

SHORT COMMUNICATION

What Would Hermione Do? A Collaborative Approach to Developing the Next Generation of Wizards

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Abstract

The characters in J. K. Rowling's popular Harry Potter books and movies clearly benefited from the information that Hermione continually gathered through her passion for books and her astute research skills. The students that we serve will also benefit as they develop an appreciation of the information that can be gained through information literacy and the sources and tools that they will utilize in assembling the information necessary to make essential decisions in the future. The purpose of this article is therefore to encourage teachers and librarians to proactively collaborate, as Hermione did, in the interest of enabling our students to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, and mindset to recognize and seek the valuable information available through all types of libraries.

Keywords: collaboration, information literacy, teaching, information seeking, Harry Potter (book series), Hermione Granger (character)

Introduction

One of the most recognizable library quotes from the Harry Potter series is attributed to Ron Weasley, who answers Harry's question about why Hermione Granger is going to the library. His answer? "Because that's what Hermione does. When in doubt, go to the library." Whether a fan of the fantasy or adventure genres or not, it is likely that you have heard of the *Harry Potter* series. Perhaps you have read one or more of these popular books by J. K. Rowling, or viewed the movies based on these books, which relate the experiences and adventures of Harry and his friends as they prepare for future success as wizards at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

One of the most interesting characters is Hermione Granger, a close friend and schoolmate of Harry at Hogwarts, whose passion for learning and books has propelled her to become the top student in her class. While there are numerous recognizable and memorable quotes from the *Harry Potter* series, one of the most well-known and noteworthy for librarians is that of Harry's good friend Ron Weasley who reveals this essential trait of Hermione. While Ron's answer is specifically crafted in response to young Harry's question, its wisdom has merit for a broader audience in the contemporary world of academic preparation, ranging from elementary through

higher education. The intended audience to discuss these connections thus includes teachers and librarians.

Harry and Ron Befriend a “Bookworm”

Harry becomes close friends with Hermione and Ron early in their time at Hogwarts, and their adventures together serve as the storyline of each of the books. While in the earlier books Hermione is portrayed as a book nerd who spends so much time in the library perusing volumes to find necessary answers to pressing questions, throughout the series, Harry and Ron learn of her wisdom in seeking out the guidance that can be found in books by those who seek it. The fact that she is passionate in her quest for knowledge and familiar with the resources available in the Hogwarts library serves her and her friends well as they navigate the usual challenges of wizardry school and the many “extra-curricular” adventures in which they are engaged. It is also fascinating how Hermione is often capable of pulling a relevant book with just the right information for the situation at hand out of a seemingly small backpack; but then again, she is a wizard in training.

The Importance of Collaboration

A companion theme to the importance of information literacy that runs throughout the *Harry Potter* collection of books is the importance of collaboration. Harry, Hermione, and Ron face challenging situations arising from their collective passion for inquiry and adventure, and they triumph over many challenges through collaboration, with the benefit of creative wizardry when necessary. Using information for decision making is at the heart of most of their experiences.

This article is written to challenge and empower teachers and librarians to collaboratively seek to instill in the “wizards” under our tutelage an appreciation of the role of information in making decisions throughout one’s life. As humans seek increasingly complex information, the role of libraries as “go to” sources is vital, as we as “muggles” (non-wizards) seek to make informed decisions. We should be working together, as teachers and librarians, to encourage those we prepare and serve to recognize the value of all libraries, including school, college and university, and public libraries. Through collaboration, we can point students to resources where they may discover the many answers to life’s challenges and decisions, through the auspices and services of their libraries (Rawson, 2014).

Reflection on the numerous adventures of Harry and his friends reveals many logistical issues related to the problematic situations they continually face, as well as the creative solutions that they devise and enact to get themselves out of each one. Logistics also comes into play on the numerous occasions that Hermione, often accompanied by her counterparts, makes the pilgrimage to the library. The fact that she recognizes the need to seek the wisdom that can be found in the library holdings and is familiar with its location, organization, and how to find the desired information contributes to the successful outcome of many of the adventures of these wizards in training. Quite often, J. K. Rowling’s characters model positive information-seeking behaviors.

As teachers and librarians, we must commit to instilling in those we serve the same understanding and, ideally, the same passion that Hermione continuously demonstrates

regarding the value of the wisdom available through libraries (Freier, 2014). As teachers, we should, like Hermione, encourage our students to go to the library when in need of accurate, credible, and timely information. Our ability to do so is enhanced through our taking the time to actually visit the library regularly to meet the library staff and learn about its available resources and services (Hickling-Hudson & Hepple, 2015). Taking the time to do so is a worthwhile and fulfilling commitment that greatly enhances a teacher's credibility when assigning projects that require students to use library resources.

The Librarian's Role

Librarians similarly play an integral role in a successful collaboration designed to nurture a mindset wherein, like Hermione, those whose learning we oversee seek out necessary information before making important decisions, often through visiting a library in person or accessing its contents electronically. This noble challenge can often involve library staff visiting classes in the interest of sharing with students what the library has to offer in terms of useful resources and services, or it can also entail arranging class visits to the library space. In either case, students can be given a reinforcing assignment that specifically requires them to utilize what they have learned about the effective and efficient use of library resources.

While successful collaboration between teachers and librarians will enable each to fulfill their professional responsibilities more fully, well planned and implemented collaboration will be an important contribution toward developing Hermione's information-seeking mindset in those students we teach. The positive, collaborative working relationship that we develop as teachers and librarians, along with the synergistic assignments that we give our students and the support and services our libraries, provide significant learning opportunities for all. As students embark on their educational adventures, each assignment can provide an essential ingredient of our "potion" for helping them achieving success in critical thinking and informed decision making.

Learning from Hermione

A follower of the adventures of Harry and his Hogwarts colleagues is often amazed at the wonders of magic that are integral elements of each storyline. It is fascinating to observe the progressive skill development that takes place during their years as Hogwarts students, where they transcend from the ability to perform simple magical spells as first-year students to possess the knowledge and skills to perform advanced magic by their final year at Hogwarts. As teacher-librarians ourselves, we should have a similar purpose, as we seek to prepare students to enhance their knowledge and skills in the use of information resources in support of their development as thinkers and lifelong learners.

While Hermione, often accompanied by Harry and Ron, frequently made the pilgrimage to the Hogwarts library, there were times that she also pulled just the right reference source out of her backpack or "wanded it up" in some other way. The ability to access reference sources remotely when faced with a pressing decision, while certainly appealing, must be viewed with appropriate discretion and caution. Through the advances of modern technology information on almost any topic of necessity or interest can be quickly accessed through the Internet and search engines. While such information sources can be both convenient and timely, they may not yield information that is accurate, credible, or professional -- all desired characteristics of useful information for decision making.

Conclusions

Both in the world of Harry, Hermione, and Ron, and in our modern world today, there are those individuals, monographs, periodicals, and other sources of information that can be trusted and should thus be valued and relied upon when making decisions -- and those that should not. In the pages of the Harry Potter series, we learn about the many good wizards with proper intentions and motives that they meet during their time at Hogwarts, but also unfortunately those wizards whose hallmark is the dark art of magic. Just as the characters considered and discussed the context of information, we must instill in the students with whom we work the critical importance of ensuring that the information they retrieve to make informed decisions meets the recognized characteristics of “useful” and “accurate” information.

In an age when it is so easy to run an information search instantaneously from a computer or portable device and immediately believe and trust the information retrieved, we must ensure that those we teach are prepared. We must ensure that they realize they know better than to just accept all information retrieved from the web as worthy of their trust and action. Our students must understand that much of the information available on the web is suspect and often the work of dark wizards.

Recommendations

Just as a reader of the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends learns something worthwhile from the time spent engaged with the book, so too there should be a useful takeaway from this article. Through working collaboratively, as librarians, we can prepare those under our care to develop an actionable mindset regarding the integral role that libraries play in informing the decisions we make, much as Hermione did. As teachers, we must send our students to the library, where they will find the dedicated, knowledgeable librarians who will teach them about libraries and the valuable information that they can provide. And as students of lifelong learning, we must show others how to discern credible information using what we have learned ourselves from libraries throughout our lives.

Regardless of the subjects that we teach or level of instruction, as teachers, we must recognize the mission-critical role that information literacy will play in the personal and professional lives of our students. It is essential that we likewise recognize the synergies that can be developed and achieved through working in collaborations with the librarians and other dedicated professionals who stand prepared to assist our students in not only finding the information they need to answer the questions of today but also in developing the knowledge and skills that they will need to recognize and utilize available information sources throughout the many future “adventures” that they will encounter. Through a proactive, collaborative approach, we can encourage students to share strong information literacy strategies.

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Brief Biography

Dr. Robert S. Fleming is a professor of management and past dean of the Rowan University Rohrer College of Business. He also has an affiliate appointment as a professor of crisis and emergency management. He has demonstrated his commitment to developing student information literacy skills in his teaching and through numerous collaborative projects with library professionals.

