Craig Seasholes is a veteran educator who leads by example and is a powerful voice in the industry. After working with K-5 grade students in the greater Seattle area for many years, Craig has become known nationally as a librarian advocate. He sheds light on the expertise librarians bring to curriculum decisions and instruction by serving on local and national library associations, including AASL and Washington Library Association (WLA). Craig is actively involved in Future Ready initiatives and has devoted his career to modeling acceptance and tolerance as he operates a true future-ready library program. Here he shares his insight on how to build a leading library.

Q: As 21st-century library programs go, yours is considered a leader. How did you get your program to its current place, and how did you become a leader?

A: I often see library leadership like slipping my bike into the peloton behind other experienced riders, using their skill to pull myself up to speed, then taking a turn leading so that others may follow and add their strengths to the group. We’re much better together.

Every day in my elementary school library I work with students and staff to bring their needs and enthusiasms to the fore. If five bouncy boys need a book about soccer to discuss, get it and volunteer to lead their book group. At the same time, I keep an ear and an eye out for district, state and national conversations that intersect on issues librarians are facing elsewhere. When CCSS, or NextGen Science, or Future Ready initiatives develop traction, I want my library to be ready to help teachers navigate what’s coming down the road. Taking my turn at leadership at both state and national librarians’ associations helped me see the connections between local challenges and ways that others are addressing them. Reaching out via social media, shining a light on the efforts of others and being unafraid to connect with those I admire has brought new ideas and resources back to my daily practice.
Q: What factors enabled your library program to become what it is today?
A: I think the biggest game changers have been the ease of technologies that allow connection between sites (schools, readers and authors, field scientists and class-bound students) and an explosion of tools available for the creation and sharing of new ideas, information and evidence of learning. Students who are able read and connect with others in meaningful ways help fulfill our mission to be effective users and producers of ideas and information. But it is also worth noting the transformative networking that happens in face-to-face interactions in libraries, bookstores, conferences and events – human connections are still a powerful tool for change.

Q: What connections or partnerships have helped you build a 21st-century library?
A: Whenever I need help with collection development or analysis, library partners (like Follett) provide expert service that helps me work smarter, not harder. Local booksellers have been a great ally in bringing authors and media attention into our library. A school and public library partnership grant funded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation helped move our district forward toward greater collaboration with the Seattle Public Library. Tapping into library social media connections has provided numerous opportunities for online interactions with other programs that delight students, colleagues and administrators alike.

Q: What lessons did you learn from the journey?
A: Maybe not everybody has to have a theme song, but it helps! For me the big lesson is that it’s up to us to show librarians “to push and make it happen” as my friend put into the lyrics of a LIT-TL rap about library and information technology programs. “LITs do a thousand and one more things than book stackin’.” http://goo.gl/TNPbiC

Q: What words of encouragement do you have for a struggling librarian who wants to transform his or her program? What ideas can you share?
A: While meeting the needs of students and staff, don’t hesitate to act on your enthusiasm and hunches. The infectious power of “what if” opens a world of possibilities that broadens the horizons for those we serve. Reach out and connect with librarians who catch your eye on social media, or contribute in the chat of webinars. Follow the leaders until you’re almost ready to take a turn at the front of the peloton...then push yourself to take a turn in front. Let us all benefit from your enthusiasm and skill.

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Teacher-Librarian