



*Across the country, in multiple modes of instruction, school librarians have been stepping up during challenging times.*

## The Lessons We're Still Learning

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When the *Knowledge Quest* Editorial Board planned the focus for this issue in May 2020, we thought it would be something along the lines of lessons learned: what we'd keep from our experiences in working through the triple, interrelated pandemics—COVID, racial injustice, and economic crisis—and what we hoped to never have to do again. Because of the timeline of producing a print issue, our contributors wrote about what they'd learned so far between November 2020 and January 2021 while major shifts were still happening. As I write this in February 2021, my school district's board is deciding whether we will go from remote to hybrid; many of our districts have already gone from different configurations of remote, in-person, and hybrid, and back again. The image of learning to fly a plane while building it is shifting again—now we're modifying that plane while constantly learning to fly it better, turning it into a seaplane, and learning to pilot that.

In my district in New Mexico, while we've been remote, elementary school librarians have conducted bedtime storytimes online, produced televised lessons, hosted virtual author visits, and continued teaching full pull-out schedules virtually. Secondary librarians started or increased their library's social media presence to connect with students, authors, and each other; experimented with online book clubs; and found new ways of collaborating with each other and other teachers. School librarians at all levels taught students how to place holds for curbside pick-up, created screencast tutorials, curated succinct, visually appealing communications with teachers and

our communities using graphic design platforms, and collaborated with other staff to diversify the narrative and examine racial inequity. Did each of us do all these things? No, but all of us did some of these things. Did we all know how to do these things last spring? No, but we taught ourselves and learned from each other, our district library services team, and school librarians and other educators across our state, the country, and the world. Did all our attempts result in success stories? No, but we kept trying, and we're still learning.

One of the commonalities of all the success stories shared in this issue is a mindset of responsiveness. As Lucy Santos Green and Susan Grigsby wrote back in 2017, "Not only do we swivel, adapt, morph, add on new skills, rebrand—we attempt to do so ahead of the curve. We futurecast during our present program implementation." Now, as then, the range of futurecasting has to "involve

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more than the technology and the digital shift taking place in school libraries. It [has] to include...student access, equity, literacy, media bias, and more.” Why refer to an article from 2017, when even last spring seems so different from our current realities and seems so very long ago? Because their comments seem almost prophetic in their relevance to our current way of working—it’s just a much sharper curve we’re trying to stay ahead of now. Also, to remind us that we’ve been working this way for a while now. Our contributors all reveal responsiveness, or real-time futurecasting, while supporting the Shared Foundations in our *National School Library Standards: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage*.

Suzanne Sannwald, a high school librarian and San José State University iSchool lecturer in southern California, equates responsiveness to reading the room. By constantly evaluating what her community needs and envisioning how she can help, she creates new programs and services that her community may not have been able to identify yet, but which the community quickly comes to value and depend on.

In Texas, middle school librarian Karina Quilantán-Garza was well prepared to lead and support students and staff with new technology because she was already an educational technology leader and had sought out additional training last summer. Her responsiveness is evident in her focus on student and colleague needs. She has been thinking beyond remote learning by using her schedule not only to help her now, but as documentation for post-pandemic advocacy and growth.

Moving east, Christopher Stewart, a high school librarian in Washington, DC, makes the observation that “we must keep our finger on the pulse of the world around us.” His responsiveness included developing and teaching a course on critical approaches to race, mailing books and snacks to students, and meeting students throughout the city for outdoor, socially distanced brunch-and-book discussions.

Kerrie Burch and Susan LeBlanc give the perspective of the New York State School Library Systems, which supported school librarians in urban, suburban, rural, and mixed settings. By facilitating communication and collaboration, promoting leadership and growth opportunities, and working toward digital equity, the forty systems responded to the unique needs of their regions.

Finally, in our feature article, Leanne Ellis and Melissa Jacobs of the New York City School Library System show responsiveness in their growth mindset and opportunities seized by creating a “Translation of Practice” document of

best practices for remote learning, renewing their school librarians’ focus on media literacy, providing virtual conferences and professional development, and using and expanding partnerships with public libraries. All this work is illustrated by interviews with school librarians from all levels and multiple boroughs.

Across the country, in multiple modes of instruction, school librarians have been stepping up during challenging times. As you read this issue, assess the innovations you’ve made in the past year and reflect on what you want to continue post-pandemic and why. Or, if you feel overwhelmed at all the many tools, programs, and services that you haven’t tried yet, breathe. These ideas can be your springboard for prioritizing what you want to learn this summer, to implement next year.

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### Works Cited:

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