

As Benjamin Franklin said "When Libraries exist "the Doors of Wisdom are never shut". If the goal of high school is to prepare our students for life through the pursuit of true knowledge, than the heart of the high school must be the library. In my school the large glass doors allowed visitors to see into the space, yet the back wall was not visible. It almost appeared to go on forever. No longer a place of "shh" my high school librarian, Dr. Joyce Valenza, created a space that was alive with the excitement of new ideas, a space where the mind could indeed go on forever. The high school library is no longer a place to spend a quiet study hall. It is the media center, the heart beat. It is the place to synthesize the random facts thrown at you through the day. The library is where knowledge is applied and morphed into the students' own creations. The library is the makerspace of the mind.

Our vast digital database was among the first in a high school to connect us to real time information. While other schools had some staff members creating wiki pages, Dr. Valenza implemented cutting edge technologies. Students at Springfield, in 2008 were creating wikispaces, Prezis and leaving PowerPoint presentations in the dust. Dr. Valenza's access to numerous Gale databases allowed us to apply our new knowledge to real time information. It was interesting to learn about the electoral college; it was more effective to watch live streaming voter returns and do a real-time electoral count. No longer were we left to wonder if we would ever use what we were learning about. We used our new knowledge every day in that Library.

It is her example that led me to believe that a good High School librarian is more like a GPS, helping students find the information that they need. As Alexandra K. Trenfor said "The best teachers are those that show you where to look but don't tell you what to see."

With access to these databases, Dr. Valenza did more than leave the library doors open. She took our hand, walked us in, and showed us how to navigate the vast ocean of Digital Information. New technology brings new opportunities for our students to engage in learning but it is up to the Librarian to ensure that the technologies are applied correctly.

One of the most important skills with which our students can graduate is the ability to research. Not only will college require it, but life requires it. Whether we are buying a new car, or a new home, we all need to be able to research and to find relevant information quickly and efficiently. Dr. Valenza consistently reinforced the need to check your sources. While the world wide web has made access to information instantaneous not all of that information is qualified. The ability to identify quality of information is a key component of quality research. Dr. Valenza's high school library ensured each of us graduated with the ability to do just that.

When I entered Springfield in 2008, social media was primarily the AIM page where we decided what we would wear to ice skating on a friday night. Facebook was a thing for college students to connect with potential roommates. The idea of Twitter, Instagram, Periscope, and Snapchat were as foreign as self driving cars. But in my High School Library our Librarian was already in the digital age. It was light years ahead of surrounding school districts.

It is important to remember that no high school librarian, even one as experienced and proficient as Dr. Valenza, can exist in an isolated world. Therefore her participation in and contribution to professional learning communities reminds us all that it is from one another we get our best ideas. As social media exploded so to did Dr. Valenza's presence in the library community. Tweeting out new research, and encouraging words, became a daily occurrence in Dr. Valenza's library. Using her blog and her facebook page she created go to resources for high school librarians across the country. For example, at an author meet and greet I had asked the author to sign a copy of her book to Dr. Joyce Valenza. She put her pen down, looked into my eyes and said "wait, do you actually KNOW Joyce Valenza?" She went on to explain that she had recently attended an author's conference where Dr. Valenza's Blog was a hot topic! This story is relevant for two reasons. First because it is a shining example of the well deserved notoriety of my fantastic high school librarian and inspiration, Dr. Joyce Valenza. Second, and most importantly, because it was a book that was being signed. All the media, all the databases, and all the technology can never and will never overtake the heart and the soul of any library which at its essence is the written word.

While today's Library is a Media Center, a place to apply and to engage in real learning it is also a haven. In the Library we meet Emerson, Thoreau, Toni Morrison, JK Rowling, Tolkien, and Walter Dean Myers. We find Poetry and Art. We can go beyond the walls of the building and get lost in the pleasure of literature. Dr. Valenza is most certainly a 21st Century Librarian. Through Social Media, access to high value Digital Databases, real time information and the ever changing landscape of research she affords her students every opportunity to go further, to learn more and to be able to find the answer, no matter the question. But she, like every great Librarian, is at heart a person who loves words. She takes the time to know her students and thus is always ready with a suggested read. If our goal is to become proficient writers then we must be readers. Reading for pleasure is one of my greatest joys. Dr. Valenza would ask us about what we were reading. She asked not to test our comprehension skills but to engage in a conversation about a great book. In my mind the only thing better than reading a great book is talking about it with someone who loves it as much as you do. High School can be a rough road. A great High School Library is the place where the road is a little smoother. It is alive, it is buzzing with activity. It is safe and silent. It is loud and adventurous. It is a space without boundary, a space without judgement. In the world of High School where the pressure can be great the Library is that most essential place where the big world outside goes away and you enter the beautiful world of words.