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Book Review: Becoming an Embedded Librarian: Making Connections in the Classroom

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Review of *Becoming an Embedded Librarian: Making Connections in the Classroom,* By Michelle Reale

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Review of *Becoming an Embedded Librarian:*
Making Connections in the Classroom,
By Michelle Reale

Becoming an Embedded Librarian is a case study in how academic librarians who teach can move beyond one-shot instruction sessions to become more closely involved in college classrooms. In this brief book of just over one hundred pages, Michelle Reale details her experience becoming embedded in an English literature course for students completing their senior theses. Through a series of anecdotes, the author describes her process of making connections with faculty and developing relationships with students. The first half of the book is more conceptual, with a focus on definitions and strategies, while in the second half Reale discusses how embedded librarianship looks in practice. Organized into short chapters that often include bullet points, step-by-step lists, and recommended readings, this title is a very approachable introduction to embedded librarianship.

While in Reale's example embedded librarianship is focused on being physically present in the classroom, she does a good job of acknowledging that librarians from different institutions will use this term to denote very different models of instructional engagement with students. She mentions, for example, librarians who focus on online classes, and who monitor discussions in the course management system as a means of observing what students know about the research process. And while some libraries may have an embedded instruction program that is centered around delivering instruction to the same course several times each semester, Reale's approach involves attending every class session in person, meeting frequently with faculty outside of class, and scheduling individual appointments with students as they develop their theses. She does not shy away from acknowledging that being embedded takes time: to build relationships with faculty in order to gain access to their courses, to attend class sessions, and to conduct follow-up meetings with students.

Reale is clearly in favor of embedded librarianship and makes a strong case for why the one-shot instruction model is ineffective and problematic, especially when instruction librarians lack awareness of what the students in the course may have already mastered and in which areas they would like to learn more. Experienced instruction librarians will likely wince

when reading about Reale's experiences receiving requests from faculty seeking a substitute teacher, rather than quality instruction. Reale makes the case that through embedded work librarians can begin to own their role as faculty members and form meaningful campus partnerships in which they can provide input on matters of curriculum and assessment. Meulemans and Carr (2013) advocated for a similar model.

Reale dedicates the second half of the book to explaining how embedded librarianship has worked on her campus. She includes discussion questions that she has asked of students and describes her emphasis on conceptual, rather than skills-based, instruction. She suggests that embedded library instruction should emphasize the process of inquiry that drives research, rather than a series of steps that must be followed to locate articles. Although she does not cite the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015), readers will recognize many similar ideas in her discussions. To this end, Reale's book provides one template for embedded librarianship that could be applied at other higher education institutions and also one implementation of many of the concepts that are articulated by the *Framework.*

Becoming an Embedded Librarian serves as an example of how librarians can work to establish themselves in new roles on campus. Although Reale's experiences and perspectives are limited by her work with one department at one college, her book speaks to a larger narrative: how librarians may be proactive, rather than reactionary, by reaching out to partner with faculty and academic programs, rather than waiting for invitations to collaborate. Reale provides a solid example of how librarians can initiate conversations with their faculty colleagues and work to form pedagogical partnerships that will improve student learning.

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