**Transcript: Leading from the Library with Ashley Cooksey**

Well, my name is Ashley Cooksey and I’m a school librarian and an adjunct instructor at the University of Central Arkansas.

And I’ve been a librarian in different libraries ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade. So, I’ve had kind of a range of working with students in different aspects. And today I'm here to talk to you about leading from the library.

And over in the chat I’m going to ask a couple of questions.

So just in the chat box next to it and think about how you would define a leader.

Who is a leader? What is a leader? What characteristics does a good leader display? And I’m just going to watch the chat for a second and you’ll notice there is an intentional, something different in the title that you’ll notice if you are a grammar person like me and you really want everything to be just so, you’ll notice that the leading is NOT capitalized and that’s on purpose. We’re talking about lowercase leaders not uppercase leaders.

Listening skills, Jeri says, that is an excellent characteristic of a leader. You want someone who is going to listen when you need help and even if you just need to talk out a problem, which is me. I often just need someone to talk to. Just if I can talk it out, it helps me to figure out what I need to do and what my next steps are.

Okay, Rene Brown’s definition, being proactive and making others around you better. So, encouraging leadership skills or encouraging the strength that you see in others, listening and patience. These are all excellent ideas for a leader.

You’ll notice again that lowercase L. That doesn’t mean that leadership is a title and, surprise, you guys are all leaders, every one of you in the position that you are in right now. You are a leader. And yes, Shelly, absolutely, asking, just knowing that you can ask those questions when you need them.

And so AASL states that one of the roles of a school librarian Is to be a leader. And they define that in the AASL manual for the National School Library Standards as the school librarian is a teacher and a learner who listens and acts upon good ideas from peers, educators, and learners.  Leadership also requires increased professional commitment. And thorough knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing the profession. So, I would say that you are all definitely leaders because you have made a commitment to expanding your knowledge and to improve your library and practice.  And you’re a leader no matter where you are. Even if you don’t have that title of a leader. And you can facilitate leadership growth. Even if you aren’t recognized for it, you are a leader.

So just kind of thinking back to some of those qualities that you see over in the chat. Do you have those qualities? Are you someone who’s empathetic, do you listen when someone needs help?

And we’re breaking this down into three ways that library and leadership can be developed and that can be through instructional partnership, collaborative partnership, and professional partnership.

So, let’s take a quick look at each of these. And if you have any questions, definitely pop them over in the chat and I’ll try to answer them the best that I can, and we’ll have time at the end as well for questions, and then I have some resources.

So, if you hear me mention resources throughout this, just know that you will have the opportunity to have those resources shared to you as well.

So as an instructional partner, some of the things that you can do is lead professional learning. Offer to co-teach, do some drop-in sessions. That was always one of my favorite things to do as an instructional partner was drop into teachers’ classrooms. It allowed me to see students in their natural environments. So, especially if I was having behavior issues with a student, I want to know if that was happening elsewhere, and just messaging the teacher and saying, “Hey, I'm going to sneak in the back of your classroom. You won’t notice me. I’m not gonna say a word. I just want to sit and observe. Let me see what you’re doing.” And offering virtual sessions, pulling resources, creating displays, and curating for teachers: all of those are things that you can do as an instructional partner. And there was a very smart librarian somewhere said that we are teachers who just happened to teach both students and adults in the largest classroom in the school. And leading professional learning can be both in-person or virtual and you may have done some of that throughout this distance-learning time right now, and being that person that is compiling ideas and creating screencasts. Are you supporting their professional learning? How are you doing it all throughout the year? Offer to coach each lesson to ease into collaboration.

Sometimes that gets to be a little bit tricky with teachers. And because they teach content, especially the high school area—high school teachers very much are closed door teachers. That’s their classroom, and I always tell them, I want nothing to do with your content. I don’t want to teach physics. I’m not teaching biology. I’m not going to teach algebra. I don’t want to touch your content. That is your kingdom. Let me come in and help by being a co-teacher and co-planner. Let me teach the research skills and you teach the writing. Let me teach the technology and how to use Google sheets to share data and create a pie chart or a bar graph. You can talk about data collection and Punnett squares. I don't want to do that. I did that in high school, and I’m done with that. Be that person who can pull resources for students.

Many times, teachers are hesitant to collaborate. And especially if I’ve not had that person that they can go ask. And so be that person and collaborate with students. Ask the kids, what are you doing in your class right now? What are you studying in science? And that will be an easy way to ease into it. I did that with a fourth-grade classroom. I had tried to work with the science teacher for about three years and kept getting, “Oh, yeah, we'll do it.” And then that was sort of the end of the collaboration. And so I just asked the students, “What are you guys doing in science right now? What are you studying?” And we have a very hands-on science department and we’re really strong in the arts as well. So, makerspaces didn’t always work so great in my library. It took a while to develop that because they got plenty of that in their class. So, when I asked the students what they were doing in science, they said, “Well, we’re studying volcanoes and different kinds of volcanoes right now.” Like, okay, that’s great. I’ve got a lot of nonfiction books on volcanoes, and it was fourth grade. So, I went ahead and pulled, like, the “Ranger in Time” book about Pompeii and some of the “Magic Tree House” stuff. Just anything I can think of that had to do with the volcano. And they said, “Well, we have to do some research. We’re all assigned a type of volcano and we’re looking up information about it.” So, we shared our research and databases that we had access to. And the students kind of brought their graphic organizers in and started taking notes in the library, and we talked about citing resources and making sure that you got the website’s name written down. And then we actually took that and did some augmented and virtual reality with it. Have you guys ever heard of Quiver? Quiver is a 3D or augmented reality app that you can download on your phone or on an iPad. And they have coloring sheets. So, you just print the coloring sheet. They have free and paid, and if it’s for free, it’s for me. So luckily the volcano was for free, and you print the coloring sheet. The students color it, scan the QR code, and hover their device above it, and it actually makes an augmented reality version of the volcano, and you can interact with it and turn it different directions or tap on it to make it explode. So, when the students finished research, they would color their volcano and then they got to use the iPads to kind of interact with it.

And they told their teacher what they were doing, and she came to me very upset. She said, “We're going to build model volcanoes in class. Why are you doing this with them? You should have asked me first.” I said, “Let me, just let me show you what they’re doing,” and I kind of showed her and she thought it was really cool. And this is a very technology-heavy teacher. And for the remainder of the project and the research, she came to the library with every fourth-grade class that came in, and she stayed the entire time they were there, and talked about the books they were checking out, double-checked their research to make sure that they were collecting the information that they needed, and interacted with them. We were able to use Google Maps as well and pull up some video. There was an active volcano at the time, so we were able to kind of pull that up and just put it in the background for students to watch, and really made those real-world connections for them.  But it was all because I wanted to be that instructional partner and work with the teacher. But I couldn’t get the collaboration to click or to take place, and that one project lets you. Every single unit that that teacher did, she came to us to ask, “How could we collaborate? What can you do to support what they’re doing in the classroom?’ On everything that they did from there. It took a while to get there but it was something that I was able to do just by asking the students, “What are you doing?” And pulling in those book displays, which is another thing that you can do.

You can also lead professional learning. Where do you see opportunities to lead PD at your school? Sometimes they need to be developed. So, talk with your administrator about opportunities they see. Oftentimes that was my principal asking for me to share information on how to access the databases we were paying for or that our state provides. What are the school’s mission and goals? Make sure that you’re supporting those in your professional learning. Create book displays for nonfiction. Increase the book talks. Those are some things that I did because our goal for our school was to increase pleasure reading in nonfiction. So, I created displays of nonfiction books. I built YouTube book-trailer lists of nonfiction books to increase those, and that’s the way that I could make that connection with our school’s goals and things that the library had to offer, so when our goal changed to increase specifically for science- related topics, the principal then came to me and said, “Hey you remember those book trailers you did for just nonfiction? Can you kind of only make sure it’s about the topic? Here’s the fifth and sixth grades’ curriculum map for their science unit so that you have that.” And it was because I had taken that initiative to be the leader in that area and tie that into the library.

Providing just-in-time support for your campus also really helps. Create screencast videos and provide digital support. Thinking outside the box, not just for teachers, but your parents need that support, too, and parents need to know what it looks like for a student to log into Google Classroom. That was a parent night that I provided because the students had, we had rolled out a one-to-one initiative and didn’t provide a whole lot of support for parents. They had questions, too. The students knew how to access Google classroom and where to get their assignments, but the parents didn’t. So we hosted a Google Classroom night for parents and had the parents sign into their students’ Google Classroom, so they could see what it looked like and how assignments are posted. And then a couple of parent-type questions about how it was graded because not everything is done in Google Classroom. So, the grades on their home access center were matching up with Google classroom. About 75% of the parents didn’t know how to access their grades on the Home Access Center, to log in and be able to see what their students’ grades were in every class. So we took that opportunity through that parent night with Google to take that a step further and show them how to sign into their home access center so they could see their students’ grades. And that was something, like I said, about 75% of those parents had never done because they didn’t have the support. They didn’t know that and that was just something that came about from that just-in-time support. We were able to see that was a need right then, and we took that and made a really quick screencast video and shared it out on our social media so that it was available to a parent to be able to review and see it anytime.

Those are things that you can do very, very easily to support your students, your parents, and your staff as well as be that just-in-time support and be a leader in your area. I’ve mentioned curation a couple of times and Padlet, Wakelet, Symbaloo, Pearl Trees, Hyperdocs. Those are all free resources, and I have a video that I’ve included in our resources today that walks through how to use Padlet, Wakelet, and I believe Symbaloo as well. And so that's there. Just know that it’s for one of my classes through the University of Central Arkansas so you may hear me talk about your assignment that’s due and that’s because they have an assignment to curate resources.

And then talking about those forward-facing books: 50% of shoppers buy the first thing they pick up. So, this is why having those forward-facing displays. Even if you just stand books up, you don't have to have fancy stands, those will stay on their own. Nine percent of patrons check out a book from traditional shelves. Just saying that’s fine. After a library, and this is a study that was done in a library, after they began to do some forward-facing displays, 26% of patrons began checking out from forward-facing books. So just from taking the time to move some of those books forward facing. And you can build that around a theme. Typically, in March, since it’s Women's History Month. I try to use a lot of female biographies or books by female authors just to have that there. It doesn’t have to be anything special, or a big display or posters printed. It’s just me walking around the library pulling books and turning them out. And you can even have students do that. Let them know that you’re wanting books about a specific topic. And say, “Can you just walk around and find those for me?” And they will come back with a massive stack.

Another way that you can increase your leadership is through being a collaborative partner. I’ve talked about ways that I’ve done this a little bit with some classroom teachers. Building relationships and planning together, and scheduling. And I have a couple of scheduling ideas and because, if you are in an elementary library, your schedule is probably a fixed schedule, and you are probably a teacher prep period so you don’t often get that face-to-face collaboration time.

And then stakeholders and community members are also part of your collaborative partnership that you can develop. I always picture Jerry Maguire when I think about building relationships: help me help you. I can’t help you if I don’t know what you need. I can’t know what you need if you’re not talking to me. Take the time to build relationships. It takes a while. It might not be the very first thing that happens, like that science teacher that took about three years for me to build that relationship with. And once it clicked, it was constant that we had that collaborative approach to our teaching. Be sure to approach everything with a growth mindset and steering clear of those complaining and negative aspects. You always hear the phrase, “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Sometimes that doesn’t work. Sometimes the squeaky cart gets abandoned and left behind. So, make sure that you approach that with a growth mindset.

If you hear the, you know, I hear a lot of people say my principal won’t let me. Have you talked to your principal and asked why? A lot of times, when someone is saying no, it’s because they don’t understand, or they don’t know the foundation for what you’re trying to do. Give them a little bit or show them and ask, “Why, what'’ the roadblock here? What can we do?” I also hear a lot of, I just can’t do that. Okay. Have you tried? Have you attended a webinar? What have you done to do something different? If you can’t, find something you can do. And include those collaborations on your lesson plan, and this is a lesson plan that I use. And it’s just very simple, and at the bottom you’ll notice that it says collaborative notes. So even if I have not met with a classroom teacher face-to-face to plan a full-on collaboration, and what most people think of collaboration, even if it was just asking the teacher, “What are you doing right now?” “Oh, we’re talking about the rock cycle.” “Okay, I have some nonfiction books I can pull about the rock cycle.” Pulling those books and facing them forward. I have a rock collection. So, putting that rock collection out on display for students to see different types of rocks and minerals. Anything like that goes in my collaborative notes so that when my lesson plan is viewed, even if I’m not actually teaching a lesson about the rock cycle or research about the rock cycle, that note is still in there—the fifth grade is studying rock cycle, books have been on display. That lets the teacher know and it also provides me with a way that I can connect with a teacher. That was a really big unit for fifth grade, was the rock cycle. In our Scholastic Book Fair, there was a huge book about rocks and minerals and had very excellent pictures in it and it told, had scientific facts about all of them and their weight and the color and I was able to use my Scholastic dollars and bought that book to go in the teacher’s classroom library, and she absolutely loved it. And I wouldn’t have known to do that if I hadn’t had that conversation. That was just a quick email, hey, what are you doing in science right now? It took a whole two seconds and then that was able to kind of develop that relationship with that teacher.

Scheduling is often tricky in the library because,, like I said, if you’re an elementary librarian you are probably a prep period. If you are a high-school librarian, you are probably begging teachers to please come in and use my room. Let me, let me have you in the library, so it can be a little bit tricky. And these are just a couple of schedules from different teachers, and you’ll notice on the top one. That's the closest to the title is a scheduling on Monday 4/27. This is “Print Tyler's Spelling.” That was from a high-school teacher that included that in her Google Calendar. So, she took the time to mark off this time of my day. I’m going to print a copy of this teacher’s spelling for him. How easy is that to show that you can be that support for a teacher. And the bottom left-hand corner is from Shannon and her planning. She includes special events. So, if she knows that grade levels are celebrating a specific topic, or if it is poetry month, that all goes on to her calendar so she can remember to kind of tie those things in so that she can plan collaborative lessons. And having that information there is so helpful.

In my scheduling I wasn't able to attend PLC in grade-level meetings because that was often during when I had the class, so if I had third grade, typically third- grade teachers were in their PLC meeting. I was their prep period. So, I asked if they would share their notes from that meeting. And we use Google Drive, so they were able to share those with me. And in Google Drive you may know that you can select some text for an image and make a comment about it. And I would read their notes from the meeting and make a comment of, “Oh, yeah, I have books about landforms; and I have a whole series of books about this author, let me pull those; we’ve already talked about citing sources and I see you’re doing research, I’ll make sure that I bring that back up into a lesson next week. And so just kind of making little comments about what I could do to support their learning, really developed relationships with teachers where they soon began to include me in their notes. So when they were in the meeting, and they knew that they were going to be teaching on a specific topic, they would highlight, and if you add in the person’s name, it tags them in that so I would get a notification: Mrs. Webb wants to know if you have books about, you know, landforms or whatever, and I was able to kind of interact. So pretty soon the teachers knew they could rely on me or they could ask questions or find support in the library and began to include that. So, I was able to build that in my schedule. Even though we could meet face-to-face, it wasn’t something that happened to work out. It was really nice because you know teachers depended on that to include in their lesson plans eventually.

And then stakeholders and community. Your leadership goes beyond those four walls that you live in. And remember that the library is not your room. It belongs to the students and the teachers. You just have an office or a desk there and it was really a room for everyone, and your leadership goes beyond that. Be sure that when you’re talking about these partnerships, that you’re making it a win-win. Don’t always come asking questions. Come with solutions. A way that you can kind of move beyond your four walls to show stakeholders and community what you're doing in the library and how you can support. It’s offering to present at board meetings. Our board meetings for our district are actually moved from campus to campus. So, the school board meets at every campus all throughout the year, and when they met at our campus, they always met in the library. So, I would make sure to have, even if it was just a graphic poster that I had done in Canva or Smore, printed out and on their table so that they can see it. I was doing a breakout, digital breakout one time and the principal happened to walk through the library, and she said, “Oh, hey, we have a board meeting tonight. Can you leave these boxes out and then come have them do this activity?” So that night the computer lab teacher and I went to a board meeting and had our board members go through a digital breakout that was about science and using the library catalog. And the whole premise behind it was, the principal had been arrested for stealing the cookies. So, it was kind of funny. She didn’t know what it was about. She just knew that it was fun, and the kids were engaged, and the board members got a really good kick out of it and something that we could do to show how the library was impacting students and engaging them as well.

“It’s not about how many students you reach by teaching an individual lesson, it’s about the influence you have on your school community, and how many students you can reach by reaching your teachers.” And that's from *Leading from the Library*, which is a super easy read by Shannon Miller and Bill Bass, and that talks about different ways that you help can help your school community thrive in the digital age, and ways that you can support your teachers and students, your community, your parents through leading from the library.

And the last way to develop your library leadership is to be a professional partner. Always approach being a professional partner through reflection. Professional reading, attending webinars, and continued learning and being a connected educator. And look for professional books to inspire your practice. They don't all have to be library related. One of my favorite books is *The Innovators Mindset* by George Couros and *Digital Leadership* by Eric Sheninger. Neither one of those are library focused but it really helped me to focus my practice and to share ideas professionally and make connections with classroom teachers. The link that you see there is also going to be in the resources. It is a crowdsourced list of professional reading for school librarians, and it grows all the time as I share it and it’s completely editable so you can add in your ideas or make a copy and save it for yourself. But I just share that on Twitter through my PLN and say, “Hey, what are some really great books that you find for professional practice?” and it’s just kind of grown from there.

And then attending webinars and continued learning—there are tons of those out right now. As a matter of fact, that was one thing that our Commissioner of Education, when we went to distance learning, teachers began asking, you know, well, I’m going to interact with my students and my lesson plans in Google classroom, but what do I do? And he said use this time to improve your practice. So, we have what’s called Arkansas Ideas through our PBS station, and it builds professional development and webinars. He said use that, there are free webinars all over that are happening right now. If you are curious about a tool like Flipgrid or Wakelet, webinars are happening every week for those, and the Future Ready Librarians group has webinars about every week, and they range from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. Just depending on what webinar it is.

And the last thing is to be a connected educator and which I think we're going to talk more about but it's, join Facebook groups, get online. And Twitter chats completely changed the way that I teach in 2012, and when, she’s become a really good friend now, Shannon Miller was at a conference and presented about Twitter, and I’m like, I’ve tried it. I don’t really understand. I mean, what’s a hashtag? But after that, and after I began to participate in Twitter chats, everything changed, and that’s where I learned from my PLN of so many different resources and being able to share that with teachers, sharing images on Instagram. You can find tons of school librarians on Instagram. Goodreads and Pinterest are both ways that you can connect and curate and build. Those are what I call passive connectivity. You don’t interact much with each other on those two platforms. You can still develop your practice, but it’s not completely interacting. And I hear a lot. I don’t have time for that. I don’t have time to be on Facebook groups or on Twitter. You’re on social media. I see you checking Instagram at lunchtime. Just add that time for your practice in just a few minutes, and it will, you’ll notice a big impact on your practice and what you’re doing.

So those are just a very few ways that you can do that and I see someone talked about the curation videos and those like I said, those are gonna be in our resources that I’ve shared and so this is a quote from Eric Sheninger that I’ve seen in his book, *Digital Leadership,* that says that if you’re not telling your story, someone else will, so being on a social media platform and talking about what you’re doing in your school library and sharing what’s happening in your school. That’s a way that you’re going to get your story out there and to show that you are an important part of this school. If you’re not telling your story, and you’re not showing what you’re doing, someone else is going to. And it’s probably not going to be a good side of it, because again, going back to that growth mindset, people are going to complain if they see something wrong. And if that’s what you see posted, and you’re not showing what you are doing, it’s really easy to turn a story negative. And so, share what you’re doing. Be sure to follow your school’s guidelines.

That’s another leadership opportunity. Check your acceptable-use policy and see if it’s up to date. When was the last time it was updated? Is there anything that you need to add to it and make those connections and be that advocate for student privacy? And maybe even for developing those websites. Who manages the social media for your school? So have those kind of in your wheelhouse so that you know who to go to share, and to be that leader for your school as well. And my information, if you need to contact me, and my email address and website are both great places. And you can find me on tons of Facebook groups across Facebook as well as Instagram and Twitter, sometimes Snapchat, not very often and I have not taken that TikTok plunge yet, but you know, maybe in the future. I’m seeing a lot of really great TikToks and shared for just-in-time learning opportunities for students as well as for teachers.

And then I have just a couple of next steps. The first one would be to reflect. What next steps can you identify for yourself to strengthen? Or if you don’t have it in your wheelhouse just yet to establish instructional collaborative and professional partnerships. So, thinking just on yourself. What resources can you begin exploring? Sometimes it’s great to have a next step that really kind of brings you in and makes you think about what you are doing already, and you’ll be surprised at what you’re doing already for leadership. An action that you can take, and it’s just a super simple action, is to email your administrator or instructional facilitator or instructional coach and ask what support for professional learning they need for next year. They probably have some ideas of where they’ve seen teachers struggling and know that they need to provide something but not sure where to start and provide suggestions. So, how can you help with that?

Offer your services. You can put together a screencast. Screencastify is free to record your screen, and you can show them how to check out a book or how to find something on the Internet. And you’ll see through that curation video that I shared that was done in Screencastify and it saves to your Google Drive. You can upload it right to YouTube and start a YouTube channel.

Remember to tie into your school’s mission and vision if possible and always think about, is it best for students? Why and how. Because again that’s a really great way to get in with your administrator. If it’s best for students, chances are your administrator’s gonna say, let’s try it.

Discuss: So, in your discussion with your cohort, what’s the biggest challenge you face when initiating partnerships and collaboration with others at your school? What can you do to overcome them? And how can you present partnerships as a win-win?

[Ashley Cooksey’s Advocacy and Personal Learning Networks Resources](https://wakelet.com/wake/u8GGv1LzVbKNJjt-TDU8g)

*\*Small edits have been made for clarity.*