



THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK

BEYOND JUNIOR SHELVERS: Involving Students in Creative Library Work

By Melissa Techman

Whether or not your library has enough staff, there are compelling reasons for involving students in the work of the library. The widespread interest in makerspaces and student tinkering has pulled students into libraries, giving them new creative roles. Including students in design decisions and outreach projects builds their sense of ownership and increases their interest in libraries in general. Not only do these efforts connect the school community in new ways, but there are easy advocacy benefits as well.

Be Open to Clubs and Informal Groups

Open up your library as much as possible. If you're in K-5, keep working toward a flexible schedule, if you don't already have one. In high school, welcome lunch groups and students with study hall periods. Enlist students who are already in the library but also seek out those who aren't and invite them in. I have an informal group of 30 students I call Design Crew. We meet occasionally and I email them requests and solicit ideas. Everyone who contributes in any way is a member. Students making things for the library is new for my school, but I'm seeing growing interest.

There is a new sound studio in the library. Students are recording, remixing, making podcasts, and working on sound effects for the theater department. The musicians and poets who use it are the target audience for some posters and video tutorials on copyright and remix rights. Instead of making my own, I'm asking some of the students to do the research and come up with guidelines. We can share these products with the school and offer them to other schools that we Skype with or share sound files with.

The Drone and Model Aircraft Club has been an unexpected delight, meeting several times a week in our makerspace room. Sometimes they're inside tinkering and flying tiny quadcopters, and when the weather is good they're outside at lunch. They're an inclusive bunch, and welcome curious newcomers. They can't wait for our laser cutter to be installed, so I'll be asking them to make a basic training guide.

The Creative Writing Club meets in another room but has agreed to plan and offer a blackout poetry event in the spring. They're a huge group and I'll be reaching out to them several times this year, to see if they'd like to organize some talks on fanfiction, or help with free writing events.

Fight the Urge to Buy All Your Signs and Posters

There are some really nice posters from ALA and bookish sites, but use them sparingly. Art, photographs, and authentic or quirky touches are best. Elementary libraries often feature wonderful student work and act as the central galleries of their school. I had some great lunch bunch artists and display helpers who made my former library really come to life. In my new position in a high school, I'm slowly getting traction with sourcing student-produced items. I'm patient, but Design Crew is still the email version of herding cats!

Visit art classes and ask for photos of 3D work, copies of paintings, and enlargements of prints. Ask the photography and digital imaging teachers if you can speak to their classes briefly. Show classes the kind of thing you're looking for and tell them you know they can do better. I held up a poster I made about reference help at the library (a Word doc that our county's library support services enlarged very cheaply). Students charitably agreed that it was good but not great, and they're starting to email me photographs and give me advice about signs and displays. As users, students are perfectly suited for figuring out what information works best on signs, or in how-tos, and they need practice thinking about themselves as users.

Many libraries host art shows and displays, and I'm looking forward to seeing what that looks like at our school, but my approach is different. The displays and signs that students help with are separate from the traditional teacher-chosen art shows. It's slow at first, but as word spreads, students begin taking the initiative. Also, I'm starting to tap into talent from unexpected sources. One robotics team member sent me pictures from a recent hike and they are stunning; some gorgeous nature shots really make a difference in our windowless library. Photography teachers have me on their radar, but word is spreading outside their classes.

There are some really nice posters from ALA and bookish sites, but use them sparingly. Art, photographs, and authentic or quirky touches are best.

Students Can Help Research Creative Projects

A student working at the WAHS Squad (student-run technology help desk in the library—a big help in a 1:1 school) overheard me wondering about LEDs, circuits, and e-textiles. We started talking and a small group of students offered to research prices, resistance of conductive thread, and test some products. It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm and I'm planning to help them shape the results of their research into a student guide to wearable tech. Similarly, after I show classes some of the resources in the Digital Public Library of America, I plan to ask for volunteers to investigate "on-ramps" to contribute content to DPLA, as well as the Internet Archive.

Often students are willing to talk or look something up, but reluctant to write or produce something that's not "for a grade." In K - 5, I found some enthusiasm for blogging, but it was hard to sustain without a lot of support from classroom teachers. In high school, I'm hearing a lot of "I hate to write." I'm beginning to see that what they mean is "we don't enjoy writing school essays." One way I've found to pull writing out of some students is to interview them. I come up with some questions, take notes, and tidy up the results. It often produces really good articles; the students are knowledgeable and good communicators—they just don't see that these elements are at the heart of good writing.

There are lots of ways to involve students in outreach. At all levels, students can help document and promote library events, as well as make simple posters and booklists.

Outreach - Fun, Connections, and Advocacy

There are lots of ways to involve students in outreach. At all levels, students can help document and promote library events, as well as make simple posters and booklists. Other ideas I hope to try:

- Having students design surveys for the school community and younger students, with survey teams available to Skype and discuss findings with younger students and other schools.
- Readers advisory outreach: teens provide "if you like ____" articles for the local newspaper.
- Events in which the library is a center for co-creating art objects with younger students (could be virtually, via mail, or through physical exchange and delivery).
- Having students make kits for our library, younger kids, or public libraries (sketching kit, bug-watcher kit, etc.). Each kit could include a book and simple activities.
- Maker outreach, in which students visit nearby schools and offer craft and electronics activities, like light-up cards with simple circuitry.
- Students teach others how to make screencasts or make how-to cards for library resources.



Melissa Techman, MLS, NBCT, is a librarian at Western Albemarle High School, Albemarle County (VA) Public Schools. She was formerly a K-5 librarian and a public librarian. She has written articles for AASL's Knowledge Quest, Edutopia, and School Library Journal. Presentations include "Ebook Making with Students" (with Joelle Alcaininho) at SXSWedu 2013, "Libraries as

STEM to STEAM Hubs" at Computers in Libraries West 2013, and "Social Media with K - 8" at Computers in Libraries East 2015.



FROM CLASSROOM TO LIBRARY:

Building Collaborations as a First-Year School Librarian

By Nikki Brewer

When I began my first year as a library media specialist, I realized that I didn't have much information about how to begin collaborating with teachers in my building. I had spent the last eighteen years of my profession collaborating with the building's ELA teachers as an eighth grade ELA teacher and department chair. Now, I had to find ways to begin forming collaborative relationships with every teacher within every content area in my middle school setting. I found my biggest cheerleaders in the fellow librarians in my district as well as my former ELA counterparts, and from them I began to venture out and create new ways to develop a collaborative climate within my building and my district.

My first priority as I entered the library several days before the teachers were expected to return to school was how to reach out to my peers (both former and new). Our school had just hired more than fifteen new staff members, so in some respects, I was lucky to have many fresh faces as potential

collaborators. I knew I needed to share who I was, get to know who they were, and communicate with ideas that were fresh and not just a boring email or hard copy letter. I bravely set out to make my debut to the entire staff as the librarian rather than my previous status of ELA teacher. Join me as I share my experiences, tips, and examples of how to create collaborative partnerships as a first-year school librarian.

Tip 1: Share Library News & Resources Online

Create an educational Twitter account and encourage staff (if they have not already) to create their own too. Be sure to preface that the account will be for educational, not personal, purposes. Create or revise a handle (username) for your Twitter that is related to your school and your library. Follow every teacher who has an account, and definitely put yourself out there so that they will follow you.

Create and share a hashtag (if there isn't already one) for your school and for your library. (You may need to check with your administrator or public relations department first.) Tag teachers and the school often in positive posts related to your library, school, teachers, and activities. These two steps will create a sense of camaraderie as well as open doors of communication, because you will be able to see what teachers are doing in their classrooms and learn about their teaching styles and educational values. By creating a hashtag for your school and library, you are enabling staff to begin recognizing the school and/or your library in their own tweets. Finally, by creating a Twitter handle and hashtag related to the school library, you demonstrate pride and school community. Many school districts and educational organizations have taken to using Twitter and hashtags to make worldwide connections for sharing ideas, events, and other collaborative activities. For me, I learned a great deal about which educational leaders

By creating a hashtag for your school and library, you are enabling staff to begin recognizing the school and/or your library in their own tweets. Finally, by creating a Twitter handle and hashtag related to the school library, you demonstrate pride and school community.