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## What Fuels Us: Values-Driven Librarianship

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The student returning Maia Kobabe's memoir *Gender Queer* told me that they never expected to find a book that echoed so many aspects ("weirdly exact details") of their personal experience. They went on to apologize for keeping it an extra week because they had to make their dad, boyfriend, and sister read it, too. This was a spark for me last year, a moment that reconnected me to the purpose and values that drive my work.

If you're reading this, you have plenty of your own spark moments about the lives you've changed, and it's not an exaggeration to say that you've probably saved some lives. Getting the right book to the right reader at the right moment is a radically transformative act. Yet it's tough to reconcile this when so many communities are struggling to fund or fill school librarian positions. It's even harder to accept that school librarians and educators are under attack for the books we have on our shelves. Many of us have felt our own inner spark flickering, our spirits flagging under the constant demands and pressure.

In the past three years, schools and educators have pivoted and reinvented ourselves, reimagined how we teach and the services we deliver to our students and families, iterated and modified systems and methods on the fly. We've been handed new teaching responsibilities, and stepped into new leadership roles in our schools. Our students and families have never needed us more. During the pandemic, our country woke up to what we've known all along, that public schools provide essential services for students and their families, communities, and our economy.

More specifically, our students and families need "us," their school librarians. We are essential.

The *Knowledge Quest* Editorial Board chose the theme of this issue to take stock of what truly matters in school librarianship. We're not the same as we were in February 2020. What still holds true? What will we carry forward with intention in 2022? Seen from the 50,000-foot view, what is truly at the core of what we do?

### Purpose

Our content expert for this issue, Hannah Byrd Little, asks readers to consider the tension between our dearest values and changing world in "A School Librarian's Purpose." S.R. Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science are a succinct and elegant summation of the purpose of libraries, according to Little. His Fifth Law still rings true nearly one hundred years later, and is arguably the most important: "A library is a growing organism" (Wikimedia Foundation 2022). In 2022, thriving school libraries are responsive and adaptable, particularly in the landscape of near-constant change during a pandemic. Little cites Jim Collins, who describes lasting organizations as having "a set of timeless core values and purpose that remain constant over time" coupled with "a relentless drive for progress—change, improvement, innovation, and renewal" (Collins 2022). Collins's "dynamic duality" is precisely what we've been balancing while dealing with the effects of Covid—and is perhaps why our professional practices in recent years have been so exhausting.

## Values

Even in the digital age, building relationships by connecting readers (students and teachers alike) and books remains the heart of what we do. Alicia Abdul, author of “I’m the Lucky One: Readers’ Advisory at the Core of School Librarianship,” is a self-avowed “reader and a librarian,” and both are balanced equally in her personal and professional identities. Sharing her passion for books is translated into booktalking in all forms—a “walk-and-talk” as she strolls the stacks with a reader, booktalking with classes, or virtual booktalks, both live or recorded. Through the readers’ advisory conversation about books and preferences, the individual feels seen, respected, and affirmed by their librarian. All readers, including (especially!) those at the high school level need to be able to select books for personal interest—without judgment—to continue to grow as lifelong readers. Abdul calls on school librarians to educate our colleagues and advocate in our schools and broader communities that “reading is reading.” Period.

## Mission and Vision

“My brain was frazzled because I was going from one task to another with no downtime in between, and I could hardly focus on anything before facing another interruption.” Megan Musick sums up the day of a school librarian in just one sentence! It’s discouraging to leave school at the end of the day wondering what we’ve actually accomplished. Musick’s article, “When to Lead and When to Manage: Balancing Lofty Goals with Day-to-Day Tasks in the School Library,” includes a framework and practical tips for reimagining our time at school.

She outlines how to start with the big picture, a mission and vision, and end up with a task list for a typical day. Understanding the difference between leadership and management is essential for organizing and sometimes delegating the tasks associated with the many roles school librarians fulfill—even within our own libraries, we wear so many hats. This article is an actionable resource for all of us who need a purposeful reset to manage the big picture amidst the whirlwind of our days.

## Clarity and Intention

Students were wandering the aisles, struggling to find their favorite genres amidst the acres of fiction books. The emergent readers couldn’t find their way to their favorite animal books in the nonfiction section (probably looking for shark books, because it’s always the shark books with kindergarteners). Michael Rawls, author of “How I Solve Problems in the School Library with Intention,” is purposeful about centering student agency

in the elementary library. After transitioning from the classroom, Rawls began by observing the existing systems and patterns of use. It was the “glitches” that helped him identify the need for adaptation and innovation, with the goal of making “the library more user-friendly and more accessible.”

Rawls’ observations uncovered barriers to access that were contributing to both management and behavior issues. Removing these barriers solved those problems, and as a bonus, resulted in more joy in the library for learners. His fresh approach to the continuous iteration of solutions exemplifies the library as a “growing organism”—and what’s more, creates a student-centered environment where students are actively engaged and empowered.

## Your Values Light the Way

Some years our spark moments come like fireflies, multiplying exponentially through synchronicity and connection, reigniting our inspiration and passion as school librarians. Other times, for any number of reasons, our own light has dimmed and the sparks are less frequent. Reframing our intentions and rediscovering our purpose is how we reconnect with the core values of our vocation, so we can rekindle that spark. Because your spark leads to a flame, your flame becomes a fire, and that warm glow is the heart of your school.

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**Iris Eichenlaub** is currently on a leave of absence from her role as librarian/instructional coach at Camden Hills Regional High School in Rockport, Maine. She is a member of AASL, has served on the editorial board for *Knowledge Quest* since 2020, and before that she wrote for the *KQ* blog. Iris currently serves as the Social Media and Engagement Chair for the Maine Association of School Libraries. She was named the 2017 Knox County (ME) Teacher of the Year, a 2017 Maine Education Association Inspiring Educator, and the 2022 Walter J. Taranko Maine School Librarian of the Year.

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