



"It was as a teacher librarian that I first started seeing myself as having something worth sharing beyond the school."

Action Is Eloquence

ANITA BROOKS KIRKLAND

Action Is "Action is eloquence." The words are Shakespeare's (n.d.; *Coriolanus*), and they have become my professional motto. My career is characterized by jumping at unexpected opportunities that seemed to fall from the sky. I've certainly changed lanes a number of times, driven by a desire to learn and make a tangible difference.

CAREER PATH: ROADS TAKEN AND NOT TAKEN

If you had asked the teenage me, I would have said that I was destined for a career in music, and indeed I completed an undergraduate degree in music education and a graduate degree in clarinet performance. I worked as a student assistant at two university music libraries, foreshadowing the eventual lane changes in my career. After some early ventures into being a freelance musician and studio instructor, I completed my education degree, with music and school librarianship as my teaching focuses. I spent many years as a middle school instrumental music teacher with a schedule that included a smattering of core subjects, mostly English and history. I loved teaching music and have remained an active musician in my life outside of school, but midway through my career I realized my true teaching passion was in teacher librarianship.



Playing clarinet in the Wellington Wind Symphony

LANE CHANGE: TEACHER LIBRARIAN

In 1999, when the opportunity arose to take over the library at my school, I jumped at the chance. Succeeding an exemplary teacher librarian made it possible to build deeper capacity for collaborative inquiry, reading engagement, and particularly for integrating technology into teaching and learning. The principal was very supportive,

valuing the instructional leadership for learning processes and cross-curricular approaches that the teacher librarian provided.

All of this was within the growing external threat of massive cuts to educational funding in Ontario (Martin, 2009). I had arrived in my dream position only to have that rug pulled out from under me after a few short years. Elementary teacher librarian staffing was cut drastically in my school district. For one short year I found myself traveling between three schools, but the era of full-time positions was over.

LANE CHANGE: CONSULTANT, K-12 LIBRARIES

In 2002 I became consultant for K-12 libraries for the Waterloo Region District School Board. Despite my relatively short tenure as a teacher librarian, I was fortunate to be hired for my competencies over my experience. The position involved supporting all aspects of the library program for 116 elementary and secondary schools. This included leading a comprehensive professional learning program for teacher librarians, teachers, and library support staff and delivering countless workshops for other instructional leaders, teachers, and students on information literacy, digital resources, information ethics, and educational technology. Administrative duties included managing all aspects of online database licensing and access, administering a professional learning fund that made it possible for teacher librarians to attend conferences, and participating in many system initiatives. One of the most interesting aspects of my position was extensive consultation in the design and functionality of new libraries and



My consultant's wardrobe included a hard hat and steel-toed boots.

library renovations. Over my 12 years as consultant, we built 17 new school libraries and renovated 18.

The most important project during my tenure as consultant was the creation of the library learning commons website. We brought together a team of elementary and secondary teacher librarians to create a comprehensive suite of instructional resources that could be accessed from a common site or integrated into existing school library websites. The website made a huge impact within the school district, with a common yet adaptable instructional approach and seamless access to online resources. It gained national and even international attention, not only for the usefulness of the resources and design but also for the powerful model of collaboration in its creation and use across schools and panels.

LANE CHANGE: UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTOR, TEACHER LIBRARIANSHIP

Let me start here by explaining teacher qualifications in Ontario. Teacher li-

brarianship is an additional qualification for licensed teachers in the province. Teachers take a three-part series of courses to achieve their specialist qualification in teacher librarianship. Individual school districts have varying standards as to what level (part one, part two, or specialist) is required for certain positions in the school library. Explaining the intricacies of this system might require a few hours, comfortable seating, and a warm beverage, but suffice it to say that the system emphasizes instructional approaches and teacher librarian/teacher collaboration over the procedural and technical competencies that might be more fully addressed in master's programs.

While still working as the school district's library consultant and having just completed an MLIS degree on the side, I became an online course instructor for teacher librarian additional qualifications for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I increased my course load after retiring from the school district. In 2017 we took part in a large project to update all three courses to meet new expectations from the Ontario College of Teachers, the body that governs teacher qualifications in the province. We also added a blended online/face-to-face course option for teacher librarian part one. Teaching these courses has been very gratifying, helping to ground theory in the reality of practice as experienced by the teachers participating in the courses.

THE COLLECTOR LANES, WHERE THE REAL ACTION TAKES PLACE

It was as a teacher librarian that I first started seeing myself as having something worth sharing beyond the school.

The district ran a comprehensive educational technology professional learning program for teachers, and for a few years I was their busiest instructor, leading courses in video editing, music production, and podcasting, in addition to more “librarianish” topics related to information and digital literacy. As the district’s library consultant, my reach broadened, and I presented at library and educational technology conferences and facilitated workshops at many different school districts across Ontario. I also began writing quite extensively for education journals.

The most important collector lane of my career has been involvement in professional associations. Volunteering in associations has provided the best learning opportunities and the most stimulating collaborative work for advancing the profession. I joined the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) Council during my year as an itinerant teacher librarian and continued on the council for a decade. I served in many capacities, becoming the association’s president in 2005.

OSLA is a division of the multi-

sector Ontario Library Association (OLA), Canada’s largest library association, and in 2014 I was very honored to serve as the OLA president. OLA initiated a government relations strategy during that year that endures to this day. I continue to be actively involved in the OLA, currently chairing its Mentoring Committee.

LANE CHANGE: INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

Retiring from the school district did not decrease my commitment to school libraries. I have continued to present at conferences and for school districts across the country. My focus has been gradually shifting from teaching practice to strategic planning, program assessment, research, advocacy, and leadership for the library learning commons. I have also had the opportunity to consult for independent schools like the Hamilton Hebrew Academy, a project that involved a complete renovation of the facility to support the school’s focus on inquiry-based learning (Weiser, Wilson, & Brooks Kirkland, 2018). Always

willing to push myself slightly out of my comfort zone, I’ve also worked with other library sectors, facilitating professional learning workshops for both public and university library staffs.

LANE CHANGE: CANADIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

My biggest postretirement project has been the formation of Canadian School Libraries. In 2014 national cross-sectoral library associations in Canada went through a huge shift, with the dissolution of the Canadian Library Association and the emergence of the new Canadian Federation of Library Associations. While these changes were generally positive for the world of librarianship, the Canadian Library Association dissolution had a serious negative impact on the school library world. Our freshly minted national standards document, *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* (Canadian School Libraries, 2018), was effectively orphaned, and the only national journal dedicated to school library practice ceased publication. The hard-fought-for national collaboration that produced *Leading Learning* was effectively disenfranchised by the dissolution. And *Leading Learning* itself, which had made a significant impression in Canada and had also received international attention, was suddenly at risk of becoming unsupported and unavailable.

And so began my most recent lane change, this time, borne out of crisis. Being so recently retired, I was in a great position to take practical action as part of a national working group. With positive results from a national survey, the working group decided to proceed with forming a new nonprofit



Speaking at the OLA Super Conference in 2013



charitable organization, Canadian School Libraries. Clearly my background in associations proved helpful, but nevertheless the learning curve was steep as we negotiated the legalities of incorporation and achieving charitable status, developed a governance structure, and embarked on fundraising initiatives. We were also very aggressive in getting *Leading Learning* up on the web in both English and French, launching a new online journal, hosting a national research symposium, and creating an online archive of Canadian research into school library practice. Although we have a growing group of volunteers, board members have taken on the majority of the practical work. I chair that board but also serve as an editor, web developer, graphic designer, and business manager. Action is indeed eloquence in this case.

BEING A LANE CHANGER: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LEARNING

Recalling all of these experiences prompts me to reflect on the big picture. What have I learned from each of

the lanes that my career and life have followed? How do they connect and relate? How do I understand myself, given these experiences?

Aside from the intense pleasure of creative expression, my musical training has taught me the discipline of practice, being persistent, learning through iteration and self-assessment, and the value of coaching and taking direction. Playing in musical groups has taught me the value of teamwork and collaboration in the pursuit of excellence.



Teacher librarianship is at the core of my professional identity.

Spending years as a subject and classroom teacher grounded me in effective practice and experience as the other partner in a teacher/teacher librarian collaboration. Moving into the school library built the leadership capacity that enabled me to move forward in all of the ways that I have described.

It's all about the learning. That is the crux of the matter. Everything that I have pursued is grounded in the competencies of the teacher librarian, and that is how I think of myself, even though I actually worked as one for the shortest segment of my professional career. Teacher librarians have the capacity to be change leaders. This isn't always what happens. I can't count how many times I have observed how working in isolation and clinging to past practices undermine progress. The picture I have painted here of my own career sounds very rosy, but believe me, there were many bumps and pitfalls along the way. An inherent drive to learn and willingness to try new things, even things that put me way outside my comfort zone, are ultimately what has helped me overcome obstacles and achieve some level of

eloquence through what I do. So here I humbly offer my advice for a successful career with the capacity to be a lane changer, and perhaps even a change maker.

Follow your passions and play to your strengths. We don't make our mark on the world by trying to fix ourselves. Take strength from your passions and leverage your strengths as you find a way to make a difference.

Take energy from change. We are in an era of unprecedented change, and teacher librarians can help put that change into context for other learners. Be prepared to try new things, learn from experience, and move constantly forward in attitude and practice.

Be a constant learner. It's the only way to move forward. What we knew a couple of years ago risks being hopelessly out of date if we are not open to learning from every experience and everyone around us.

It's all about relationships. You can't do this alone! Building relationships extends your influence and builds trust.

Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate. Need I say that again? Collaborate. Leverage the collective knowledge and strengths of your network—your hive mind is far more powerful than trying to solve problems in isolation. The true story of my success is in what I've accomplished in collaboration with colleagues.

Give back and give forward. Over my career, mentors have gently nudged me toward new ventures. They saw something in me that I didn't necessarily see in myself. I am so thankful for people like Carol Koechlin, Liz Kerr, Esther Rosenfeld, Larry Moore, and David Loertscher for their encouragement. I do my best to follow their examples



Think It, Do It—the theme of OLA's Super Conference and Kirkland's tenure as president.

and provide similar support and encouragement to emerging leaders.

Think it, do it. I have no patience for people who like to complain but aren't willing to step up and do something about situations or to try new things. Don't just think about it—do it! Action is eloquence.

REFERENCES

- Canadian School Libraries. (2018). *Leading learning: Standards of practice for school library learning commons in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://llsop.canadianschoollibraries.ca>
- Martin, R. (2009). What happened to Canada's education advantage? *Star*. Retrieved from https://www.thestar.com/opinion/2009/10/20/what_happened_to_canadas_education_advantage.html

com/opinion/2009/10/20/what_happened_to_canadas_education_advantage.html

Shakespeare, W. (n.d.). *Coriolanus*, act 1, scene I. *Goodreads* Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/15186>

Weiser, G., Wilson, H., & Brooks Kirkland, A. (2018). A teacher-initiated library learning commons and the transformative outcomes it can produce. *Canadian School Libraries Journal*, 2(2). Retrieved from <http://journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/a-teacher-initiated-library-learning-commons-and-the-transformative-outcomes-it-can-produce/>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Kirkland, A. B. (n.d.) *By the Brooks*. Retrieved from www.bythebrooks.ca
This is Kirkland's website and blog, where she shares a wealth of workshop resources

The Canadian School Libraries. (2018). *Canadian School Libraries*. Retrieved from www.canadianschoollibraries.ca

This website provides direct access to all major projects and resources.

As a writer, presenter and consultant, **Anita Brooks Kirkland** (B.Mus, B.Ed, MM, MLIS, Ontario Certified Teacher) specializes in the areas of information and digital literacy and the role of the school library learning commons. She draws on her extensive experience as a teacher educator, both as an instructor in teacher librarianship for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and in her previous role as the consultant for K–12 libraries at the Waterloo Region District School Board. Kirkland was a contributing writer to *Together for Learning*, Ontario's guideline document for the school library learning commons. She serves as chair of Canadian School Libraries, coeditor of the *Canadian School Libraries Journal*, and cochair of the Treasure Mountain Canada Research Symposium and Think Tank. She was the 2014 president of the Ontario Library Association and president of the Ontario School Library Association in 2005. She is on the *Teacher Librarian* advisory board.

YA FICTION

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Thomas, Kara. **The Cheerleaders**. Delacorte, 2018. 384p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781524718329. Grades 9–12. Monica, 15, misses her sister, Jen, who apparently committed suicide five years earlier. In this tightly-plotted mystery, Monica finds a mysterious note written to her stepfather, a police officer, and starts to wonder if it was really suicide. Four other high school girls died shortly before Jen did, all of them cheerleaders like Jen: two murdered and two in a car accident. Life at home has been bleak since then. Monica's also just ended a pregnancy after being secretly involved with a guy in his twenties. More clues emerge about the deaths, including a significant text message on Jen's old cell phone and stories from people who knew her. Suspense builds as the dots connect beautifully right up to surprises at the end. The title will pull in readers while the excellent mystery will keep them glued to the page.

Ireland, Justina. **Dread Nation**. Justina Ireland. Balzer + Bray, 2018. 464p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062570604. Grades 9 up. The Civil War has ended early, because the dead started turning into zombies. That wild premise launches this dramatic fantasy about racism and sexism in an alternate historical setting. The zombies, called shamblers, need to be fought, which is why Jane, a biracial teenager, is at a Baltimore school, training to fight. Although she expects to be a bodyguard to a wealthy white woman, instead Jane finds herself on a train West as punishment for looking into a mystery about corruption among the wealthy and powerful. Will the walled settlement on the plains, where the mystery continues, be the death of her, or will she find the freedom she deserves in a painfully unfair world? With lots of action and a little romance, this is a terrific first book of two.

Lucier, Makiia. **Isle of Blood and Stone**. Houghton, 2018. 400p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780544968578. Grades 9–12. Everyone in the long-ago imaginary kingdom of St. John del Mar knows that two of their three princes—along with their caretakers and bodyguards were brutally killed as children in a massacre while on a picnic eighteen years ago. Another of the dead was a famous mapmaker, whose son, Elias, 19, has followed in his footsteps. But then two maps appear with recent sites on them, maps that bear the unmistakable style of Elias's father. Is he still alive? Are the princes? Allied with Mercedes, a strong, smart diplomat who has won his heart, Elias sets about uncovering the past. Each clue brings danger and new clues, with red herrings and surprises along the way. Strong on plot and characterization, this appealing tale explores themes about prejudice, sexism, and the importance of kindness. First of two books.

Miller, Samuel. **A Lite Too Bright**. Harper, 2018. 480p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062662002. Grades 9 up. What if your grandfather were a cross between Jack Kerouac and J.D. Salinger—a Beat-type cult figure from the hippie era who wrote just one novel? So it is with Arthur Louis Pullman III, whose famous, reclusive grandfather died five years ago after having inexplicably disappeared for five days. Narrator Arthur, 18, misses him despite the Alzheimer's of his grandfather's last years. Having lost his girlfriend, best friend, and college scholarship—a back story that unfolds slowly—Arthur boards a train to figure out why his grandfather left and why he died in Ohio. Following what could be clues in the form of poems presumably written by his grandfather, Arthur travels from California to Ohio with stops along the way, falling for an enigmatic girl and encountering a group of dangerous fanatics who worship his grandfather's writing. Intricately plotted with a complicated main character, this debut novel shines.