Editorial

School Librarian Leadership around the World

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The concept of leadership is multi-dimensional. Adding a few more layers to this concept - those of school librarianship and international cultures – and there are endless possibilities for research and discussion. I’m delighted to serve as your guide in this exercise in the current issue of School Libraries Worldwide. My professional life has been consumed with thoughts and actions of leadership these past few years. It began in 2004 as a member of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Board of Directors when we drafted the latest strategic plan and chose as our Big Hairy Audacious Goal: "To achieve universal recognition of school library media specialists as indispensable educational leaders." It grew through Project LEAD – a leadership program for future school librarians and the creation of the PALM (Partnerships Advancing Library Media) Center at Florida State – a research center with a focus on school librarian leadership. And it crystallized for all of us in the profession in the U.S. with the publication, Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs (AASL, 2009). For the first time, the role of leader was prescribed. The “school library media program is built by professionals who model leadership and best practices for the community to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the technological society of the 21st century” (p. 45).

The increased focus on school librarian leadership raises questions. Does every school librarian want to be a leader? What are paths to leadership in a school library setting? Can school librarians be educated to lead? Are there certain leadership areas that are a more natural fit for school librarians? What leadership styles and theories apply to the school librarian? What does school library leadership look like in different countries and cultures?

One group that is attempting to answer the question of cultural differences that may impact leadership is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Project. It is a multi-phase, multi-method program of cross-cultural research in which investigators spanning the world are examining the inter-relationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership. Approximately one hundred and seventy social scientists and management scholars from 61 countries representing all major geographic regions throughout the world are engaged in this long-term programmatic series of cross-cultural studies (House, 2004).

An important question addressed by the GLOBE research team concerned the extent to which the practices and values associated with leadership are universal and the extent to which they are specific to just a few societies. To probe this issue, the team began with a large number of possible leader “attributes.” As a result of their findings from the 17,300 respondents worldwide regarding all these attributes, the team was able to identify 21 “primary leadership dimensions” or “first order factors” that in all societal cultures are viewed as, to some extent, contributing to a leader’s effectiveness or lack of effectiveness. The 21 primary leadership dimensions are:
Administratively Competent | Decisive | Non-participative
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Autocratic | Diplomatic | Performance oriented
Autonomous | Face saver | Procedural
Charismatic / Visionary | Humane orientation | Self-centered
Charismatic / Inspirational | Integrity | Status consciousness
Charismatic / Self-sacrificial | Malevolent | Team collaborative
Conflict inducer | Modesty | Team integrator

GLOBE researchers also studied leadership within six culturally implicit theories of leadership: Charismatic/Value-based, Team-Oriented, Participative, Autonomous, Human, and Self-Protection leadership.

In most cultures the first of these is considered most desirable. The second is desirable. The other leadership styles, except for the Self-Protection, are seen as acceptable. But whereas the first is universally desirable (of course, how could one not like a leader who inspires, is visionary, self-sacrifices, and is performance oriented?), the other patterns are culturally contingent. To be ambitious, for instance, is “good” in some cultures and “bad in other cultures” (Triandis, as cited in House, 2004, p. xix).

Do you think these attributes and theories apply to school librarianship? Is there an approach to school librarian leadership that transcends cultures and works in all situations? Ralph Turner posits in Notes from the Noodle Factory: 21st-Century Librarianship in Search of New Paradigms, that school libraries can serve as places of deep thinking. In a leadership role, school librarians might evaluate the environment of the library itself as instrumental in the cognitive, learning process. Francesca Fodale and Jessica Bates share how leadership opportunities exist with disadvantaged students in secondary schools in, Northern Ireland - What is the Impact of the School Library on Pupils' Personal Development? Autism and other categories of students with disabilities provide a platform for technology leadership with teachers relating to assistive devices as studied by Demetria Ennis-Cole and Daniella Smith in Assistive Technology and Autism: Expanding the Technology Leadership Role of the School Librarian. Technology is also the leadership theme of The Power of Web 2.0: Teacher-Librarians Become School Technology Leaders by Jennifer Branch-Mueller and Joanne deGroot. Librarians and Leadership: The Change we Seek by Kaye Dotson and Jami Jones takes us back to the our library education roots and unveil three major trends from their research relating to school librarians’ preparation for leadership roles. Advocacy, an activity often linked to leadership, is explored in Ann Dutton Ewbank’s study and reported in School Librarians’ Advocacy for the Profession: Results of a U.S. National Survey. The findings indicate that perhaps advocacy should not be automatically assumed to be a practice of school librarian leaders. Jeffrey DiScala and Mega Subramaniam’s contribution, Evidence-based Practice: A Practice towards Leadership Credibility among School Librarians shows us that this credibility can be built when evidence-based practice is focused on student achievement. Andrew Shenton, Naomi Hay-Gibson, and Ken Shenton take a leadership role in informing us of theoretical constructs in other disciplines that are of value to our own research in From Human Vending Machines to Lateral Thinking: Helpful Theories and Models for School Librarians. What a rich array of perspectives we have!

IASL would not exist as an organization without the transformational leadership of its first President, Dr. Jean Lowrie. Marcia and I have had the privilege of visiting with Jean here in Florida on numerous occasions and listening to the story of how it all began. Formally, IASL was inaugurated in 1971 in Jamaica where we most recently met and celebrated the 40th anniversary. But informally, Jean, Margot Nilson of Sweden and Carolyn Whitenack of the USA, started discussing an international organization for school librarians as far back as 1962 (Ovens, 1972). Even before that, Jean had been taking groups of school librarians on study tours around the world to visit school libraries and interact with their international colleagues. Like any good leader, Jean is quick to share credit with a cast of international characters, which she did in a letter to IASL on the occasion of our 30th anniversary (Lowrie, 2001). The work of these pioneers and later members has led to IASL being the organizational leader in school library research. But what
might be the next step? You can explore that question in Marlene Asselin’s review, *Internationalism as Leadership in IASL Research: Accomplishments and Directions*.

You would not be an IASL member, nor would you be reading this issue, if you were not already a leader in the field of school librarianship. We hope the topics explored here enrich your leadership role.

**References**


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