



# THE EMBEDDED LIBRARIAN FOR K-12 SCHOOLS

The embedded librarian model has been around for a while. According to *Embedded Librarians: Moving beyond One-Shot Instruction*, the term was first applied in 2004 in an article by Barbara Dewey (Kvenild and Calkins vii). However, the model has been in use since the late 1960s in medical libraries. From there the practice spread to academic libraries, where it continues to be a viable service model. Embedded librarianship involves "focusing on the needs of one or more specific groups, building relationships with these groups, developing a deep understanding of their work, and providing information services that are highly customized and targeted to their greatest needs" (Brower 3). This may involve leaving the confines of the library to offer these services.



to only scratch the surface of what a librarian can really do to help faculty and students. It is like trying to hit a target with a shot gun when what you really need is a guided missile.

Two of the most striking examples of the embedded librarian model in higher education are California State University at Stanislaus and the Arizona State University Herberger Institute School of Dance. Warren Jacobs' 2010 article is one of the few to record quantitative data about the difference it made to be embedded. During the course of 2009, Jacobs' office was relocated to the Department of Education because of a library renovation project. He used the opportunity to become embedded in the department. He emailed, he visited with faculty, he visited classes; he marketed his services like crazy. Even he admits that the embedded model, if done correctly, will increase the workload (Jacobs 6). In the end, two numbers stood out. Jacobs provided over 150 research consultations with faculty and 45 with students within the Department of Education during 2009. Normally, the *entire* library staff provided about 100 research appointments each year beyond the reference desk. He increased his instructional sessions (*entire* class sessions) by 20 percent. Embedding himself in the department worked.

The Arizona State University Herberger Institute School of Dance provides more qualitative data. After a large donation to the school made a special collection for dance possible, Christopher Miller, the librarian for the collection, was invited into the dance department as an equal member with faculty. Miller doesn't offer hard numbers, but he lists the observed advantages he found, such as being completely integrated into the department, being a departmental colleague having greater input into the curriculum and the ability to teach information literacy, and finding that the librarian was perceived by students as having a more "pronounced role" in their educational experience (Miller 98). These are outcomes that many school librarians would give their book carts to have

## HOW CAN WE TRANSLATE THE EMBEDDED LIBRARIAN MODEL TO K-12?

How do we get there from here? Academic libraries have larger staffs, bigger budgets, and the freedom to leave the library. How can K-12 librarians manage to offer embedded services in a school setting? Here is the most important question: How can we afford not to? The value of school libraries is being questioned from all sides. Sometimes it seems that school librarians are the only ones who care about what school libraries can offer. But what if that were not the case? In *Purple Cow* (2009), Seth Godin writes

## LIAISON MODEL VS. EMBEDDED MODEL

Most school libraries currently use a service model that is more closely related to the liaison model in academic libraries, where librarians offer a variety of services to departments to which they are assigned based on expertise. These services may include bibliographies, ordering materials, information literacy instruction, etc. The difference is in the depth of service. Like the one-shot lesson, liaison services tend

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By Robin Henry

about being remarkable. He says that being remarkable is what will keep you viable. Embedded librarianship is one way to be remarkable. K-12 libraries will have to scale down the embedded model to fit them, but it can be done.

Jake Carlson and Ruth Kneale offer advice for making the embedded model work. First, be a team player. Embedded means working with others, so play nice, which includes taking the time to build relationships. Next, be willing to accept some risk—and this might mean moving outside your comfort zone. Remember the old saying “If you haven’t failed, you haven’t tried.” Not every attempt you make will be successful, but make the attempts anyway. In K-12 schools it is important to work out a plan. Target the departments or teachers you will work with first, remembering the definition of embedded librarianship. It is okay to target some teachers or departments and not others. As a K-12 librarian, your staff is small, so you have to make your efforts count. Don’t waste time on a teacher or department where you do not have a reasonable expectation of success. Save them for when everyone is talking about how remarkable the library is, then they will make their way to you. Remember your goal, which is to provide information literacy instruction to your students.

**KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER**



Practical strategies for embedding yourself into a department are based on the definition of the embedded librarian. Make sure you know what is being taught and when. Always be ready with a suggestion for how the library could help with the unit. Go to departmental or team meetings to make yourself available. If you haven’t already done so, move your pathfinders into the digital age and put them online. See if you can

embed yourself into online class activities by offering to create a links page, a citation tip sheet, or other valuable services to teachers and students. If you can arrange coverage by an aide or a volunteer, offer to go to computer labs and instruct students in databases, searching, or research-specific topics for a class. Talk to your administrator about what it means to be embedded. Advertise, advertise, advertise through whatever means you have at your disposal. Make sure that the staff knows what services they can get from you and the library.

**EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP AS A PROCESS**

A word about assessment: Keep records of all the lessons you collaborate on and the teachers you work with to share with administration and to promote the value of embedded librarianship. Get students to share stories about their success. Remember that the transformation won’t happen overnight. There are stages of embedded librarianship, and like any process, you may move between the stages and be at different levels with different staff members.

The first stage is the introductory phase in which you begin the process of marketing by introducing yourself, going to meetings, and targeting key people with whom to build relationships. Next comes awareness, when you brand the library, create subject and course guides, and engage in other outreach activities. Third is the timely instruction services phase. Here you get the chance to give instruction to students. Make it count. Partnerships make up the fourth stage when you begin to work on specific courses with instructors and become more directly involved in classes. The final phase is information competency, which means that you work to get information literacy fully integrated into the course work, measure your progress, and provide feedback to

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faculty team members (Krkoska 122-124). This fifth stage is where all school librarians would like to be, and it is a laudable goal that will help students be better prepared for life after their K-12 experience.

The embedded librarian model can be a successful service model for K-12 libraries. By concentrating on the targeting and customizing aspects of embedded librarianship, K-12 librarians can make it work and make a difference.

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