

# Teacher Librarian Recognizes

## Visionary Leaders of the Learning Commons Concept

**S**chool libraries now face the second major crisis in the past fifty years.

The first was the multimedia revolution that challenged school librarians to incorporate media in many forms rather than just books, to be competent in the provision of many audiovisual pieces of equipment. That change in media produced the terms *library media center* and *media specialist* and successfully challenged the notion that only the males among us could successfully operate such equipment as 16-mm projectors. It took some folks more than a decade to adapt to the new technologies and transform the field.

Now, as all of us know, there is an even greater challenge: the Internet and the digital natives who bring into question much of the storage and retrieval emphasis so central to the profession of librarianship in general. When R. David Lankes published his *Atlas of New Librarianship* in 2011 and his article in *Teacher Librarian* (39:3, 8–12), he said that the role of librarians now centers on the *creation* of knowledge, not the storage and retrieval of knowledge, as has been our mission for the last century.

To their credit, the visionaries in this gallery realized early on, as Google began to dominate information-searching behavior, that an entirely new role for school libraries was needed. Their foresight, leadership, writing, presenting, blogging, and examples have stimulated a refreshing reinvention of the central role of information and technology in the twenty-first century.

In recognition for the contributions made by these individuals, the editors have selected them as recipients of our first annual *Teacher Librarian* Leadership Awards. We asked the honorees briefly to reflect on their contributions to schools, the field, or the organization(s) they represent, or to share a guiding principle or strategy.

Karen Bonanno is the director of KB Enterprises Pty Ltd in Australia, a private education consultancy company that is committed to developing and providing professional learning programs to enhance the skills and expertise of educators.

With the philosophy that quality teachers make a difference to student learning and academic achievement, Bonanno hosts cutting-edge professional learning webinars and discussions through the website *School Libraries, Technology and Creativity* (<http://www.schoollibrarymanagement.com/index.html>). The live webinars provide an opportunity for attendees to engage in dynamic and creative sharing of ideas, as well as Q & A with the presenter. Feedback from attendees provides the foundation for the development of each webinar theme and topic to maintain an organic approach to the professional learning experiences of colleagues. Through her



work providing management services to sustain the professionalism of personnel and professional associations in the school library sector, she was instrumental in the establishment of virtual online conferences since 2004 for the Australian School Library Association. These virtual events hosted papers and forums that facilitated intense, engaging conversation between the presenters and the delegates.

Andrew Churches is head of Faculty Art & Technology, Kristin School, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand.

I am a passionate and curious educator. My teaching subject has allowed me to investigate and adapt a wide range of existing and emerging technologies to be used in the classroom. I continually challenge myself to broaden my pedagogical horizons, to use new tools and approaches to engage and motivate my students to learn. I have the privilege to be able to share my work and experiences in both the virtual and real world, presenting at conferences and workshops and authoring blogs, wikis, and the occasional book. For the prospect of teaching my students, exploring a new website, and learning a new tool are highlights of each day.

Robin Cichetti is the library media specialist at Concord-Carlisle Regional High School in Concord, Massachusetts.

The transition from a traditional high school library to a learning commons is part of a long-term strategy to prepare students for life in a dynamic and evolving world. Our current program informs

our planning for the future. We are building a new school, and the learning commons is situated at the heart. Our new space will build on our current program and feature service areas for information needs and reading on-demand, as well as a genius bar for support with the technology associated with our 1:1 deployment. We are building our digital resources for the future while simultaneously re-evaluating our assumptions about the role of books on shelves. In the learning commons, the priority is student information and media skills and the resources and space to support the educational goals of the future.



discerning consumers of information. By arming our students with digital citizenship skills to navigate their way through the myriad of information sources that bombard them, we strive to provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to excel in school and beyond. We have transformed our library learning commons into a place where teachers collaborate every period of every day, students collaborate, and both are invited to showcase their talents and skills. We have physical, virtual, and experimental spaces where students contribute to knowledge-building centers in all three venues. The oversized signs on our walls read “Communicate,” “Collaborate,” “Ask,” and “Create,” and we model these values in our ongoing efforts in the learning commons every day.

Like a modern agora, the learning commons is a place for our community to gather, learn, work, create, socialize, collaborate, and communicate. It is exciting, and it is relevant to the needs of teenagers today. As librarian, it is incredibly exciting to be part of the leadership team planning for the educational future and knowing that the learning commons is a central part of this goal.

Valerie Diggs is the teacher librarian at Chelmsford High School in North Chelmsford, Massachusetts.



In the Chelmsford High School learning commons, I have created not only a physical shift in space but also the pedagogical shift from *passive* to *active*, not by eliminating the printed word but by moving it from the center of the space to the periphery, creating an open and central space for collaboration, dialog, and interaction. This creates a space more accustomed to open learning and collaboration, where the learning commons can be seen as a dynamic space where teachers and students can explore *together*. Older library designs created an atmosphere of individuality, where students could not be seen or heard, and in fact those were the rules of school libraries for a long time. With knowledge transfer and exploration shifting from linear to more of an organized chaos, the library could no longer live in the past. So by creating a more open and fluid design, we want students and teachers to see the space as inviting, where they can hang out, explore, investigate, collaborate, and create. Opening up space

helps integrate the learning process with an environment in which students find themselves naturally more comfortable and productive. This is one of the hallmarks of the learning commons approach at Chelmsford High School.

Vi (Violet) Harada is a professor at the University of Hawaii, Department of Information & Computer Sciences, Library and Information Science Program in Honolulu, Hawaii.



I view the learning commons as an expansive community of learners seeking answers and solutions to questions they passionately care about. On a daily basis, one of the most exciting engagements for me is to help learning partners make critical connections between people and ideas. The networks are vast. The beauty is finding common threads in different conversations and bringing people together. It might involve introducing an elementary student trying to make sense of a geothermal experiment to a geologist at a local university. It might be connecting a high school teacher working on the Japanese internment experience with a museum authority in Los Angeles. It might be helping a new principal who wants to build a trend-setting library converse with award-winning teacher librarians across the nation. A learning commons has no physical boundaries and presents limitless opportunities to grow relationships and nurture ideas. It's not about designing new spaces and structures—it's all about leveling the learning field and bringing together learners young and old to build dynamic knowledge collectively. It's a rare privilege to be part of this adventure.

Lyn Hay is a lecturer in teacher librarianship at the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, ACT, Australia. She has worked in teacher librarianship as

Sydne Cohen is the library media specialist at Brookfield High School in Brookfield, Connecticut.



My library learning commons philosophy has always been guided by my belief that great things can be accomplished if we keep an open mind. Our mission to be a social, academically exciting, and worthwhile place for all members of our community drives us to reach for excellence on behalf of the students. Our library learning commons is dedicated to knowledge building. Our students have knowledge at their fingertips in our one-to-one iPad school, and it is our obligation to teach them to be responsible producers and

a practitioner and academic since the mid-1980s. Her research on the impact of school libraries on student learning, teacher librarian-principal partnerships, technology integration, and school library futures has informed her conceptualization of an “iCentre,” which builds on and expands the learning commons concept.



Gwyneth Jones is the “Daring Librarian” of Murray Hill Middle School in Howard County, Maryland. The learning commons I have helped to create with my students and community in my Daring School Library is not only the physical center of the school but, philosophically, its heart. We abound with books, digital audio players, and media materials, places to comfortably read or study, tables that are easily moved and reconfigured for project-based learning, as well as an adjacent TV studio for multimedia remix, mash-up, and video production. We are part classroom, gaming arcade, VIP lounge, “libratory” (term snagged from Joyce Valenza’s *Manifesto!*), art gallery, and performance stage. We are a creative, productive, rowdy learning space where shushing rarely happens and kids are our number-one customers. We crowdsource constantly to make sure that their needs and wants are being served. We embrace mobile media, and our facility has a web presence that makes our services available to students 24/7/365 with our learning wiki, blog, and website. We are ever evolving and always open to change.



ers over the years who share this mandate. These folks have all helped shape my vision of the learning commons as a model for twenty-first-century schools. I am very proud of the courageous and inventive work my colleagues Dr. David Loertscher, Sandi Zwaan, and Esther Rosenfeld, and I have done to prepare publications to envision and execute the learning commons approach for schools. Our work calls for a reinvention of school libraries and computer labs to establish a vibrant core for the learning commons and a new culture of learning.

Here in Ontario, the emergence of a learning commons for schools has been captured in a visionary document called *Together for Learning*. Having seen this document evolve from conception to fruition, I am thrilled with the enthusiastic response. It has been my pleasure to help facilitate understanding and implementation over the past few years by writing journal articles and conducting webinars, workshops, and conversations to support transformations. I thank my lucky stars for aligning to include me in the shaping of school libraries of the future, and I congratulate this journal for championing the cause and bringing the learning commons to its readers.

The iCentre was first considered in 2009; at the time, the future of school libraries was being hotly debated in Australia as a result of the Building the Education Revolution initiative providing hundreds of schools throughout Australia with funding to build a new school library or refurbish an existing school library. In a time when some school communities and education systems were asking whether a twenty-first-century school needed a school library, I argued that this was an opportunity for teacher librarians to rethink, rebuild, and rebrand school libraries to better reflect the needs and demands of digital learners in a socially networked world. The iCentre concept challenges schools to brave the convergence of facilities, technologies, people, and resources, to develop a central facility within the school where information, technology, learning, and teaching needs are supported by a team of qualified information and learning technology specialists and support staff. This approach is designed to tackle a major challenge still facing many schools today: the silo-based infrastructure of information, technology, and learning. This convergence requires all team members to be part of the same conversation about the intersection of information, technology, curriculum, and pedagogy in supporting the educational goals of the school. These conversations inform the strategic directions, policy, and practice to meet these goals. This team approach is essential for an iCentre to deliver a holistic, synergized educational program that supports twenty-first-century learning.

Carol Koechlin is an experienced educator who, although retired, continues to advocate and contribute to the field of information literacy and school libraries. She presents workshops in both the United States and Canada and has been a leader in developing the concepts of the learning commons.



Preparing students to be active and successful learners has been my passion throughout my work in education. I have been very fortunate to work with many talented teacher librarians, partner teachers, administrators, and educational lead-

Sue Kowalski is the teacher librarian at Pine Grove Middle School in Syracuse, New York.



I surround myself with passionate folks who are on a constant mission to transform spaces, instruction, services, programs, and overall focus of their library to create a program that meets and exceeds the needs of its investors. The Pine Grove Middle School Library operates under a model of shared investment, and our team is always looking for a better way to deliver our program. With the support of our student iStaff team (forty student staff members), library assistants, teachers, and administrative leadership in and out of the building, we have re-



## JUNIOR FICTION

## TRAVELING INTO ADVENTURE

**13 gifts.** Wendy Maas. Scholastic Press, 2011. \$16.99. 978-0-545-31003-1. Grades 3-7. A lapse in judgment causes Tara to spend the summer with relatives she hardly knows. Another lapse makes her beholden to a strange old woman who demands Tara collect thirteen specific objects before Tara's thirteenth birthday—or suffer dire consequences.

**Sabotaged: The Missing, Bk. 3.** Margaret Peterson Haddix. Simon & Schuster, 2010. \$16.99. 978-1-416-95424-8. Grades 4-7. When Jonah and Katherine try to take Andrea (really Virginia Dare) back to the sixteenth century, things go wrong. Have they damaged the time stream? Can JB rescue them? What really happened to Roanoke Colony anyway?

**The thirteenth princess.** Diane Zahler. HarperCollins, 2010. \$15.99. 978-0-061-82498-2. Grades 4-6. Her father's grief over his wife's death keeps Zita, the youngest princess, in the kitchen, until her sisters fall ill and Zita is determined to save them. Inspired by the fairy tale, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*.

**A world without heroes: Beyonders, Bk. 1.** Brandon Mull. Aladdin Books, 2011. \$19.99. 978-1-416-99792-4. Grades 4-7. When Jason is transported to Lyrian from Colorado, the Lyrians believe he's the Beyonder, prophesied to deliver them from Maldor, the evil emperor. Should Jason stay and fight, or keep searching for a way back home?

**Young Fredle.** Cynthia Voigt. Illus. by Louise Yates. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. \$16.99. 978-0-375-86457-5. Grades 3-6. When Fredle, a house mouse, ends up outside, he battles cold, hunger, and loneliness, but also learns to fend for himself as he discovers the wonders and dangers of the outdoors. Should he give it all up to go home again?

purposed our space and created six new zones, increased the integration of our iStaff student work program, added new mobile and presentation technologies, gone wireless, and rearranged our entire nonfiction collection to better meet customer needs. A few of our purchases were funded by Follett as a benefit of our recent designation as a School Library Media Program of the Year (SLMPY) award winner. Many of our changes have been at no cost. We have increased our outreach through improved virtual connections and alternative scheduling that maximizes the use of space, technology, and professional expertise. Our goal is to strive for high-level engagement between the library and each and every one of our investor groups.

Michelle Luhtala is the library department chair at the New Canaan High School Library in New Canaan, Connecticut. She also does much presenting, both online and in person. A SLMPY award-winning librarian in 2010, Luhtala freely shares her insights and innovations with others all of the time.



At New Canaan High School, we share a culture of integrated innovation. The library program is what binds instruction and helps learners make interdisciplinary connections. Our physical space is large and crowded. On average, we accommodate about two hundred patrons at a time. Ours is an open campus. Students do not sign in or out of the library. We live by the motto, "It's your library. We just teach here." This extends to the larger New Canaan community as well. We have a corps of twenty-five parent and alumni volunteers, and classroom teachers perform supervisory duty in the library as well. We share our physical facility with the rest of the information and communications technology team—technology integrationists, tech support, etc. Nearly half of the district-owned computers (including

mobile devices) available to students at New Canaan High School are located in the library.

Our library program is accessible 24/7. Collaborative instruction in the humanities is transparent and posted to a blog: THE ANNEX@. Our STEMS (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) library instruction is posted to our learning management system, Moodle. Our face-to-face instruction is concise, but we conference with students as needed, either in person or online. Learners are expected to independently consult our online instructional materials, which include an array of video tutorials to support various learning styles. They participate in discussion threads about their learning process. Our rubric measures collaboration, contribution, continuity, and growth, among other skills, a testimony to our commitment to embedding twenty-first-century learning across disciplines. Students are encouraged to contact us off-hours via text message (Google Voice kicks messages over to e-mail on our end), Facebook, Twitter, or e-mail. We don't promise to respond in real time, but we do when we can. This formula for blending learning in real and virtual space has proven successful. Improved student achievement on cotaught units is aligned with improvement among the same cohort group on standardized tests over the past four years, since we have been delivering blended instruction.

Dawn Nelson is instructional media and technology coordinator for Osseo Schools near Minneapolis, Minnesota.



A learning commons gives students access to information any time, any place. And it means that our libraries are now open 24/7. My role as the instructional media and technology coordinator for Osseo Area Schools is to develop and implement initiatives to develop learn-

ers, research and advocate for resources, and remove obstacles to student access to information. For example, wireless access in 100% of our learning spaces supports netbooks and iPad and iPod carts, as well as BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) initiatives in all of our schools. Teachers and students have access to Google apps, Moodle, WordPress, and other Web 2.0 resources. Our librarians are truly information and technology literacy specialists, flexibly scheduled and empowered with opportunities for training and teamwork. Library websites built using a template provide links for students and teachers to maximize use of electronic resources. We are developing a collection of e-books with both online and e-reader access, provide staff development, and collaborate with teachers to provide relevant instruction. In January we received the ISTE Seal of Alignment for a staff-development program focused on student learning and technology integration, and current initiatives are staff development for teachers interested in BYOD options, flipped classrooms, and online learning.

Mark Ray is the teacher librarian at Skyview Senior High School in Vancouver, Washington.



As the 2012 Washington State Teacher of the Year, I have been thinking a lot about the “teacher” part of “teacher librarian.” In developing the library information technology (LIT) framework in Washington State, I worked with colleagues to re-imagine our profession, place, and program to better support student learning. In the same way that “teacher librarian” makes teaching explicit, “learning commons” makes learning the core of a library information and technology program. Librarians cannot merely be in the business of stuff—we must be in the business of teaching and learning. As a teacher librarian, instructional technology facilitator, curriculum leader, uni-

versity instructor, writer, and advocate, my message is always the same: teacher librarians and school library programs are more, not less, essential in this digital age. But the place and program called “library” must evolve beyond what used to be. Despite changes in the information landscape, the need for diverse literacies, critical-thinking skills, and digital citizenship are at the core of twenty-first-century learning. Our job is to ensure that students are effective users and producers of information and ideas. Teacher librarians and the learning commons are essential ideas as we seek to meet this goal.

Ross Todd is an associate professor in the School of Communication & Information at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, and the director of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL), at Rutgers University.



CISSL fosters the transformative role of twenty-first-century school libraries, their integral role in the learning fabric of schools, and their role in ongoing school improvement and reform for me. I have been working with school libraries for many decades, both as a teacher librarian in Australia and New Zealand and as a school library educator in Australia and the United States. I have seen both enormous transformations and challenges in this time. I research how young people learn and build new knowledge from information, how school librarians and classroom teachers can more effectively empower student learning, and how the development of information and critical literacies through guided inquiry and constructivist learning approaches lead to deep knowledge and understanding. Through this research and other knowledge, I know one thing for certain: Gen Next is coming, and we have a major responsibility for creating a learning and information future for them that is better than today. The increasing ubiquity of information technology in ed-

ucation, especially digital devices, mobile technology, and app-driven content delivery, are changing the face of libraries and pose significant questions about learning, reading, and literacy development in a digital world. The emergence of new technology frontiers for learning, such as the creation of virtual learning worlds, online schooling, and virtual gaming, ask us to think out of the box to develop a creative, inquiry-centered pedagogy that fosters critical thinking, problem solving, and the development of intellectual engagement and rigor in learning.

Being involved in substantive research studies (in such states as Ohio, Delaware, and New Jersey) with thousands of students, teachers, and school librarians, I am convinced more than ever that school libraries conceptualized as pedagogical centers and learning commons will provide a strong and certain foundation for students learning, living, and working in our twenty-first-century world.

Joyce Valenza is the teacher librarian at Springfield Township High School in Springfield, Pennsylvania.



I love my work as a teacher librarian, and I learn with teens in this work. I study them, write about them, and look toward how technology and information literacy work for them. I see my participatory library as a learning commons—a kitchen rather than a grocery store, a space that encourages transformation over transaction. This year, thanks to a community grant, I have been allowed to add a dynamic, kid-designed, multimedia “making” space to my existing facility and resources. I love developing and maintaining virtual libraries, making the library a hybrid and interactive experience for learners and teachers. I love working with students as they contribute to these efforts and create their own web-based knowledge-building centers. There is transparent sharing and collab-



## YA FICTION

## AMERICA IN THE PAST

**The girl is murder.** Kathryn Miller Haines. Roaring Brook 2011. \$16.99. 978-1-59643-609-1. Grades 7-10.

Manhattan in 1942 comes alive in this well-crafted mystery about a lonely girl and her detective father just back from Pearl Harbor. Iris, fifteen, tries to fit in at her new high school by adopting the popular slang and dress, even sneaking out to go to Harlem nightclubs, while also trying to help her emotionally distant father with a case about a missing boy from her school.

**No crystal stair.** Vaunda Micheaux Nelson. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. Carolrhoda Lab, 2012. \$17.95. 978-0-7613-6169-5. Grades 7-up. In this inspiring novel based on the life of the author's great-uncle, different voices tell the story of Lewis Michaux, whose Harlem bookstore was a focal point for black intellectual and political life for decades. A memorable portrait of a man who pursued his dream, influenced history, and changed lives.

**Phantoms in the snow.** Kathleen Benner Duple. Scholastic, 2011. \$17.99. 978-0-545-19770-0. Grades 6-9. Newly orphaned Noah, fifteen, goes to live with a relative he doesn't know in the Colorado Rockies in 1944. His Uncle James is a popular member of the Phantoms, a military unit of skiers preparing to fight in Europe. Noah reluctantly learns to ski and starts rigorous training with the Phantoms in this satisfying novel about adjusting to tough changes and meeting physical challenges.

**The year we were famous.** Carole Estby Dagg. Clarion, 2011. \$16.99. 978-0-618-99983-5. Grades 6-10. Journal entries, letters, and newspaper stories follow Clara Estby, seventeen, and her immigrant mother in 1896 as they try to walk from Oregon to New York in a scheme to save their farm from foreclosure. Danger, new friends, and an authentic dynamic between mother and daughter result in a compelling read.

oration on many of their larger inquiry-based projects. I see social networking tools as a critical component to building "tribes" that function as online learning commons with the potential for international collaboration. As such, I help build things, like the "Geek Tribe," which is an unofficial and growing group of teacher librarians who learn from each other in online communities of practice.

Linda Waskow is the library media technology specialist at Beaufort Elementary School in Beaufort, South Carolina. This picture was taken at the school's recent birthday celebration for Dr. Seuss.



I am a learning commons practitioner, collaborator, and evangelist. I am convinced that the learning-commons model is the best program for school library media centers in the twenty-first-century. I infuse new ideas into my practice to extend the boundaries of what a learning commons is and can become—teaching and learning with technology tools and media resources that are accessible whenever and wherever needed. I continue to share what I've learned through my monthly publication (*Media Connections*) for the teachers at my school, a journal article published last year, consulting services for a school in my district, and as a presenter at a school district in South Carolina, SCASL 2011, SC EDTECH 2011, and ISTE 2011. I am currently serving on a statewide committee comprised of district library media supervisors to update the state library media program survey instrument. The goal is to have a final product that will provide essential data about school library media programs and adopting the learning commons concept in form and practice. I see this survey as a wellness check of library media programs in the public schools in our state.

Tim Wilson is the chief technology officer (CTO) for the Osseo School District, near

Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although he is not a library school graduate, Wilson is a strong supporter of collaborative student learning using the concepts of the learning commons.



I didn't go to library school, and I couldn't tell you that books about celestial navigation should be in the 527s without help from *Wikipedia*. Fortunately, my utter lack of formal qualifications has never stopped me from appreciating the central role the library media specialists play in my own work as CTO. They are the "boots on the ground" in our efforts to entice, cajole, and occasionally bribe our teachers to make literacy of all kinds a central concern. As CTO I am responsible for everything from the data center to the media center, and a significant part of my job is ensuring that all members of my team—technicians to teachers—have student learning as their primary mission. I play the role of a connector in my division, leading with one foot in the technical world and the other in the classroom and media center. The result, I hope, is a group of technicians whose job is to help kids learn and a cadre of media specialists and technology integrationists who view the technicians as partners. Great things happen when we do that well.

In a world where teacher satisfaction has dropped to 44% ([http://www.metlife.com/about/corporate-profile/citizenship/metlife-foundation/metlife-survey-of-the-american-teacher.html?WT.mc\\_id=vu1101](http://www.metlife.com/about/corporate-profile/citizenship/metlife-foundation/metlife-survey-of-the-american-teacher.html?WT.mc_id=vu1101)), there are some shining lights in the field of teacher librarianship who not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. Follow these award winners, emulate what they are working toward, and be a pioneer, trying things, doing things, working on things, all of which move you toward the goal of being a risk taker for the good of learning.