Customize your celebration with your community

Use your favorite School Library Month themes from the American Association of School Librarians to customize your celebration with your school community. These evergreen themes can be used to celebrate how school libraries and school librarians support teaching and learning this April or anytime you celebrate with your community.

ACCESS COLLECTIONS OF DOWNLOADABLE GRAPHICS, VIDEO ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM SPOKESPEOPLE, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING, AND MUCH MORE!
Introducing the Shared Foundations Series!

This dedicated study will immerse the school library professional in each Shared Foundation from the National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries to deepen understanding, broaden perspective, and develop practice.

**Inquire**

LORI E. DONOVAN  

Design inquiry-based learning experiences that improve learner outcomes, personalize inquiry paths, and engage learners.

**Collaborate**

MARY CATHERINE COLEMAN  

Create a collaborative culture that enhances learning and enriches the entire school community.

Buy all six books in the Shared Foundations series through this specially priced bundle and save!

$295.99  
ALA Members: $266.39  
AASL Members: $251.59  
ITEM NUMBER: 7000-9200

For more deep dives in the AASL Standards, look for the National School Library Standards stamp displayed on the covers from AASL and ALA Editions.
FEATURES

10  Going beyond Book Displays: Providing Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Youth
    Lisa Gay-Milliken and Jeffrey DiScala

18  Regard More, Not Regard Less
    Welcoming All to the Sanctuary of the School Library
    Barbara Gabaldón

24  Safe Spaces beyond the Library’s Four Walls
    Keungsuk Sexton

32  Student Diversity Inspires Special “Our Languages” Collection
    Kay Waitman

40  Intentionally Creating a Safe Space for All: The School Library as Refuge
    Paula Wittmann and Nancy Fisher-Allison

50  Trauma-Informed School Libraries
    A Space for All
    Elizabeth Pelayo

56  Not Your Mother’s School Library
    Melanie A. Toran

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Visit <http://knowledgequest.aasl.org> to read these online exclusives.

School Library as a Safe Harbor for LGBTQ Students and Families
    Mary E. Bannister

School Libraries and Social Justice Education
    Inquiring, Including, Collaborating, Curating, Engaging, and Exploring for Change
    Marianne Fitzgerald, Donna Mignardi, Jennifer Sturge, and Sandy Walker
In the school library, if we are providing sanctuary only to those who feel comfortable seeking it in the library, we are not valuing the school library as a sanctuary for all.

Regard More, Not Regard Less — pg 18

COLUMN

62  CBC Column
Behold the Gatekeepers: Unlocking an Equal and Diverse Library
Tiffany Rose

DEPARTMENTS

4  President’s Column
Creating Opportunities for Inclusion in School Libraries and AASL
Mary Keeling

6  Guest Editor
Column
Going beyond School Libraries as Safe Havens
Rachel Altobelli

64  Index to Advertisers
In this issue, colleagues share school library practices to welcome ALL learners: immigrants, bilingual and multilingual students, learners who have been impacted by trauma, homeless children, students in the LGBTQ community, and others from underrepresented groups. We often speak of the school library as a safe space, but social, emotional, and intellectual safety goes beyond serving that certain student who prefers the library to other spaces in the school. As guest editor Rachel Altobelli reminds us, “It really matters who students are [and] being aware of their many identities and supporting those identities” (2019). The authors in this issue share specific tools and skills that enable them to meet specific needs of individual members of their learning communities. These school librarians fully support their learners because they have taken the time to learn about their students’ cultures and preferred modes of interaction. By reaching learners where they are, they help them participate fully in their schools.

AASL has many resources to help school librarians create an inclusive school library. Two were developed by the 2018 and 2019 classes of ALA Emerging Leaders, and both use the AASL National School Library Standards to scaffold exploration and professional growth:

- **Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries** (AASL 2018) is a comprehensive resource that poses questions and suggests learning activities to guide reflection and professional action across all domains of every Shared Foundation. This resource helps school librarians develop a deep understanding of the need for LGBTQ materials in their libraries, and it outlines strategies to protect learners’ rights and privacy.

- **Developing Inclusive Learners and Citizens Activity Guide** (AASL 2019) focuses on the Include Shared Foundation. It combines scenarios, resources, and activities that can be used with learners or for professional development. The materials in this resource help school librarians establish an inclusive school environment and influence positive change in their school culture.

As we work to include all learners, AASL is also taking steps to increase representation of people of color in the association. ALA’s Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services has set a strategic direction to dismantle barriers to participation and to create a more diverse and equitable organization in which all members can participate fully (2017). This year, my presidential initiative task force will address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), providing professional development about EDI topics and creating structures to empower school librarians of color to become fully involved as AASL leaders. As I write this column in mid-September, the task force has established its vision, launched a mentorship cohort, and begun planning additional projects. I’m so excited to have the opportunity to work with this powerhouse team: Erika Long (chair), Michelle Easley, Chiquita Toure, Maegen Rose, Rachel Altobelli, Klaudia Janek, and Anita Cellucci.
At the task force’s first meeting on July 10, 2019, we used a protocol to imagine AASL’s future desired state, describe current conditions, and list action steps to move toward the desired future (Murphy 2008). This statement is just one that describes a future desired state for AASL:

Active participation in AASL membership is more diverse. There are processes in place to facilitate inclusion and diversity.

The task force also described current conditions in the past tense, which helped uncover questions about what and how individuals could contribute to the association and wonderings about implicit bias within AASL. This process also affirmed that AASL has already done some good work on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Descriptions of present conditions in the past tense included:

When we started this [project], I had just read a book, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World of Men*. It made me think of bias in a different way. We weren’t necessarily aware of structural biases baked into the system.

There were some good learning opportunities available when we started, such as diversity topics on the blog and webinars.

Finally, we listed action steps as if they had already been taken. Speaking in the past tense explicitly connected the desired future state with the present. Because we had described the desired future and the existing conditions in concrete terms, the proposed actions were clearly connected to the vision:

We revised the “Get Involved” form and created a guide to walk people through it.

We did some work with the Affiliate Assembly. We scheduled time in that group to work with the state leaders to provide professional development on EDI topics.

We held a town hall where we had intense conversations about topics like micro-aggressions so we could feel comfortable having conversations with our students when these situations came up.

In subsequent meetings, we reviewed our meeting notes, prioritized key ideas and action steps, and formed small groups to work on developing structures and professional development plans between meetings. The group is working on several fronts simultaneously: increasing membership participation among school librarians of color; outlining opportunities for members to learn about diversity and inclusion; creating pathways to leadership; providing access to leadership training; and offering educator resources to help school librarians establish inclusive learning environments.

AASL has already created many good opportunities to learn about EDI issues through the Knowledge Quest website, webinars, conference programming, and resources such as the two resource guides noted above. This issue is another expression of AASL’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. As we attend to who our students are, let’s appreciate their many identities, reach beyond our own experiences, and work to transform teaching and learning for all learners. “The right to be included belongs to everyone” (Bruguera 2011).

Mary Keeling is district supervisor of school libraries for Newport News (VA) Public Schools where she has developed and led implementation of a district-wide inquiry process model. She was a 2015–2016 Lilead Fellow, chaired the 2015–2018 AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force, and has written for many school library–related publications. She wrote “Supporting You, Supporting the Standards: AASL’s Implementation Plan” in the November/December 2017 issue of Knowledge Quest.

Works Cited:


Altobelli, Rachel. 2109. Personal communication.


We often talk about school libraries as third spaces and safe havens, but what does that look like today? Is there one way of making a space safe, or are there many? How are school libraries similar to other libraries, and how are they different? More importantly, can we go beyond safe havens and toward celebrations of student identity, kindness, and inclusion? The authors in this issue share philosophies, specific plans, and an overall call to action for school librarians to create safe spaces for their learners. They show us how, and more importantly they show us why.

When I first read the articles in this issue, I noticed a common theme: the need to truly see and value all facets of students’ identities. School libraries need to be more than havens for students who sometimes don’t feel safe or valued; they must be places where student identities are celebrated and their experiences are carefully considered.

School libraries need to be more than havens for students who sometimes don’t feel safe or valued; they must be places where student identities are celebrated and their experiences are carefully considered.

The more I read the articles in this issue, the more I was inspired to keep searching for more ways to make our school libraries safe, inclusive spaces. It isn’t always easy to make school libraries safe for all—we sometimes need to deeply consider our own implicit biases—but the rewards are priceless. School libraries can be safe havens for students by focusing on inclusion.

Include is the Shared Foundation from AASL’s National School Library Standards on which this issue rests. While it’s hard to pick a favorite, Include might be mine—how can you not be inspired by the idea of learners who “[demonstrate] an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (AASL 2018)?

The articles in this issue show school libraries where students are surrounded by inclusiveness and respect for diversity. It’s clear students respond to this inclusion and respect. When they are seen, respected, and appreciated by their school librarians, they are engaged and excited learners.

For me, Lisa Gay-Milliken and Jeff DiScala’s article on going beyond book displays to truly support LGBTQ students strikes a very personal chord. I remember—intensely—feeling like I (years away from being ready to come out) never really belonged at school. I hope each reader will find their own entry point as they read about school librarians across the country doing the work to make sure students feel seen and welcomed in ways I and other school librarians weren’t (or, sometimes, the ways we were).

Barbara Gabaldon demonstrates how valuing student diversity, both culturally and linguistically, can create school libraries that go beyond traditional ideas about school libraries and create vital spaces for all learners.

In an online exclusive, Jennifer Sturge, Marianne Fitzgerald, Donna Mignardi, and Sandy Walker show us...
how the AASL Standards align with Teaching Tolerance’s Social Justice Standards, further emphasizing how the work of seeing and advocating for our students sits at the center of the school librarian’s role.

From New Jersey, Keungsuk Sexton shows us how a strong school library can be seamlessly embedded in the school and larger school community so students find support everywhere they go. The third space of the library, in her hands, becomes something that surrounds students with support, love, and the desire to spread the safe space of their school to the world around them.

On the other side of the country, Kay Waitman’s school library in Anchorage is full of love of language, with students reading in many languages and feeling justifiable pride in their home languages as well as English. Their bilingual skills are sources of strength and pride, and the school library is stronger for its embrace of families, languages, and cultures.

Three librarians from Seattle give us a window into a multiplicity of ways to support students and use diversity within the surrounding school community to bolster both library programming and student and family engagement. Nancy Fisher-Allison and Paula Wittmann show us how to support specific groups of students and create a space that is welcoming and inviting for any student who is drawn to the library. In an online exclusive Mary Bannister gives concrete suggestions for how to educate ourselves and support our LGBTQ students.

Elizabeth Pelayo writes about her work to become a trauma-informed school library. She outlines the philosophies that inspired her school’s work and provides practical suggestions for how to create library safety and inclusion in a trauma-responsive way.

When you read Melanie Toran’s article, you may feel like you’re right there with her, seeing her rapport with students and watching the way they respond to her support. Her understanding of and support for LGBTQ students will change lives for the better, and she shows us how the AASL Standards align perfectly with this work.

It has been an honor to guest-edit this issue and to work with so many fantastic colleagues and authors whose writing shows us the many ways a safe haven can be a quiet refuge or a busy hub, a place to calm down or a place to celebrate, a third space or a feeling of support, or all of these things at different times and for different students. I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue as much as I did, and find some practical advice that inspires you to Think, Create, Share, and Grow.

Rachel Altobelli lives with her wife in Albuquerque, NM, where she is the director of library services and instructional materials at the Albuquerque Public Schools. Her work has appeared in Knowledge Quest, American Libraries, the KQ website, and the School Library Journal website. Rachel currently serves as a member of this year’s AASL Presidential Initiative Task Force, which is focusing on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. She has served on several other AASL committees and is active in her state association. She was privileged to be the AASL member guide for the group of ALA Emerging Leaders who created Defending Intellectual Freedom: LGBTQ+ Materials in School Libraries. She is passionate about advocating for the representation of all students in school library collections.

When I read the articles in this issue, the more I was inspired to keep searching for more ways to make our school libraries safe, inclusive spaces. It isn’t always easy to make school libraries safe for all—we sometimes need to deeply consider our own implicit biases—but the rewards are priceless. School libraries can be safe havens for students by focusing on inclusion.
SHARE THE WEALTH
Recruit and win!

2019–2021 SHARE THE WEALTH MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Share your commitment to the school library profession by participating in AASL’s Share the Wealth membership recruitment campaign. By recruiting your colleagues to AASL, you are contributing to their professional development as well as to the growth of your association. A growing AASL means greater recognition for school librarians in the K-12 community, more resources and support for members, and a larger network dedicated to transforming learning.

AASL members who refer a colleague will be entered into:

- Monthly drawing (in the month the application is received) for a complimentary AASL membership—over $100 value
- Grand prize drawing for complimentary 2021 AASL National Conference registration, airfare to conference, and three-night hotel stay in Salt Lake City, UT (one entry for each referral received)—$1,500 value

Personal Membership Categories:

- $124 I want to join AASL/ALA for the FIRST TIME
- $162 Renew SECOND YEAR ALA membership and ADD AASL
- $198 Renew THIRD YEAR ALA membership and ADD AASL
- $103 I am a library support staff person employed in library and information services or related activities
- $88 I am employed full- or part-time in library service related activities at a salary of less than $30,000 per annum, or I am unemployed
- $74 I am a student enrolled in a library science program (5-year limit)
- $50 I am already an ALA personal member and want to join AASL

Method of Payment:

- Check enclosed (payable to ALA)
- Purchase order enclosed
- VISA
- MasterCard
- AmEx

Account/PO # _____________________ Expiration Date ________________
Name/Contact _____________________ Signature _____________________
Phone ________________________________ E-mail ____________________

Your membership will be effective for one year following the receipt of dues.

Referred by __________________________
Name __________________________
E-mail __________________________

Membership in the American Library Association is required for membership in the American Association of School Librarians. In order for your reference to receive credit for this referral your membership form must be returned to AASL (not ALA) for tracking.

MAIL, FAX, OR E-MAIL APPLICATION TO:
American Association of School Librarians, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611-2795
Fax: 312-280-5276 | E-mail: aasl@ala.org

For more information, visit us on the web:
WWW.ALA.ORG/AASL/STW
For your development as a school library leader, there’s only one AASL Learning Library. It is a repository of webcasts, podcasts, and digital resources from AASL, including the latest issues of Knowledge Quest. Collect and manage ALL your learning in a central location, on your time and at your pace.

AASL 2019

sessions captured in Louisville

Concurrent sessions captured at the AASL National Conference in Louisville are now available in the AASL Learning Library. Purchase the entire conference set or individual webinars, or join AASL to get your ALL-access pass to the largest library of AASL Standards-based online learning.

SHARE THE WEALTH

Encourage your colleagues to join AASL! They’ll gain an ALL-access pass to the AASL Learning Library and you’ll earn a chance to win a trip to Salt Lake City for the 2021 AASL National Conference.

VISIT WWW.ALA.ORG/AASL/STW.

AASL Salt Lake City 2021

OCTOBER 21-23

national.aasl.org

To get your ALL-access pass to the AASL Learning Library, visit ALL.AASL.ORG
GOING BEYOND BOOK DISPLAYS

PROVIDING SAFE SPACES FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Lisa Gay-Milliken
lgaym001@odu.edu

Jeffrey DiScala, PhD
jdiscala@odu.edu
Lisa’s Story

Imagine: it’s the late 1980s and kids in high school still check out books to get information. A student walks into the school library, looking a little nervous. The librarian, familiar with such timidity, asks the young girl if she needs assistance. The student quickly refuses, grabs a book off the nearest shelf, and leaves through the pages. The librarian recognizes overwhelming reluctance when she sees it and leaves the girl alone, never finding out that the student was trying to sneak to the back of the library where the books about SEXUALITY are located. Though the section is actually unmarked in the 300s, the young girl imagines everyone can see that big, bolded word above the stacks—and that word terrifies her.

School libraries should be a space where students of all ages feel welcome and safe. I (Lisa) can speak from experience when I say this is not always the case, not in the 1980s and not today. Even in the school library, a place I now cherish, I was fearful of ridicule and harassment. I was frustrated because I did not see myself—a young, questioning, and confused lesbian—in any of the books. Gay and lesbian characters didn’t exist on those high school shelves.

“But that was the 1980s,” you say. It hasn’t gotten much better for much of the LGBTQ community.

In 2019, I was back in a high school library, but this time the school librarian was my mentor; I was attending Old Dominion University to earn my MLIS with a school library endorsement. One of my first tasks was learning how to enter a new title into the collection. By coincidence, the very first young adult book I processed was The Past and Other Things That Should Stay Buried. Examining the book’s leaf, I learned the author, Shaun David Hutchinson, is gay and the book was on Book Riot’s Most Anticipated 2019 LGBTQ Reads. I thought, “Yes! Change is here. It’s in my hands! Young people must feel so supported and safe in their quest for information!” After some discussion, I found the reality to be more complex. Even though my mentor had more LGBTQ materials available than librarians of the past and expressed a desire to better serve those students, she had no approach for providing access to those materials, assisting LGBTQ youth with complicated and private information queries, or helping those youth feel safe in the library. It felt like one step forward and two steps back. As I shared this story with my professors at Old Dominion University, we sought to make a change and help others create that space.

It Is Essential to Serve All Students

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 34 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth have been bullied on school property (2017). (Transgender and questioning/queer youth have not historically been surveyed.) Our schools, including our school libraries, should be safe spaces for all.

We believe that most school librarians want to provide a safe space in their libraries, but may not know how or may feel restricted in what they can do. After their 2017 survey, GLSEN stated, “less than half (41.0%) of [middle and high school] students reported that they could find information about LGBTQ-related issues in their school library” (2018, 8). We believe that 41 percent isn’t nearly enough.

LGBTQ youth and their allied peers are desperate for characters in books where they can see themselves and their friends. As Gross explains:

A good coming-out novel can be a window or a mirror... Coming-out novels have an important role as cultural educators, allowing some readers to walk in the shoes of those unlike them and develop empathy and understanding. However, these books’ role as mirrors is equally important; they may offer affirmation, guidance, and hope for young readers who are challenged to find those things outside the world of words. (2013, 68–69)

This seems easy enough for a school librarian to accomplish. Simply create an LGBTQ book display or add books with LGBTQ characters to the collection. But we know it’s never quite that simple.

The challenges are significant with some stemming from local culture and community location. Still, we need to work hard to ensure that libraries in all communities are welcoming, safe spaces. Perhaps even more so in conservative regions where diversity may not be as celebrated or visible. As school librarians, we must confront our own bias and discrimination. Regardless of one’s personal beliefs or the opinion of your school or district administration, and perhaps breaking with some of the cultural norms of your community, access to ideas and information in the school library is a civil right for all students. In addition to it being a civil right, it’s also in the AASL National School Library Standards under the Shared Foundation of Include. This Shared Foundation emphasizes the idea that best practice for a school librarian is to ensure that displays and communications focus on resources that reflect a variety of viewpoints, cultures, and experiences.

Many school librarians may not even be aware a problem of access exists for LGBTQ youth. Our hope is that this
LGBTQ youth and their allied peers are desperate for characters in books where they can see themselves and their friends.

article and the included ideas and resources will help school librarians create more safe places for LGBTQ youth.

Challenges in Supporting LGBTQ Youth

Even though it’s been thirty years since Lisa’s experience in a school library and things have changed a great deal for the LGBTQ community, librarians still struggle in supporting LGBTQ youth. Serving vulnerable populations must be handled carefully. Major challenges for school librarians in serving LGBTQ youth include obstacles to ensure visibility of materials, cataloging and providing access to materials, and a lack of professional development. All these challenges are evident in Lisa’s story.

Serving Vulnerable Populations

Some school librarians may feel uncomfortable finding information and resources about sexuality due to perceptions regarding what is appropriate to discuss and present to students. Sexual orientation is so often associated with sex that some school librarians may feel it is not their place and that it should be left to parents’ discretion. School librarians also may fear backlash from administrators, parents, and/or the community based on the “controversial” nature of discussing sexual identity. The stigma, discrimination, and bias surrounding gender identity and transgender students can make it even more difficult for present-day school librarians.

Visibility of Materials

"Maintaining a quality LGBTQ collection may literally save lives by supporting an environment of tolerance and acceptance” (Garry 2014, 75). While exposure and visibility are important, school librarians must provide opportunities for discovering and viewing materials privately for those students who remain closeted or who may need to avoid social stigma or discrimination. As indicated in Lisa’s personal story, a reader may not want to be approached. So, how do school librarians get the materials into the hands of the students who need it? One children’s bookstore owner "avoids segregating LGBTQ titles, she says—partly to show readers that the store is inclusive in a city that is socially conservative” (Green 2019, 28).

Cataloging and Accessibility

Lisa’s internship mentor wanted to support LGBTQ youth, and she did an excellent job of sprinkling books with LGBTQ characters throughout the non-fiction collection in her high school library. However, the only way for students to locate a book with an LGBTQ theme was to browse the shelves, a labor-intensive task, or to ask the librarian, which a student may be too embarrassed or ashamed to do. Collection development, outdated cataloging techniques, and improper tags are reasons why LGBTQ youth have difficulty finding books on the shelves. Further complicating access, even if a student is confident in searching the catalog, many school librarians do not know the proper terminology with which to label materials.
Many of the sources that we reviewed often used the acronym LGBTQ interchangeably with the phrase “gay and lesbian,” which excludes bisexual, trans, and queer/questioning youth. It is also important for librarians to educate themselves so that they are using the terminology that LGBTQ youth themselves use (Chuang et al. 2013, 26).

Mandated filters on school computers can also prevent access, creating an obstacle for LGBTQ youth as they attempt to locate valid and accurate information in their school library. This is a real dilemma because when LGBTQ youth are not provided with materials and resources in their school, home, or community, they will turn to online resources. It is reported that “LGBT youth were five times as likely to have searched for information online on sexuality or sexual attraction as non-LGBT youth (62% vs. 12%) and LGBT youth were also more likely to have searched for health and medical information compared to non-LGBT youth (81% vs. 46%)” (GLSEN 2013, x).

Professional Development for School Librarians

Loretta Gaffney fondly remembers her first Ally training because, “The facilitator looked around the (nearly) full room of teachers and librarians and said, simply, ‘My gay fifteen-year-old self thanks you.’ As a teenager, he would have given anything for even one visible teacher ally” (2017). A school administrator who is interested in providing professional development (PD) for their staff on project-based learning will find a variety of opportunities. In contrast, searching for PD on supporting LGBTQ youth in schools will produce little to no options. “Ensuring a safe and welcoming school environment for all students, including [LGBTQ] students, is an important responsibility of educators. Yet research indicates that educators regularly fail to take action in the face of anti-LGBTQ bias and are often not equipped to address these issues” (Kosciw et al. 2012).

Making Your School Library a Safe Space for LGBTQ Youth

Former ALA President Julie Todaro emphasized the necessity in supporting our youth:

The Trump administration’s decision to revoke important protections for transgender students couldn’t conflict more with the library community’s fundamental values and the principles upon which libraries are founded… Every student deserves to learn in an environment free from discrimination… ALA, its members, all librarians and library professionals are committed to diversity, inclusiveness, and mutual respect for all human beings, and we will work tirelessly to ensure full representation of all members of society. (2017)

Regardless of the reason, it is a challenge for school librarians to support LGBTQ youth in their schools, so all librarians must model a clear and consistent message that all are welcome. Nearly 60 percent of LGBTQ students report feeling unsafe at school (GLSEN 2018). LGBTQ youth (and others) will benefit from a school library space where they feel welcome, safe, and supported. “LGBTQ students are hardly the only ones to feel underrepresented and alone, and it’s important for school libraries to support every student. The strategies and mindsets used to support LGBTQ students can and should be used to help support all students” (Altobelli 2017, 11). Here are some
suggestions to help meet the needs of a group of students that is often dismissed, ignored, or overlooked:

Visibility and Access

• A first step: If you haven’t done so before, it’s great to start with building a display with the resources you have. “While we do not have the power to dictate how a space is viewed, we can ‘set a tone and invite people in’ by providing interesting topics and interactive displays” (Cardoso and Russo 2018).

• Check availability: Conduct a search within your library collection to see if you can locate LGBTQ information/books easily. Are there enough materials? If not, start a wish list. Need recommendations? Check award winners and lists online. Or collaborate with a local LGBTQ organization for recommendations.

• Create visibility everywhere: LGBTQ material should be incorporated into other areas, not just a centralized location or event. LGBTQ titles should be included in any book clubs.

• Go digital: Suggest a search of e-books to your students. The evolution of the e-book market, and the ability to easily tag books online as belonging to multiple genres, makes it easier to label subcategories of YA, including when there are major and minor LGBTQ themes and characters (Jones 2015).

• Make a path: Provide instructions on how a student can privately find other materials in the library. Create a pathfinder related to LGBTQ topics, particularly as you disperse LGBTQ resources throughout the collection and online. As an example, the ACLU has created a resource library at <www.aclu.org/library-lgbt-youth-schools-resources-and-links>.

• Broadcast inclusion: Designate your school library as a safe zone by exhibiting diversity around the library with posters and bulletin boards. Safe space signs are a great way to nonverbally communicate to students that you’re LGBTQ friendly and will not tolerate “hate” in your library.

• Wear your support on your sleeve: Wear safety pins to identify as a person in the library who is safe to talk to about anything. The

It is a challenge for school librarians to support LGBTQ youth in their schools, so all librarians must model a clear and consistent message that all are welcome.
symbol identifies the wearer as “a safe person for anyone to talk to regardless of their race, religion, gender, abilities, or sexual identity” (Boog 2017, 29).

• Declare your pronouns: Wear and create name badges with your pronouns in support of trans-gender youth, i.e. “Lisa Gay-Milliken (she/hers).”

Services and Events

• Provide meeting space and support, become the faculty liaison, and recruit for a Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) that begins in the school library. Key findings from a GLSEN survey indicate that LGBTQ students experienced a safer, more positive school environment when their school had a GSA or similar student club (2018).

• Celebrate, support, partner with, and advertise LGBTQ events in your community.

• Facilitate a panel of LGBTQ authors and community leaders after school. Following the event, build a display with the authors’ books to celebrate the event.

• Match kids and books in a gender-neutral way. By providing this service school librarians can serve everyone better. For example, during songs, rhymes, and games in storytime, change the pronouns in familiar songs; for instance, “Old McDonald had a farm, and on her farm” (Nichols 2016).

• Participate in professional development. A great place to start is at The Trevor Project with a Trevor Ally Training (The Trevor Project n.d.).

• Create a presentation for your PTA about LGBTQ-related materials in the school library.

Useful LGBTQ Resources

There are numerous organizations, websites, book titles, articles, and other resources to assist you in providing services for LGBTQ youth from kindergarten on up. We have brought a number of these together in an annotated bibliography: <http://bit.ly/LGBTQforkQ>. You’ll find the bibliography with more than 45 resources fit to learn more, gather ideas, find help for others, and entertain. If you have suggestions, please e-mail us and we will be sure to add to the bibliography.

Seize the Opportunity

As we are both individuals in the LGBTQ community, we understand what it means to be a 15-year-old in a confused and vulnerable position and happen upon an accepting, welcoming, and inclusive environment. Whether it’s because we’ve seen a Pride flag, heard about an event or group that openly states it is “welcome to all,” or heard someone talk about something as simple but as impactful as their pronouns, the value of finding such a safe space as an individual who is often wary of discrimination and even danger cannot be overstated. The school library can be a gateway to so much learning and community. We encourage everyone to take the opportunity to make the library a place for all our students, including the vulnerable LGBTQ youth who may have difficulty finding such spaces anywhere else in their lives.

Lisa Gay-Milliken
is the assistant director of education at Lutheran Family Services of Virginia and an MLIS graduate student at Old Dominion University. Her recent publications include “Collaborating in a School with No Library” in the March/April 2019 issue of Teach. She is the president of the ALA Student Chapter at Old Dominion University.

Jeffrey DiScala,
PhD, is an assistant professor of Library and Information Studies at Old Dominion University and the research and planning director for the Lilead Project. His research interests include the evolving role of the school librarian, evidence-based practice, and professional learning. He is a member of AASL, including the Supervisors Section and Educators of School Librarians Section.

16 Knowledge Quest | Going beyond School Libraries as Safe Havens
Works Cited:


REGARD MORE, NOT REGARD LESS
Welcoming All to the Sanctuary of the School Library

Barbara Gabaldón
gabaldon.ba@aps.edu
My mom was my high school librarian. My oldest sister, who had to transfer to my mom’s high school as a junior when we moved, was so mortified, so sure that it would be the social kiss of death if anyone knew that her mom was the librarian, that she told people that the librarian was a nice lady who lived down the street from us and gave her a ride to and from school every day. And happened to have the same unusual last name.

By the time I went to high school, I had made a few friends in the area and wasn’t so worried about the social stigma of having a parent on staff, even the school librarian. I actually hung out in the library sometimes, often to work on assignments (some of the best being those collaboratively planned by our visionary librarian and social studies teachers) and often to socialize. I wasn’t in one clique, so I knew and met people from many walks of high school life—drama kids, soccer players and runners (my sports), brainiacs, artists—and chatted with all of them in the library. I even managed to get kicked out a few times for laughing too loud. I suppose that school library was a sanctuary for us, though not the stereotypical type or with the stereotypical regulars. It was a vibrant place where interesting people liked to be and belonged in a community—a third space.

We know the stereotype of the students who find sanctuary in the school library, and the words used to describe them range from fond to mean: curious, intellectual, quiet, sensitive, bookish, nerd, loner, outcast, loser. The stigmatized school library is seen as a sanctuary only in the sense that it’s a last refuge for students who have no place else to go. There’s nothing about this library that tells students that they belong, just that they don’t belong anywhere else. My junior high library was this type of place, and I only went in there occasionally and reluctantly.

I hadn’t changed that much from junior high to high school, but the libraries were two very different places. How did my high school librarian create a third space, a vibrant sanctuary? I believe she forged relationships with individual students from all groups and grew and diversified the library users from there; she also used engaging content in her teaching. While I never anticipated following in my mom’s footsteps, I am now a high school librarian in one of the largest high schools in New Mexico. I took a very different route to get here—from elementary dual language teacher to librarian in a two-way bilingual immersion elementary school to my current role—but I am striving to form a vibrant sanctuary using the same basic tenets.

Many passionate articles and blog posts have appeared about the public library as sanctuary, particularly in response to growing anti-immigrant statements and actions—see, for instance, the blog post by Laura Saunders on the Simmons Unbound website titled “Libraries as Sanctuary Spaces” <https://slis.simmons.edu/blogs/unbound/2017/01/30/libraries-sanctuary-spaces/>. Yet few have discussed the school library as sanctuary. Is it that school librarians generally fall into the “libraries are neutral” side of the argument? Is it that, at least in the case of public schools, we assume that by law we already serve all students in our communities? Or is it that we believe that because school libraries are already seen as sanctuaries, at least for some, we don’t need to promote this concept?

Many of the descriptions of public libraries as sanctuaries provide myriad examples of ways in which they serve the underserved: language circles, English language learning and citizenship classes, and access to technology for the homeless, to name a few. In the school library, if we are providing sanctuary only to those who feel comfortable seeking it in the library, we are not valuing the school library as a sanctuary for all. We need to prioritize knowing our communities and being proactive rather than neutral.

As Judi Moreillon notes:

In the types of outreach and the target audiences for our outreach activities…librarians who adhere to our value of “access” seek to be fair rather than equal. A neutral library would simply exist and serve the patrons who come. The library/librarian that assesses the community and determines how to best help people achieve their goals will, of necessity, do more for some than for others. (2018)

**Culture—Are We Really Neutral?**

Promoting authors of color is not neutral. It does promote the creation of sanctuary. In our 96 percent minority school, I make sure students see names and faces like theirs throughout the library on display every day. Our students are predominantly Hispanic, both immigrants and New Mexicans, so this means Rudolfo Anaya, Matt de la Peña, Erika Sánchez, Isabel Quintero, Zoraida Córdova, and Meg Medina. The experiences of authors from the East Coast/Chicago and from different Latinx backgrounds are similar but not exactly the same for my students; however, being surrounded by Hispanic names and reading about characters who have a lot in common helps my students enter the club of reading and writing and know that they belong in our school library.

Other ethnic groups are represented in our school and larger community,
so our students are also exposed to Jason Reynolds, Sherman Alexie, Rin Chupeco, and many more. I seek out, prominently display, and purposefully promote diverse authors. I also have students critically look at publishing and representation in awards over time, such as the Newbery or our state awards, and discuss why we have awards such as the Coretta Scott King or Pura Belpre. As Cory Eckert observes:

Where there is imbalance, giving equal weight to the privileged and the underserved does not create balance. If we are doing our jobs, we are providing the space and resources that our communities need in order to thrive. Even if your...administration believes in the myth of library neutrality, you’re not powerless. What books have you faced out? What books do you read in storytime? What is the color of the people in your advertising clipart? Your library may wish to remain neutral, but librarianship isn’t neutral. All your decisions shape your library.

(2016)

I promote The Hate U Give to Native and white students, American Born Chinese to Hispanic students, and Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda to straight students. All our students need windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in the books they read and in the books we display and promote. I would promote diverse authors even if I worked in a predominantly white school, because we do our students a disservice by insulating them. Far from being an extra or optional aspect of school librarianship, Include is one of the Shared Foundations of our AASL Standards. As the late Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop eloquently explained in her development of the concept of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors back in 1990:

Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others...They need books that will help them understand...their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they only see reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism.

(1990)

Language—How Fully Are We Serving All Students?

An individual school librarian might oppose the use of ELL students’ home languages or work in a school or district in which English-only is the norm. Yet it is our job to provide reading materials to all our students. When school librarians face obstacles to being literacy leaders for all, we need to examine biases and educate ourselves on the effectiveness of home language use in order to serve all students. Sometimes our collection will follow the lead of the school program; a two-way bilingual immersion school with most students starting to read in their home or target language of Spanish should have more than half of the picture books in Spanish as well as a good balance of Spanish-to-English non-fiction and chapter books for students to continue their development in both languages. In other situations, the library might
lead the school in supporting home languages, as in when multiple languages are represented in a community, or when a recent influx of immigrant or refugee students precedes the school’s development of programs addressing their needs.

When I started in the library position in a two-way bilingual immersion elementary school, the dual language program was based on native English speakers and native Spanish speakers learning language, content, and cross-cultural competency together. However, you could tell at a glance that the library collection did not support the program or the population. In a school in which most of the students were learning to read and write first in Spanish, then transferring those skills to English while continuing to develop in Spanish, our small collection of books in Spanish—picture books, fiction, and non-fiction—were segregated in a short section of primary-sized shelving. Not only were there too few books in Spanish to support the students and families, but the size and segregated shelving for the Spanish collection implied that Spanish was not as valued and that they could not get out of the little kids’ area until they learned English, notions not aligned with our program or community values.

Growing the Spanish collection was essential, but still not sufficient. Book arrangement can help or hinder a student’s sense of belonging, too. Even before my additions to the Spanish collection outgrew their space, I started rearranging the book collections. I created a much larger section, with lots of room to grow, for Spanish picture books, next to and in the same type of shelving as the English picture books. Spanish fiction was moved to taller shelves next to the English fiction, again with room to grow. And I chose to interfile Spanish and English non-fiction, because in our effective dual-language program, by the time students were starting to read more non-fiction and use it for research, they were strong enough in both languages that they could choose to use resources in either or both languages. As the collection and arrangement started to reflect and promote the goals of the program and community, the school library became a vibrant, well-used sanctuary.

I might not have approached collection arrangement the same way in a multiple-language school, but I knew my community and the goals of the dual-language program well, and this allowed me to thoughtfully approach collection development and arrangement to promote the school library as a sanctuary in that particular community.

Language in signage promotes sanctuary as well. Even though the percentage of students participating in our high school’s bilingual program is much smaller than the percentage at my former elementary school, I carried habits of celebrating language and culture to something as seemingly inconsequential as signage. I continue to work to balance the language in signage and alternate the language on signage that I use and make, so that it isn’t always English on top or on the left, followed by

In our community, the fact that most students have cell phones can give the impression that the digital divide has been overcome, but many students do not have access to the technology they need for assignments at home...
Spanish on the bottom or on the right. My reasoning is, how would you feel if your mother tongue was always second—if it was even used? Consistently using both or multiple languages and alternating language position helps make students, parents, and other community members feel more welcomed and encouraged to participate.

Access—Who Needs Sanctuary?

Our school is fortunate to have an administrator who recognizes the importance of access to the school library. I work a staggered schedule with the library assistant, so that one of us opens the library before school, the library is open during lunch, and one of us keeps the library open after school. I know that many schools may not have the luxury of a library assistant (or full-time librarian), but I have heard of other ways that librarians keep the doors open outside of duty hours: principals providing comp time or a stipend, sharing of assistants, etc. It is worth advocating for access as an important aspect of sanctuary.

In our community, the fact that most students have cell phones can give the impression that the digital divide has been overcome, but many students do not have access to the technology they need for assignments at home: Internet access, a computer that is not shared among siblings and maybe the family business, or a printer. Also, many of our students work from the time school is out until late at night to help support their families, and need time during lunch to use the library’s technology.

Some teachers with whom I collaborate do not bring their students to the library to choose books for independent reading, while some teachers have restrictive requirements for their reading assignments (no graphic novels, page minimums, etc.). These students need time outside of the school day to browse or get help locating the reading materials they truly want to read.

Finally, some students simply need a space to either be alone or to socialize, and despite the traditional view of the school library as a silent place, the latter is equally valid and can co-exist with the former. While touring colleges with my daughter recently, I noticed that many college libraries had different zones, sometimes even different floors, designated for silent study, group work, and food-and-drink-allowed zones. While I don’t have multiple floors, I was inspired to start to create similar zones in our library. After reading Maisy Card’s insightful article on over-policing black and Latinx youth’s needs for safe places to gather (<https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=School-Libraries-Are-Vital-to-Black-and-Latinx-Students>), I am currently gathering input from students on allowing food in the library.

Many school library mission statements include phrases such as “serve all patrons regardless of background” or “serve the whole community, no matter the language, beliefs, etc.” While well-meaning, such language falls short of the often excellent work that many school libraries are doing to serve all patrons. To create school libraries that are sanctuaries for all, we can’t disregard who our patrons are; we need to regard very closely. We can’t say that it doesn’t matter where our patrons come from, because it does matter and we need to know our communities well in order to build sanctuary libraries.

Works Cited:


Barbara Gabaldón is a teacher–librarian at Atrisco Heritage High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. An ALA Spectrum Scholar (2004), she received her MA in Information Resources and Library Science from the University of Arizona. A founding board member of Dual Language Education of New Mexico and former co-organizer of La Cosecha Dual Language Conference, she has focused her career and her professional development presentations on educating culturally and linguistically diverse students. She recently joined the selection committee for the Land of Enchantment Book Award.
Sometimes the bullying got so bad, Jay Monroe* would not even go into the school building after being dropped off. “Or he would go in and walk right out, just wander the neighborhood,” recalls his mom Tanya.

Jay was raised by a single mother, whose jobs sometimes could not cover rent. For a time Jay and his mom had to stay at shelters, even while Tanya was working full time. By the time he was 12 years old, he had bounced around several schools in Essex and Hudson counties, and was often the victim of bullying, encountering teachers sometimes unwilling, or unable, to put a stop to it. By 2017, when he enrolled at the Dr. Michael Conti School (PS #5) in Jersey City, he had little hope things would be any better.

Adults who first meet Jay note his kind eyes that bespeak an old soul. He is soft-spoken, unfailingly polite, and usually not prone to confrontation. I first met Jay in the Conti school library where he had come, in his words, “to hide out,” not wanting to be in yet another new classroom, terrified of facing a new group of students. He initially seemed inconsolable; it took our crisis intervention teacher Lou DeCarlo and guidance counselor Emma Santiago Hernandez several turns to soothe and coax him into attending his classes.

Jay finally mustered the courage to meet his new teachers and classmates, and by the end of the day he felt a glimmer of hope. “The kids all introduced themselves, looked me in the eye…and the teachers [special education/homeroom teacher Iraida Cesar and paraprofessional Esther Rentas] kept checking in to see if I was comfortable. It felt different, definitely.”

Tanya Monroe says that for her son, the ensuing two years at Dr. Michael Conti School were an epiphany. “He used to often be shut down because a child was expected to just sit, stay silent, accept things as they are… Here, they treated him as a person—a member of an extended family—with respect—something he never had in a school setting before!”

Prioritizing Kindness and Inclusion

My own personal story is different from Jay’s, but like him, I know firsthand that a child’s attitude toward learning, how they view themselves, how they see their place in the world is tremendously affected by the kindness—or lack thereof—in a school’s culture.

Many decades ago, at the age of five, I arrived in this country with my parents, who came to America to pursue the immigrants’ dream in the promised land of opportunity. My first day of kindergarten in Houston, I didn’t speak a word of English, but I still remember the warmth and kindness of my teacher and classmates, how they sometimes literally took me by the hand and made me feel welcome. My family stayed in Texas only for a year, and as we moved to various parts of the United States, I was repeatedly “the new kid.” The degree of warmth and welcome varied vastly, depending on the school.

At the Dr. Michael Conti School in Jersey City, New Jersey, where I’m now the school librarian and a literacy support teacher, we have in place a Kindness Initiative woven into the curriculum, where educators, administrators, and parents pledge to promote a climate where students feel accepted. As they progress from pre-K through middle school, students are exposed to social justice literature designed to get them to empathize with others. Having kids connect with characters in a book is just the first step to getting them to care about the way inequality and unfairness plays out in the real world. Ultimately, we want them to feel empowered to try and do something about injustice, so we’re big into project-based learning (PBL) that encourages students to value and practice kindness. In this way, a “safe space” isn’t limited to a physical space, be it a library or a classroom, but becomes a mindset that potentially affects the whole school community.

For example, in autumn, after read-alouds of Jacqueline Woodson’s Each Kindness (where the narrator Chloe and her classmates repeatedly reject a new classmate), our primary-grade students begin tracking their own daily acts of kindness, written with a marker on a big orange vegetable nicknamed the “Pump-Kind.” Our
fifth-grade students read the same book, but they re-write the story from the viewpoint of Maya, the character in Woodson’s story who was shunned by her peers. Our fifth graders later write anonymous compliments to send to classmates. On Valentine’s Day, fifth-grade classes celebrate friendship by decorating paper hearts with words of encouragement for their classmates. Students randomly post the affirmations around the school in the hopes that they will help brighten someone’s day.

Our elementary students are taught to value being kind to those outside the school community as well. Students in grades 2–4 read books by Roald Dahl, like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, and The BFG, and are taught about the social inequities that exist in the world. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory enables them to recognize the real challenges other families face, and Matilda conveys a comforting message that “You are not alone!” As a result of learning that message second graders initiated the Empathy Bead Project. The students designed and sold bracelets and necklaces with unique beaded patterns to collect relief funds for hurricane victims via UNICEF. In addition to the gratification of helping those in need, our budding entrepreneurs learned about economics including concepts like goods and services, cost and profit, and supply and demand.

Read-alouds of books like William Miller’s Richard Wright and the Library Card or Rose Blue’s Ron’s Big Mission teach students about taking access to books for granted. Our third graders initiated a book drive to benefit the kids at York Street Project, a non-profit organization helping families in need break the cycle of poverty. The student-led drive was a huge success, collecting an overwhelming amount of
books. Our third graders sorted the donations by reading level, placed them in decorated boxes, and then created personalized bookmarks to send along with the books. The students were grateful that they were able to share the love of reading with children and families in our community.

Kindness also extends to non-human creatures. Sixth graders recently presented more than twenty boxes of pet supplies and food, as well as cash donations, to the Liberty Humane Society. The donated items were collected through a drive organized by students as an extension of class discussions on issues concerning animal rights (found in books like Charlotte’s Web); students explored ways to help neglected and abused animals.

Our students are learning from a young age that being kind and charitable are attributes worthy of excelling at, just like academics or sports—areas in which students traditionally receive affirmation. Students in primary grades took it upon themselves to raise awareness about Type 1 Diabetes, creating an informational bulletin board for our school lobby and raising funds for the Junior Diabetes Research Foundation. Additionally, a second grader, unprompted, spent his weekend holding a bake sale on his front stoop to raise funds for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s Pennies for Patients Drive.

Student Voice and Empowerment

“Making an impact on the world, one project at a time!” is the motto by which our students approach their project-based learning.

While reading The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton, our seventh graders, facilitated by inclusion teacher Taylor Jackson, took concrete steps this past year to combat bullying, something all too common among adolescents and something kids like Jay Monroe had felt powerless to address at his prior schools. A student-led inclusive community council was formed; the council’s mission is to encourage mental health awareness and address social isolation among the student population. The council plans programs to encourage student outreach, such as the Know Your Classmates event. During this event, middle school students sit with someone they normally would not sit with during lunch, engaging in casual conversation and making new connections.

As part of Conti’s inclusive community initiative, our eighth graders were assigned to read Aisha Saeed’s best-selling novel Amal Unbound in their English class. The book tells the story of a Pakistani girl’s dream of receiving an education, which falls apart when she is forced into indentured servitude. Inspired by Malala Yousafzai and untold girls like her, this book had our students contemplating issues like class and gender inequities, resistance, and social justice.

Amal Unbound also led students to explore ways to take an active role in their community to build pride and a sense of ownership. Their plan to transform a blighted area near our school into a lush community garden, with “buddy benches” to remind visitors about the importance of inclusion, is now in the process of becoming reality.

Leading up to these projects, several students engaged in our school’s first-ever series of TEDEd Student Talks. Topics covered included ways Conti teens are leading the sustainability movement in Jersey City, how a child found comfort in literature after the death of a pet, how another student found happiness after her parents’ divorce, why being an only child is awesome, and the negative effects of being labelled “cute.” The TEDEd Student Talks engaged and impressed the audience made up of peers, teachers, administrators, school board members, and local politicians; but most importantly, the talks gave our students a forum to share their observations, their concerns, and their stories.

The Dr. Michael Conti School has also expanded its original kindness initiative committee to include student representatives along with administrators, teachers, and parents; the committee coordinates activities promoting unity and a sense of belonging among the entire student body, not just among middle schoolers. After visiting primary-grade classes to present read-alouds of The Mitten Tree by Candace Christiansen, members of the kindness initiative committee created a PS5 Mitten Tree by collecting new winter mittens/gloves, hats, socks, and scarves to hang on the tree. The winter wear and cash donations were donated to the Hudson United Way.

Giving students a voice, empowering them to make a difference, acknowledging that their input is worthwhile—all these were revelations to students like Jay Monroe, whose confidence grew as he realized his opinions matter, too.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Facilitating PBL that covers real-world issues that are relevant to students’ lives and interests is just as important as amplifying student voice. For the past two years, Conti faculty and staff, under
the leadership of principal John J. Rivero and assistant principal Alan LaMonica, have researched and learned about Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), read Zaretta Hammond’s *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, and engaged in lively, sometimes uncomfortable, discussions exploring our implicit biases. Integrating culturally responsive pedagogy is an ongoing process that begins with building trust and creating social-emotional partnerships. As principal Rivero explains, "CRT leads to deeper, higher levels of learning and helps close the achievement gap...By addressing the diverse cultural, racial, and language diversity of our students, our goal is to make learning meaningful for them.”

In prior years, our seventh graders read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, raising questions about the penal justice system in America and exploring the Second Amendment and gun control. For this project students used both primary and secondary sources, interviewed stakeholders like police officers, legislators, and families affected by gun violence, produced editorials for a school newsletter, and participated in a town hall meeting where they role-played the varied positions on this heated issue.

Our eighth graders examined the effects of gentrification on the economic, social, and racial landscape of our city. Working in teams, students took on the role of TV reporters tasked with producing a news segment. While these projects are designed to teach students the skills to articulate and participate in "discourse in the real world," they also learned that topics like gun control or gentrification are as much social justice issues as they are about safety or real estate.

For the past decade, seventh-grade students at our school have been reading Jerry Spinelli’s *Maniac Magee*, whose main character is homeless. Through PBL, middle school teacher Omar Alvarez’s classes studied the impact of homelessness worldwide and in our city. Students created action plans, wrote letters to policymakers, and partnered with local shelters to organize fundraisers. “[The homeless] all have stories,” concluded Ed Johns*, a previous seventh grader who visited the Hope House shelter for his research. "We see them like they’re nothing. We walk past them because we think they’re addicts or alcoholics or lazy, but that’s not the case. They all have stories behind them. And they need our help.”

Hope House was one of the local shelters where Jay Monroe and his mom had stayed for a period. Making kids aware of real-world struggles their peers may be dealing with is yet another step to discourage bullying and promote kindness.

**Seek Community Partnerships**

Beginning in 2012 the Dr. Michael Conti School collaborated with the Big Brother Big Sisters organization, which has been hugely successful. The friendships struck between the "Bigs" and "Littles" (as the mentors and mentees are known) have benefited our students greatly. Upon learning about Jay’s artistic streak, his mentor got him a sketchbook and has been a stable male role model and sounding board for Jay during the past two years.

The first year he was a student at Conti, Jay’s typical after-school routine would entail going to meet his mom at her workplace, and then when her shift ended, they would call the local shelters to see if room was available for them that night.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson, and Union counties recruits many of the mentors for our students from a financial firm, Pershing

Eighth-graders work on turning an unsightly overgrown area into an urban oasis for the community.

**During Conti School’s week-long Annual Project Gallery Walk kids find their voice via TEDEd Student Talks.**

Our Mitten Tree inspired by Candace Christainsen’s book of the same name.
Upon learning about Jay’s situation, Pershing “adopted” Jay and his mom and basically gave them a Christmas for the past two years, including toys, sports equipment, sneakers, clothes, even a bottle of perfume for Tanya. Later, when Tanya eventually secured an apartment she could afford, Pershing asked her to compile a list of items needed to furnish the new abode, providing things like storage lockers, toasters, etc.

Pershing also regularly provides our students with ongoing classes in life skills like financial literacy, writing resumes, applying for scholarships, and succeeding at interviews.

Partnerships with community organizations have also helped Conti families with disaster relief. United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Pershing, and others have stepped forward in several instances where fires decimated our children’s homes. Seeing organizations come through with assistance sends the message to our student body that it’s okay to ask for help, whether for yourself or for others. Members of our Junior National Honor Society, facilitated by guidance counselor Emma Santiago-Hernandez, are learning not to be shy about reaching out and politely asking for resources. The message of community, of helping each other in times of need, resonated with students like recent class salutatorian Lisa Maldonado*, who didn’t give a second thought to donating a pair of prized Air Jordans to a classmate who’d lost their possessions in a fire.

We also get our kids involved with Cal Ripken’s Make a Kid Smile Day, which provides underprivileged children a shopping spree at sporting-goods merchant Modells, and the annual Jersey City Back-2-School giveaway, during which children receive free, supply-filled book bags.
Keungsuk Sexton is a librarian and literacy support teacher at the Dr. Michael Conti School (PS #5) in Jersey City, NJ. She was a speaker at the AASL Awards Ceremony at the 2018 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in New Orleans. She and her school’s “Promoting Social Justice Awareness and a Culture of Kindness through Literature & PBL” initiative were recipients of the 2018 AASL Roald Dahl Social Justice Award.

Jay Monroe Now

Prior to arriving at PS5, Jay’s daily focus was simply physiological survival and safety. To see his development over the past two years is an affirmation of what kindness, support, and amplifying student voice can have on children who may otherwise slip through the cracks.

Jay recalls the project he embarked on this past year. Focused on the driving question, “Is recycling only sustainable when profitable?” students worked diligently to prove that it is not. Using recycled PVC pipe scraps and wheels from a discarded BBQ grill, Jay and his classmates created a fully functioning walker, which they donated to Mike DeFilippis, the son of a Jersey City teacher, to use at the beach. Jay says presenting the walker to Mike felt great. “Doing something for someone else is a powerful feeling!”

Jay says art was always his escape; at his old school, he would draw during class and be roundly reprimanded for it. Here, Jay got to use his artistry in the service of a project, helping to recycle scraps into things he really cared about. And he was praised for his contributions. According to his homeroom teacher Ms. Cesar, Jay’s “creativity and eye for design came in handy” for the recycling scraps into usable objects project.

This one-time self-described “shy, nervous” young child has grown into a person who exudes a quiet confidence. The child who at one time hated crowds and clung to his mother has now enrolled to study hospitality and tourism at Ferris High School. “I want to help others feel welcome as they travel the world,” Jay explains.

“My son has blossomed,” says Tanya Monroe, her voice cracking. “He has definitely come a long way.”

Jay has now left the Dr. Michael Conti School and matriculated to high school. The “safe space” provided by the Conti school was never meant to be just a physical one, but one that students hopefully internalize and draw assurance from, wherever life may lead them, wherever they may be.

*Student names have been changed to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of minors.
STUDENT DIVERSITY INSPIRES SPECIAL

“OUR LANGUAGES” COLLECTION

Kay Waitman
waitman_kay@asdk12.org
My transition from classroom teacher to school librarian brought many new and exciting opportunities. I feel grateful and fortunate to be able to build connections with every child in my school. My goal is for all my students to feel safe and welcome, whether they have grown up in the neighborhood, have just arrived from the Dominican Republic speaking only Spanish, have experienced the trauma of being a refugee fleeing home countries due to dangerous, unsafe conditions, or have recently moved from one of the small, remote Alaska Native villages.

In order to provide a safe and welcome environment in our library, I created an “Our Languages” collection of books in the first languages of all my students, from Español to Hmong to Yup’ik Eskimo. I also partnered with a local furniture store, Scan Home, to create a large, cozy seating area in the library and a safe place for students to visit when they feel sad, angry, or other feelings that often accompany transitions to new settings or trauma.

Williaw Elementary School, where I’m the school librarian in Anchorage, Alaska, currently has a very ethnically and culturally diverse student population (see figure 1). As of October 2018, the ethnic breakdown for Williaw Elementary School students was 46 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 16 percent Hispanic or Latino, 16 percent two or more races, 10 percent white, 7 percent Alaska Native, and 5 percent African American (“Anchorage School District Ethnicity Report” 2018).

Over the years, Anchorage, Alaska, has grown to become one of the most diverse cities in America. In the Anchorage School District, there are more than 110 languages spoken (Anchorage School District n.d.). In 2012–2013 Williaw Elementary was the twelfth most diverse public school in the United States (Tunseth 2015).

The Anchorage School District has an English language learners (ELL) program that supports students learning the English language. As I work with students, I know that while learning English is important, linguistic support for students’ native languages is also vital, because students may stay connected or may want to reconnect to their native language and culture.

During my first year as the school librarian at Williaw Elementary, our school collection didn’t contain books in the various languages that students spoke or heard at home. The collection contained a few Spanish books in the Dewey section at the bottom of a shelf, but they were rarely checked out.

I wanted to celebrate and showcase our student’s diversity in our school library. My goal was to enhance our collection with books that:

- Appeal to ALL my students
- Contain familiar illustrations that remind students of their homelands
- Contain illustrations and descriptions of where their parents or grandparents lived before moving to the United States
- Have illustrations of people who look like them
- Are written in first languages
- Are bilingual that contain words in both a first language and in English
• Are culturally based and are in English with illustrations

Grant Launches "Our Languages" Collection

In my first few months of librarian-ship, I wrote my first DonorsChoose request for books in Yup’ik, Somali, Vietnamese, Tagalog/Filipino, Spanish, and Hmong. The day the books arrived, I invited some students into the library to help me open the boxes of books.

One fifth-grade student, PajTshiab, found the bilingual book Good Night, Little Sea Otter by Janet Halfmann and Wish Williams. It’s written in Hmong and English. She sat down and started to read the story. PajTshiab was reading the Hmong text in the book. I asked her if she would read to me. I listened to her read the language she learned to read and speak at home. She said that she would like to check out the book to share with her family that had immigrated from Thailand.

Not all Hmong children know how to read in their language, but many know the stories told in the hand-embroidered traditional Hmong story cloths featured in the book Dia’s Story Cloth: The Hmong People’s Journey of Freedom by Dia Cha. Many families want to teach their children to read in Hmong. Hmong students enjoy sharing the Hmong language books with their families because these books are not always commonly available.

Another student, Asoese, pulled the bilingual book At School in Tongan and English (Tonga Nuyasa Edition) by Ahurewa Kahukura from one of the boxes. She was thrilled to see words in print that she heard at home. She was not able to fluently read the words but was eager to share the book at home with family members. She shared that her family is originally from Samoa.

I created an “Our Languages” section in our library with bins of books in the many different languages that our students speak or are part of their ethnic background. My students are able to learn about our world and about themselves, and they are able to stay connected to their culture, language, and traditions through this special collection. I placed the collection near the circulation desk in a central area that is highly visible and is easily accessible.

Literature for 'Real People’

One part of the “Our Languages” collection is Yup’ik, one of the largest Alaska Native languages. Yup’ik is a language and a description for its people. Yup’ik translated to English is “real person” (Alaska Native Language Center n.d.). Many Yup’ik families have moved from villages to larger communities such as Anchorage for economic opportunities. The transition from a village to Anchorage is often difficult, both socially and emotionally, for families.

As an educator, I strive to help my Alaska Native students stay connected to their rich culture. By adding books written in Yup’ik or Yup’ik and English to our school library collection as well as adding traditional Yup’ik stories in English, our entire school population benefits.

When I read and share bilingual Yup’ik stories with my students during library class, I encourage my students to share information about who they are. They share where they’re from and their stories. Through this process, we welcome
them into the school family, which helps them feel safe. My students flourish and gain confidence as we celebrate their individuality and culture. Reconnecting my students with Alaska Native culture, language, stories, and traditions helps them feel welcome at our school.

**My Experiences in a Yup’ik Village**

"Quyana," I said smiling, as one of my students, Lucy, handed me her library books that she was returning. She smiled and seemed surprised to hear me say "thank you" in the Yup’ik language. She told me how she shared the books with her grandmother who read them to her and how she enjoyed hearing "Gram" share stories about their Yup’ik culture when she was little. I was excited to get her feedback on the new books written in the Yup’ik language I had just received from my DonorsChoose grant.

I shared with my student, Lucy, that I began my teaching career in a Yup’ik village on the Kuskokwim River. We shared stories about traditional Alaska Native foods that we enjoy such as dry fish and akutaq (Eskimo ice cream made from white fish or salmon, moose fat or vegetable shortening, sugar, and berries), eeling (catching eels through thick river ice), berry picking, and other experiences. We had a connection. Before she left the library, she asked when I’d be getting more Yup’ik books.

When I was teaching in the Yup’ik village of about 125 people, the elders (who are grandparents of my former students) spoke fluent Yup’ik. My students’ parents were semi-fluent and spoke mostly English, while my students knew and spoke only words and phrases in Yup’ik. My small classroom library didn’t have any books in Yup’ik, and all my students spoke English at school. I witnessed how the Yup’ik people passed down stories, traditions, and beliefs mostly orally by listening and learning from the elders, who were respected leaders in the small communities. I invited the elders into our classroom to share their stories with my multi-age class. I enjoyed hearing the stories as much as my students did. I wondered if anyone had written these stories down.

One spring day, a parent shouted “The ice is going out!” as she ran into our classroom toward the end of the school day. I wasn’t sure what that meant exactly, but I soon realized that I, along with my students and the entire school population, would soon be running down to the mighty Kuskokwim River. I could hear it before I could see it. We watched large chunks and plates of ice flowing down the river and stacking up with fierce power along the massive and powerful river.

Soon, one of the elders explained in Yup’ik, her first language, how we needed to carefully go to the river’s edge and wash our faces in the flowing water. In turn, the river would wash any sickness we may carry down the river. All the children and community members participated in this tradition. It was an honor to be a part of the rich Yup’ik culture and to witness the respect the children and community had for their elders.

Many families pass on their rich cultural traditions; however, my former students in the Yup’ik village grew up learning English as their first language. The desire of many Yup’ik people is for the language to be revitalized by teaching young people to speak and read in Yup’ik. A new Yup’ik immersion program opened last year at an elementary school in Anchorage. It is the first school in the Anchorage School District to offer immersion program in an Alaska Native language.

**Connections to the AASL Standards**

The different ways my students utilize and value the books within the “Our Languages” collection reflect the Include Shared Foundation from the AASL Standards across many Domains. My students value balanced perspectives that are enhanced by the school library’s variety of resources. Our library represents all students and their place in the global learning community, and facilitates opportunities to experience diverse ideas (AASL 2018, 76–77).

Within the Create Domain, the “Our Languages” collection supports the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of the range of learners and their communities (AASL 2018, 76–77). My students identify and value the stories of their peers and value books in other students’ first languages.

I coordinated our first Barnes and Noble Book Fair in October 2019. I planned activities surrounding a multi-cultural theme to showcase our school’s diversity. We had students perform multicultural songs, and volunteers led multicultural games such as a Thailand jumping the rubber band game and board games such as Tapatan, a game from the Philippines. The fair also included multi-cultural crafts such as creating a Hmong star ornament, and storytimes in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. It was a true celebration of our students and a great way to raise funds to purchase more books for the “Our Languages” special collection.

**How Diversity Weaves Us Together**

As a first-year school librarian, my top priority was to build connections with my students. In order to accomplish this, I knew that I needed all my students to feel welcome and safe. To help students feel welcome,
Recommended Books for an Elementary Level "Our Languages" Collection

This is a list of "first language," bilingual, and cultural books. Many are part of our collection and some are on my list to add to our collection this year.

Hmong

- *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella* by Jewell Reinhard Coburn and Tzexa Cherta Lee
- *Good Night, Little Sea Otter* (Hmong/English) by Janet Halfmann
- *The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee’s Story* by Pegi Deitz Shea
- *Nine-in-One, Grr! Grr!* by Cathy Spagnoli
- *Dia’s Story Cloth: The Hmong People’s Journey of Freedom* by Dia Cha

Filipino/Tagalog

- *Filipino Friends* by Liana Romulo
- *Abadeha: The Philippine Cinderella* by Myrna J. De LA Paz and Youshang Tang
- *My First Book of Tagalog Words: Filipino Rhymes and Verses* by Liana Romulo and Jaime Laurel

Spanish

- *Si Llevas un Raton a la Escuela* (Spanish Edition) by Laura Numeroff
- *You Be You/Sé Siempre Tú* (English and Spanish Edition) by Linda Kranz
- *La Araña Muy Ocupada* (Spanish Edition) by Eric Carle
- *Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story* by Tomie DePaola
- *Oso Pardo, Oso Pardo, ¿Qué Ves Ahí?* (Brown Bear and Friends) (Spanish Edition) by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle
- *The Cazuela That the Farm Maiden Stirred* by Samantha R. Vamos
- *Rooster/Gallo* by Jorge Lujan and Manual Monroy
- *Tortillas Para Mamma and Other Nursery Rhymes* (various authors)
- *Gracias/Thanks* by Pat Mora and John Parra
- *Maria Had a Little Llama/María Tenía una Llamita* by Angela Dominguez

Vietnamese

- *Milet Mini Picture Dictionary: English–Vietnamese* by Sedat Turhan and Sally Hagin
- *Vietnamese Children’s Favorite Stories* by Phuoc Thi Minh Tran, Dong Nguyen, et al.

Tongan

- *At School in Tongan and English* (Tonga Nuyasa Edition) by Ahurewa Kahukura
- *My First Tongan 200 Picture Word Book* by Gerard Aflague and Mary Aflague

Somali

- *Milet Picture Dictionary* (English–Somali) by Milet Publishing
- *My Bilingual Book Sight* (English Somali) by Milet Publishing

Samoan

- *Colors in Samoan with English Translations* by Mary Aflague and Gerard Aflague
- *Let’s Learn the Samoan Alphabet* by Gerard Aflague and Mary Aflague
- *My Bilingual Book Sight* (English Samoan) by Milet Publishing
- *Teach Me Samoan: Using 31 Daily Words* by Gerard Aflague
- *My First Samoan Alphabets Picture Book with English Translations* (Bilingual Early Learning & Easy Teaching Samoan Books for Kids) by Natia S.
- *Teach Me My Feelings in Samoan with English Translations* by Mary Aflague and Gerard Aflague
I partnered with a local business and furniture store, Scan Home, to create a central, comfortable reading area I affectionately named the Owl’s Nest.

This cozy reading space, inspired by our school mascot, includes a large papier mâché tree that was created in collaboration with our art teacher and fifth-grade students. Its burly trunk is decoupaged with discarded book pages, and an owl’s nest sits atop the tree. Students contributed ribbons of different textures, colors, and sizes and wove them together to create the owl’s nest. Owls usually use a nest built by another species in nature, so the plan to build a nest that represented the various students in the school worked out well. The nest symbolizes how our diversity brings us together as a community when celebrated and woven together like an owl’s nest.

Students typically sit together as a class in the Owl’s Nest seating area after they check out books. A pair of decorative owls “roost” in the nest, and remind everyone of how we are all unified and a part of our school family. I value how my students sit together as a class in this common space and share books with each other. It may sound like a simple addition of a piece of furniture and art, but both have significantly helped to build community and safe relationships in our library.

Something else that is being built in our library is the confidence of English language learner (ELL) students and students who are refugees who have fled their countries due to unsafe conditions. If you walk through the Owl’s Nest space in our library, you may hear students reading to each other in their native, first languages. You may see Hmong or Yup’ik students who do not read in their first language but can see themselves in the illustrations and recognize some words and phrases on the pages of the books they’ve checked out. You may also see white students, who make up 10 percent of our school population, reading bilingual books in Spanish and English or Samoan and English. You will see all students, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or background, feeling safe and welcomed.

A new student, Juan Ignacio, arrived at our school directly from the Dominican Republic, speaking very little—if any—English. He was very fluent in reading Spanish and immediately started checking out books from the Spanish book collection. As a result, he felt safe, valued, and welcome as he was able to check out books and read along with his peers in the Owl’s Nest.

The bilingual books are not only popular with ELL students, they are also a hit with other students who learned only English at home, but have a desire to reconnect with their ancestral/native language. Bilingual books are also enjoyed by white, English-speaking students. They enjoy learning about different cultures through the English print and illustrations.

Many times, when I read the English words in bilingual books, I’ll invite students to read a portion in their native, first language. You may hear students reading to each other in their native, first languages. You may see Hmong or Yup’ik students who do not read in their first language but can see themselves in the illustrations and recognize some words and phrases on the pages of the books they’ve checked out. You may also see white students, who make up 10 percent of our school population, reading bilingual books in Spanish and English or Samoan and English. You will see all students, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or background, feeling safe and welcomed.

In Anchorage, there are more Hmong than any other refugee group. Some of my Hmong students have shared stories with me about relatives living in refugee camps, but most of the Hmong people migrated from Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin (Lee 2009; Tsong 2004).
My students from Somalia, who are also refugees and immigrated to Alaska with assistance from the Catholic Social Services’ Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services, regularly check out books in the Somali language week after week and share them with their parents and siblings at home. One second-grade boy, Ayaanle, often shared the Somali books with his classmates of other ethnicities and cultures, and they soon started checking out the books as well. Although I hadn’t expected this, I was pleased to see how accepting and interested his classmates were in his language and culture.

Students learn to go to the safe place and practice self-regulation independently. There are four breathing exercises that I teach, including the S.T.A.R, Drain, Pretzel, and Balloon. These techniques are based on the Conscious Discipline method (Conscious Discipline n.d.). There is no judgment and students are allowed and encouraged to go to the safe place at any time. When they are feeling calm and safe, they quietly rejoin the group.

The benefits of having a designated safe place as well as literature that supports students’ needs are many. My students feel safe and welcomed. In my experience, when this occurs, connections are easily formed. Many former students who graduated and transitioned to middle school have accepted my invitation to return to visit and volunteer in our library.

Almost every day after school, a handful of students enter the library to greet me as they start shelving books while we chat about our day.

Kay Waitman is the teacher-librarian at Williwaw Elementary School in the Anchorage School District. She has lived and taught in many different regions in Alaska. She is a member of AASL.

STUDENTS LEARN TO GO TO THE SAFE PLACE AND PRACTICE SELF-REGULATION INDEPENDENTLY.

Meeting Needs with Safe Places

I’ve worked to create a socially and emotionally safe environment in our school library. In addition, our library also has a designated physical “safe place” where students learn self-regulation techniques when they are feeling sad, mad, or another feeling that may make it challenging to participate in library lessons and activities. I teach different relaxation techniques so students learn to independently calm themselves.

The benefits of having a designated safe place as well as literature that supports students’ needs are many. My students feel safe and welcomed. In my experience, when this occurs, connections are easily formed. Many former students who graduated and transitioned to middle school have accepted my invitation to return to visit and volunteer in our library.

Almost every day after school, a handful of students enter the library to greet me as they start shelving books while we chat about our day.

Kay Waitman is the teacher-librarian at Williwaw Elementary School in the Anchorage School District. She has lived and taught in many different regions in Alaska. She is a member of AASL.

Works Cited:


Intentionally Creating a Safe Space for All

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AS REFUGE

Paula Wittmann
pswiftmann@seattleschools.org

Nancy Fisher-Allison
nafisheralliso@seattleschools.org
“School libraries are safe havens, often for the student you least suspect.”

—Pam Muñoz Ryan (2019)

The value and importance of offering safe spaces within the complex environment of a busy school cannot be overestimated. For students in need of a respite, the school library can be a refuge. There seems to be an instinctual attraction to this unique space.

What makes a student seek out the school library on their own? The manifold answers depend on a child’s life circumstances and their innate personalities. Sometimes it is for the books, to meet up with friends from other classes, or to use the computers, but many often simply want to visit the space. These students may come with friends, but they often come alone.

This piece focuses on creating a safe space for several subsets of the elementary school student population, including Muslim students, children with autism spectrum disorder, and students with social-emotional challenges. These groups do overlap and intersect, and they are united in their reliance on the library as a refuge. However, as school librarians, we know that any child might seek out the library at any time, depending on their situational needs and the day. Thus, our final subset is the nucleus of even-keeled, neurotypical children who still express the need for a school library’s sheltering space.

Building and Cultivating the Library as Refuge

It takes conscious effort to create an atmosphere of social-emotional safety in a school library. Mindful of the core values embedded in AASL’s National School Library Standards, especially the Shared Foundations of Include, Curate, and Explore, school librarians can shape an environment that beckons to children and inspires them to become partners in protecting the unique space where everyone is welcome.

At Paula’s elementary school, this atmosphere is taught and reinforced throughout the year. Paula sets out the expectations for the library at the beginning of the year, noting that the library is a quiet, respectful place where everyone should feel welcome and safe. She leads classes in a discussion of the many places in the school that can be noisy and sometimes overwhelming for students, like the gym, playground, lunchroom, and even classrooms. Paula stresses that part of the purpose of the library is to provide a space for those who need a more peaceful space. Students practice transitioning to a calm demeanor as classes come to the library, and when things start to get loud, students are reminded to respect the space.

Our guiding concept as school librarians is the relationship. When children come to the school library, they are stepping into a known world with clear expectations and
a welcome vibe. As stewards of the space, we are uniquely poised to appreciate the whole child; we learn their interests, their stories, and their concerns. Walking into the library means going to a place where children know they’ll be seen, but never judged. We understand that any time children choose to be in the library is an important opportunity to build relationships.

In the library, the watchwords are inclusivity, flexibility, and respect for others’ needs. Books, magazines, games, and makerspace activities offer a natural path to collaboration; even in a mixed-age setting, students who are not necessarily acquainted with one another display a natural ease in playing or creating together. This is where the library works its special magic.

**Muslim Students at Nancy’s School**

An intentional focus on school library services for Muslim students—including the provision of a safe and welcoming space—has received considerable attention in the professional literature (see the “Recommended Reading” section). Islamophobia remains a pervasive issue in the United States; inevitably, societal issues find their way into schools, including elementary schools. Compounding the challenge, young Muslim girls—especially those from immigrant families—visibly stand out in our school hallways, with their flowing dresses and colorful hijabs. When acts of terrorism occur, Muslim students, including the children at Nancy’s school, vocalize feelings of fear.

Being of service to Muslim students requires a commitment to professional learning. This is an example of doing the necessary work to cultivate a safe space; it is essential to select professional development based on the specific environment of one’s building. Islam is often poorly understood in Western countries. One of the most common errors is to think of Islam (and Muslims) monolithically; in reality, the Muslim world is remarkably diverse. The Muslim student population at Nancy’s Title I school is a perfect illustration. Over the years, the Muslim students have been African-American, Gambian, Oromo, Somali, Iraqi, Egyptian, Saudi, Pakistani, Kurdish, Filipino, and Indonesian. Muslim staff members are Somali and Cham (a Muslim ethnic group from Cambodia and Vietnam). Statistically, the “typical” Muslim is not Arab, despite American perceptions to the contrary (Diamant 2019).

Within the United States and inside of American schools this diversity is in full bloom. The effort to create a safe space for Muslim students is two-fold: affirming the identity of Muslim children and informing the rest of the student population about Islam, both globally and locally.

Because the school library is a stronghold of knowledge, the librarian can play a powerful role in offering information that counters biases and tempers microaggressions. The educational goal is not merely tolerance but understanding and ideally supportive interest. Carefully curated library materials and programs can erode ignorance and build knowledge within a community; ideally, Muslim students can experience relief from anxiety about stereotyping, and can focus on what they are at school to do: learn.
The school librarian’s obligation here is to curate a collection that offers “mirrors and windows” for Muslim and non-Muslim readers. Fortunately, the publishing world is waking up to the need for engaging and authentic literature that features Muslim characters or portrays Muslim life, both religiously and culturally. Led by Muslim-American authors of children’s and middle-grade literature Karuna Riazi and Hena Khan, Salaam Reads (an imprint of Simon & Schuster) made its debut in 2016. Other recent titles portray Muslim-American characters seeking balance between their inner and outer worlds and yearning to be understood. (A fine example here is Jewell Parker Rhodes’s *Towers Falling*.)

A school librarian can weave these texts into teaching and learning in natural ways, without seeming overly deliberate. During the month of Ramadan at Nancy’s school, first graders engaged with alacrity during an interactive read-aloud of *Under My Hijab* by Hena Khan. The outstanding illustrations by Aaliya Jaleel supported students’ efforts to determine when and where a contemporary American Muslim woman would wear a hijab. Our collective conversation was imbued with respectful curiosity. At the close of our reading, one child announced joyfully: “That book is about me!” Such is the power of literature to create a sense of cultural safety and belonging in a school library. Another girl approached Nancy quietly after class and asked to borrow the book.

In addition to creating a robust collection that offers insights into Muslims as individuals and Islam in general, a powerful means of offering knowledge is to invite a speaker from the local community. School librarians should be aware of community resources, and well poised to include other voices in children’s learning experiences. Through a professional development opportunity, Nancy had visited the Muslim Association of Puget Sound (MAPS), a religious and cultural center for the Seattle area’s Muslim community. Coincidentally, one of her school’s parents worked there. During Ramadan 2018, this parent connected Nancy with Adam Jamal, the assistant imam and executive director of education at MAPS. Adam kindly visited Nancy’s school to meet with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students.

His presentation covered not only the global history and central tenets of Islam, but also the contributions of Muslim-Americans to civic life in the United States. The presentation drew scores of questions from children. Muslim students in the audience were visibly proud and affirmed, while non-Muslim students became more informed in an engaging and informal way.

Although it is difficult to quantify the effect of carefully selected acquisitions and other knowledge resources on Muslim students’ sense of place in the library, anecdotal evidence from Nancy’s school suggests that Muslim students view the library as their special space.

S. and her brother arrived at Nancy’s school in September 2019. They were both book-hungry, and immediately attached themselves to the library (and the librarian). The fall of 2019 was also a time when Nancy decided to launch some makerspace programs. With encouragement from district leadership (and in accordance with her meager budget), she introduced several simple activities, including jigsaw puzzles, potholder weaving, and Rubik’s cubes. All recess activities from previous years remained in place (reading, book-borrowing, arts and crafts, use of designated computer programs, and board games). S. had a strong, quiet presence, but was not ready to spend recess in the swirling frenzy of our playground. She was an
avid seeker of the library’s informal offerings and was drawn to the jigsaw puzzle table. Her seatmate from class, A. (a Mexican-immigrant boy), would have been comfortable anywhere, but he joined S. regularly in this pursuit, and the two soon brought others along.

The jigsaw table proved to be a remarkable opportunity for collaborative recreation; Nancy watched students who had no previous relationship with one another forge bonds as they pursued the common goal of completing a challenging puzzle. S.—new to the school, and under a hijab—found not only a safe space but camaraderie.

**Students with Social-Emotional Challenges**

At Paula’s school, some students have scheduled library breaks, and others regularly visit the library with teacher permission. When those students who have permission to visit the school library arrive, Paula knows that they are feeling overwhelmed or are having a hard day. These students are usually on the radar of many adults in the building due to sensory issues, learning challenges, challenging home lives, or a hard time fitting in socially. Visiting the library “...helps me relieve stress,” one student noted. A library visit is one tool for providing support to these students.

This past year, M. arrived at Nancy’s school as a fifth grader. Even under the best circumstances, it is not easy to join a fifth-grade cohort; most of Nancy’s fifth graders had been together since kindergarten. As an added challenge, M. was a beleaguered veteran of the foster-care system; she had experienced childhood trauma and trusted no one. Fortunately, she had landed in a nurturing home with committed foster parents; furthermore, she had enrolled in a neighborhood school with a strong community ethos and a dedicated staff.

M. had multiple layers of defensive emotional skin. A., a fellow student, also extended a welcome to M. Perhaps because A. was a bit of an outsider himself, M. accepted his offer of friendship. A. loved the library’s puzzle table; initially, M. came to the library during recess simply because A. was there. Over time, she started to enjoy the space for its own merits. It was a nice place to hang out, and she appreciated the quiet.

In addition, she noted that no one teased her when she was in the library; in other places, kids or even teachers would make comments in a teasing manner that made her uncomfortable. M. felt that the library was calm and liked having
an alternative to the playground. J., another fifth-grade girl who connected with M., explained that their new friendship group viewed the playground as “rowdy and crazy,” and sought a place where “everyone was not arguing.”

During formal learning periods, M. struggled to maintain behavioral control and frequently fled the classroom. Midway through the year, as M.’s guardians worked with school staff to develop a behavior plan, her guardians asked M. whether she would like to designate a “break space” for times when she needed to be away from peers. Her answer: the library.

**Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Students on the autism spectrum instinctively gravitate toward school libraries (in fact, many elect to serve as library volunteers or teaching assistants). For these children, the library is an excellent place to practice spending time with others in an informal social setting. It is also a place to share activities, find commonalities, and enjoy being noticed and appreciated for one’s unique self.

Children on the spectrum are frequently “othered,” sometimes in brutal ways, but just as often in subtle ways. In our schools, the Access room (a room designated for students with special needs) is available to students with IEPs as a comfortable refuge, but the virtue of the school library is that it is more socially mixed and it has materials that allow students to immerse themselves in their passions. Students with ASD, like everyone else, seek a measure of acceptance; libraries, with their welcoming, nonjudgmental vibe (and the librarian’s watchful eye), allow for safe interactions between ASD children and neurotypical children. In this respect, it is especially helpful to have makerspace activities on hand; they unite children in common creative purpose.

**Everyone Belongs at Your School Library**

Personal challenges are not a requirement for seeking sanctuary in the library. All children experience the need to nourish their spirits and regain emotional equilibrium; the library is there as a protected and sheltering place for them. In many schools, the library is the only public space intentionally put forward as a refuge. Certainly, students with chaotic lives crave safety and often find refuge in the library, but it is important to remember that every student craves safety and a place to feel protected. With its mission to serve every student, the school library can be that refuge.
Calm, Quiet, and Peaceful

Throughout the school day students stop by Paula’s school library. Students must ask for permission from their classroom teacher, so often they stop by to get a book to take back to class or to ask for help. However, students also drop in to take a break in a serene space. The library is their chosen escape spot. As V., a fourth grader, says it is, “getting away from the commotion.”

Some students need a “reset” after lunch before the second half of the day. Others make special arrangements to eat lunch in the library, whether to avoid the thundering din of the lunchroom or to have private conversations. At Nancy’s school, the counselor initiated a weekly lunch circle for fifth-grade girls, with a table reserved in the library. In this sacred little circle, the group discussed some weighty issues. Subsequently, several of the girls arranged to have lunch in the library on an ongoing basis. In a sense, the counselor had endorsed and reinforced the perception of the school library as a safe zone.

The majority of students who visit outside of their scheduled class time have sought the library on their own. They come in, find something to look at, and settle into nooks, corners, and tables. Other times they sink into their book and eventually need to be reminded to return to class. The ability to self-select to visit the library is important.

Our schools use the RULER program (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotion) from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to support social and emotional learning. Self-selected use of the library as a break encourages students to monitor their own emotional needs and find solutions to regulate them. Some students are regular visitors and may visit multiple times during the day. However, many are occasional visitors; they know the library is there if they need a different type of break. One parent told Nancy that her daughter “went to the library sometimes if she wasn’t feeling 100% … It made her feel better about whatever was ailing her.”

Fun

As school librarians we know that our time is limited with any class. We work to ensure that the learning is memorable and impactful. This means carefully planning lessons that integrate the standards we are working on with compelling learning activities and resources that catch the interest of students. Lessons are deliberately planned so students get to explore ideas and resources that they may not encounter in class. Often the lessons support the topics and learning in the classroom, but show students a different way of looking at a topic. The lessons also offer additional resources that expand students’ understanding. By teaching memorable lessons we are building the understanding that ideas and learning are fun and engaging, and that the school library is a place to look forward to visiting during both structured and unstructured times.

At Paula’s library, scheduled classes earn library choice time through good behaviors: quietly transitioning in the library, positively participating during lessons, and being able...
to focus on choosing, checking out, or reading during check-out times. This structure reinforces positive routines and productive lessons, but it also provides students with the opportunity to use the library as a place of self-choice and joyful exploration.

When a class earns choice time, they can choose various activities such as drawing, creating mini-books, using the finger puppet theater, working with different STEM-related activity sets, or reading. These activities allow students to explore different ways of learning and self-select who they would like to work with and what they would like to do.

Students may also self-select to visit during one of their recesses at Paula’s school. Because of scheduling, this often coincides with another class’s library time. The library is fairly small, and students know their options at recess are quiet browsing and check-out, reading, working, or art. If they are too loud, they are asked to leave. One student noted, “It’s quiet and I don’t feel alone outside.” If there is another class in the library, they often follow along with the lesson being taught. As one student put it, “It’s fun to listen to storybooks while checking out books.”

Besides providing a space to feel safe emotionally and physically, the library is also a place to safely explore ideas of personal interest. “It is a place full of learning stored in the books. It is a safe place to be wrapped in the books,” explained one student. It is easy to forget that many of students’ passionate interests are not covered in the classroom. In the library students can feel validated and explore those interests.

Another student added that coming to the library outside of class meant, “It’s not a race for the books.” At Nancy’s school, where students are only able to borrow one graphic novel at a time (due to purchasing limitations), the graphic novel cart is a magnet during recess. Some students want a safe place to explore ideas or have time to browse for just the right book. A student of Paula’s summed it all up: “I can read whatever I want, it’s quiet...in the library I feel at home.”
Conclusion

Schools today often cater to students who are extroverted or feel comfortable in active spaces. Class is full of expectations of participation in discussion and group work. Students are expected to work regularly in cooperative groups on projects and learning activities both large and small. The lunchroom is loud, and recess can be stressful. This can be compounded if a child feels alienated, disconnected, or overwhelmed. The school library can be an antidote for these students.

Through careful nurturing of relationships, environment, collections, and structured and unstructured learning, school librarians can create a critical refuge in the ecosystem of a school. The school library can be an invaluable resource to meet the regular and occasional needs of students to have time to relax and explore ideas on their own. By working to encourage the school community as a whole to accommodate flexibility for students to visit on their own, schools can promote the library as a haven for any student who decides they need it. Students today are often anxious and overwhelmed. Many of them just need a place to take a break, relax, explore ideas, or simply feel that they belong and are welcome.

Works Cited:

Paula Wittmann is the NBCT-certified teacher-librarian at West Woodland Elementary in Seattle, WA. She is a member of AASL. She also serves on the Washington Children’s Choice Picture Book Award Committee.

Nancy Fisher-Allison recently retired as the teacher-librarian at John Rogers Elementary School in Seattle. She is a member of the Washington Library Association and the National Council for the Social Studies. She has presented at the annual K–8 Conference of the Washington State Council for the Social Studies. She received recognition from the Urban American Indian Alaska Native Education Alliance (Seattle) for making the school library a safe place to explore cultural differences.
Trauma-Informed School Libraries

Elizabeth Pelayo
Elizabeth.Pelayo@d303.org
A SPACE FOR ALL
Some people see the school library as merely a place for books and materials, but for many students, it is a refuge and a place where they can relax and feel safe. School libraries are more than receptacles of books, technology, and audiovisual needs; they are sanctuaries for many students dealing with issues outside of school. Whether it is addressing students’ academic needs or their social-emotional problems, school librarians and staff provide an engaging and comfortable place for young people. The school library is the heart of the school, and much of what happens in the school includes the library in some way, shape, or form!

As school librarians we believe that gathering information is one of the most powerful tools available. The more we know about our students and patrons, the better we will be able to support their needs. That’s why it’s important school librarians be trauma sensitive and trauma informed; school librarians need to understand how trauma affects the brain so that we can help our students suffering from these issues. We have everything to gain by adding knowledge about trauma-sensitive issues and their effects on adolescents to our toolboxes.

Defining Trauma-Informed Libraries

Understanding the fundamental and core beliefs of what it means to be trauma informed is essential. As in most new learning we have to gather information so we can see how this learning relates to us and our school library spaces. The timeless thought that we cannot know where we have been, is key to this philosophy.

To be defined as a trauma-informed and sensitive environment a school or library must commit to supporting every student. According to the Treatment and Services Adaptation Center, ”In a trauma-informed school, the adults in the school community are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress” (n.d.). Recognizing students who may be at risk can prove challenging at times, but through open communication and positive, trusting relationships identifying students with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) becomes easier. Some common ACEs that students may experience include:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Abandonment
- Neglect
- Death or loss of a loved one
- Bullying
- Chaotic living environments
- Witnessing domestic violence

As school library professionals we must hold true to creating an inclusive environment for all in our collections, policies, and patron expectations.

Consider how adults handle trauma and use that information as a mirror for understanding our students’ reactions. When we go through traumatic experiences in our lives, we are not ourselves at work, with our families, or with our friend groups. If our colleagues know what we are dealing with emotionally or physically, they are more likely to be understanding of off behavior, like late work or insouciance.
Imagine then that you were sensitive to students in such a way. You had the background information and were aware of the triggers that might mean the difference between a productive day at school or a complete meltdown. When a student’s emotions are hanging on by a thread, the smallest thing can cut it or keep that student hanging on. As school librarians we are committed to try our best to help students through these moments.

To assess whether your school library is sensitive to students’ trauma, review the ten principles of a compassionate school from the state of Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction:

1. Focus on culture and climate in the school and community.
2. Train and support all staff regarding trauma and learning.
3. Encourage and sustain open and regular communication for all.
4. Develop a strengths-based approach in working with students and peers.
5. Ensure discipline policies are both compassionate and effective (restorative practices).
6. Weave compassionate strategies into school improvement planning.
7. Provide tiered support for all students based on what they need.
8. Create flexible accommodations for diverse learners.
9. Provide access, voice, and ownership for staff, students, and community.
10. Use data to identify vulnerable students, and determine outcomes and strategies for continuous quality improvement. (n.d.)

By following these principles to be compassionate and sensitive to all our students, school librarians can help develop their school library into a safe space for staff and students.

Professional Development

The first step in any new way of thinking is understanding. When my school began the process of becoming trauma informed, a base of knowledge had to be laid down that would define this new way of trauma-informed thinking. Using all school professional development time was a great way to reach all staff and ensure that everyone was hearing the same message about trauma-informed and sensitive behaviors in education.

Screening the movie Paper Tigers directed by James Redford was my school’s initial step. This documentary film follows six high school students at Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, Washington. The school’s principal has seen great success with his students using trauma-sensitive strategies and outlines what he did and continues to do to see positive changes in his students.

After the movie screening the school’s staff needed processing time and conversation. We carved out dialog time during professional learning community work days, staff meetings, building leadership team meetings, and school improvement team meetings. To process the movie, the school’s instructional support coaches created focused driving questions that were discussed by all staff. Examples of these questions include:

• What key messages did you take away from the film? What stood out?
• How did learning about ACEs and the changes made at Lincoln impact how you think about students in our school/your classes?

As a library group, my assistants, instructional tech specialists, and I reflected on these questions. Because our school library is the heart of the school, we decided that the school library needed to be on the forefront of these changes. A brainstorming session of ideas soon followed, with my library staff producing a list of ways that we could be a more trauma-sensitive library. All the ideas we came up with reflect trauma-sensitive practices by being inclusive, supportive, and sensitive to students’ outside situations. Removing barriers for students with traumas so they can focus on the work they need to do at school was our goal. A few of the ideas we came up with were:

• Student IDs for check-out becoming preferred, but not mandatory
• Late and damaged fines reviewed
• Chromebook loaners given to students without charged devices
• Chargers checked out to students to use in the library
• A free replacement ID each year

All of these ideas were approved by our building administration and implemented in the second year of our trauma-informed learning.

Year Two Implementation

In year two of our learning, the school leadership team set up a plan to shift into a trauma-sensitive mindset. Teachers were surveyed to find out what learning they wanted and needed to further their understanding and buy in to this inclusive way of thinking. During department meetings lead teachers would encourage conversations...
and sharing among staff on topics related to social-emotional learning and ACE-informed procedures. These procedures could be as small as a “hello” at the door entering the classroom, or as complex as taking a day during the week to do social-emotional learning lessons with the entire class. According to the National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments, “Supporting social and emotional development is a core component to trauma sensitive schools” (2018, 49). (The center offers a packet of specific handouts and tools that can be used to support this mindset at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Building%20TSS%20Handout%20Packet_ALL.pdf>.)

For our school library, year two was a learning process. The school library staff found that some of our new ideas worked out great, and some needed to be tweaked. Most of our ideas worked just the way we thought they would. However, Chromebook loaner devices proved to be the most difficult to implement, and continues to be an issue still. Students with ACEs have a hard time remembering to bring their devices charged to school, or they are unable to charge their device if they are not living in a permanent home. Some students have difficulty even bringing back the loaned Chromebook. Students with trauma are not thinking about bringing back what they borrowed; their minds are on other things. We continue to find that loaned Chromebooks are not returned, so we then have to hunt them down. We just don’t have the time or staff to do that every day. As a group we are still trying to brainstorm ways to make this a more successful process for students and library staff.

### Year Three Modifications

Moving into year three our goal as a school was to have the majority of staff members using some kind of social-emotional learning strategy, lesson, or protocol in their classrooms. To support this goal the school improvement team created professional development sessions where teachers could choose a strategy they felt like they needed to learn more about during institute days. The sessions were led by members of the school improvement team. Some examples of sessions included:

- De-escalation Strategies
- Self-Care Strategies
- Dropping Your Personal Mirror
- Keeping Discipline
- Offer Support Strategies
- Trauma and the Brain

The library staff debriefed as a whole group about what we learned in these sessions, how we felt about our learning, and what additional topics we still wanted to explore. During these sessions, we all were able to make concrete connections to the school library, and it really helped us in our understanding of ways to help students in the library. Some of our big takeaways from these sessions were:

- Keeping our cool as best we can when students begin to escalate or get frustrated with us or library policies.
- Taking care of ourselves during the day, making time to relax at our lunch breaks, and taking care of our basic needs at work when we need to.
- Using calm talk and reassurance to help students de-escalate when they become heightened in the library.

### Action Steps to Implementation

All the valuable learning, mindset adoption, and subtle changes in library policy became our action plan. With all this learning in place as a library staff we were able to connect to students, be more understanding of students’ needs, and work toward a library environment that is welcoming and safe for every student. When students and staff feel connected to the library and see it as a safe and inviting space, then they will want to be there; and when students and staff want to be there, circulation, connections, and use of resources increase. Our school library staff goals are to form positive supportive relationships, and to share new ideas and resources with waiting students. Through trauma-sensitive library practices we are shaping libraries of the future to meet the needs of our students and staff better than ever before.

Thoughts about education as a one-size-fits-all program have begun to fall by the wayside. The ideology of trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive thinking is a natural fit into the new educational metamorphosis, which has shifted to more person-alized learning. When matching students with a book or a resource for research we always ask questions first. That sense of satisfaction we feel when we have exactly what the student is looking for, the relief in students’ eyes that yes, we can help, and the feeling that we made a difference with a student that day is everything. We ask questions to help understand what students need. School libraries are a safe place for all students where they can temporarily forget about the trauma in their lives, and focus on finding books and resources that can support them.
The positive feedback and outcomes with this trauma-sensitive mindset have been far reaching and abundant. As a school we have seen great success in our abilities to connect with students and form positive relationships. We have seen an increase in students asking for help when they need it and being open with staff when they need support and getting it. We have also had an increase in students feeling like they have a trusted teacher in the building that they could go to for support. As a library we have stayed true to our mission of being an inclusive and safe space for all students. The library is the heart of a school with a beat on what our students need to be successful. Stopping to consider outside factors in students’ lives has been an eye-opening experience and has brought changes to our school policies that have affected the library’s day-to-day operations. These changes, such as incorporating social-emotional learning lessons and being more flexible with students on rules such as IDs and Chromebooks being charged, have been our most successful. The school library has become more aware and more thoughtful, and it is a place where students can feel safe and connected to their school. Many of us chose the school library profession because of how teaching and libraries made us feel as adolescents.

Over the past years the school library staff have revised our policies, developed a better understanding of our students’ needs, and become aware about best practices in helping students with ACEs. All these factors have contributed to a positive school library environment. We have fewer students reaching a frustration level; we have eliminated obstacles preventing students from checking out materials that they need; and we have fostered positive feelings and relationships with students.

As we look forward, the school and library will continue incorporating trauma-sensitive and -informed practices. The plans that we make for each new school year will include ways that we can support all our students in positive ways. Our commitment to collecting resources for all students, not just ones that support our own beliefs, holds strong. Moving forward we will continue to keep a pulse on what our students are asking for and what will best support them psychologically and academically. Our library policies and procedures will be fluid according to our students and their needs.

Every human being needs a place to feel safe, a place to belong and feel understood. The library in every school can be that safe and understanding place. For some students, our area of the building can serve as a quiet eye in what seems to be the hurricane of life, a spot in the busy school day to catch a breath and slow down. The fiction titles that we offer that give students an escape or a reflective moment are invaluable. The nonfiction titles and resources that give students information they need to learn and grow in vast areas of knowledge are priceless.

Understanding where your students are at emotionally and cognitively together is really at the heart of being a trauma-informed and -sensitive library. With all the knowledge that understanding ACEs has provided, we have truly made great strides at becoming a school library that is a safe space for all.
FEATURE

NOT YOUR MOTHER’S SCHOOL LIBRARY

Melanie A. Toran
melanie.toran@nn.k12.va.us

Knowledge Quest | Going beyond School Libraries as Safe Havens
It’s enough that students feel they have to post everything on “The Gram” (Instagram) or “The Book” (Facebook). Whether it’s their OOTD (outfit of the day), their WCW (Woman Crush Wednesday), or MCM (Man Crush Monday), students may feel the need to tag friends, strike the “tongue out, fingers up” pose in the bathroom, and/or follow and like those who have the lifestyle they wish they could have. In actuality, students may have had enough, enough of pretending to be someone they do not know, and they may decide that they are done being silent and live out loud. Whether students choose to live out loud or keep everything “on the low,” they only want one thing: to be accepted. School libraries are places where people seek solace—not just by burying their heads in books to see themselves in the characters or to look up information on a topic they can’t bring themselves to ask friends, but as a safe haven, or third space, from those who have prejudices based on one’s sexuality.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) community want the same resources, services, and sources as other people, just without the prejudices. They want a place that is a diverse and inclusive environment. This environment should be a place of solace and support. Students are turning away from sitting alone to coming into the school library to be with those with whom they can relate. Everyone wants to be understood, loved, and accepted, but not everyone knows how to show it. School libraries have always been a safe place for all, but now the school library is turning into a safe haven for those who are looking for security.

School libraries of today are not your mother’s school library. The library is no longer a quiet place or a meeting place; it is a place with books, posters, displays, and workers who listen to their patrons, look like their patrons, and respect their patrons… it is a safe place. I know you are thinking school libraries have been safe havens for those who need heat in the winter, air in the summer, unlimited WiFi, and electric sockets, but libraries are becoming safe havens for people who do not feel the love from their peers, are not welcome in the cafeteria, and/or are bullied because of the lifestyle they choose to live.

In 2018, AASL released the National School Library Standards to provide school librarians with guidance and structure on how to best tailor their school library space to the needs of their learners. With libraries steadily becoming a safe place for patrons to support inclusiveness, celebrate self-worth, and embrace others’ diverse perspectives, the previous standards had to be updated to reflect all types of learners and leaders. The standards contain five levels: Shared Foundations, Key Commitments, Domains, Competencies, and Alignments. Each level is designed to reflect the others, ensuring the standards-related activities are mutually reinforcing, building capacity among learners, school librarians, and the school library (AASL 2018).
The four Domains are Think, Create, Share, and Grow and detail the school librarian’s role in engaging learners and leaders to support the learning community. There are Key Commitments to the Shared Foundations of Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. The Key Commitment is the main objective behind each Shared Foundation (AASL 2018). Although each foundation is equally important when implementing the standards, Include is the foundation that school librarians can continuously build upon. The Key Commitment in Include is to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community (AASL 2018). The Share Domain aligns with Include by providing opportunities to experience diverse ideas and by implementing solutions that address multiple barriers to equitable access to resources and services (AASL 2018).

Let’s look at how the Domains in the AASL Standards make school libraries a safer place.

Just Think how patrons would be more likely to use the school library because there was no judgment regarding who they were, who they want to be, or who they love. In schools all around the nation, the hashtag movement #attendance–matters is popping up on social media sites, bulletin boards, and in staff meetings. Attendance does matter. If the kids/patrons ain’t happy, nobody is happy; and if the kids ain’t happy, they are not coming to school or the school library.

One can Create a space of acceptance by modeling understanding. When kids feel accepted it gives them a sense that this place “gets me.” Being different, looking different, and having different feelings has no place in some kids’ homes. In school, we encourage uniqueness and standing out from the rest. We create a sense of self to have pride in being whatever you choose to be. Last year, we allowed our students with a unique sense of self to assist us with our book order and displays. Let’s just say our book display was fierce.

Our workspace is their learning space, their listening space, and their happy place. We Share our area with our students. Nothing good ever came out of something that wasn’t open. Our students are welcome to come in just to sit and chat, look at library materials, or just look at us, but they are welcome and they bring friends who have never been to the library. It is kind of like when you find something good and you post how good it is on social media; people see it and check it out for themselves. That’s how school libraries are now; they are endorsed by people they respect; their peers, the people who look, act, and think like they do.

We Grow from what is poured into us. As teachers, librarians, and school personnel, the vibe of the school starts from the administration and trickles down. Building leaders set the tone of the school. If the leaders are not leading in a manner for those to follow, then it needs to be brought to the forefront that the school is a business, the students are the customers, and we aim to please. As school librarians, we want continued business with our customers, and the only way to make sure they come back is to make them feel welcomed, accepted, and respected.

As an ally and advocate for all students (ages 8–80) I am constantly learning. I was taught that there were four basic needs to survive: water, air, shelter, and food. As I have become wiser, I feel there are a few more to add: education, acceptance, and security. The four basic needs have become seven due to the ever-changing needs of the people we serve as teachers, librarians, and school personnel. Can you even imagine life without an education? Without being accepted for who you are? Or without a sense of security? Ain’t nobody got time for that!

As a high school librarian, I have had my fair share of patrons who come in just to “see someone really quick.” One day, I decided to go back to the library coursework days and use some of the skills I acquired when learning about our patrons. I used my reference interview questioning skills to get to know about my patrons’ interests and hobbies. I talked with one of my “keyless entry” students to make their “real quick” visit more personal and professional for both of us. It went something like this:

Me (in my cardigan): Hey young man, you got one minute to visit your friend because he is independently working on an assignment.

Him (sitting down): Alright, I’m leaving now.

Me: You are welcome here; you just need a pass.

Him: Alright, miss. It’s all good, y’all don’t have no good books in here anyway.

Me (clutching my pearls): Excuse me, sir. I will have you know I have picked most of these books myself.

Him: What y’all got? (His way of stalling to not go back to class)

Me (since he’s here I can promote the library to a potential user): We got every Anime book, books on singers, rappers, entertainers, etc.

Also Me: So what are you into?

Him: Boys!
Me: Oh, I got (insert me rambling off the titles of all the books from our diverse perspectives section).

Him: You lying!! Y’all got books like that? I was just joking.

In life, I have learned that the truth comes out in a joke. He and I talked for the remainder of the block (yes, he won the game of coming in the library and staying without a pass, but I won at the end). He threw out bait to see if I would bite and to see if I like to fish (was gay friendly) or if I was allergic to fish (straight-laced). I shared with him a Sports Illustrated magazine because he likes to browse through the sports pages and read up on what interests him. Just from doing reference interviewing I have circulated books that haven’t moved, made new friends, and got recommendations on what’s trending in my students’ world. Spoiler alert: that student has come back to check out “one of them books” (LBGTQ) for a friend because his friend didn’t believe we had those kinds of books. I may have gotten suckered by someone who was looking to skip class, but I earned a patron’s respect, got input on book selections, and also became someone’s sense of security when it came to who he really wants to be.

There isn’t a day that goes by where there is not a new face coming in the library “real quick.” These new faces are looking for familiar faces to feel at ease with when it comes to making book choices. I learned from the student that it is no one’s business what he reads, and he is most correct. So he asked me if there was any way he could read “those books” without everyone seeing what he was reading. I suggested a book jacket/book sleeve (he had no clue what I was talking about). He suggested an e-book. How ingenious! Why didn’t I think of that? From then on out, we have always talked with students about their book selections and their preferred format because they know what they want to read, what they want to know, and how they want to read.

Future-ready librarians, let’s stay tuned to what’s going on outside the school so that we meet our students’ needs and interests. Let’s learn out loud! Let’s build an inclusive collection with our students that recognizes and revels in diverse perspectives. Next, let’s make sure that there is information on a variety of vantage points, beliefs, and understandings that reflect each of our students. Lastly, let’s ensure all students feel safe, secure, and welcome regardless of their race, religion, culture, or sexual identity.

Have pride! Live out loud! Be powerful...because you are enough!

Melanie A. Toran is the lead school librarian at Heritage High School in Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, VA. She contributed to the blog post “On a Mission: Students with Exceptional Abilities Coding Music” on the Knowledge Quest website and “Libraries Ready to Code Redux: Real Life Successes” in the spring 2019 issue of Info Today. She was a recipient of the ALA Ready to Code Grant.

Work Cited:

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) gratefully acknowledges the following organizations for their support and generous contribution toward the success of the association and the school librarians we serve:

**DIAMOND LEVEL**  $50,000+

[OverDrive](https://www.overdrive.com)

[Bound to Stay Bound Books](https://www.btsb.com)

**PLATINUM SPONSORS**  $35,000–$49,999

[Follett](https://www.follett.com)

**SILVER SPONSORS**  $10,000–$19,999

**BRONZE SPONSORS**  $5,000–$9,999

[Capstone](https://www.capstonepub.com)

[Demco](https://www.demco.com)

[ProQuest](https://www.proquest.com)

[Rosen Publishing](https://www.rosenpublishing.com)

[Scholastic Book Fairs](https://www.scholastic.com)

[verizon](https://www.verizon.com)

[The American Association of School Librarians empowers leaders to transform teaching and learning.](https://aasl.org)
Diverse characters and stories give life and voice to marginalized communities, wanting, needing, deserving to be seen and heard.

Behold the Gatekeepers: Unlocking an Equal and Diverse Library

Tiffany Rose
asouthpawdraws@gmail.com

A child who reads is the gatekeeper of worlds of possibilities; with each new book a child gains a key to a world once unknown.

The feel of a book, the spine, its numerous pages give life to new adventures. When the light breeze of a book’s printed pages blow softly upon a child’s face, the child breathes deep the text.

A child’s eyes scan the pages and with every turn of the page, takes one step closer into a world where the impossible becomes probable. Where the heroine saves the day, a quest of great peril awaits, or purple polka-dotted dragons can be your pen pals.

As a child I was a voracious reader. I would devour anything I could get my hands on, from National Geographic magazines to volumes of Greek mythology. I lived just a few minutes walk from my local library branch. Each day after school, I’d grab a snack at the YMCA and head next door to my escape, my sanctuary. Every time I swiped my library card, I imagined I was getting an all-access pass to a top-secret vault of adventure where I could navigate treacherous seas with a band of pirates, discover Middle Earth, fight my way through the doldrums, or meet Asland on the edge of Narnia.

As I descended the aged stairs, the familiar smell of books of all shapes and sizes welcomed me back another day. I sat for hours searching the shelves for new friends and foes, going on adventures, all while sprawled over my favorite bean bag chair that was just the right amount of lumpy. I sometimes laid like a starfish on the green carpet and imagined myself in lush green grass reading while fingering through my favorite tattered copy of Stuart Little.

Or perhaps tucked away in a nook somewhere reading Slake’s Limbo. Best of all on a rainy day, bringing my flashlight and turning my raincoat into a makeshift tent with a chair and reading the latest edition of R.L. Stein’s Goosebumps.

The thing is, as much as I LOVED the library—the plethora of books offered, falling in love with new characters and hating others, setting off on a new adventure, or feeling a true sense of loss when I closed the back cover of a new favorite book—there was always a question that lingered in my mind from a young age...where are the characters who look like me?

With the exception of Snow Day, your odd side character in the Babysitter’s Club series, and a myriad of informational books about Harriet Tubman, Fredrick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcom X, I
never saw myself reflected in the fantastic characters that I read about. The stories of people like me were nonfiction, rife with pain and struggle. Meanwhile eight-year-old me dreamed of brown girls with dragons in far-away worlds. The diversity in my local library was lacking, and the selection at my private school was even more limited.

It doesn’t take away from the beautiful experiences or memories I have of the library, but it did have an impact. I was a little brown girl in a monochromatic literary world, desperately yearning to see herself.

I always thought of the library as my sanctuary surrounded by my favorite characters.

A sanctuary should be a haven for all and not just a select few. Some might argue that in the literary world, a reader should be able to identify with a fictional character, so what does it matter their race, socio-economic status, or gender? It matters. It matters the world to the child searching to see themselves. Diverse characters and stories give life and voice to marginalized communities, wanting, needing, deserving to be seen and heard.

Books containing LGBTQIA characters, diverse family units, princess boys, melanated masterminds, differently abled heroes, neuro-atypical astronauts, and strong-willed girls who rescue themselves are imperative.

Painting your library with the inclusive works of Jess Hong, Yangsook Choi, Jess Twiss, Jessica Love, Daniel Haack, Alexandra Penfold, Rebecca Sugar, Jillian Roberts, Michelle Worthington, Vivek Shraya, Koja and Angel Adeehoya, Matt de la Pena, and
Jacqueline Woodson will provide your shelves with a spectrum of color, inclusivity, and consciousness.

These texts and others like them provide a mirror into a child’s identity. One of the duties of literature is to hold up a reflection of the human experience. It allows the child to connect with characters who look like them or share their common experience. Conversely, diverse selections of books give children a key to a door that life may never have opened for them otherwise, thus allowing them access and expanding their worldview.

When children have access to texts like these, their world explodes with promise and possibility. As educators, authors, parents, and librarians, we owe it to every child to create an imaginarium of books and characters in which children see themselves reflected.

For the next child who opens the door to their local or school library, it is my hope that the shelves be colored with inclusivity and they find themselves weighted with keys to unlock a world of adventure and diverse experience, while curled up comfortably on an oversized bean bag.

As that little brown girl swept up between the pages in a monochromatic literary world, I held tight to the vision of some day seeing characters who looked like me upon the page. Out of this tiny spark grew my passion of depicting children of color, being their free, quirky, unapologetic, melanated selves. From that passion came my debut picture book *M Is for Melanin: A Celebration of the Black Child.* Every time I pick up a pencil to draw or sit behind my desk to write, I remember my eight-year-old self tucked away in the library, and I create for her.

**Tiffany Rose** is a left-handed illustrator and author. She is currently living and working in Shanghai, China. She’s a lover of coffee, wanderlust, massive curly Afros, and children being their imaginative, quirky, free selves. She is a full-time teacher, part-time author-illustrator, and world traveler. Rose remembers what it was like as a brown child not seeing herself reflected in the books and characters she loved so dearly and has been inspired to create art and meaningful stories so that underrepresented children can see themselves in books. Pencil in hand, she’s changing that percentage one illustration at a time.
Ensure that the voice of the largest library association includes the vital role of school librarians in K-12 education.

YOUR VOTE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Meet your candidates on the AASL elections web page.
Advocate for the election and share the AASL “VOTER” twibbon.

ALA IS A POWERFUL VOICE FOR ALL LIBRARIES

As school librarians have seen, that larger voice is critical when ensuring school librarians are part of federal legislation, that the intellectual freedom of our students is kept at the forefront, and that school librarians are recognized as a unique and critical role for developing lifetime library users. It takes school librarians involved in ALA leadership to keep this at the top of everyone's minds.

www.ala.org/aasl/elections
In January, 1920, Lawrence Sibert started a company with the express purpose of prebinding books for schools and libraries, thereby extending the life of their children’s collections at a reasonable cost. Today this third generation family owned business continues the mission, and with the aid of 21st century technology, provides the best juvenile books, media products and related services to the libraries of North America and beyond.

To celebrate this milestone and thank our customers for their loyalty and business, we will be announcing special offers, discounts and promotions on the BTSB website, as well as through social media and email, during the 2020 calendar year.

**SAVE $20 ON ANY ORDER OVER $200**
Coupon code 012020

Be sure to follow us on Twitter and Facebook so you don’t miss any announcements.

*Not valid with any other offer; expires 5/31/2020*