A Note From the Editor

Thank you to Theme Editor Julie Tallman for her excellent work on the Theme Section “Reading in the Age of Harry Potter.” As I write this note, I am pleased to report that the theme sections for the next two issues, prepared by Theme Editor Ross Todd on “Adolescents’ Information Seeking and Use” and by Theme Editor Denise Agosto on “Gender and Digital Technologies,” are progressing well.

Julie Tallman has written an introduction to the theme articles by Ray Doiron, Margaret Mackey, Rebecca P. Butler, and Nancy Planagan Knapp. I will, therefore, restrict my comments to the research articles that begin this issue and that invite us to reconsider our perspectives on the library as space and on the connections between research and evaluation.

In the first article, Louise Limberg and Mikael Alexandersson report on their year-long study on the meaning of the school library as a space for learning as experienced by students. Their study draws on a sociocultural perspective on learning and a phenomenological perspective of space. Their work calls to mind for me the work of Mark Dressman (1997) on the library as a space for literacy. Limberg and Alexandersson cite Dressman’s observation that the school library is a space very different from the classroom space and that the school library offers students potential for independence, as a public space open for everybody in a school and as a place where information is organized not by school subjects, but by a classification system that attempts to represent the world’s knowledge. Dressman’s work caused me to reexamine my understanding of the vital partnership role parents can play in the school. It heightened my awareness that the school must be careful to use respectful and varied approaches to parental involvement, that we need to take a reflective look at the school’s programs of literacy, including information literacy, to be sure we appreciate the perspectives of students and their families. Dressman’s work and that of Barton and Hamilton (1998) challenged me to acknowledge the existence of information literacy forms and values beyond schools and libraries, to remember that educational practices are a particular set of practices that may complement and enhance the practices of home and community, but that are also capable of violating and devaluing them. For example, reading promotion programs developed by school librarians do not always take into account that many working-class parents value reading for information more highly than reading for pleasure; on the other hand, school librarians may not realize how important the library is to children as a place where their choices about what to read and how to use space are allowed. If we consciously learn about and consider children’s (and parents’) perspectives on learning, we can build those per-
spectives into our school programs. We can use that knowledge as a basis for
discussion and investigation of learning issues with students and their
parents. Limberg and Alexandersson challenge school librarians to listen to
the voices of our students and to challenge the still-predominant meaning of
the school library as a warehouse for books in favor of other meanings, such
as a space for free discourse and intellectual activity as well as a space for
collective rather than individual action.

In the second article, Sarah McNichol reports on a recent project under-
taken in England by a research team from the Centre for Information Re-
search on behalf of that country's Department for Education and Skills.
Through surveying school library staff, teachers, and headteachers and by
consulting with the Department's School Libraries Working Group, the re-
search team produced self-evaluation models for English school libraries.
This research article demonstrates the value of policy-relevant research, that
is, research conducted for practical purposes such as developing policy,
solving problems, or making decisions. Evaluation, whether self-evaluation
or evaluation by others, is one way of developing understanding of where we
are now and of where we want to be. McNichol's article reminds me that there
are several ways of thinking about program evaluation. The mainstream
perspective addresses decision-making or problem-solving concerns. That is,
self-evaluation models such as those developed in the English project can be
used to help educators make decisions about the school library program.
From the mainstream perspective, an evaluation would be judged successful
if its findings were used to develop recommendations that were adopted by
the school. The alternative perspective of program evaluation considers more
indirect, subtle, and long-term impacts. That is, evaluation, whether self-
evaluation or evaluation by others, can have an educative purpose. From the
alternative perspective, an evaluation would be successful if it influenced
educators' thinking about the program and/or developed support for the
program. The mainstream view of program evaluation focuses on policy-
relevant or instrumental use; the alternative view includes conceptual use
and persuasive use. Both views, however, are useful in understanding how
to use the process of evaluation to implement improvements in the school
library and the school library program. As McNichol comments, evaluation
can help school librarians to demonstrate to teachers, education officials, and
others the contribution that their services can make to teaching and learning
and to achievement levels—and that is something all school librarians have
as an important goal to achieve.

To all of the authors whose work is included in this issue of School
Libraries Worldwide: thank you for sharing your ideas and insights. Your
work provokes us to reconsider our perspectives and helps to open up new
questions for exploration.

To all of the readers this issue of School Libraries Worldwide: remember that
it is the goal of the editorial team of this journal to have the major part of each
issue focused on current research. Please consider sharing the research you and/or your colleagues are doing. I would be delighted to receive your submissions.

Dianne Oberg
Editor

References