



Over the past year and a half, the lives of learners, teachers, and school librarians have been fraught with stressful situations. Focusing on academics has been challenging to say the least.

The Importance of Self-Care

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“You all take care, now.” I don’t know if that phrase is a southern thing or a country thing, but it is definitely a grandmother thing. My grandmother never said good-bye to anyone including us grandchildren; she always said, “You all take care, now.” In the past year and a half, I have come to believe that taking care of oneself is way more important than I realized.

Part of the work we take on as school librarians is taking care of our learning community. We make sure our students have a safe space to retreat to. We collaborate with our teachers to help them as they create and implement learning experiences. We keep snacks for our hungry students, deal with teenage drama, and make sure the technology works.

Over the last school year, we gave new meaning to the school library as a safe space. We quarantined books, sanitized everything, and redesigned the school library to incorporate social distancing. We increased our stress levels by handling multiple tech issues, finding workarounds for insufficient internet access, creating take-home makerspace kits, giving access to books for all our students regardless of whether they were at school or at home. We updated our websites to provide more resources for our teachers and students. The list was endless and exhausting. Taking care of ourselves tended to come last or not at all.

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest* our contributors share ways they cope with the stress of juggling all the new challenges faced while dealing with face-to-face, remote, and hybrid learning. They also offer strategies for self-care that we can use as we move forward into what is still an uncertain future.

In their article “Confronting 2020 in the School Library: The Power of Collaboration,” Dr. Joel Hoag (principal) and Dinah Wade (school librarian) relate how they partnered together to provide as normal a school library experience as possible for their students. They describe how they worked to address their three goals of virus mitigation, instructional integrity, and creating a culture of resilience. Their story illustrates how much can be achieved when an administrator and a school librarian combine their knowledge and experience to meet a challenge.

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In “Managing the Unprecedented,” three school librarians detail their experiences in managing virtual, hybrid, and in-person learning. Jhenelle Robinson relates her experiences during the pandemic in “Leading Out Loud: Empowering Youth through School Librarianship.” As a school librarian in the South Bronx, moving to virtual and hybrid learning was especially difficult in a community that lacked many of the resources necessary to meet the challenge of remote learning. She shares her work as a facilitator of an identity club on her campus, the Black Student Union. The focus of this newly created club is to celebrate and learn from the contributions of Black people.

Erika Long reflects on the last year of “pandemic librarian-ing” in the vignette “Putting on Your Full Armor.” She eloquently expresses the anguish many of us felt over the last school year as we confronted the many challenges of supporting our teachers and students. I want to follow her story to see how she fares over the next school year.

In her essay “Breathing in a New Atmosphere,” Karina Quilantan-Garza, a Texas school librarian in the Rio Grande Valley, describes her efforts to support the social, emotional, and creative needs of her students. She tapped into the resources and activities available through the 2021 Great Kindness Challenge. Using her own interests as a guide, she shared music playlists and created a gaming league. Her examples provide an exciting opportunity for us to think about how we can incorporate social and emotional learning into our school libraries.

In the article “Incorporating Mindfulness in the School Library Three Ways,” Traci Chun, Ashley Cooksey, and Lynn Kleinmeyer share how mindfulness can inform our collections, spaces, and practices. They explore how a “self-discovery” section can support students as they navigate social and emotional situations. Take a look at your library space through the filter of sensory experiences. Are we overstimulating our students with visual noise? Examples of mindful practices are offered including posture practice, providing opportunities for creative endeavors, and designating places to experience quiet and reflection.

Jennifer Luetkemeyer and Ashley Cooksey outline ways to take care of yourself in the coming school year in the article “Health and Healing in the School Library: A Return to Better?” In particular, they focus on the value of practicing mindfulness. Mindful breathing,

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meditation, and visual journaling are intriguing suggestions for how we can use mindfulness to become more mentally healthy.

Over the past year and a half, the lives of learners, teachers, and school librarians have been fraught with stressful situations. Focusing on academics has been challenging to say the least. Helping our students and teachers cope with the challenges stemming from the pandemic and racial and political unrest have clearly been a high priority. Within this issue, the authors have articulated our pain and offer strategies for managing the stress, not just for our students and teachers but for ourselves as well.

You all take care, now!

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