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School Librarian as Inquisitor of Practice

Reimagine, Reflect, and React with the New Standards

Elizabeth Burns

The modern school library is a complex social setting "grounded in standards and best practice" (AASL 2018). The new *National School Library Standards* have refreshed the student learning standards and aligned new Shared Foundations to the school library. Additionally, the competencies for learners are now complemented by competencies of effective school librarians. To be effective, school librarians must be aware of classroom pedagogy and possess a thoughtful disposition about their practice. Professional competence challenges school librarians to continuously monitor and self-assess while being receptive to professional growth. Ideally, school librarians are self-reflective. This reflective stance toward our own practice allows us to model the self-reflection process for learners and impact practice for greater student improvement.

Engaging as a Reflective Practitioner

Anne R. Freese (2006) has described reflection as a form of inquiry, similar to the process school librarians strive to instill within their learners. Like inquiry, reflective practice begins with a curious disposition regarding one's own practice and the success of learners. School librarians act as

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professional inquirers, hoping to make sense of their own practices and how they impact student learning. School librarians reflecting on their practices are eager to identify how theory and practice inform each other.

Educators who are reflective practitioners observe how learning occurs in the school library and consider ways to improve instruction and learning (Todd 2015). With student success as their goal, reflective practitioners systematically consult research to identify best practice, collaborate with other educators, and pursue innovations in their practices. They then reflect on the impact of their work and determine how they may better meet the needs of their students. In addition to improving practice, this reflection may lead to data collection that provides evidence of an impact on student learning that can be shared with others across the

school community (Loertscher and Woolls 2002; Todd 2015). The new school library standards provide several entry points for school librarians wanting to implement reflection as a regular practice.

Reflection in the *National School Library Standards*

The *National School Library Standards* focus on competency-based assessment and evaluation; this focus encourages school librarians to reflect on their own practices. These standards also encourage school library practitioners to pose questions about their practices and develop ideas about how teaching impacts daily activities and students' achievement. This shift aligns with more-thoughtful attention to personalized learning and allows for monitoring effectiveness and growth in meeting the needs of all learners.

The new AASL Standards were developed with the intent that school librarians at all stages of their careers will be guided by best practice and a strong research base. Through an inquisitive stance, the school librarian will ask questions about the teaching and learning process. In Part II of the standards, the end of each chapter highlighting one of the six Shared Foundations contains a compiled list of best practices. These suggested activities align with the tenets of the Key Commitment expressed by the Shared Foundation on which the chapter focuses and assist school librarians in identifying those practices they may choose to implement in their own practice and setting. Through this endeavor, school librarians may use the suggested best practices, and then plan and reflect on their actions. Additionally, throughout the standards are questions to guide the reflective practitioner. These questions are written to prompt reflective thought when implementing the new standards and engage others in the use of the Shared Foundations for greater impact on students' learning and achievement. Finally, several assessment and evaluation guides are included. The evaluation suggestions for school librarians (AASL 2018, 153), the school librarian growth plan (AASL 2018, 164), and the Evidence of Accomplishment list in Appendix H all serve as resources to aid in the reflection process.

Once reflections are complete, school librarians may choose to use the results of their reflection to improve or modify practice—or they may choose to share their results through discussions with colleagues or decision makers in their school communities. Any reports or documentation that are created are evidence and a means of supporting assertions of the value of library practices; this evidence may also be used to enhance collaboration. Reflection and resulting documentation provide evidence of continuous improvement in practice. Formalized reflection is designed to assist school librarians improve practice. In short, when acting as reflective practitioners, school librarians gain a sense of what is successful in their school libraries and build sharable evidence to support what does and does not work.

Using the format of the reflective practitioner, as a school librarian you can implement the new standards and reflect on the impact of your activities.

What? Reimagine Student Learning

The new AASL Standards challenge school librarians to refresh their practice. Using the Shared Foundations and the language of the Key Commitments, you can refresh low-level assignments with robust, authentic tasks that ask students to think critically. Reflection begins with an inventory or recall of what is or has recently occurred. After developing and teaching new lessons, the reflective practitioner thinks objectively about what happened.

Consider:

- What did you observe about your learners?

- Were learners engaged in the learning process?

- Were the strategies and assessments aligned to the objectives?

- Did the lesson allow learners to connect information in a new way?

As a reflective practitioner you can embrace the opportunity to pause and explore the impact of your practice.
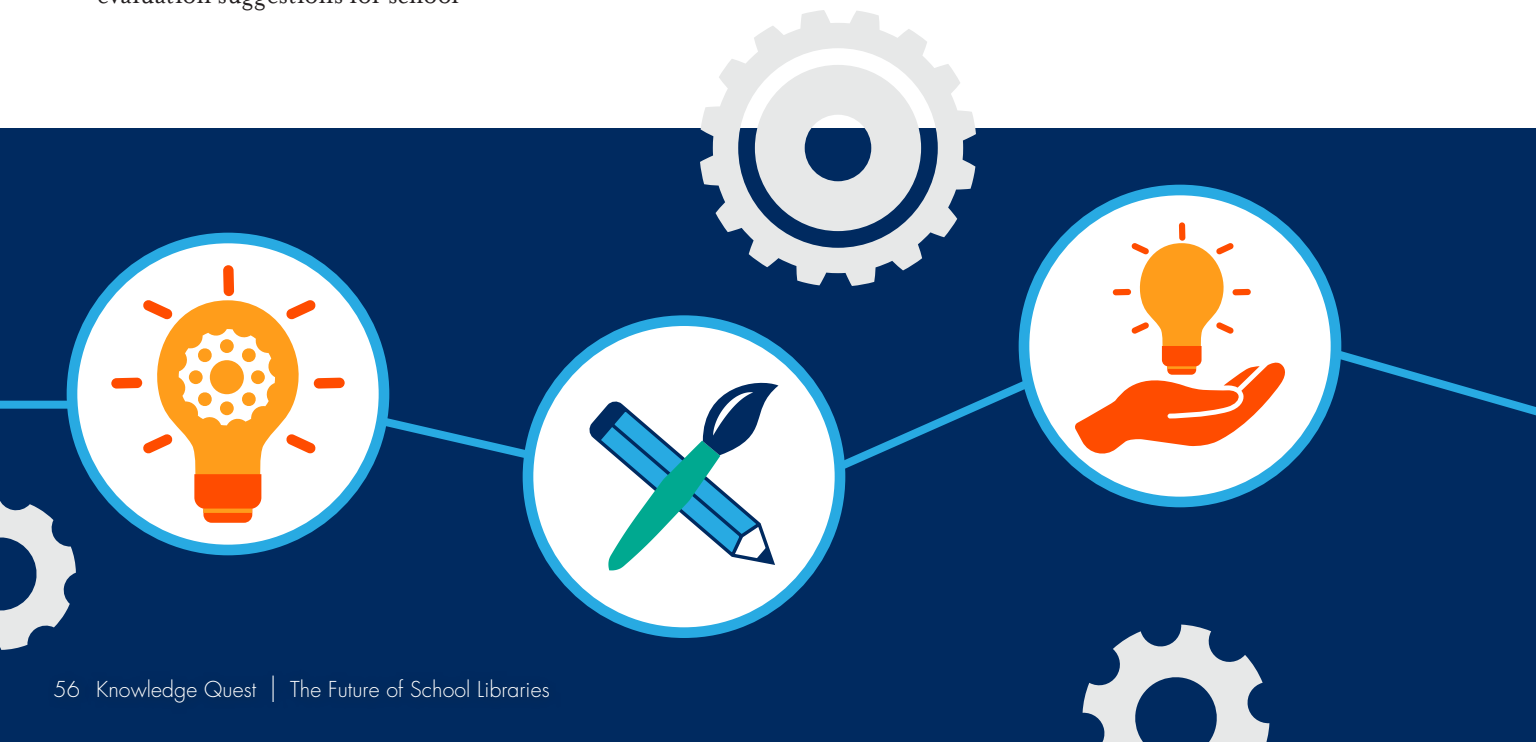
So What? Reflect on Your Experience

Reflection involves not only thinking about a teaching and learning experience, but also questioning parts of the experience. Reflection is thinking about the learning experience and then considering what you might do differently the next time. Deep reflection on a teaching experience can be challenging. Many reflections tend to be descriptive and fall short of focusing on changes in attitude or practice that lead to professional growth. Questioning your practice to identify areas of strength and areas of weakness allows you to determine what is important. This assessment identifies where student needs lie and helps you to prioritize areas of focus in your practice.

The questions in the standards help form initial reflective thoughts on your implementation of the standards. This reflective component challenges you to explore best practice in action. Reflections are commonly viewed as self-assessments, and when conducting a good reflection you will discuss personal feelings and ideas while analyzing your teaching. Reflection

includes open self-disclosure and a connection to experiences in an effort to demonstrate personal growth.

Questions that can guide your reflection as you begin this practice include:

- What do you think went well? Explain.

- Do you think the task made an impact on student learning? How are you measuring this impact?

- How was the experience different from what you expected—for you *and* your students?

- What would you do differently next time?

- What surprised you during the learning experience?

Now What? React to Your Findings

Once a deeper understanding of what has occurred in the lesson has been reached and you have reflected to discover the strengths and challenges you face in your practice, it is time to think about your own growth and development. In the reaction stage

a plan for next steps can begin. It is here that you will think about the impact you are having on students and begin to consider sharing this information with others.

Again, here are some ideas to assist you as you begin your process:

- How will you think or act in the future as a result of this experience?

- What were your thoughts during the experience? And why did you think that way?

- How or what can you learn from this experience?

- What areas will you focus on for improvement in future lessons?

- What do you regard as your most important personal learning experience during the lesson? How will you apply it in the future?

- What did you learn about yourself as a learner and/or school librarian as a result of this reflection?

- About what would you like to learn more, related to this reflection?

Using the Shared Foundations and the language of the Key Commitments, you can refresh low-level assignments with robust, authentic tasks that ask students to think critically.

By employing the opportunities for reflection through the implementation of the new standards, school librarians engage more deeply and explore new opportunities in their practice.

When we become reflective practitioners, we can learn from our experiences. Self-assessment measures where we are and where we want to go next in our practice.

Reflection for Lifelong Learning

Reflection is the process that helps school librarians think about what happened, why it happened, and what else could have been done given the same situation. The inquiry process of lifelong and continuous improvement is present in every aspect of an effective school library. By employing the opportunities for reflection through the implementation of the new standards, school librarians engage more deeply and explore new opportunities in their practice. Using the evidence collected in the reflection process, school librarians have the potential to interrogate their practice and set the plan for continued professional and pedagogical growth. The evidence of impact on students' learning gained through reflective inquisition can be shared to benefit the practice of other school librarians and to demonstrate the value of school libraries.

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