

## Do We Still Dewey?

By Christine Allen

**D**o we still Dewey? Well, yes, we do, but technology has changed so much of everything else we do in today's school library. For example, I have to admit, I let this article go to the deadline because I knew technology would save me; I could e-mail it in no time at all. Although there's nothing really wrong with that, today's reliance on technology didn't exist for most of us even a few years ago.

A similar difference exists between what our students' lives are like now and what we were taught about those students when we were in school learning to be library media teachers or specialists. (I know it may offend some, but I do think it was easier when our title was plain and simple: librarian.) Even for twenty-somethings, so much has changed in such a short span of years that you, too, can be nostalgic about telephones that haven't become a physical attachment to one's head. Or not. What has really changed—and will never go back—is the ability to access all kinds of information in all kinds of ways. Our students are accustomed to this; we still may be adjusting.

While thinking about writing this article, I picked up a children's book called *JAZZ A B Z* by Wynton Marsalis and Paul Rogers (Candlewick, 2005) to find the frontispiece looking as if it were part of a 78 rpm record sleeve with a black record sticking out of it. For students, this book begs an explanation, and who better to discuss this

than the school library teacher? No one even sees a vinyl record anymore unless they are collectors. Students today have no knowledge of records, or of record players, for that matter. This reminded me of Beloit (Wisc.) College's attempts to give its staff the big picture regarding incoming freshman:

- their lifetime has always included AIDS;
- Bert and Ernie of *Sesame Street* fame are old enough to be their parents;
- they have never had a polio shot, and likely do not know what it is;
- gasoline has always been unleaded;
- they have always had VCRs and DVDs, but they have no idea what a BETA cassette is;
- Banana Republic has always been a store, not a puppet government in Latin America; and
- there has always been cable TV and, in particular, lots of music channels.<sup>1</sup>

I believe our biggest challenge today is to keep up with (and hopefully outpace) our students so we do not seem dinosaurian to them, and so they will keep on needing to learn from us. There may be a really steep learning curve here, but take heart: the school library's mission is still to ensure students and staff become effective users of ideas and information. And, students will still look to you as a nontechnological guide to recreational reading. We

still want teens to not just be *able* to read, but to *want* to read, and to look for enjoyment, satisfaction, and, yes, even escape, in their reading choices. After all, we read their books, so who better to advise or recommend what would most appeal?

Former ALA president Sarah Long writes, "As a librarian, I worry about the future of libraries. I know that people born after 1980 are very different from those of us who were born earlier. These less-than-30-year-olds were born digital. All their lives they've had computers and digital toys of various descriptions. There is some evidence that they actually think and process information differently as a result . . ."<sup>2</sup> Like it or not, school librarians today better be on the cutting edge of learning and information technology. We can either hold the broom, or be swept away by it.

In today's schools, the emphasis should be on locating, selecting, understanding, assimilating, and synthesizing exponentially increasing amounts of information. Knowing how to find information is empowering. Testing is important for proving those abilities, but it is in the library that students have the chance to actually expand their abilities to do all of that. And, perhaps most importantly, to enjoy learning how to be empowered.

Corny as it sounds, it is still true: This is why you wanted to be a school library teacher. Teach your students how to learn and they will be able to succeed in their lives. **YALS**

### Reference

1. Beloit College, "The Beloit College Mindset List," [www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset](http://www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset) (accessed Dec. 27, 2007).
2. Sarah Long, "How the Internet will change libraries is at the front of my mind," *Daily Herald*, Sept. 25, 2007; [www.dailyherald.com/story/?id=42996&src=3](http://www.dailyherald.com/story/?id=42996&src=3) (accessed Jan. 8, 2008).

---

**CHRISTINE ALLEN** is currently YALSA's elected ALA Councilor and the District Librarian (K-12) for a large, urban southern California school district. She also has been a youth services librarian in a public library and has taught elementary and middle school students.

Copyright of *Young Adult Library Services* is the property of American Library Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.