

# THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN AN INFORMATIONAL RENAISSANCE

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The other day, one of my colleagues asked me to reflect on the changing role of the school library and librarian in high school academic research projects. Here are some of my thoughts.

Reading is still the core of our school's curriculum. The purpose of our library program at Okemos High School (OHS) is to strengthen classroom instruction. It is reflected in our K–12 library mission statement: *helping teachers teach and students learn*. We do that in several ways.

## 1. Exemplifying a Culture of Literacy

As a teacher-librarian, I provide individualized reading guidance and nurture a love of reading. I think that students benefit from an element of choice in their reading assignments. Our library helps provide choice to our students with a wide range of reading material with online databases, e-books, digital audio, and print materials. I avidly read young adult literature so that I can recommend books from my own experience. This February, I started reviewing titles on the Book Blog (<http://www.okemoschools.net/education/components/board/default.php?sectiondetailid=14714&>) on the library's home page.

I am always trying new ways to profile and promote a supportive academic environment for all of our students. The OHS library achieved School Library 21 Exemplary Status ([http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/lm\\_SL21\\_313134\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/lm_SL21_313134_7.pdf)) from the state of Michigan for a program that includes reading incentives, helping reluctant readers, and visiting authors—all inspiring students to achieve. Take a look at my blog, *Balancing Books & Technology*, <http://www.okemoschools.net/education/components/board/default.php?sectiondetailid=17504&>, for this year's activities.

## 2. Teaching Information Skills

I want our students to become producers and users of ideas, not just consumers of information. So, I am always teaching literacy skills that enable our students to evaluate text in all formats. Some educators call this reading “transliteracy,” for students are expected to gather and understand information from a variety of media, including print, video, audio, social media, and blogs ([www.transliteracy.com](http://www.transliteracy.com)). In her book *Web of Deception*, Anne Mintz says that we are operating in an “Age of Misinformation.” Her book details the amount and extent of errors on the Internet, which is why it is important to teach our students to evaluate all sources critically.

Part of my job as a teacher-librarian is to encourage our teen readers at OHS to disconnect from devices and read longer novels and nonfiction titles that will build knowledge and encourage thinking. For me, academic research is a learning activity that utilizes the Common Core standards for writing that require students to “build and present knowledge.” This is the very heart of all of the Common Core State Standards: rigor and relevance.

Many of our young academic researchers find specific information through web searches. Part of the research process for them involves going back to print and putting their specific research in a larger context. Very often, this process puts their research into a historical perspective, and students begin to see how information relates to knowledge and understanding.

It is important for me as a teacher, a reader, and an intellectual to model correct information-gathering habits, and communicate clearly in writing, speaking, and/or video—as well as encourage reading for pleasure. All of us—teachers, parents, and administrators—need to encourage all of our students at all grade levels (K–12) to be critical users of information for life. When students come to the library for help gathering information to utilize it in a project, they have interactions with other caring adults who will help with their information search, think about it, and support their writing.

### 3. Implement Technology Tools

I also enjoy helping students and teachers use technology tools for personal and academic learning, communication, and collaboration. Through the school library, the use of technology becomes a natural part of the teaching and learning process.

In the past ten years, we have migrated from a VHS collection to streaming video through Discovery Education and video on demand (VOD). We highlight numerous databases available through the Michigan Electronic Library (MeL) and Regional Educational Media Center (REMC) that not only help our students get general information from encyclopedias but also give them access to specific information in historical or scientific archives. Our digital library is steadily growing with e-books and digital audio that students and teachers can access 24/7 in our online catalog. Getting information or a great book to read from the library is no longer limited to school hours.

Technology coaching for the staff has gone from creating pamphlets in Microsoft Publisher to apps like Explain Everything, which allows users to annotate any object while recording in real time. My book talks have gone from PowerPoint presentations like “Top 10 Apocalypse Survival Tips I Learned From Reading YA” to book trailers on SchoolTube. While we continue to help students with log-ins, passwords, and issues on how to format and print inquiry-based research papers, we also supply tech support for digital storytelling and encourage students to discuss books on a variety of electronic platforms, such as Subtext, Goodreads, LibraryThing, and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Teen Book Finder.

Recently, I shared an article from Grad School Hub with some of my colleagues: “Just Google It: How Google Has Changed Research for Grad Students” (2015). I read the article just as I posted seven options to create e-posters for social media (Fields, 2014). I found it interesting that the Grad School Hub article was designed graphically for social media. It is very motivational for me to think more digitally and become better at making e-posters.

As a certified teacher-librarian, I teach information retrieval skills, encourage a culture of literacy, and help teachers and students use technology effectively. It is my job to give our students technology support and the opportunity to create, learn, and share with others.

In conclusion, our school library supports academic reading and writing not only by providing quality print and nonprint material, but by encouraging collaboration between students outside of the structure of the classroom. We work to give students the opportunity to work in teams and respect the perspective of others. This type of learning is the fabric of the Common Core State Standards and a needed skill set of the 21st century. Our library at OHS is not just a book room, with the library staff shushing students and checking out books. It is truly a dynamic learning commons, an essential place for all students to collaborate and receive support using technology, researching subjects, writing, and reading for content.

### References

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Source: Fields, S. (2014, May 29). The school library in an informational renaissance [Blog post]. *Balancing Books & Technology*. Retrieved from [www.okemosschools.net/education/components/board/default.php?sectiondetailid=17504&threadid=1385](http://www.okemosschools.net/education/components/board/default.php?sectiondetailid=17504&threadid=1385)

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