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Navigating the Library Slopes: Dispositional Shifts in the National School Library Standards

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NAVIGATING THE LIBRARY

SLOPES: DISPOSITIONAL

SHIFTS IN THE *NATIONAL*

SCHOOL LIBRARY STANDARDS



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The *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* challenge school librarians to embrace change and imagine the library as an evolving environment, thriving in an ever-changing educational and information landscape. This growth mindset can be challenging to achieve and requires certain “patterns of acts” or dispositions (Katz and Raths 1986, 7). Dispositions add another requirement for school librarians who must possess thorough skills and extensive knowledge—an added component that makes a school librarian dynamic and impactful.

School librarians straddle two professional fields: education and library science (Akers 2015). As educators, they teach the information practices and behaviors embedded in the information field while simultaneously modeling the characteristics of learners, information seekers, and curators and creators of knowledge. School librarians must engage the skills of both educator and information professional, wearing two identities like a pair of skis as they navigate the slopes of information use and instruction. Having a set of foundational behaviors, or dispositions, helps guide school librarians and keep them anchored throughout this professional adventure.

Gatherer, Contributor, Connector, Creative Force, Defender, and Guide

The release of the AASL Standards allows for a refreshed examination of dispositional behaviors aligned to the Shared Foundations. Dispositions supporting the Key Commitments and addressing the Competencies champion and revitalize best practices; these best practices can be identified and modeled by the school librarian. Here we offer a newly enhanced set of professional dispositions presented as nouns, personified beliefs the school librarian can embody. These dispositional traits, when embodied, make a librarian more valuable. As Jami Jones and Gail Bush (2009) have stated, for a disposition to become practice, one must frequently and voluntarily engage in the practice. Aligning practice to the Competencies, a school librarian frequently and voluntarily gathers, contributes, connects, creates—and encourages creation, guides, and defends.

A librarian needs to be a *gatherer*. Not a hoarder of materials that may be of use, but rather display behaviors similar to those of an ethnographer researching a learning tribe, gathering understanding of the community. A school library professional is aware of the

school environment and focuses attention on the school’s needs. The school librarian listens to individuals—students, teachers, parents, and community members—“with understanding and empathy” (Costa 2014), observing them in physical and virtual learning spaces. Through the Shared Foundation of Curate, the school librarian wonders about and documents learning in the cognitive, affective, developmental, and physical domains, taking in “data from all senses” (Costa 2014) and recognizes the power of knowing learners, the learning culture, and learning resources. School librarians are versed in the school’s mission and curriculum.

A gatherer is conscious of all learners and their varying strengths and struggles. It is with this understanding school librarians use knowledge to predict needs, curate the most appropriate resources in a variety of formats, and provide support. AASL acknowledges the Shared Foundation of Curate in its AASL Standards document. The document reiterates, “expert curation, conducted by a qualified school librarian, is essential to ensuring that the collection meets the needs of learners and educators” (2018, 98). A good gatherer knows the community as a group and as individuals and curates with them

Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Curate	From Hoarder (Materials focus) to Gatherer (Learner focus)	Listening Documenting Observing Collecting insights Reading curriculum, mission statements, professional learning research Building a collection that meets the needs of the school community

Figure 1. Disposition of a gatherer.

Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Collaborate	From Protector (Knowledge owner) to Contributor (Knowledge creator)	Sharing Giving Collaborating Co-teaching Developing relationships

Figure 2. Disposition of a contributor.

Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Inquire	From Builder (Isolated learning goals) to Connector (Connections)	Making connections between: school and real world learners to information tools to creation etc. Making learning personally relevant Reflecting

Figure 3. Disposition of a connector.

in mind. Figure 1 illustrates this disposition on a continuum.

Another essential disposition is acting as *contributor*. A school librarian must offer, share, invite, and provide time, resources, and expertise for the academic success of learners. School librarians define themselves as professionals who are ready with hands and heart open as a resource and support for other educators and learners. Finding opportunities to share just the right thing at just the right time demonstrates listening and truly seeing a learner or classroom teacher. These interactions can be the spark that transforms relationships and learning in a school community. Some ways of contributing include:

- Contributing to the school library profession through membership in organizations, conversations with other professionals in the field, and action research, which can energize a librarian and the profession
- Offering ideas, lessons, and resources to teaching colleagues as another way to invite and encourage more-robust instruction and collaboration
- Participating in thoughtful professional discussions and asking questions
- Contributing resources, tools, and strategies that build relationships, promote learning, and support intellectual freedom
- Contributing information-literacy expertise to the collaboration table to enrich student learning
- Contributing through co-teaching activities to support curriculum and content integration

For the school librarian's contributions to be understood, effective communication is required. Being

a contributor demonstrates a school librarian's engagement in the profession. Not only being aware of connections but acting on them promotes the Shared Foundation of Collaborate as school librarians, "demonstrate the importance of personal, social, and intellectual networks by modeling the use of a variety of communication tools and resources, and cultivating networks that allow learners to build on and create new knowledge" (AASL 2018, 88). Figure 2 illustrates this disposition on a continuum.

The tendency to find, create, and develop connections, to be a *connector*, is a required disposition for a school library professional. A school librarian needs to make connections within the multiple roles and respon-

sibilities of the job to streamline tasks, impact learning, and communicate a strong vision. Examples of connections that are made include:

- Learners to information and ideas
- Library to classroom
- Classroom to whole school
- School to the real world
- Mission statements, philosophies, and policies to the library program
- Tools to creation
- Inquiry and information skills to content
- Big-picture concepts to individual learning

- Data and documentation to advocacy
- Budgeting needs to student learning
- Assessment to learning
- Library organization to user access
- Current understanding to new information

Being a connector is like being a weaver of a learning web for students. Seeing connections and developing these bonds impacts the whole school's learning culture. Through the Shared Foundation of Inquire school librarians model investigation of resources using multiple literacies. The language of the Shared Foundation discussion in



Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Explore	From Enforcer (Rules, fines, equipment guard) to Creative Force (Spark for learning)	Being curious Playing and experimenting Exploring possibilities Using design cycle Making mistakes Energizing and personalizing learning

Figure 4. Disposition of a creative force.

Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Include	From Defensive (Protective stance) to Defender (Proactive stance)	Curating to build empathy Modeling ethical information use Advocating for library program Considering all patrons in policy decisions Championing intellectual freedom

Figure 5. Disposition of a defender.

Shared Foundation	Dispositional Shift	Practices of the School Librarian Demonstrating This Disposition
Engage	From Seeker (Find facts) to Guide (Evaluate, remix, create)	Evaluating resources Modeling ethical use and reproduction of materials Encouraging safe online practices Promoting digital citizenship

Figure 6. Disposition of a guide.

the standards book helps elaborate on this disposition when it describes the need for “a school librarian to be conversant in a wide variety of information resources and multiple literacies” (AASL 2018, 71).

Being a *creative force* is important for all educators and especially for school librarians. An open, playful, flexible stance can bring innovation into the library and learning space. The Shared Foundation of Explore’s Key Commitment challenges learners to “discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection” (AASL 2018, 38). When professional educators are creative, they update their understanding and toolkit of teaching strategies, providing more exploratory opportunities. Embracing rather than fearing mistakes brings energy to the school librarian as a lifelong learner. When a school librarian is willing to take risks and explore possibilities, a sense of adventure and excitement infuses the learning. Using flexible thinking for problem solving is important, as there are many constraints in education and specifically on the school library. A professional with a creative mindset can overcome obstacles as well as initiate plans with enthusiasm. A creative force can be a contagious force and can move school cultures from institutions to inspiration. Another way of viewing this disposition is illustrated in figure 4.

Another important disposition for school librarians to demonstrate is being a *defender*. Librarians need to advocate for underrepresented populations, differentiated learners, and intellectual freedom. They can do this through their actions and decisions as well as their words. Developing collections that have windows and mirrors for all readers, and providing access to tools and resources for all students support an inclusive

learning community. Reconsidering policies and procedures that are limiting or present barriers to access and contribution allows for greater participation by all learners. The AASL Shared Foundation of Include calls upon school librarians to “facilitate experiences in which learners exhibit empathy and tolerance for diverse ideas by developing learners who engage in informed conversation, debate, and persuasion and by guiding learners to contribute to discussions in which multiple viewpoints on a topic are expressed” (AASL, 2018, 80). Figure 5 illustrates this disposition.

Finally, the school librarian is a *guide*, playing orienteer to the

World Wide Web to embody the Shared Foundation of Engage. In this role the school librarian models and facilitates the ethical use of information for the school community. Championing positive digital citizenship and responsible content creation that models respect for authors and creators, the school librarian advocates for the “social, ethical, and legal implications of information access, services, and technologies” (AASL 2018, 115). Having a strong backbone on these issues will carry a school librarian beyond the role of teacher or library manager to democratic leader. Figure 6 shows the continuum of this disposition.

To gather, contribute, connect, be a creative force, defend, and guide are demanding dispositions that make an excellent school library professional. School librarians use these dispositions like poles of support as they glide down the slopes of student learning and curriculum. They leverage their roles of teacher and librarian like skis giving them direction and momentum to traverse the slopes of academic knowledge and skills learners must navigate. Maintaining a balance built on best practice through the educational landscape ahead, school librarians are ready to soar.



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she received her MEd from Old Dominion University’s Library Science Program. Her recent article “It All Starts with a Question” was published in the February 2019 issue of *Teacher Librarian* and highlights collaboration between a classroom teacher and school librarian on an inquiry project.



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