Eleanor Roosevelt said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams” (Warner 1992, 307). This quote can be applied to school library media specialists as they engage in the process of creating a facility of their dreams. At the heart of facility design are core philosophies and beliefs. The philosophies and knowledge of how students and teachers engage in the learning process should guide a facility’s design. The cornerstones of good library facility design reflect a vision of how the school library and school library media specialist contribute to the complex process of learning and teaching in physical and virtual school library facilities.

This issue of Knowledge Quest invites you to think about “Bringing Vision to Reality” in your school library facility. The issue’s focus is both practical and theoretical. Articles by Subel and Callison explore a key question, “How does facility design support different kinds of learning and teaching?” Author Sue Subel describes how her districts’ vision of school library design was informed by research conducted by Dr. Ross Todd in the Ohio Study. This study examined the perceptions 13,000 Ohio school children had of their school library (Todd and Kuhlthau 2003).

Author Daniel Callison (2006) describes criteria for creating a “place for inquiry, exploration, conversation and discovery” (579). Is your school library “functioning as an information network hub and facilitating links to community agencies, museums, archives, other libraries, human experts, and electronic discussions both local and worldwide?” (582).

Conceptually school library facility design has been transformed over the last decade from a concentration on a bricks and mortar physical place that primarily served as a resource storage space to a virtual, flexible, learning space. The new library spaces exist virtually and physically where students may explore, wander, and seek new ideas, information and acquire information literacy, critical thinking and practical lifelong skills. A draft of the AASL’s 21st Century Library Learning Standards describes skills students should possess (AASL 2007). These include, but are not limited to:

- “Use a variety of information literacies to gather meaning from information presented in any format”;
- “Demonstrate mastery of technology tools to be both productive and critical thinkers”; and
- “Collaborate with others to broaden and deepen understanding” (AASL 2007).

AASL’s new standards encapsulate a transformative message of the skills that students need and require to function in a ubiquitous computing environment. These standards encourage student academic and
lifelong skill mastery that will enable students to be productive in an increasingly global environment. How and where these new necessary skills are cultivated is of great importance. The teaching and learning environment of the school library in which these skills are not only validated but facilitated alters our conceptual framework of the role of the school library in the teaching and learning process. Our conceptual view of the school library as an active, accessible learning space that exists beyond its physical boundaries creates new challenges and considerations in facility design. In 2005, the Council on Library and Information Resources published “Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space” (Bennett et al. 2005). The introduction posits the publication is “intended to stimulate thinking about the role of the library in the digital age, about the potential—and the imperative—for libraries to meet new needs, and about how these new needs will influence the design of physical space” (vii). Although the essays focus mainly on research and academic library facilities, the emphasis is on meeting the new needs of patrons. Adjusting the conceptual framework or perceived role of the library is certainly at the heart of creating a new vision of the school library as an educational environment.

Media specialists must consider the foundations of learning and teaching, information access, and program administration philosophically and theoretically. What are the essential goals for managing your library’s sources and services? The foundation of your vision must be built from the knowledge of these best practices. To succeed and positively influence the educational process requires the school library media specialist to acknowledge and understand the emphasis on student achievement, special education, technology management, and funding that factor into the design and renovation of library facilities. In a coauthored KQWeb article entitled “The Impact of Ubiquitous Computing on Library Facilities,” Drs. Jason Holmes and Meghan Harper (2007) explore the influence of ubiquitous computing on the student’s library experience and the practical challenges of supporting student work in this environment. Will your school library facility support a ubiquitous computing environment so that teaching and learning is as enjoyable as a “walk in the woods?”

The practical questions, “What does a school librarian have to know and be able to do in order to build or renovate a school library? and “How should school librarians work with facility designers and communicate their vision?” are addressed in Mary Stump’s article that describes the new design of Kenmore Middle School. Author Jill Henderson explores the concept of a shared public library and school library facility. Ms. Henderson explores the practical considerations of a combined public and school library facility and the importance of developing shared goals and vision for the facility’s services.

Witness the excitement of facility transformation experiences of two school library media specialists, Stacy Simonyi and Judy Brown, who have made changes large and small in their library facilities. These changes borne from a vision of best practices for teaching and learning in the school library resulted in changes that positively affected student learning and illuminated their role as school library media specialists and that of the school library media center.

Are you looking for ways to make a “big change” in your library facility? Take a look at 21 practical short essays on small changes that make a big difference in teaching and learning in the school library. Dream big, dream in color, and share so others can envision it.

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