

Remembering Ross Todd

By Carol Gordon

Snapshot

Dr Carol Gordon reflects on the far-reaching impact and legacy of her friend and colleague Ross Todd.



July 12, 1951 - March 30, 2022

On April 27th members of the Department of Library and Information Science in the School of Communication and Information gathered in New Brunswick, New Jersey to honor their colleague, Ross Todd, who passed away on March 30th. Ross will be greatly missed for his research and publications, his teaching and advisement, and the dynamic presentations he has made around the world. His colleague, Joyce Valenza, noted,

‘It is impossible to overestimate Ross Todd’s influence on the school library profession’, said Joyce Valenza, who worked with Todd at Rutgers University’s School of Communication and Information since 2014 but knew him for more than a decade before that. ‘For so many of us, his research in the areas of inquiry-based learning and evidence-based practice was career-changing’. (Yorio, 2022)

Several years ago, the School Library Journal recognized the scope and depth of Ross’ work when they featured him on the cover of their periodical, portraying him as a knight in shining armour whose work conquered all the trials and tribulations of school librarianship.



his work...has armed teacher librarians with the tools they need to position school libraries as critical to a 21st century education.

Ross would hasten to add that it is his work that has armed teacher librarians with the tools they need to position school libraries as critical to a 21st century education.

Ross' work, that he has immortalized in his presentations and publications, is his legacy to school librarianship and it will be relevant for decades to come. As his colleague and friend at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, I was invited to deliver a talk about Ross' scholarship at a memorial event in New Jersey. I share this talk with you, hoping that it will inspire you to use Ross' work in the important work that you do every day. My hope is that this talk will inspire teacher librarians to put Ross' research into practice.

Ross considered his research as central to his teaching and advisement. Dr. Marc Aronson, a Professor of Practice at Rutgers University reminds us of the impact of Ross' research.

'Ross excelled in every dimension of his role at Rutgers as teacher, department member, and published author. It was in his role as researcher that his work has, is, and will be foundational in building influence for how we think about libraries and librarians for decades to come.' (Yorio, 2022)

As a budding information scientist Ross focused his doctoral dissertation on the effects of new information about drugs on the existing knowledge of four high school girls. In fact, most of Ross' major studies involved children interacting with information in school library environments. Dr. Carol Kuhlthau's research on the information search process was foundational to Ross' research on how adolescents use information to build new knowledge. The ISP focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of students as they interact with information. These observations alert school librarians to the learner's need for intervention and help. Several of Ross' doctoral students used the information process in their dissertations and Ross often co-authored articles for them.

Ross and Carol Kuhlthau founded the [Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries \(CISSL\)](#). Again, as Marc Aronson noted,

'His commitment and his research were not just to school librarians, but to international school librarianship – that sense of learning the best from what's done everywhere, sharing the research knowledge gleaned from everywhere.' (Yorio, 2022)

Ross and his CISSL colleagues developed the [school library impact measure, known as SLIM](#), to document changes in students' knowledge of a curriculum topic through Guided Inquiry. Ross was also interested in exploring the Information Search Process in new, technologically rich information environments. He hotly contested the notion that today's youth are 'digital natives' who can effortlessly navigate complex information environments. He viewed the idea as a subversive notion that threatened the research-based premise that young information users need intervention to build new knowledge from information.

CISL researchers conducted three large studies in Delaware, Ohio, and New Jersey. In the study, 'Delaware Students Learn from School Libraries,' Ross and CISL colleagues surveyed more than 5,000 students and 100 teachers and found that 98 percent of students indicated school libraries helped them to use computers, get information, build knowledge, get help with reading, and become independent learners.

'Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries' conducted by Ross and Carol Kuhlthau, was the largest qualitative study of school libraries. The article written by Ross and Carol was titled, **'13,000 Students of Ohio Tell their Story: Yeah the School Library Rocks.'**

The New Jersey Association of School Librarians commissioned CISL to conduct **'One Common Goal: Student Learning.'** This study yielded data from a survey and focus groups with school librarians, teachers, and principals. CISL made recommendations based on these data for the improvement of New Jersey school libraries. Ross was particularly proud of the findings that showcased the voices of students and teachers.

Ross contributed the concept of evidence-based practice to librarianship. He defined it as using evidence from the research as well as evidence from the knowledge and professional experience from school librarians and the evidence of learning showcased by them. Ross commented,

'I am deeply gratified to see the growing commitment to evidence-based practice and increased energy expanded for its implementation.'

Ross had the vision to see evidence-based practice as a tool for the future sustainability of school libraries.

Ross had the vision to see evidence-based practice as a tool for the future sustainability of school libraries.

Ross was also interested in knowledge management that captures, stores, and shares the knowledge and experience of educators and librarians. He recognized that schools need to improve efficiency and productivity to retain the institutional knowledge critical to the effective workings of a library.

Most recently, Ross' research addressed social justice. He collaborated with his former doctoral student, Punit Dadlani, to write three papers based on research conducted in a New Jersey school. They observed adolescents involved in a research task and interviewed their teachers in order to classify social justice principles based on fairness and equity. This research strengthened the argument for equity, rather than equality that ensure each child gets what they need to learn, rather than every child getting the same help and support. It is fitting that Ross' research culminated in social justice because he lived by his firm convictions of right and wrong and had the courage to express and defend his beliefs.

Ross' legacy will endure through his students who learned from him, his academic colleagues who inspired him and were inspired by him, and school librarians and educators who applied his research to their practice...

Ross' legacy will endure through his students who learned from him, his academic colleagues who inspired him and were inspired by him, and school librarians and educators who applied his research to their practice in schools around the globe.

Ross' research enriched his teaching and advisement. His research is his legacy to his students.

- He taught them how to intervene to help young information users to learn from Guided Inquiry.
- He modeled how school librarians can generate and use data for the improvement of their practice.
- He taught them how to be introspective and disruptive, in a good way.
- He armed them with the tools of evidence-based practice and knowledge management.
- He modelled internationalism.
- He showed them how to build their influence to get what they need.
- He prepared them to make a difference.

Since Ross' favorite place on the planet was Paris this tribute ends with the words of Marcel Proust, a French author who offers us solace for our loss with these words:

'Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy. They are the charming gardeners that make our souls blossom.'

References

Yorio, K. (2022) Ross Todd, Transformative Figure in School Libraries, Has Died at Age 70. *School Library Journal*, April 21, 2022. <https://www.slj.com/story/Ross-todd-transformative-figure-in-school-libraries-has-died-at-age-70>

Dr Carol A. Gordon is the Principal Consultant at Gordon & Associates Consulting. Dr Gordon was formerly Associate Professor, Library & Information Science at Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, USA.