

The Evolution of NextWave

LEADERS FOR
21ST-CENTURY LIBRARIES



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In January 2012 a group of four school library professors attending the ALA Midwinter Meeting were having lunch and discussing various issues related to the school library field. These school library professors agreed that one challenge facing the profession is preparing future leaders. As current school library leaders retire, it is difficult to identify people who will step into these leadership roles. These four colleagues shared what they had tried to implement in the past to alleviate this situation, including applying for funds to subsidize the tuition for school library doctoral candidates or to create a self-sustaining doctoral program for school librarians to prepare them to become school library professors or high-level district leaders. None of these possible solutions had become reality. From this one ordinary lunch—a common occurrence at various conferences—came a commitment from these professors to explore further possibilities for cultivating the next generation of leaders for the school library profession.

The Challenge

School librarians have backgrounds in two pedagogical worlds. They are teachers and must understand the educational arena of instruction and curriculum delivery. They are also librarians responsible for establishing a library, both virtual and physical, that will provide access to the information that students and other members of the learning community need. School librarians require courses and training in how to teach (education field) and courses in providing resources, managing a library, using technology, and working with students as they develop information skills (LIS field). AASL's mission statement is: "The American Association of School Librarians empowers leaders to transform teaching and learning" (2015). To fulfill this mission, school librarians need expertise in teaching and in library and information science content. Applicants wishing to become school librarians have two major avenues available to achieve this goal: a Master's degree in education with exposure to basic



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education curriculum or a Master's in Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree from a program that presents curricula aimed at all information professionals. If a school librarian strives to complete doctoral studies, these same two choices are available: a doctorate in education or LIS.

This limitation creates the challenge facing the school library doctoral students today. The number of school librarians who work toward a doctoral degree is small; therefore, no doctoral programs present only school library content. Advanced course work at the doctoral level in the school library field is rare. Doctoral degrees usually

The Evolution of NxtWave—Invited Scholars' Retreat (ISR)

The four colleagues (see boxed text) realized that if they were to hold true to their commitment made at lunch that day, they needed to identify a time and place where they could devise a plan that would address this challenge. They participated in an Invited Scholars' Retreat (ISR) where initial planning took place. This retreat allowed the sponsors to remove themselves from their daily responsibilities and flesh out their initial ideas. The challenge was further defined. School librarians who enter into doctoral programs do not have advanced courses in the school library area. The general education courses and the LIS courses do

not address the research needs or interests of school librarians. Nor do these programs present information and training in the competing standards inherent in the school library field (Church et al. 2012). In addition, a second challenge was identified: school librarians in doctoral programs may not have the opportunity to be mentored and guided by professors who have a school library background. In 2004 Donna Shannon surveyed both ALA-accredited and NCATE nationally recognized programs and found that adjuncts teach many school library courses, and some programs do not have tenure-track faculty in the school library area.

The project conceived at the ISR was named *NxtWave*, Leaders for 21st Century School Libraries. The purpose of the project was to provide training and mentoring for the “next wave” of school library leaders. The *NxtWave* sponsors developed four guiding principles that drive the *NxtWave* project.

NxtWave Scholars will:

- Develop a depth of knowledge about their school library profession;
- Be visible and engaged leaders in their professional community;
- Articulate an informed vision for the profession;
- Create and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

The ISR provided an opportunity for the four colleagues to begin the initial planning of the project, develop a timeline, identify the requirements for applicants, and begin planning the curriculum for the advanced courses. ISR-I was followed by ISR-II with numerous conference calls in between. At the end of ISR-I and ISR-II, the *NxtWave* project was a reality.

Implementation

During fall 2013 the *NxtWave* sponsors accepted sixteen members into the first cohort. These members are all certified school librarians and are doctoral students

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at the sponsoring universities. The four advanced courses are offered online and, through cooperation from the universities where the sponsors teach, the students attend classes together. Each of the sponsors teaches one of the courses.

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*Sponsors of
NxtWave:
Leaders for 21st
Century School
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Gail K. Dickinson,
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The four advanced courses are described below.

#1

*Concepts and Context
of School Libraries
(Spring 2014)*

Concepts and Context for School Libraries introduces candidates to the broad landscape of school librarianship and its relationship to the greater library and information profession. A critical examination of benchmarks and key concepts tied to literacies, information science, and technical innovation will provide a body of foundational knowledge in support of the development of the candidates' personal and professional frameworks. Candidates will use frameworks to optimize their ability to conduct inquiry and provide leadership for 21st-century initiatives in school librarianship.

#2

*Frameworks for
Best Practice in School
Libraries (Fall 2014)*

Frameworks for Best Practice in School Libraries explores best practices in school libraries using the framework of current national standards for school librarianship preparation programs. (For information about the standards,

go to www.ala.org/aasl/education/ncate.) Major areas for exploration include but are not limited to teaching for learning, literacy and reading, information and access, advocacy and leadership, and program management and administration. Emphasis is placed on extensive reading in each area. In preparation for a future article submission, students conduct a thorough literature review in a specific area of interest.

#3

*Strategic Leadership
for School Libraries
(Spring 2015)*

Strategic Leadership for School Libraries focuses on the social, economic, and political issues and trends facing school libraries. The broad area of the social realities includes the increasing diversities in society, overcoming the digital divide, and preparing all students to be active and engaged 21st-century citizens. Schools are facing harsh economic realities in funding as well as positive signs that resources in different formats may become less expensive and may greatly increase access. Common Core as well as other state and federal standards initiatives create opportunities on the political front as well.

#4

Inquiry & Research in School Librarianship (Fall 2015)

Inquiry and Research in School Librarianship will examine current research in the school library field and provide the students with the skills they need to use existing research data for evidence-based practice. The process of conducting action research and traditional research will be reviewed in the context of the school library field. Students will practice interpreting data and applying these interpretations to solving problems for library program improvement. A research proposal for an action research project will be prepared; the proposed project will include the process for identifying and meeting Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

For an online cohort with students from the eastern, southern, and western parts of the United States to be really effective, face-to-face events are desirable. The sponsors realized that seeking grant funds to assist in implementing their idea was an avenue that should be explored. In September 2012 the NxtWave sponsors applied for an Institute of Museum and Library Services Laura Bush Grant and were provided with funds to pay tuition for the four classes and to provide for conference travel opportunities for the NxtWave Scholars. This monetary support has enriched the NxtWave experience. At these conferences, the NxtWave sponsors and their students have an opportunity to build on this NxtWave community.

In addition, the NxtWave Scholars have assignments that support the second guiding principle, "be visible and engaged leaders in their professional community."

Conclusion

At the time of this writing, NxtWave Scholars are completing their second class in the cognate and are ready to begin their third one. The students are becoming friends and colleagues through the experiences in the project. Also, the NxtWave sponsors have become these students' mentors and continue with their commitment to shepherd these scholars through their doctoral studies.

NxtWave continues to evolve, and during their monthly phone conferences the sponsors have started discussing NxtWave 2. Lessons have been learned while working with the first cohort, and this knowledge will guide the planning for the next cohort.

The initial lunch with friends and colleagues at the 2012 ALA Midwinter Meeting was a catalyst that will initially provide sixteen doctoral graduates ready to take their places as leaders in the school library profession either at the university level or through high-level leadership roles in school districts. They will be the NxtWave of school library professors and leaders in the school library profession.



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