not hidden in a little-used vertical file.

Take thoughtful advantage of their lending programs and traveling exhibitions. Many institutions have collections for loan, videos for lending, and traveling exhibits and treasure boxes. These can be great temporary additions to your museum or arranged for use by or in classrooms.

Find out about opportunities for field visits. Even if an institution does not have a special education liaison that comes to schools to speak, more than likely a representative will be delighted to speak in the library and tell your students about their collections and how it might be used. Many professionals can visit classes that are studying a particular topic and speak to the curriculum. The school librarian may be able to facilitate an expert for visit that can bring items that are not able to be loaned to exhibit during their talks. Try to arrange for frequent special visitor presentations and talks. While often it may be possible to arrange speaker visits that relate to a subject that particular classes are studying at a certain time, try to make these special events available to all students, even those who are not studying that particular subject or in that particular class. And try to have speakers that are just plain interesting, have great stories to share, and unique information to convey. Their discussion may not have to do with the current curriculum

but can act as a reinforcement to the idea that learning is not always mandated and that we often learn just because we are interested. Speakers can visit during the school days and class periods but from time to time, host an event that takes place over lunch, after school, or in the evening to better ensure that access is granted to more students, as well as faculty and parents.

Action.

As often as possible, encourage and attend field trips to local cultural institutions with classes and teachers. This is a great opportunity work with teachers to show kids how to use information skills and how meaning is constructed in the real world that does not use a curriculum to guide its learners.

Plan field trips for library volunteers and students and create a club that regularly visits cultural institutions in the community after school, on the weekend, or during the evening. Discuss what constitutes a cultural institution and talk about how learning is different in these places than it tends to be in the school. Take students not just to the art, science, and history museums but also to the university library to see how a Library of Congress classification system works, to an archives to compare using a physical finding aid versus an online finding aid, to a rare books library—just for the awe. Then take them to a zoo and a botanical garden to explore and discuss the similarities and differences between these types of cultural institutions and the others. Open doors and create well-tread pathways to institutions that will support them in their learning lives for a lifetime.

Conclusion

This paper has been an exploration of how the school librarian can create a program that simultaneously supports curriculum-driven education that often occurs in isolation while freeing and inspiring the learner to discover new worlds of individual interest and meaning. In doing so, a new and tentative lens has emerged through which to view the school library, one that looks at the school library as a cultural institution itself and a connection to free-choice learning institutions within the community. The school library, which serves as rich soil in which to grow a lifelong learner and lead him or her into worlds where they have a choice about what they learn and how they make meaning of information, has no boundaries.

By looking at ways that the school library can develop its program to create a rich kingdom full of the jewels of learning and possibilities, pathways and questions, experiences and inspirations, we have discovered or are reminded that the true treasures that lie in the school libraries are the students themselves.

I can't help but think that maybe if students in K-12 were given more opportunities such as the ones suggested in this paper, that someday, when I revisit the archives and rare book and special collections libraries where this whole journey began, that I might have to worry a little more that my shoes are boisterously disturbing engaged learners engrossed in marbled endpapers, listening to voices of ancient books that aren't lonely anymore, delighting in the handwriting of long past presidents, and that someone else is ogling the vintage candy bar in the comic book collection.

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