The Power of (in) the (Im)possible

Principles of the Possible

At first, I just did not know what to title this paper. I wanted to focus some formative ideas around “possible” and “impossible,” as they pertain to the ongoing development of school libraries, and to use the lens of my ongoing research to explore these ideas further.

And so there were a number of variations: “The Power of the Possible,” “The Power in the Possible,” “The Power of the Impossible,” and “The Power in the Impossible”—all with subtle implications. Embedded in this play on words was the sense of moving forward, overcoming contextual, perceptual, and personal limitations that get in the way of development. Two quotes have stuck with me on the impossible–possible dichotomy. First, that of Audrey Hepburn, who once said, “Nothing is impossible; the word itself says ‘I’m possible’!” (Brainy Quote 1). And then there is George Bernard Shaw’s statement: “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything” (Brainy Quote 2). I see the impossible–possible dichotomy essentially as a construction of the imagination, a limited one at that, reinforced by complex contextual dynamics. The reality of our lives is shaped by what we believe to be possible or impossible. The challenge is to dream beyond the borders of our own experienced world and its boundaries, letting go of the limits to our own imagination and action. Notions of possible, impossible, and limits all revolve around “i.” To think the impossible wraps us in an impermeable boundary or, indeed, locks us out of a world of opportunities.

POSSIBLE PONDERINGS

Russian psychologist Galina Ivanchenko argued that the sphere of the impossible lies “beyond” the limit of the possible and defines an individual negatively. She speaks rather of the sphere of the possible,” a system of interconnected target values that can be achieved through changes of the subject’s actual situation due to either its own immanent dynamics or the subject’s activity” (Ivanchenko, 1993, p. 1). According to Ivanchenko, at the heart of the possible is understanding the context of individual action, propelled by a belief that the current system and context can be transformed, that it is not fixed and unable to be changed, either in the short term or long term. Her work was deeply influenced by psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose socio-cultural approach to cognitive development and educational action has contributed the notion of the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Vygotsky speaks of the possible, not the impossible.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THE IMPOSSIBLE: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

An analysis of the history of school libraries and their development over the last century is a testament of realizing the possible. It was often slow and sporadic, lacking local support, and without precedent for procedure. It is a history filled with the story of champions, often including children raising money for their early upkeep,
and numerous setbacks along the way. One of the early researchers on the impact of school libraries on student learning was Mary Gaver, a professor in the Graduate School of Library Services at Rutgers University. She led a major research study, Effectiveness of Centralized Library Service in Elementary Schools, (1963), involving 271 schools in 13 states. She compared the test scores of students in three learning environments: schools with classroom libraries, schools with centralized libraries run by nonlibrarians, and schools with centralized libraries run by librarians. Students in schools with centralized libraries managed by qualified librarians tended to score higher than students without centralized libraries or qualified librarians. She held the strong belief that “with the school library literally the heart of the educational program, the students of the school have their best chance to become capable and enthusiastic readers, informed about the world around them, and alive to the limitless possibilities of tomorrow” (Gaver, 1958). Gaver’s pioneering study blazed a trail for school library research at a time when school libraries were in their infancy. She saw the possible.

As a researcher gathering data over many years now examining the status, continuous improvement, and impacts of school libraries, I have heard many stories of the impossible, such as:

I formally teach grades K–4 and have not had the opportunity to collaborate on projects with the classroom teachers in those grades. I see the children 40 minutes/week. This is a 100% increase over last year, when my predecessor saw grades 2–4 only 20 times per year. Under these conditions, it is not possible to identify specific learning outcomes resulting from library instruction. (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2010, p. 170)

I am the teacher’s prep, and I teach 33 classes a week in Library, Multi-Media (I’ve become the quasi-computer teacher), Remedial Math classes, and last year I taught Family Life classes for 35 classes. I have no time to collaborate with my colleagues on projects, and it is very difficult to get time to plan my classes and have access to the library for students and teachers. I would love to be more active within my county professional organization, but so many meetings are scheduled after school, I can’t attend. (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2010, p. 190)

A commonly stated impossibility centers on getting “administrators to really understand what we do so that they would see the instructional value of our programs and not just a place to find a book or schedule an event (closing us down)–some get it, but some really don’t” (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2010, p. 190). Enough is enough.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THE POSSIBLE

Helplessness is a way of defining the impossible. We feel we have no control over or impact on our situation. According to a long history of experimental and qualitative research in psychology and sociology, helplessness is a learned behavior (see, for example, Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Peterson, Maier, and Seligman (1993)argue that helplessness is shaped by the problems that arise in the wake of a sense of uncontrollability and is reinforced by constructing a mental model of the impossible. Simply put, the future of school libraries, left in the hands of the impossibilists, do have a strong and visible impact on our situation. According to Peterson, Maier, and Seligman, helplessness is a learned behavior (see, for example, Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Peterson, Maier, and Seligman (1993) argue that helplessness is shaped by the problems that arise in the wake of a sense of uncontrollability and is reinforced by constructing a mental model of the impossible. Simply put, the future of school libraries, left in the hands of the impossibilists, means that there is no future.

On the other hand, the two most recent research studies that I have undertaken remind me that school libraries, in the hand of the possibilists, do have a strong and vital future. The two studies that inform this paper were firstly, Phase 2 the New Jersey School Library Study “One Common Goal: Student Learning,” which was undertaken by CiSSL researchers in 2010–2011 (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2011), and secondly, my current study through CiSSL titled “Collaborative Inquiry in Digital Environments” (Todd & Dadlani, 2013). For the purposes of this paper, these are labeled Study 1 and Study 2, respectively.

Study 1 (Phase 2 of the New Jersey School Library research) sought to examine the dynamics of twelve school libraries that were considered to contribute richly to the learning agendas of their schools, and ones where their future was well within the realm of possibility, at least as assured by
TEEN ISSUES


Miller, Malinda. *Dual Diagnosis: Drug Addiction and Mental Illness* (Illicit and Misused Drugs). Mason Crest, 2013. 128p. LB $22.45. 978-1-4222-2430-4. Grades 7-12. The beginning chapters compare the function of the brain in normal circumstances and after drug use. The series addresses the abundance of misinformation that is available about common drug questions: “Is cigarette smoking more addictive than heroin? Is marijuana safer than alcohol?” The readability is user-friendly and helpful, personally and educationally. Concluding is a section on rehabilitation programs, a glossary, bibliography, and index.


school principals of these schools. Using stories and narrative forms as methodology, the researchers formed twelve focus groups as the basis for data collection, to gather detailed insights into students using and learning through school libraries, faculty and administrators’ attitudes toward and values of school libraries, use of school libraries including enablers and inhibitors, faculty and administrators’ perception of the school library’s impact on student learning, sources of evidence of impact, principal/administrator support for school libraries and their impact on learning outcomes, and perspectives of the future of school libraries. Data were collected from ninety-seven participants: 49 percent were classroom teachers; 22 percent had school librarian positions (either full time or part time); and 29 percent had school or district administrative positions. Sixty-five percent of the focus group participants were female, and 35 percent were male (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2011, pp. 11–16). Full documentation of this study is available at the CiSSL website. Additional publications from this study are Todd, 2012a, 2012b, and this paper also draws on ideas expressed in these.

Study 2 ("Collaborative Inquiry in Digital Environments") is ongoing. It seeks to understand the process and outcomes of an inquiry-based project involving teams of students collaborating for the creation and production of knowledge of a curriculum topic. The research involved two classes of ninth-grade English students in a New Jersey public co-educational high school. The school has a long history of collaborative inquiry involving the school librarian and classroom teachers. In this study, we are tracking the process of how student teams work together to build a shared representation of knowledge, examining the dynamics of this co-construction, and tracking students’ engagement with information sources and how they transform their information into knowledge. Forty-two students were randomly assigned to thirteen groups and given a research task centering on the construction of a scholarly argument surrounding the literary merit of a chosen work of fiction. In addition to class-based instruction, students undertook their inquiry task in a class wiki environment set up by the school librarian, where the students, teacher, and school librarian came together to discuss research topics, establish working relationships, plan and manage tasks, collect information sources, and work together through the process of co-constructing their products, which included a class presentation, visual display, and annotated bibliography. The wiki environment enables researchers to capture and track their research and writing processes, their use of information sources, interpersonal dynamics and decision-making processes, and feedback from the instructional team. In addition, data were collected using the CiSSL-developed Student Learning Through Inquiry measure at the start and end of the inquiry task to capture cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning (available at http://cissl.rutgers.edu/joomla-license/impact-studies/57-impact-studies-slim). Students also wrote daily reflections and commented on other students’ journal entries, generating 336 journal entries (Todd & Dadlani, 2013).

PRINCIPLES OF THE POSSIBLE

In the schools that we have studied, it is clear that libraries are part of the possible. They are valued as part of the culture of the school, a value that has been built up over time, positioning the school library as an integral part of the identity of the school and its operation, inextricably linked to the learning going on in the school and the learning success of the school. What made this possible? Several core ideas, which I have labeled “Principles of the Possible,” emerge out of the two studies identified above and are illustrated by a selection of statements made by participants.

Principle 1: The primary function of a school library is pedagogical, with access to quality information as the foundation of meaningful pedagogy.

From the perspective of the participants in Study 1, the school library was not primarily viewed as an information space; rather, it was seen as a pedagogical space driven
by a learning-centered vision, one where access to quality collections both print and digital was seen as essential. They saw that the library functioned primarily as a whole-school pedagogical center for all faculty and students to develop intellectual capacity through engagement with information in all its forms and to realize core curriculum outcomes. The library was viewed as a common instructional zone for the whole school—both students and teachers. It was perceived as different from the regular classroom. For the students, its primary purpose was building capacity for critical engagement with information and producing knowledge; and for faculty, it was seen as a common center of learning innovation, experimenting with information and technology to enhance teaching skills using information and technology, and integrating multiple media:

The library serves as a learning tool to support every avenue of education rather than just as a microscope just supporting biology or a chalkboard just supporting note taking. So the library becomes more all encompassing as a tool that supports learning. (language arts supervisor)

I think calling it a library is not accurate—to me it’s become a learning center that has resources. When I see students in here, they’re doing research, maybe teacher-directed, but you know, I see a lot of them come in just to find out general information, to learn something—maybe not related to school—so to me it goes far beyond what we think a library was, and the place is always hopping. (principal)

Teachers in Study 1 believed very strongly that the pedagogical work with the school librarians had a significant impact on their own teaching processes in the school and the improvement of their teacher quality, as well as student engagement with learning:

It’s turned my world upside down. I’ve thought as I’ve never thought before; I’ve taught as I’ve never taught before; and I see kids going places—in their minds, in their lives, and in their goals they never dreamed possible. (social studies teacher)

The librarian encourages a collaborative spirit. . . . I’m doing a blogging project in January, and back in October the librarian spoke to me about collaborating with me and helping me teach the children how to use resources that frankly I wouldn’t do as good of a job doing by myself. (language arts teacher)

And that teaching the teachers, that has really been beyond books and research, really the tools that they have made available to teachers have made me a better teacher, have helped me to create more meaningful and efficient ways to assess the kids as well as to engage them. So it has made my classroom so much more diverse in terms of what teaching modalities as well as ways that they can demonstrate that they understand the content. They have given me so many tools for my toolbox that have made me a better teacher. (English teacher)

Basically like guided inquiry on students’ and teachers’ side as well—like they’re guiding you along the way, and they’re helping you break down preconceived notions of something you need to research. I think of the library here as a think tank. . . . That’s true inquiry. (science teacher)

**Principle 2: The role of the school librarian is primarily that of teacher, coteaching with classroom teachers to develop curriculum standards.**

Part of the cultural dynamics of the schools in both studies was the high expectation that school librarians were primarily coteachers who undertook a very direct, active, and visible role in engaging in shared instruction to meet curriculum standards.

From a curriculum perspective, the library is the place where the curriculum gets implemented. And not just pieces of the curriculum but the whole curriculum. For me, [the school librarian’s] ability to work with other teachers is very important for that. She’s not seeing one part of the knowledge that we’re trying to impart to students; she’s seeing the whole picture and that allows her to bring language arts skills, to science skills to history, and so on makes it easier. (director of academic services, district curriculum supervisor)

I really think that because the librarians are coteachers for the most part, the kids get to see us working together with another adult. And I think that’s really important. They get to learn how to collaborate, how to be curious, and how to work through problems together. Maybe that’s a hidden type of learning, but I think that’s one of the most valuable things that they get out of it is that they get to see us work together and model what we want them to be able to do in small groups and together as a class. (English teacher)

We’re still in a time where we don’t believe our information centers are as powerful as they are, as our educators believe. Our librarian is a powerful educator. Our information center is as good as the teaching that goes on there. (principal)

The librarians are not necessarily librarians—they are media teachers. They’re teachers first. And their role is entirely different here than anywhere else I’ve ever been. Because they are part of the growth concept. And they have challenged themselves to be on the cutting edge of what’s going on and what teachers need. So what they do is challenge themselves to go out and figure out how best to service what our needs are. And in order for them to do that, they have to listen very well, they have to be willing to get outside of their comfort zone and be educated, and then they work to integrate this through their teaching. . . . I really think it’s the collaborative atmosphere that really brings us together as school, and the library, as we talked about, is the center of that. (principal)

The school librarians’ role as teachers defined, defended, and sustained their presence in the school and was the basis for the allocation of funding to ensure that this instruction was underpinned by a strong and quality information and technology infrastructure. Their role as coteachers was clearly expected, understood, valued, and tangibly supported.

**Principle 3: An inquiry-centered pedagogy defines the instructional role of the school librarian.**

The school library was seen to contribute directly to quality teaching in schools through the provision of inquiry-based instruction and implemented through in-
to undertake substantial research projects; rather, the inquiry-centered instruction provided jointly by collaborating teams was carefully planned and staged to take students though a research journey and was used to carefully diagnose particular learning needs to ensure successful research:

I would like to say the librarians do two things exceptionally well in process: [they] spend a considerable amount of time planning for teachers to understand the research process and helping them align what part of research cycle or stage they might want to start with. So they model for teachers what is good practice of inquiry and do the same for students. They model student-learning behaviors. And they seem to be able to seamlessly do that, whether they’re working with adults or students. (teacher)

We really see the connection between what we’re doing in our own classrooms to what we could possibly do here. It’s a great experience for the students to not only learn how to research, and to learn how to explore and inquire through various media, but to have somebody else who is a support and a guide and a facilitator, besides the classroom teacher. . . . That collaboration is highly effective. I look at that as one of the strengths of our current program. (teacher)

They spent a lot of time with us understanding the components of research. Within that they made sure we knew process but we knew the also tools and how to use that within context of any class that a teacher wanted to do research in. We can model effective research for the students. (supervisor of instruction)

So in terms of contributing to the learning process, the library does it, but on two different levels. In terms of content support, but also inquiry skills support. And sometimes those skills are more imperative than the content because they are lifelong skills that the teachers are supporting through their content as well. (language arts supervisor)

They teach the students, but then they are also a resource for the students that are learning an inquiry process that is very sophisticated and really asks a lot of them. (English teacher)

The staged process of inquiry-based learning was valued by classroom teachers. Students were not left to their own devices to undertake substantial research projects; rather, the inquiry-centered instruction provided jointly by collaborating teams was carefully planned and staged to take students though a research journey and was used to carefully diagnose particular learning needs to ensure successful research:

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**Principle 4. The focus on curriculum content and knowledge development enables the integration of inquiry capabilities in a meaningful way.**

For years I have heard the claim that school librarians are not about content but rather about process. I think this is problematic. Students learn curriculum content, and teachers teach curriculum content. Students learn declarative knowledge about geography, history, science, and the like. Effective learning of curriculum-based knowledge, however, engages the mind with ideas—the information base to creating curriculum knowledge—and cognitive and affective processes to do this in a powerful way. In Study 1, instruction through the school library first and foremost sought to enable the development of core content curriculum standards. Teachers recognized that resource-based inquiry was directed first to content knowledge and enhanced in a deep way through inquiry-based interventions that developed engagement, depth of knowledge, and mastery of thinking processes to create knowledge. Teachers saw that the school librarians were not implementing a “library” curriculum in isolation to the core content standards; rather, they were curriculum content experts bringing to the learning experience the intellectual and technical capabilities of engaging with information to construct knowledge and to use a range of creative tools for students to represent that knowledge. This required considerable professional trust, negotiation, openness, sharing of viewpoints and opinions, and stepping outside of the box to engage in collaborative learning directed to the transformation of information into knowledge:

I know from my administrative capacity I think one of the things we’re stressing is the idea of providing multiple pathways for learners to demonstrate understanding—opposed to traditional assessment methods of valuing memorization and recall—envisioning new ways learners can demonstrate their understanding. Can they put together a podcast, a multimedia presentation? Again, it’s just not putting something together because it looks pretty, but embedded within that are core principles that students are achieving. (supervisor of instruction)

I would start by saying that probably the greatest asset is that the librarians see themselves as coteachers in every situation, instead of maybe what we always thought of as a traditional librarian. So I see that as our greatest strength. They are individuals who truly believe that they are coteachers with teachers. They are impacting a very specific type of knowledge that they want the students to come away with, whether it’s research or media literacy leading to content knowledge. They are approaching it from a teaching standpoint, which has
not always been my experience. (principal)
They are learning to think through all of the information around them, develop their ideas. The main business in this library is thinking. (principal)
The library ... represents that thirst for knowledge –where students can go if they want more. I think not only physically is it that space, but also psychologically representing that to them, because our jobs is also to create a thirst of knowledge. ... Having that space for them is important for them, to go there, and to know that’s there, and that someone will guide them through. (teacher)
The expectation that coteaching would lead to the development of content knowledge was clearly expected in Study 2 by the students, where they worked in teams to produce an argument about the merit of a literary work. As shown in Todd and Dadlani (2013), students highly valued the opportunity to work in groups because of the affordances it provided for them to build knowledge. Their posttask reflections predominantly centered on curriculum knowledge. Students particularly valued the group process for providing opportunities for sharing and critiquing different perspectives and viewpoints on their chosen fiction to build their argument, and at the same time, expanding their own repertoire of knowledge about the work under study. They saw the outcome in terms of a better quality product:

I like working in a group. When working with others, I get so many other views and ideas that I had not previously thought of. This really adds depth to the final product. (student)

I really like working in groups. It gives different perspectives on the same big topic. (student)

Working in groups allows for different ideas to come in to play, creating a sharper focus for the task. (student)

**Principle 5: The collaborative nature of teaching is the core dynamic for integrating the school library into the culture of the school.**

In Study 1, the collaborative nature of teaching emerged as the central dynamic of enabling the work of the school librarian to be integrated so widely and so deeply into the learning fabric and culture of the school. Underpinning the notion of “team work” and “team player” was the mutuality of working toward one common goal—enabling core curriculum content standards—and this was clearly the case in these school libraries (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2011, p. 67–72).

And [the school librarian] will be in your classroom working with you as well. When we do our research paper with our juniors, the media specialist has come to my class, with my freshmen as well, multiple times, and there is a skit we go through together as we are teaching plagiarism. And you know they have fantastic lesson plans—they are not just attached to the books, attached to the media center—they are all over the school and part of the team. That helps to lure the kids back here as well. (English teacher)

We have a nice teamwork approach. I have my strengths as a historian, [the librarian] has her strengths as a media specialist, and we work really well together. (teacher)

The collaborative teaching role is key. . . . They are helping you build your lesson—you’re not just coming up here and saying here’s what I want you guys to do. They are helping you build that lesson and working together with teaching it. (history teacher)

Where there’s a strong coteaching model, it’s hard to know who the regular ed teacher is, who the special ed teacher is, where one person’s role ends and another person’s role starts, and in a really good coteaching model there is joint ownership of the lessons, presentation, the learning that goes on, not just for some of the students but for all of the students, so I think what you see here is a true coteaching model where there is teaming going on. So what happens is, I think, the librarians challenge the teachers to step outside of their comfort zone because they step outside of their comfort zone. (principal)

**Principle 6: School libraries constitute and advance social justice.**

While there are multiple interpretations of the concept of social justice, at its heart is the belief that all people deserve equal social, political, and economic rights; treatment; and opportunities and that even at the cost of broader social welfare, such rights should not be foregone (Rawls, 1971; Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006). Concepts such as freedom of information and access to resources have long been central to professional and scholarly literatures of libraries. Vincent (2012), writing in the context of public libraries, cited a definition of social justice as “every one of us having the chances and opportunities to make the most of our lives and use our talents to the full” (p. 349). Given the substantive discourse surrounding the future of libraries and their perceived value in society, we examine the extent to which social justice concepts and principles were embedded in the narratives surrounding effective high school libraries (Dadlani & Todd, 2013). The Study 1 analysis revealed the predominance of four social justice categories embedded in the broader social justice scholarship: (1) utilitarianism, (2) equity of resources, (3) equity of access to advantage, and (4) equality of capabilities; these attest to the role of the school library in advancing social justice concepts.

The first category, utilitarianism, contains comments and strategies that support the greatest good for the greatest number. For example, teachers decided to use collaboration between the teacher and librarian to provide equitable access to information, instructional expertise, and personal attention through a division of labor:

I’ve got 25 kids—how do I help 25 kids in one 42-minute class period? But when you have someone else who’s on the exact same page that you are, the kids get so much more assistance and personal attention. (teacher)

In the second, the equality of resource category, teachers spoke about how time and the variety and quantity of technological resources (including both individual experts and physical equipment) either helped them in achieving more equal treatment of their students (in the cases where these resources were available) or hindered them (where the resources were wished for):

Because 42 minutes—six minutes to get
them all seated, set, and ready, another five minutes to go over what you need to go over, if not longer—you only have about 20 minutes to grab it up and then they’re out. . . . We just need more equipment. . . . It just extends the bounds. (teacher)

The third social justice category, equality of access to advantage, centered on creating opportunities for lifelong learning. Teachers saw the school library, its leadership, and its resources as lifelong and welfare based, and as such, would enable their students, and indeed themselves, to deal with twenty-first-century information and technology complexities beyond the school environment:

Empowering students to be able to control their own learning to be responsible for it. To know how to go about it. How to figure out “how to figure out.” Giving them those 21st-century skills that they’re going to need to move forward. So it’s almost about empowering them with a skill set. (teacher)

The fourth category, equality of capabilities, focused on school libraries providing equal opportunities to those who are disadvantaged through not having access to resources outside of school, as well as providing a comfortable and safe environment in which one could elicit the particular help required on an individual level:

So many of our students, in addition to their households not having Internet access, a lot of their households don’t have a lot of things that teachers take for granted. . . . It’s just that they know that they can get work done here that they can’t at home. . . . We need special resources. . . . We looked at their skills . . . and matched those up with materials, so we came up with this solution, which helps the kids; it helps the teachers who are not particularly well equipped to deal with that issue in their class. (principal)

From the perspective of the forty-two students in Study 2, social justice was expressed in terms of equity of contribution, with the widespread concern that the intellectual input and workload to complete the group task would be shared equally and fairly across the group. Students valued the affordances of group work in terms of having the work “split up evenly” and being “spread out among the group”; when the workload was shared among the group members, they believed that “no one would be overloaded.” They were concerned about equal effort and all team members contributing their fair share of work (as opposed to social loafing), as well as all team members receiving the same assessment credit when effort was not evenly distributed: “Usually the entire group does not work together,” and when this does not happen, “to grade several students on one project is unfair.” Students valued commitment to equitable division of labor: “The best part about working in a group, which is why I prefer it over individual projects, is that the workload can be divided among the group members. For individual projects, one must do all the work by himself, but for group projects, each member needed only to do 1/3 of the actual work, making it a lot less stressful for us.” “There is less pressure on one person because the work can be divided” (Todd & Dadlani, 2013, pp. 8, 11). The collaborative inquiry project provided rich opportunities for students to develop, experience, understand, and value social justice at work.

Principle 7: School libraries connect community and the world through digital citizenship and learning for life capabilities.

Participants in Study 1 saw the school library as a community connector—connecting people inside and outside of the school to expertise, resources, and space and to life, living, and working in the world. School libraries were a schoolwide opportunity to open the beyond-school doors. This was further enabled by the instructional role of school librarians in situating meaningful learning experiences with digital information and information technology and developing students as digital citizens with life skills of recognizing, accessing, and using quality information in multiple modes and across multiple platforms; learning to participate in digital communities in collaborative, ethical ways to share ideas, work together and produce knowledge; and understanding the identity, life, and safety issues inherent in learning, living, and playing in digital communities:

I think there’s some broad assumption that because we’re in the 21st century, people understand they may understand this. . . . The assumption that kids know because they’re digital natives is one you can’t make. (supervisor of instruction)

Students are also learning how to be responsible online—teaching students they’re responsible for what appears on that screen. (language arts supervisor)

Basically, digital literacy is not an add-on here. It’s infused [in instruction] through the school library, where students can access each content area of the school curriculum. . . . [Digital literacy] is not a standalone; it’s cohesive and fluent, and pretty well received by students and faculty. (principal)

In Study 1, faculty saw that school librarians make lasting contributions rather than temporal ones, such as test score achievement, particularly in terms of developing a range of capabilities and dispositions that can last a lifetime and have salience beyond schooling and not merely school-based achievement. This included career skills, communication skills, building self-esteem and self-efficacy, personal management skills, and project management skills:

By getting [students] involved in the changes to prepare them for this century and the digital world . . . so that they have the skill set that they need. It’s about process not product. [School librarians] jumped right on that, so they were willing to give up their [traditional role] and look at, “What does our role need to be as we move forward to prepare our kids?” So because they have been in that discussion for at least the last two years, I think we’ve benefited greatly. (principal)

In Study 2, students reflected on their group experience and believed that they learned important life skills, such as interpersonal skills, skills related to the mutuality of working to a common goal, and project management and conflict negotiation skills, for example: “The group project was a good experience. It helped me know some students more intimately; more importantly, it taught me how to compromise and work with others” (Todd & Dadlani, 2013, p. 11)
**FUTURES POSSIBLE: CONCLUSION**

The principles of the possible outlined above are the start of a *futures possible* conversation for effective and sustainable school libraries. These principles center on the school library as a center for pedagogical development, innovation, and experimentation; the pervasive visibility of the school librarian as a teacher and coteacher; an inquiry-centered pedagogy; a content knowledge-outcomes orientation; and the advancement of social justice and learning for life capabilities.

These principles orient the school library of the future from an information function to a pedagogical function. Such an orientation raises fundamental questions for the education of school librarians and what is at the core of their professional information: pedagogy or information. It suggests the formal evaluation of school librarians as teachers and the measurement of learning outcomes through coteaching. It raises the possibility of employment decisions made on the basis of quality teaching measures. The principles also offer insights into how school libraries might be envisioned, marketed and connected to wider community initiatives and social agendas.

“There is no use trying,” said Alice. “One can’t believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*.

**REFERENCES**

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