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Smashing the Nobody Understands Me Myth

Myth: Nobody understands what we do in school libraries.

Reality: We need to accept some responsibility for the myth. It's up to all of us to create understanding of the unique value proposition of the school library learning commons.

Building this understanding is our – practitioners and leaders – collective responsibility. I take this opportunity to offer some provocations, empowering us to make the shift from feeling disenfranchised to feeling empowered. Here is the action advocacy approach!

1. Understand and be able to articulate the unique value proposition of the school library learning commons.

School libraries have unique value in education. Understanding and being able to articulate that unique value proposition is critical. If we can't explain why we exist, how do we expect others to understand? Why is freedom of choice in reading important to literacy development? Why is the free exploration of ideas, an idea at the heart of the library's identity, a critical part of inquiry learning and creativity? Why is information literacy more important now than ever before, and what does that look like in the era of big data, social media and "fake news"?

2. Expand your sphere of influence and build relationships.

The more we increase our sphere of influence through relationship-building, the more influence we will have about things that concern us. Your sphere of influence may be within the school or school district, or within professional learning networks or associations. Expanding our sphere of influence strengthens our voice. Positive relationships and building influence go hand in hand.

3. Market ideas and possibilities.

Marketing is the process of intentionally making connections between what is valued by those we serve and what we have

to offer. This addresses the perception that others don't understand what we do. Of course they don't! They don't have the training and specific program knowledge that we do! It is up to us to open their minds to the possibilities.

Here's a marketing approach to try on. Instead of asking colleagues how you can help them, why not flip that approach 180 degrees. Ask them what they are trying to achieve – what their goals are – and then make the connections to how you can help them achieve those goals. A simple but powerful change. Instead of despairing at our own perception that nobody understands what we do, take a proactive marketing approach to open up deeper understanding and new opportunities.

4. Be strategic and be accountable.

Innovation is at the heart of strategic thinking. With innovation comes accountability: the process of articulating goals, evaluating the success of new strategies, reporting on our progress, and using that information to inform future plans.

5. Understand that this is what advocacy looks like – all of us taking positive action.

We often think of advocacy as something that leaders do. But I believe that we all own advocacy through what we do every day. In the words of Shakespeare (*Coriolanus*), action is eloquence. We all own it, and we can all influence change. **I**