

Searching Reflections

Maegan Heath

University of Oklahoma

August 1, 2019

Being an efficient and successful librarian requires an immense amount of knowledge and skills. As a school librarian, numerous decisions must be made that have the potential to affect many people. School librarians need knowledge and skills to build a strong foundation to consult when making decisions. This foundation can be built on an understanding of research, thoughts from experts in the field, knowledge of best practices, metaliteracy, overarching goals, understanding information seeking, and the ability to be reflective of one's own practices and actions. It is also pivotal to have an understanding of one's own information literacy and instructional skills. A strong philosophical foundation built around overarching goals based on my own reflecting, learning, and observing will help guide my actions and choices as a school librarian.

Metaliteracy and Collaboration

It is important for a school librarian to understand his/her own information literacy and the development of it. This constitutes metaliteracy. Mackey and Jacobson (2014, p. 2) note, "metaliteracy suggests a way of thinking about one's own literacy." This means an individual understands their existing literacy strengths and where they need improvements. This helps guide decisions about one's learning. I must understand that I am strong in some areas of literacy while there are other areas in which I need to improve. This will help me serve my users who will have strengths and needs in various literacies. Most importantly, in acknowledging these areas, I understand the need to collaborate with others. Collaboration will allow for different people with different literacy strengths to work together towards common goals. The efforts to collaborate will help me to reflect on my own literacies and gain skills and information by interacting with others.

Reflection

Not only is it essential to understand my own literacies, it is important to be reflective to help guide my decisions. There are many theories and models that explain information literacy and information seeking. There are a multitude of ideas and activities. It can become difficult, and seemingly impossible, to understand and implement all. However, school librarians are able to complete one important task regularly that can change their actions immediately and can impact future efforts. This is to practice reflection. Reflective practice involves understanding and adapting one's skills as s/he teaches. The teacher does not wait until the lesson is complete (Booth, 2011). My application of reflection will occur regularly including when teaching, planning/leading professional development, during collaborative efforts, while garnering input and feedback from users, and more. I will assess the impact I am making while performing the tasks and revise what is not working. This will require me to put the user first. Booth (2011, p. 18) says, "Think of the USER not as a rigid, drawn-out process of formal planning, but a strategy for creating adaptable and reusable library instruction [...]." I will reuse the aspects I identify as engaging and successful. Ultimately, this requires me to be flexible and to constantly consider the user. How are they engaged? Am I meeting their needs? How can I adapt to their learning preferences? McGuiness (2011) reminds me that school librarians do not effectively teach because they have mastered methods and tools. Instead, they ensure an understanding of how learners learn. I will be willing to admit when plans fail, or could be better, and adjust mid-activity when possible. Reflective practice will allow me to adjust immediately and to hone the effective techniques for future use. In effect, hopefully, I will become a better school librarian with each activity I complete.

Information Searching and Information Searching Instructional Skills

I will be reflective of my own information searching and my information searching instructional skills. As I complete the Master of Library and Information Studies program, I am now more aware of my information searching. I have gained knowledge of reliable, ethical resources and have gained better skills to help me search more effectively. These skills, in combination with an understanding of how others search will be a benefit to the staff, students, and families I serve as a school librarian. I understand that I often want to take the fastest route to information acquisition, and the Internet makes it seemingly easy. Vanderschantz and Hinze (2017) reveal children primarily use internet search engines. However, the easiest and fastest route is not always the most reliable. This helps me to understand the need to make accurate sources easier to access for users (through resources such as a virtual learning commons and posted lists). Spink, Danby, Mallan, and Butler (2009) note that children have the capability to create web queries (although spelling can be a hindrance), browse, and complete relevance judgements. This study serves as a reminder that children have the ability to use multiple print and nonprint information sources. This prioritizes my responsibility of ensuring my students and staff understand the importance of credible information and the harm of believing and sharing questionable information. As soon as they can access information so easily, they should become critical-thinking consumers and sharers.

In order to improve information searching for myself and others, it is essential to have a strong foundation to base my information searching instructional skills. My hope is not to create information users who only utilize best searching practices when required for an assignment but to apply the skills throughout their lives. As Grassian (2017) notes librarians exist to help people learn how to learn in order to participate in society as knowledgeable and informed citizens. I want students and staff to understand the importance of continuous learning and feel empowered

by it. I have realized it is important for users to know how to independently find resources to help them learn when they do not know something. This will help them to be critical thinkers who can successfully locate, use, and share information.

The rise of Web 2.0 tools and social media have increased the ease of accessing and creating information, and this has both enriched and created what can be an overwhelming environment (Jacobson and O’Keefe, 2014). It is important that I guide users into being critical-thinkers who can reflect before consuming, creating, and sharing information using these tools. This will involve creating metaliterate individuals who can utilize multiple literacies (i.e. digital, visual, critical information, etc.) and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Users must be able to search multiple formats of information and think critically about what they find. The four overarching goals provided by Mackey and Jacobson (2014) provide a solid foundation for my instructional skills for information searching. These include: evaluate content critically (including content that changes and evolves); understand personal privacy, ethics, and intellectual property; share information and collaborate in numerous environments; and demonstrate ability to connect strategies to lifelong learning and goals. When planning lessons on information sharing, Mackey and Jacobson’s goals will provide a quality reference to consult.

Educational Pedagogy

To support these goals, I have developed a strong understanding of how people learn in deep, meaningful ways. People are driven and engaged by following their own inquiries, being creative, and constructing knowledge. The key to creativity is inquiry and questioning (Jones, 2018). Moreillon (2019) notes inquiry is a pathway to deeper learning. He further relates inquiry to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) learning competencies. These include engaging with new knowledge by following a process and creating and implementing a

plan to fill knowledge gaps. This focus on creativity, inquiry, and constructivism supports people in accumulating 21st-Century skills such as intrinsic motivation, collaboration, perseverance, divergent thinking, and more. Inquiry-driven activities and lessons can also relate to a school's content standards. It allows students to explore their questions and can involve solving problems that are important to them. As a school librarian, I will collaborate with staff and students to understand content standards and garner their interests. This will help guide my planning and co-planning to create lessons that involve deep engagement through multiple steps. Jones (2018, p. 178) lists these as "asking questions, observing, searching for information, associating ideas, forming hypotheses, collecting data, and presenting findings." This exemplifies that inquiry-based activities can support many AASL standards. I understand that student inquiry-driven approach requires giving up some control; however, the benefits are tremendous. It will allow my students to connect their learning in meaningful ways, construct their own knowledge, and become more engaged. Student-based activities will show students are being heard and that I care about their needs and interests.

Information Privilege

Supporting staff, student, and family inquiry and learning requires that I recognize information privilege. Even within the same district and the same school the needs and access can vary greatly. Booth (2014) defines privilege "as the advantages, opportunities, rights, and affordances granted by status and positionality via class, race, gender, culture, sexuality, occupation, institutional affiliation, and political perspective." These characteristics represent the potential diversity in the users I will serve. There has been an increase of digital resources, and this has created a widening of the gap between digital haves and have-nots (Saracevic, 2014). I will work to overcome the situations that create a division between the privileged and

underprivileged. I will be committed to finding methods and resources that may help overcome these privileges. This will involve my own actions and resources I provide as well as influencing the actions of others. I will collaborate to inform staff of the privilege and ways they can work to overcome it. I will advocate to stakeholders and administration to help them become aware. Librarians and information professionals are critical in compelling themselves and those they can influence to think about power and privilege (Booth, 2014). This means developing professional development and lessons that delve into privilege and, through inquiry-based approach, could lead to staff and student driven solutions to decrease this divide.

Social Justice

One way to incorporate knowledge of information privilege, and privilege overall, is through activities and lessons focusing on social justice. This will also help connect to real-life issues. These have the potential to help learners become more connected and engaged individuals because activities have increased meaning and purpose. Lessons on social justice will help me teach in ways that cultivate both student agency and reflection while empowering students with the knowledge that they can transform injustices (Gregory and Higgins, 2017). I hope to inspire empathy by guiding students' seeking of multiple perspectives and realizing flaws and biases are built into information.

I will work to ensure staff and administrators also have an understanding of social justice. Gregory and Higgins (2017) explain how benchmarking and testing have created educational environments that favor educator control over student agency. Positive outcomes such as awareness, an attentive conscious, independent thought, and critical engagement have become less meaningful (or nearly lost all meaning) than academic content achievement. It is important that staff understand the importance of these outcomes in addition to meeting content standards.

Hopefully, this will remind them of the importance of engaging lessons that involve student-inquiry, student agency, and opportunities to engage in projects that empower students to make a difference in the world.

Conclusion

To be a successful school librarian requires a tremendous amount of knowledge and skills. My decisions will likely impact thousands of people. At times, it can seem overwhelming. However, a philosophy (see Appendix) that reminds me of the reasons and the impacts I can make will help guide these decisions. I will engage in metaliteracy and reflection to make changes to lessons and activities while working to improve my information searching instructional skills and the skills of others. I will work to ensure lessons and programs involve inquiry, creativity, and constructivism. My efforts will include ensuring students and staff understand information privilege and social justice while I work to decrease the digital and information divide that affects those within the school I serve. When making decisions, I will reflect on these overarching goals and a strong library and information studies foundation to help all those I impact become connected, caring, critical-thinking individuals.

References

- Char, B. (n.d). On information privilege [web log comment]. Retrieved from July 15, 2019 from <https://infomational.com/2014/12/01/on-information-privilege/>
- Char, B. (2011). *Reflective teaching, effective learning: Instructional literacy for library educators*. Chicago: American Library Association.
- Esther, G. (2017). Teaching and learning alternatives: A global overview. *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 56(4), 232-239.
- Gregory, L. & Higgins, S. (2017). Reorienting an information literacy program toward social justice: Mapping the core values of librarianship to the ACRL framework. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 11(1), 42-54.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2017.11.1.46>
- Jacobson, T.E. & O'Keefe, E. (2014). Seeking and finding: Authentic inquiry models for our evolving information landscape. *Knowledge Quest*, 43(2), 26-33.
- Jones, J.B. (2013). Fostering creativity through inquiry. In Jones, J.B. & Flint L.J. (Eds.), *Creative imperative: School librarians and teachers cultivating curiosity together* (p.p. 175-188). Santa Barbra, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Mackey, T.P. & Jacobson, T.E. (2014). *Metaliteracy: Reinventing information literacy to empower learners*. Chicago: Neal-Schuman.
- McGuiness, C. (2011). Teaching librarians: 10 concepts shaping the roll. In McGuiness, C. (Ed.), *Becoming Confident Teachers: A Guide for academic librarians* (p.p. 33-67). Sawston, Cambridge: Chandos Publishing.
- Moreillon, J. (2019). Standards, inquiry, and deeper learning. Retrieved from <http://www.schoollibrarianleadership.com/2019/01/28/standards-inquiry-and-deeper-learning/>

Spink, A., Danby, S., Mallan, K., & Butler, C. (2010). Exploring young children's web searching and technoliteracy. *Journal of Documentation*, 66(2), 191-206.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/00220411011023616>

Vanderschantz, N. & Hinze, A. (2017). How kids see search: A visual analysis of internet search engines. In proceedings of the 31st British Human Computer Interaction Conference.

Available at hci2017.bcs.org/wp-content/uploads/30.pdf

Appendix

Philosophy

As a school librarian, my goal is to help students and staff become connected, caring, and critical thinking people. My roles are numerous in this effort. As a school librarian, I serve as a teacher, a collaborative partner, an advocate, an instructional designer, an information specialist, a manager, and a technologist. I work to inspire students and guide them into being responsible, productive users, creators, and sharers of information. These goals will be reached in numerous ways and require multiple decisions. The decisions will be guided by my overarching goals and reflection on how to best guide students through their learning.

I hope to inspire students to become lifelong learners who apply learned information skills throughout their lives in personal and professional information endeavors. These students will understand the importance of inquiry and have the skills to fulfill their information wants and needs. In today's times, many students use digital resources including social media and Web 2.0 tools. I will teach these students to navigate through the information to find credible results, arm them with strategies to check for accuracy, and provide links to credible sources. Students will not only consume information, but they will construct and share it through creative endeavors, exploration, and making.

Another priority is to inspire students to read for pleasure. This should not be based on reading for extrinsic rewards or tests. I will work with students to discover their intrinsic desire that will, hopefully, last throughout their lives. This will involve seeking out their input and discovering what interests them.

My hope is to inspire students and staff to be attuned to their lives and the lives of others. I will provide lessons and activities that have real-life applications and provide for social justice opportunities. It is important to inspire empathy, guide the search for multiple perspectives, and

empower students and staff to make a difference. I will expand student and staff knowledge of information privilege and create an inclusive, resourceful environment that is welcoming and provides connections to multiple resources.

These goals will be met through reflection, flexibility, providing resources, and a teaching pedagogy built on inquiry, creativity, and constructivism. These pillars of my instructional philosophy will help ensure I am doing the best for those I serve. They will help to ensure I provide proper resources and resource links. I will ensure students see themselves reflected in the library's collection. These instructional pillars will remind me to allow students to create their own knowledge through opportunities to research topics that interest them and providing makerspace opportunities. The pillars will drive me to collaborate with staff to expand their knowledge of best practices, current technology, and research. Students will not only learn how to use, create, and share information, but they will understand the importance and impact of being a responsible steward of information.