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LAURA HICKS

I always bragged that the best part of being a school librarian was that I got to work with every student and teacher in the school. Over my 14 years as a secondary school librarian I developed relationships with thousands of students and had the privilege to work with hundreds of amazing educators. My experience with AASL, both as a member and as a representative to the Affiliate Assembly and board of directors, continued that rewarding experience of relationship building and collaboration. The COVID pandemic, though, has thrown a wrench into our “normal.” This is where our national association comes in. I have always seen AASL as a clearinghouse for resources on best practices to facilitate highly effective instruction, as a professional learning network, and as a very vocal advocate for the importance of school librarians in every school. As president-elect, my focus will be on supporting our profession through these trying times by expanding both the collection of resources and the partnerships with decision-maker organizations like administrators and superintendents. I will also work to augment our marketing of both to ensure not only that all members are aware of these outstanding benefits, but also the value of them to new members.

KATHY LESTER

This past year, school librarians translated their practice and adapted to meet the needs of their learners in the ever-changing learning environment. The AASL Town Halls and surveys confirmed that the critical support provided by school librarians is more important than ever.

Thus, it is essential to provide our learners with the equity of experience, opportunity, and resources provided by an effective school library staffed by a certified school librarian. I believe strongly in the AASL vision statement “Every school librarian is a leader. Every learner has a school librarian.” With the new administration in Washington, AASL has an opportunity to move forward towards this vision and to implement its strategic plan goals through building relationships to influence education policy, advancing research to inform us, and activating leadership among our members. It will be important to embrace the AASL core values of learning: innovation; equity, diversity, and inclusion; intellectual freedom; and collaboration while doing this work.

If elected, I plan to draw upon my leadership and advocacy background to work with AASL membership, chapters, board, staff, partner organizations, and stakeholders to serve AASL members, to strengthen and build relationships with decision makers, and to advocate for our learners and our profession.
**Board of Directors**

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--

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- □ Beth Reardon

**SUPERVISORS SECTION**

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- □ Jenny Takeda
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- □ Cherity Pennington
- □ Carmen Redding

For additional information on these candidates, visit <www.ala.org/aasl/elections>.
If you want to clear a room, begin talking about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). I don’t mean talking about EDI in an abstract way, but rather in a manner that necessitates reflection and action. Not everyone will feel uncomfortable and scurry away, but many will not want to discuss this topic except in safe, ineffectual generalities. Addressing EDI and doing the work to change our systems and processes are not for the faint of heart. The fight for equality for all is going to be a long and arduous journey. Yet those who take up this important work and persevere are sources of inspiration and truth in a world that is often rife with systemic racism, micro-aggressions, and exclusions. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that, by the middle of 2020, nonwhites will account for the majority of the nation’s 74 million children, and demographers project that whites will become a minority in the U.S. around 2045 (Nation 2020). These statistics do not include the other steadily increasing components of diversity. Our country is rapidly changing, and yet the need for EDI is still being questioned.

Within our profession, we must fight for every student to have equitable access to resources, educational opportunities, and certified school librarians. Equal opportunities to learn and succeed in life are the cornerstone of public education. School librarians have to speak up when we see inequity, draw attention to injustice, and advocate for our learners. We cannot allow outspoken opponents and those who feign ignorance of the necessity of equity for all to stymy our work. We must point out imbalances in learning resources and question the motives of those who impede EDI advancements in education. To quote American activist Maggie Kuhn, “Speak your mind even if your voice shakes” (n.d.). As school librarians we must speak up for fairness.

Our learners are a testament to our changing world. We are raising a generation of searchers and truth seekers. We are teaching them to think critically, search for accurate information, and collaborate. Recent events have shown us that this upcoming generation possesses a passionate activist spirit. They do not need traditional leaders to dictate mandates. They see injustice and work to right the wrongs of their predecessors. As school librarians, don’t we want to educate these visionaries with a global view of humanity? Don’t we want to support their

Unique backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints add to the richness of life and the creativity of solutions. We must also champion diversity in our profession. It is important that our learners see themselves in every career, profession, and space and not feel limited by the perception of others.
Our ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion may be used for the noncommercial purpose of scientific or educational advancement granted by Sections 107 and 108 of the Copyright Revision Act of 1976. Address usage requests to the ALA Office of Rights and Permissions.

The past year has clearly illustrated the need for greater equity and diversity. It is not just education but also our justice, medical, social, cultural, and economic systems that all must be questioned as we assist our students to improve the future. Unique backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints add to the richness of life and the creativity of solutions. We must also champion diversity in our profession. It is important that our learners see themselves in every career, profession, and space and not feel limited by the perception of others.

It is easy to get EDI fatigue if you come from a place of privilege. Yet for many, weariness is not an option. Many of our learners and colleagues cannot simply disappear from the work until a later date. They don’t get breaks from racism, discrimination, marginalization, or oppression. We all must stay committed to staying involved, which means making sure we manage our time, energy, and capacity accordingly. We cannot appease ourselves and believe that outrage in and of itself is action. Action is action.

There are countless articles, webinars, blogs, and other resources available to help us navigate how to include EDI into our programs and collections. So why not start with something simple? Some of my most enjoyable lunch conversations last year were with a Muslim student from Iraq. He and I discussed everything from religion to good books to favorite foods. A transgender student and I bonded over our love of animals and mystery novels. We became fast friends, and I got the biggest hug from her when she graduated. These encounters may seem simple, but they made a difference to each of us. How did I accomplish this? It’s not complicated. I simply recognized and acknowledged their humanity and acted accordingly.

So don’t feel compelled to immediately change your entire collection or to make some grand gesture toward inclusion. Begin by looking at your school library’s services and collection through a different lens. Ask your students about their favorite authors, or conduct a diversity audit to ensure mirrors and windows are available for all learners. Be vigilant in weeding your collection of outdated titles that perpetuate stereotypes; misrepresentation is just as harmful as no representation, if not more so. Model a culture of inclusion by forming or revamping a library advisory group comprised of students, teachers, and other stakeholders who share your vision of creating and cultivating an inclusive space and collection. Make a focused, intentional effort, and the results will follow.

Ours is not a nation founded on diversity and inclusion. Our country has a history of discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community, citizens with disabilities, those from disparate religious backgrounds, and people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. But our past need not dictate our future. Ultimately, EDI boils down to treating people the way we want to be treated. This is the most basic tenet in any belief system, and yet these efforts are sometimes seen as controversial and divisive. We all should address barriers and historical factors that have led to unfair conditions for marginalized populations. Today, we have an opportunity to model a better way forward for our students. We must embrace that opportunity.

AASL’s vision statement declares every school librarian is a leader, so be that leader in your learning community and in the world who pushes EDI forward. We can do this, and I have all the confidence in the world in us. We are school librarians, and when we put our minds to something, we are unstoppable!

Kathy Carroll is the 2020–2021 AASL President. She is a school librarian at Westwood High School in Blythewood, South Carolina. She served on the ALA Spectrum Advisory Committee from 2018 to 2020 and is serving as an ALA Councilor at Large. She also served on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Library Media Specialist Standards Committee in 2010 and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Teacher Leadership Competency Framework Committee in 2013. Kathy was awarded an ALA Spectrum Scholarship in 2007. She also was a participant in the Toyota International Teacher Program in South Africa in 2011 and was a Fulbright Teacher Scholar in Tokyo, Japan, in 2001.

Works Cited:


With overt racism and violence against Black and brown people in our communities and newsfeeds and predominantly white institutions and organizations, the world can no longer avoid the work of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This is especially true for K–12 schools, from hiring practices and curricular choices to the more-subtle ways that our schools and systems are designed to reinforce the values of white supremacy culture. According to Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, these values include perfectionism, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, defensiveness, power hoarding, paternalism, individualism, and either/or thinking (2001).

The contributors to this issue identify as Black women. In the pages ahead, you’ll read about many instances when they have experienced racism in their schools. It is taxing—emotionally, physically, and psychologically—to come to school to learn or work in systems and structures designed for white people to thrive. These Black school librarians show up as their whole, authentic selves at school, which takes purposeful effort. How often have these brilliant school library professionals been in a minoritized position in their predominantly white schools? Or at national or regional conferences for school librarians? It is often uncomfortable, exhausting, and anxiety inducing, so what makes it worth it? What makes everything worth it in our schools and libraries? Our students, of course.

Content expert Maegen Rose writes a call to action in her article “Black School Librarianship: Navigating Race and Creating Change.” School librarians are influential in our schools: as leaders, advisors, coaches, and advocates for our students. We are uniquely positioned to lead EDI initiatives in our schools, and we white folx cannot expect the burden to beshouldered by our colleagues of color. As school librarians, we love turning to books, but to paraphrase Tre Johnson, a commitment to antiracism means going beyond our books and reading, our affinity book groups, the listening sessions, and having that be the extent of our “work” to dismantle racism. The work begins with exploring our own identities but must also extend to taking meaningful action and making change in our spheres of influence. As Rose states, “We owe it to our students to do more than just read and talk about it.”

Veteran educator but new to a school librarian role Adrienne Almeida shares how her authentic approach to her school library yielded a complete shift in culture in “Leading a School Library as My Authentic Self.” Almeida’s approach to building culture with her students...
What can we do in our professional practices and in our state and national organizations to uplift and center the voices and expertise of BIPOC school librarians?

has created a welcoming and affirming space, from her approach to behavior management to developing a collection that reflects her students’ identities and interests. Her work is guided by the question: "How can I be the adult I wish I had myself as a Black child in white majority schools?" That she accomplished the cultural transformation in just half a year, prior to COVID, makes this even more impressive.

Jean Darnell shares some of the hurtful experiences she has had as a Black school librarian in her article "Unpacking Black School Librarianship." Darnell acknowledges the professional risk she is taking even by writing for this issue. The exhaustion of constant self-questioning ("What will they fire me for today?" "How will my accomplishments be ignored and/or usurped?") means that the moments of triumph matter so much more. For Darnell, empowering her students with opportunities to engage with their community decision-makers is the bright spot and motivation to persist in service of her students.

In "Advocacy: 2021 Style and Beyond," K.C. Boyd brings a fresh look to the school librarian’s role as change agent in our schools and communities. As advocates for strong school libraries, we need to be ready to inform the uninformed about the school librarian’s critical role. Boyd encourages school librarians to stand up and speak out, and she shares one of her own professional goals for the year: "to share the beauty and importance of school libraries in places where I would not normally venture."

In "Making a Mark on White Space: My Experience as a Black Librarian," Erika Long addresses how she has worked to advance representation of Black, indigenous, and people of color in the school library community. This needs to be a priority for our state and national professional organizations, to better reflect and represent the demographics of school-aged children in the United States. Long paraphrases Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop when she asserts that "learners should encounter school librarians who offer views into worlds unfamiliar to theirs—librarians as windows."

In our school libraries, in our collections and services, and always in service of our students and learning communities, school librarians value EDI and access. This may be the first time you’ve considered that our schools and professional communities are not aligned with these values when it comes to support for and inclusion of BIPOC school librarians, and the articles in this issue may push your thinking and may even make you uncomfortable, especially if you are white. I invite our white readers to take note of your responses to the articles you’re about to read. What can we do in our professional practices and in our state and national organizations to uplift and center the voices and expertise of BIPOC school librarians? And for our BIPOC readers, on behalf of the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board, I hope this issue is the invitation you need to submit your manuscripts. We need your voices in the pages of Knowledge Quest.

Iris Eichenlaub is the librarian/instructional coach at Camden Hills Regional High School in Rockport, Maine. She is a member of AASL and serves on the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board and is a blogger on the Knowledge Quest website. She is also the advocacy chair for the Maine Association of School Libraries. She is the 2017 Knox County Teacher of the Year and received the 2017 MEA Inspiring Educator Award.

Works Cited:
Black School Librarianship
Navigating Race and Creating Change

Maegen Rose
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When I was approached about serving as the content expert for this issue of *Knowledge Quest* on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), I was apprehensive about what was being asked of me and what I would then ask of several of my colleagues, all of whom I consider friends. Conversations about EDI make me uncomfortable because I have had enough of them to know that this work is often very narrowly defined, restrictive even. In my experience, EDI work does not truly interrogate policies rooted in racism or ask people to do the internal work required to develop new competencies and change practice. Moreover, I have felt silenced and unseen by EDI conversations meant to embody the voices and experiences of people like me.

When asked to take this project on, I was skeptical. I wondered how five Black women school librarians could shape a more expansive and genuine conversation around EDI in school librarianship. But I was being entrusted with setting the agenda. I shifted my thinking to visualizing what this *Knowledge Quest* issue could be. It became clear, any conversation about EDI and school librarianship had to also be a conversation about identity. Whether any of us like it or not, who we are as Black women, standing in front of students, in our libraries, and in our greater school communities is just as important and as much a part of the conversation as the actual work.

When this issue of *Knowledge Quest* arrived in your mailbox, certainly you noticed a significant difference. The cover of this issue is black. This is not a statement about the racial identity of me or the contributing writers. Instead, this intentional departure from the graphics for which readers are accustomed is meant to draw you in immediately, signaling not only its importance but its urgency. In this issue, Adrienne Almeida, K.C. Boyd, Jean Darnell, Erika Long, and I share our experiences teaching in our various school libraries and bringing to bear who we are as Black women educators.

In “Leading a School Library as My Authentic Self,” Adrienne Almeida talks about her student-centered approach to reinvigorating the school library. A former English as a new language teacher at the New York City Department of Education, Adrienne has more than twenty years of classroom experience and intimate knowledge of how to capture the hearts and minds of teenagers. With seemingly small policy changes and affirming collection development decisions, she invited students to be collaborators in reimagining the school library space. Her efforts were rewarded with major praise from students at the end of her first year.

K.C. Boyd is nationally known and widely recognized for her transformative library program in Chicago Public Schools and staunch advocacy for school libraries and school librarians. With almost twenty-five years of experience, K.C.’s work has touched the lives of students and librarians across the country. In “Advocacy: 2021 Style and Beyond,” she discusses during this critical time of forming new understandings of the world, students need adults around them to be honest with them to build trusting relationships, especially when conversations have the potential to be uncomfortable or controversial.
the importance of school librarians being respected literacy partners who are essential to academic success and turning frustration into strategic advocacy efforts.

Veteran librarian Jean Darnell is an expert at inventive lessons and programs. A firm believer in the power of young people to change their communities, she has created lessons that promote civic engagement, including a thoroughly organic lesson, E.R.A.S.E. (End Racism And Stereotypes Everywhere), that was a direct response to businesses’ racial profiling practices in her school’s local community. Jean does not shy away from embedding advocacy skills and grassroots organizing in her teaching. In “Unpacking Black School Librarianship,” she shares the difficulty she’s endured trying to empower her students to become active and engaged citizens while challenging school traditions.

Erika Long, a seasoned librarian at Metro Nashville Public Schools, brings her deep knowledge of books and relationships with authors to the forefront of her school library. In “Making a Mark on White Space: My Experience as a Black School Librarian,” she discusses the lack of diversity in school librarianship and the delicate balance of standing firm in one’s Blackness while building relationships with students and leveraging limited resources to provide rich experiences that prioritize #OwnVoices books.

My Story

My decision to become a librarian is one that seemingly fell into my lap in the summer of 2011. I had been complaining to a friend that I was getting bored in my work and needed to figure out what to do next. I had been working as a project manager for a charter school network for six years. Even though I had earned my Master’s degree in social work from the University of Chicago three months after starting the position and continued in the role for my degree, I was certain I did not want to be a social worker. I enjoyed working in the charter network’s management office and collaborating with educators across the network’s four campuses. I wanted to be in schools working directly with students, but I did not want to be a classroom teacher. My friend casually suggested I look into becoming a librarian since I loved reading and liked working in education. It was a reasonable suggestion. Also, I had loved libraries my entire life. I was excited about the possibility of working in a school library, a place that had nurtured my own love of reading in my formative years. It did not take long to find Dominican University’s Graduate School for Library and Information Science program, now the School of Information Studies. I entered the program the spring semester of 2012, and my library journey officially began.

As I matriculated in my graduate studies, I regularly followed the blogs of K.C. Boyd (<http://missdomino.blogspot.com>) and Jean Darnell (<http://www.awakenlibrarian.com>). They represented the kinds of librarians I wanted to be, innovative thinkers meeting the needs of students where they were.

During my final year of library school, I started researching school librarian positions; the prospects were grim. Chicago Public School librarians were facing job loss due to budget cuts. A professor suggested I look into private school jobs, specifically independent schools via the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Upon graduating from library school in 2014, I interviewed at several independent schools, mostly on the East Coast, and accepted a position not long after the start of the recruitment season.

Despite having worked in public education for eight years prior to becoming a school librarian, everything in the independent school world was wholly unfamiliar to me, and I struggled. Though I had always been someone who could comfortably and confidently navigate tough situations, I was unprepared for the inner workings of independent schools. My struggles consumed me. I worked in a constant state of anxiety. I worried about being “too Black,” not open and engaging enough, or not friendly enough. I worried about racism. I worried I did not understand the complexities of wealth and private schooling. Though I had earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from a liberal arts college and a private research university, my friends were mostly people of color and financial aid recipients like me. I worried whether I was the right “fit,” a word I would come to hear often during hiring season. Some of my worries were rooted in my fear of the unknown, while others were validated. I experienced a variety of microaggressions, from having my credentials openly questioned, to hearing hints of being a “diversity hire.” I have felt the heavy hand of “tradition” that reinforces a school culture that marginalizes students and faculty of color. There is no handbook for being Black in a private white institution. Yet, Black librarians not only show up in these spaces, we also work to improve them—sometimes to our detriment. We are agents of change in spaces not meant for us and that are sometimes hostile to us.

This year marks my seventh year as a school librarian at an independent school. With each passing year, I settle into being a private school librarian more, not fully comfort-
able, but definitely more confident. My identity as a middle-aged Black woman, daughter of immigrants, born and raised on Chicago’s South Side and South-Central Los Angeles inform my teaching and programming. It’s embedded in the way I think about the work of a school librarian, from teaching information literacy skills to collection development to all of the other hats I wear in my school community. I no longer avoid sharing my story with students, but instead welcome opportunities to unpack my beliefs when asked.

As a middle school librarian, I work with students ages 10–14. They are in the midst of developing their own identities and questioning their and others’ belief systems, all while going through the physical manifestations of puberty. “As children move from ten to eleven, major changes begin to take place. In their cognitive growth, children seem to be challenging all their assumptions about the world” (Wood 2015). During this critical time of forming new understandings of the world, students need adults around them to be honest with them to build trusting relationships, especially when conversations have the potential to be uncomfortable or controversial.

**Information Literacy Now Is a Better Prepared Citizen Later**

The core of my library teaching is helping students become critical information seekers. In sixth grade, students embark on a yearlong research project on a topic of their choosing. Students move through a full research cycle using the Inquire Shared Foundation from AASL’s National School Library Standards:

I. Inquire: Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.

I.A.1. Learners display curiosity and initiative by: Formulating questions about a personal interest or a curricular topic.

I.A.2. Learners display curiosity and initiative by: Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.

I.B.1. Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: Using evidence to investigate questions.

I.B.2. Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: Devising and implementing a plan to fill knowledge gaps.

I.B.3. Learners engage with new knowledge by following a process that includes: Generating products that illustrate learning. (AASL 2018)

It is during this project that I have found questions about identity, experiences, and beliefs arise most. Each year, students select topics ranging from light-hearted explorations of sports and animals to more playful topics such as dance and fashion to the most-complex topics involving social movements and historical atrocities. Though the topics are vast, inevitably, I am asked questions about my personal beliefs and opinions. Though I anticipate these moments when they reach the information-seeking phase of their projects, I still hesitate before answering. I still feel anxious about how much to share and how it will be received. I worry that answering questions about my beliefs will get me into trouble. I fear that a student will go home and tell their parents my response to a question, and out of context, it will not be understood in the spirit in which I answered the question. However, I remind myself that my beliefs are mine, and if I stay rooted in my truth, I am positively contributing to a student’s growing sense of the world. Moreover, if I share not just what I believe, but why, hopefully, I am helping students develop a foundation for rigorous interrogation of what is presented to them and a profound respect for facts.

**Collection Development Must Be Exhaustive**

In addition to teaching information literacy, I have the absolute joy of sharing a love of reading with my students and shaping a library collection that is reflective of the world and responsive to their developmental needs. Using Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s metaphor of books providing readers windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors as a guide (1990), I purchase, display, and read book-talk books that are racially and culturally diverse. #OwnVoices, LGBTQIA, offer global perspectives, address societal ills, prioritize forgotten voices, and are thematically germane to middle school. I scour book blogs and social media accounts. I communicate with my network of librarians and publishing friends. I read book review sources faithfully. I connect with professional librarian groups. Most importantly, I read as many books as I can.

School librarians cannot build a reading culture or help students broaden their reading interests and worldviews if we are not reading broadly and diversely. We cannot expect students to want to read outside of their comfort zones if we are not reading outside of our comfort zones and actively promoting fresh voices in literature.

This year, I am piloting a revised reader’s profile project with my fifth-grade students based on the Explore
School librarians cannot build a reading culture or help students broaden their reading interests and worldviews if we are not reading broadly and diversely. We cannot expect students to want to read outside of their comfort zones if we are not reading outside of our comfort zones and actively promoting fresh voices in literature.

Shared Foundation from the National School Library Standards: “Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection” (AASL 2018). Students are developing a personal reader’s profile that asks them to explore their favorite books, authors, and past readings to find common themes in the literature they enjoy. They are researching their favorite authors to learn about their lives and make connections to their own lives. They are using the information gathered to determine what attracts them to those books. How do the books make them feel? What are they learning about the world? Who is present in those stories and who is missing? Specifically, they are asked to interrogate their reading choices as a means of broadening their future book selections.

Once they have developed an understanding of what attracts them to specific books, they will build a reading list comprised of stories and genres they love but written by authors and featuring characters who do not share their racial identity or cultural heritage. They are building a reading list that offers them everything they love in a story, through a new (to them) lens. It is my sincere hope that students develop an appreciation for a wider range of perspectives.

EDI Is for Everyone, Especially YOU

School librarians are no strangers to flexibility and taking on tasks in addition to the job of librarian. Oftentimes, we are advisors and coaches. We supervise lunch, study halls, recess, arrival, and dismissal. We manage technology and archives. We advise clubs, serve on committees, and are woven into the fabric of school life beyond the library. So, it can be easy to get pulled into ongoing EDI work too, especially if you are vocal about issues you or your students face.
At the start of my career, I was reluctant to engage in this work given all my struggles.

It’s work to be the only person of color in an organization, bearing the weight of all your white co-workers’ questions about Blackness. It’s work to always be hypervisible because of your skin—easily identified as being present or absent—but for your needs to be completely invisible to those around you. It’s work to do the emotional labor of pointing out problematic racist thinking, policies, actions, and statements while desperately trying to avoid bitterness and cynicism. (Brown 2018)

EDI work is arduous but necessary. I quickly realized the importance of being a part of this work, not just for school improvement, but in support of and in service to students who look like me and others who are marginalized in the community. Students of color need adults in their school who look like them and who they know understand their experiences. Moreover, they need the adults who don’t look like them to do more, to carry the weight of creating an equitable and inclusive school. Librarians are uniquely embedded in schools and share the responsibility for this work.

Last summer, the Black@ movement on Instagram catapulted independent schools into the spotlight. Black alumni, former faculty and staff, and current Black students submitted detailed accounts of racist experiences they endured during their tenures at their institutions. It forced many schools to look inward and reckon with actions and longstanding policies that created an abusive climate for Black students and employees. My school was among the many institutions called out and called in. The message was clear: Our school needs to change. But what does that change look like? How do you change institutions that were never created for the education of Black children?

Like many educators and institutions, we read books, engaged in uncomfortable conversations, and recommitted to EDI work with revised plans. Reading books have become the normal response to Black injustice (Johnson 2020). However, schools must push beyond the perpetual cycle of ONLY taking the first step. Schools must change policies and take actions that shift school culture. We owe it to our students to do more than just read and talk about it.

The Future Requires YOU to Do Better

As you read this issue, it is my hope that my words and those of my dear colleagues, Adrienne Almeida, K.C. Boyd, Jean Darnell, Erika Long, and I resonate. I hope our words and our work give you many moments to pause and reflect on your students, your school library, your colleagues, and your role in your school community. How are you showing up for students? Are you showing up for all students? How are you making sure students feel seen, heard, and safe? How are you developing cultural competencies? Are you speaking up and speaking out when injustice happens in your school?

As Dr. Bettina Love has offered, you need to be more than allies; you must be co-conspirators (2020). You must put something on the line in the pursuit of creating an antiracist school culture. Every school librarian would agree that students are the heart of school librarianship. If you truly believe this, then YOU must take action.

Maegen Rose is the middle school librarian at Rye Country Day School in Rye, New York. She is the private school representative for the School Library Media Specialists of Southeast New York. She is a member of AASL and is serving on the 2019–2021 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury.

Works Cited:


Ensure that the voice of the largest library association includes the vital role of school librarians in K-12 education.

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Leading a School Library as My Authentic Self
How My Identity Transformed the School Library Culture

Adrienne Almeida
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Sometimes it’s hard to believe that anyone good would want you. There. I said it. It happens in personal relationships. It happens when you’re looking for work. When the interested party stays interested, the self-doubt kicks in and you start to wonder, “When’s the other shoe going to drop? Maybe this isn’t as good as it seems. What’s going to happen next? Is this going to be a mistake?” As a Black woman, there’s the added questions of, “Am I just a diversity hire? Do they want me or the boxes I check?” It’s alienating to worry about the core of who you are that has led you into the very room you’re wondering if you belong. Yet I can’t remember a time when I didn’t wonder whether I was being chosen for my skills and experiences or because I am a double box check as a Black woman. I can’t remember an accepted offer when I didn’t vow, “I’m going to prove that I was the right choice.”

That’s a lot of extra pressure to the already challenging choice of transitioning to a new community and a new career. And that’s what I was grappling with when, after earning my second Master’s degree, I decided to leave my twenty-plus-year tenured English as a new language teaching career in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) to become the director of middle school and upper school library services at a K-12 independent school in New York City.

It was the first year I would serve as a full-time school librarian and it was the first time that I would have a majority white student body. The NYCDOE faculties I had been a member of ranged from being majority Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to majority white, but the students I taught during my tenure were always majority BIPOC before we even had that term to use.

My Blackness didn’t mean the Black students at my new school were going to welcome me with open arms. They are smart enough to know that there is no monolithic Black identity that makes my presence a reflection of their own lived experiences. They were already seasoned field guides of a majority white school space, which had taught them to be rightfully cautious of all new people. Students are the foundation of my work, and the thought that I might not be able to connect with my new students was terrifying.

Luckily, in times like these the universe sends us the voices we need to hear. I am grateful for the friends and family who showed up to whisper or shout encouragement. Black school librarians sat me down and gave me a run through of their experiences, both positive and negative. One friend who had made it a point to come to every career day in my previous schools said to me, “I’ve never heard you tell a story about a teenager that didn’t make you light up. You don’t just like the students you’ve had, you like them all. I’ve seen this. You know this. You’ve got this.”

Those words carried me into my new role with confidence. Starting with my students at the center of my work, as I had every new school year of my career, was the right way forward.
Creating a Welcoming, Inclusive Space: Reflective Collection Development

In my first week on campus, a student approached me. They had noticed the Human Rights Campaign sticker on my office window and took a chance on me. They explained with kindness but firmness that there were not enough "gay books" in the collection. They felt certain that my predecessor "hid the gay books." It wasn’t my responsibility to sleuth out whether or not "gay books" were in fact hidden. What mattered was the brave person in front of me saying, "The books in this collection do not reflect me and my values. I feel unwelcome here." That was all I needed to know.

I have felt unwelcome in spaces I was supposed to belong to enough times in my life to know that I had to show up the next day with a handful of books from their recommended list to earn the respect I was being offered. So I did. I went to my local bookstore with the list they gave me that afternoon. I bought some of the books from the list. I added in some that I found on my own including Archie Bongiovanni’s graphic novel, A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns. I went in early the next day to process the books myself by hand and had them on display before the lunch hour.

That student didn’t come to the school library that day. In my imagination, they were giving me the opportunity to not mess up, but I’m sure they were just busy or forgot. However, friends of that student saw the display and word got around. When the student returned to see the display on my circulation desk, they exclaimed, "Look at what you found!" They then proceeded to make plans for all the aunties and uncles in their life who needed to read the Bongiovanni graphic novel as they checked it out.

I was pleased to see that friend group take up daily residence in the school library during their free periods and I continued to receive expansive suggestions for the collection that reflected their interests, experiences, and aspirations.

Creating the School Library Culture: The Opposite of Shh-ing

I was used to being alone with thirty-plus students, which was not uncommon in NYCDOE classrooms. I wasn’t concerned about managing students in the school library. However, I wanted to manage the library through student buy-in rather than a watchful eye. After observing the natural rhythm of the school library, including volume level, capacity, friend groups, etc., I posted a timetable for collaborative work time and quiet study time. Students were mutinous when they saw the signs go up around the room and on both sets of double glass doors. Then they read the timetable more carefully and realized it was a reflection of what was happening naturally in the space rather than an imposition of what the space should be. Even in the timetable, they felt seen and respected.

Teenage buy-in is sacred. It comes from a place of respect and is not given freely. I decided to earn it. It was essential that my students see me see them as whole people with a variety of passions. I wanted to show up for them the way I was asking them to show up for me in the school library. With this mission at hand, I attended countless basketball games, volleyball games, swim meets, jazz concerts, school plays, debate tournaments, parent association-organized community events, and other extracurricular activities after school and on weekends. In doing so, my students saw me make an effort to be a member of their community as did my colleagues who give so much of their time and energy to these extracurricular programs. Back in the school library, the students came...
in to tell me the highlights of a game or a show that I had missed with the understanding that I would definitely have been there if I could.

From that investment in time with my students and colleagues outside of the school library, we were able to create a culture with each other where showing up as your whole authentic self was the expectation. In addition to studying, you could often find students in the library practicing their original scenes for French class, restringing their bass guitar before jazz class, reviewing their most recent game footage before soccer practice, giggling through impromptu TikTok dance shoots, and meeting to plan the next edition of the school newspaper. Upper schoolers happily shared their robotics projects with wide-eyed middle schoolers, while lower schoolers checked in with friends of their older siblings.

Teachers also stopped by to provide individual and small group check-ins.

For the most part, my students honored the rhythm of the school library and respected the quiet work time we had established as much as they utilized the collaborative work and decompression time we all needed throughout the day.

The fall break season for colleges is Homecoming time for my new community. Recent and not-so-recent graduates come through the school building to pop in on their old teachers, visit with not-yet-graduated friends, and most importantly, sing with us at the Thanksgiving assembly. The building was bursting with the energy I associated with tradition and community. It was a really special time. While I was unprepared for the number of visitors allowed on campus, I embraced the opportunity to embody the school library culture we were creating.

During that week, I brought my laptop out of the office and stayed in front of the circulation desk and greeted returning friends. I introduced myself, shook their hands, and said, “Welcome home.”

One rambunctious reunion involved members of the current basketball team welcoming a former player and good friend. The visiting graduate tried to hush the current students when he saw me walking over so they wouldn’t get in trouble. My students realized that it was his first time back, so he didn’t know that I wasn’t coming to shush but to welcome him and take a photo for our school library Instagram feed. The graduate said that this wasn’t what he remembered about the school library. My current student said loudly, “That’s because we have the GOAT [Greatest Of All Time] librarian.” I looked at him surprised and moved by this epic compliment. He smiled back at me like it was nothing. Obviously, it was everything.

Maintaining the Library Community through COVID

I didn’t have the opportunity to close out my first year in the school library. I wanted to host more Magic Monday Mornings so I could finally get my head around the game “Magic the Gathering.” I wanted to host events leading up to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s annual Sakura Matsuri (<www.bbg.org/visit/event/sakura_matsuri_2020>), including a cosplay fashion show, anime screenings, and haiku writing workshops. I wanted to start a Fiber Arts Collective with some of my colleagues and students who already knit, crochet, weave, and felt. I had been planning the May graduation display for our school library and had already recruited class of 2020 co-conspirators to...
help me prepare. However, for the health and safety of our community, we closed the building on March 10, 2020. At that time we had no idea how long we would be away from one another nor how much would change in learning, creating community, connecting with others, being present, and sharing space. I had made progress in establishing the culture I wanted in our school library, but the best practices for remote librarianship were yet unwritten. I was afraid to lose the sense of community that is the cornerstone of our school library. As much as has been lost, the initial bonds were strong enough to manifest regularly attended Zoom school library office hours and book lunches, as well as a thriving student request-driven Sora digital collection (see “Resources for Right Now” at left).

While we were off campus learning remotely, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd were murdered. These three murders and the country’s response sparked Black graduates, current students, and former faculty of independent schools to start the Black@ movement on Instagram (read more about this movement at <www.cnn.com/2020/06/29/us/instagram-black-students-at-pages-race-issues-trnd/index.html>).
Black@ gave voice to recent and historic injustices experienced by Black community members over the years at independent schools, my school among them. The stories were heartbreaking and familiar, having myself been schooled in white majority spaces where I experienced racism and discrimination. My experiences in elementary, middle, and high school taught me that my ability and accomplishments could not dispel the myth that I was there only as a token of affirmative action. Those experiences are the foundation for all the times I continued to be worried about being or being perceived as "the diversity hire."

I am a bicultural Black woman. I’m simultaneously a pin-wearing, dues-paying member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (part of the legacy of enslavement predating this nation’s founding) and a fourth-generation immigrant from the Cape Verde Islands. It is a challenge to dissect what about my specific identity and my value set shaped the transformative experience for the school library I inherited. In other words, I wondered how my Blackness affected the culture my students and I created in the school library. As I was writing this piece, I asked the school’s director of diversity and inclusion, who generously shared this reflection:

More than the last iteration, the current school library is slightly more relaxed, prioritizes group work, and values the community that students forge. This library has clearly been shaped by Afrocentric values. It is a space where knowledge is actively being sought and created, in searching and deep conversations among students and in diverse activities aimed at unearthing and generating knowledge. Whether students are designing a blueprint for a 3D object, reading emergent Black authors, or wrestling with a math problem or scientific concept, students are engaged because they feel safe. They feel seen and heard.

To think my worries were whether I would connect with my new students when the real work is how to show up every day for all my students in a way that disrupts institutional racism, homophobia, sexism, and patriarchy. How can I be the adult that I wish had been there to comfort and empower all the authors of the Black@ posts? How can I be the adult I wish I had myself as a Black child in white majority schools? More importantly, how do I collaborate with the other adults already invested in liberation work at my school? How do I support their work in my role as the school librarian?

This may sound like solitary work. Let’s be clear: my ability to do my job well and be my whole self is a result of the friends and colleagues who hold space for me when I need support and who let me support them. I am never alone.

This article is dedicated to my Librarian Cooperative who shares best practices, keeps each other laughing, and holds each other up; to the community of antiracist educators I have the privilege to work with who hold themselves and others accountable to the social and emotional well-being of all of our students; to my mother and my aunts, all exceptional educators who continue to lead by example; to my father and stepmother who courageously paved their own path; to my husband for always giving me the space I need to be myself in the safety of our home; to my daughter in hopes that she knows she’s perfect exactly as she is.

Adrienne Almeida, MA-TESOL, MLIS, is the director of Middle School and Upper School Library Services at a K–12 independent school in New York City. She is also an adjunct professor at Hunter College’s School of Education where she focuses on instructing new and aspiring teachers on how to develop community with their students. She presented the webinar “Antiracist Collection Development & Programming for Middle School & High School Youth” for Infopeople in July 2020. She is a member of AASL and the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

The school library’s recognition for being “IN” in the pages of the yearbook after my first year.
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TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO AASL’S SHARED FOUNDATIONS

Anchoring the National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries, the Shared Foundations describe the core values that learners, school librarians, and school libraries should reflect and promote. Each Shared Foundation is unique and parallel one another. Don’t miss the chance to hear from these expert authors.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 20
2:30–4:30 P.M.
Shared Foundation: Engage

The Engage Shared Foundation in the AASL Standards offers the school librarian a unique opportunity to model and teach ethical academic behavior, including connecting and collaborating in an interconnected world. Attendees will leave with ideas to collaborate with fellow teachers and make deeper connections to the school library curriculum and the school’s mission and curriculum.

PRESENTERS:
Marcia A. Mardis, Professor & Associate Dean for Research, Florida State University
Kathryn Roots Lewis, Retired Director of Libraries & Instructional Technology, Norman Public Schools

THURSDAY, OCT. 21
8:00–10:00 A.M.
Shared Foundation: Include

Decisions school librarians make or do not make—by default—have tremendous impact on our learners, their families, our collaborators, and communities. This preconference is designed to foreground learner-centered frameworks and usable ideas. Attendees will leave with resources, action steps, and a strengthened commitment to support our learners through the Include Shared Foundation.

PRESENTER:
Julie Stivers, Teacher Librarian, Mount Vernon Middle School

THURSDAY, OCT. 21
10:15 A.M.–12:15 P.M.
Shared Foundation: Explore

In school librarianship, there is nothing better than the opportunity to “Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection,” as embodied in the Explore Shared Foundation. Participants will do their own exploring as they learn about Explore through a journey of thoughtful, reflective practice that supports the unique needs of their learners.

PRESENTER:
Sarah Culp Searles, District Specialist in Library Media Services, Knox County Schools
AASL Research Symposium
THURSDAY, OCT. 21
8:30 A.M.–12:00 P.M.

The Educators of School Librarians Section (ESLS) of AASL presents its seventh research symposium during AASL National Conference. As educators, scholars, and researchers, ESLS members create new knowledge about the school library field, impart that knowledge to the profession’s newest members, and share that knowledge with practitioners in the field.

AASL members: $75 | ALA members: $125
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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES, APPLICATION, & IMPLEMENTATION

Whether you are looking for assessment strategies, STEAM lessons, or learning center implementation and collaborations, we’ve got you covered! Don’t miss this chance the hear from these expert authors.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 20
12:00–2:00 P.M.
Assessing Learners: Assessment Aligned to the AASL National School Library Standards

This session will introduce school library assessment and practical assessment strategies aligned to the Competencies of the AASL Standards Framework for Learners. Attendees will explore theory-based assessment, identify appropriate assessment tools, and develop practical assessments for use in practice.

PRESENTER:
Elizabeth Burns, Assistant Professor & School Library Program Director, Old Dominion University

THURSDAY, OCT. 21
8:00–10:00 A.M.
STEAM for Elementary Learners

Based on content from “STEAM Activities in 30 Minutes for Elementary Learners (AASL Standards-Based Learning Series)” this session will discuss and explore activities that enable collaboration and shifting lessons between classes and grade levels. School librarians will learn how to engage at greater levels of complexity or cognition and to make authentic learning connections to develop a growth mindset.

PRESENTER:
Deborah Rinio, Assistant Teaching Professor, Montana State University

THURSDAY, OCT. 21
10:15 A.M.–12:15 P.M.
Learning Centers for School Libraries

Learning centers support the importance of play, academic choice, and resiliency in education. This session will demonstrate how learning centers target each of the Shared Foundations and Domains from the AASL Standards Framework for Learners as well as possible collaborations with other educators. Leave with a deeper understanding of learning centers and easy-to-implement plans to customize to meet your learners’ needs.

PRESENTER:
Maura Madigan, Librarian, North Springfield Elementary School
“I am a school librarian, and it’s the best job on the planet.” Whenever I begin a presentation, keynote address, or talk, I proudly share this mantra with the audience conveying my love for school libraries. While some may view this proclamation as corny, it expresses my deep and abiding love for libraries that began when I was in preschool and continues to this day. My love of listening to and reading stories dates back to my early childhood in University Park, Illinois, a small town located in suburban Chicago, Illinois. This sacred space sparked my curiosity and imagination so much that every day I would beg my teacher for a pass to the Hickory Elementary school library. I enjoyed reading the works of Virginia Hamilton, Judy Blume, and Eloise Greenfield and anything that had a Disney stamp on it.

When I became a school librarian, I wanted the same experience, joy, and opportunities for discovery for my students. Unfortunately, in some school districts across the country, there are threats to this space that services our most important patron: the student. These threats have evoked change that has disrupted programming and worst, caused the closure of the school library as a whole. What can school librarians, students, and parents do when this takes place? Advocate for school libraries and their school librarian, the equalizers in K–12 education.

Advocating for Our Students’ Rights

The late Georgia Congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis inspired all of us to get into #Good Trouble: “When you see something that is not fair, not right, not just, you have an obligation to find a way to get in the way” (Seelye 2020). This quote was a personal wake-up call for me to spring into action and advocate for school library programming and librarians. Before beginning the journey into advocating for school libraries and librarians, one must truly understand what advocacy means. The definition of advocacy means taking action in favor of, recommending, or fighting for a cause or supporting/defending others. School librarians and supporters must believe in this statement:

Our students have the educational right to have access to a robust, well-stocked school library program run by a certified school librarian regardless of zip code. – K.C. Boyd

Advocacy is not a new practice but one that is now performed more in various districts/states than others. To advocate for today’s school libraries and school librarians, librarians must revisit discussions/lessons taught by professors while enrolled in MLIS programs. This knowledge will provide a foundation and will help identify how the current challenges are impacting the field. For example, interviews of sixteen library leaders from across the country that represent large city districts, medium-size suburban and small rural schools, as well as some affluent and lower income communities, revealed the trend of a high mobility rate of school and district leadership (Kachel and Lance 2018). This data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed a loss of 9,200 full-time equivalent school librarians (15 percent) nationwide from 2009–10 to 2015–16, with more than 10,000 total losses since 2000 (Lance 2018). Strong school libraries require time to develop and grow within a school district, and the data provided offers advocates with the language or bullet points needed to present a strong argument for debate. Advocating for school libraries requires school library supporters arm themselves with patience, understanding, and most importantly...
knowledge. This knowledge base is critical for advocates to educate change agents when school officials do not understand our programs or the school librarian’s role. Having this knowledge also encourages the rejection of ideology or comments made by uninformed district and school leadership.

The first step for school librarians in their advocacy journey is to understand how the school system operates. This means identifying the district’s major educational initiatives, the overall strategic plan, and the three- to five-year programming goals for the district. School librarians and their supporters must become familiar with these goals and align them to the school library’s goals, the AASL National School Library Standards, and your specific state board of education goals. From my experience, some of my district leaders were surprised to learn that there are national standards school librarians adhere to.

It is at this critical point where school library practitioners will become a teacher/educator for the educated. This is your opportunity to inform district stakeholders about the important role the school library and school librarian play in schools and districts. First, school librarians can detail how student reading scores are higher and students experience higher gains over time at schools/districts where the school library is run by a certified librarian compared with schools/districts where the staffing is either run by non-endorsed staff or library assistants (Lance and Hofshire 2011). School librarians and supporters can also arm themselves with district/state education standards and crosswalk them to the AASL Standards. While this practice is not new, it is one that needs to be repeated over and over again as some of our colleagues in education are unaware that there

are national standards aligned with school libraries. Armed with this information, they can provide personal narratives of how when these standards are adhered to how student achievement increases and how students excel academically across the curriculum.

This is your opportunity to amplify the school librarian’s role as a change agent in your school district. Most importantly, this is the opportunity to remind your school officials how a great library program run by a certified librarian can educate all learners by encouraging inquiry and inspiring the next generation of leaders. School librarians and school

In a climate where school
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important than ever.

libraries should inspire leadership like that of the late Congressman John Lewis, creativity like that of Lin-Manuel Miranda, determination as seen in climate activist Greta Thunberg, and breaking the glass ceiling like Vice President Kamala Harris.

There’s no set "how-to" guide to advocacy. Advocacy evolves and changes as do the demands on public education in every school/district/state. As a best practice, school librarians should revisit knowledge acquired during their MLIS program. This information will serve as a foundation for their messaging as they move forward in developing a strong advocacy message that will impact decisions made at the school and district levels.

Advocacy Is Displayed in Many Forms

In a climate where school budget cuts threaten the closure of school libraries, advocating for students’ rights is more important than ever. In Detroit, Michigan, seven student plaintiffs sued the state for the landmark constitutional right to literacy (Levin 2020). The case settlement found that the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires that when a state establishes a public school system, no child living in that state may be denied equal access to schooling. Simply stated, students must have the right to read and the right to literacy. This is what we need to incorporate into our messaging, while advocating for our students.

Our advocacy can be done through school librarians and their stories. Whether you are new, tenured, end of career, or retired, everyone can help. New/non-tenured school librarians can simply document and share the life of their programs. They can inform all school community stakeholders of the good work being done in school libraries through school/district newsletters and/or presentations at education meetings such as PTO/PTA meetings or school board meetings where district officials love to begin the meeting with the good news of the district. It may take a little persistence and patience to gain access to these important meetings, but once granted access these meetings offer an important audience to shine a light on the school library and share the beauty of our programs and our work.

Tenured school librarians can perform the same tasks as their newbie counterparts and advocate
By familiarizing myself with my school district’s goals and objectives I can crosswalk these goals and objectives to my daily practice. This practice alone provides me with a blueprint for effectively marketing and branding my library program.

more aggressively. They can utilize social media with carefully crafted messaging that highlights not only the life of their library programs, but also how their work aligns to current research. These school librarians can also share model school districts locally and nationally that have exemplary school library programming. This band of school library leaders are critical as they have a real-time relationship with students and parents and can engage their support at a deeper level. These practitioners are also more familiar with district goals and objectives around academic achievement.

Our soon-to-be-retired and retired librarians are the backbone of school library advocacy efforts. These skilled practitioners not only provide motivational support and valuable advice but also possess a wealth of knowledge and information. These exemplary librarians also have developed long-term valuable relationships with supporters from the community who are active in civic/political activities that directly impact the school community. Finally, our soon-to-be-retired and retired librarians can provide additional support by forming advisory committees with school advocates for schools within their communities. All of our peers are valued allies in this fight and play important roles as we advocate for school libraries and librarians in our communities.

Don’t Get Angry, Get Strategic

Do I get frustrated when my program has been overlooked or disrespected, or when a principal or co-worker just doesn’t understand my role in the learning community? Do I feel disrespected as an educated African-American woman when others attempt to silence my voice or dismiss my opinions? Yes, I do; however, I’ve learned how to turn that frustration and anger into something more productive. I become laser focused and strategic. Advocacy is not easy work; it requires long-term commitment and dedication. It’s tiring, sometimes lonely work, especially for those who have an optimistic worldview of the probable outcomes that others may not share that same vision. Years of experience working in three school districts have taught me that you must be open to moving the needle forward to work toward change.

With our school systems becoming increasingly more data driven, I can admit my mind has often gone into overdrive figuring out how school librarians can be included in the critical data. As we all know, if we do not demonstrate our work as school librarians and inform our school communities about the good works we perform daily, it could be perceived that we are not contributing to the learning community. By familiarizing myself with my school district’s goals and objectives I can crosswalk these goals
and objectives to my daily practice. This practice alone provides me with a blueprint for effectively marketing and branding my library program.

When you take on a strategic mindset, it is important to set obtainable goals that you should try to meet. One of my goals this year was to share the beauty and importance of school libraries in places where I would not normally venture into, such as speaking to a group of non-librarians, granting a podcast interview for a technology innovator, or even serving on a panel where you are the sole representative for school libraries. National education conferences designed solely for content-level classroom teachers, principals, and superintendents offer another venue to highlight the importance of school libraries and librarians.

Another way to be strategic is to use the same language and tools to analyze student achievement as our principals and superintendents. While some school librarians reject the notion that libraries should be data driven, the academic climate we live in now requires us to shift our thinking and practice. Using that critical and rich data, like the reports feature in our electronic circulation system, and connecting it to student achievement/scores can greatly assist us with our messaging about school libraries. Circulation statistics (without identifying types of books or student names) can provide district leaders with an idea of how required and leisure reading can support fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Moreover, these statistics also can provide school officials with a snapshot of the foot traffic in our school libraries and daily activities.

Tracking digital resource usage for our digital resources can also reveal how students utilize supplementary materials; the digital resource use statistics are a direct extension of the lessons taught in the classroom. Monthly, quarterly, and yearly reports are critical for school librarians as they give our busy administrators an overview of our programs. This data can be inserted into their own messaging in many ways. They can report this data to the state board of education and to parents when describing the overall academic achievement of students within the district. They can also use the data when applying for grants.

School libraries can have an indelible impact on district officials making important decisions on staffing, funding, or even a school library’s livelihood of a program.

**Pushing through Adversity**

Communication is key when working toward a common goal. Advocating for today’s school library calls for all stakeholders to exercise patience and understanding, first with district and school-based leaders who may not understand or recognize a certified school librarian’s skillset, and second with teachers and support staff who may have varying levels of experience and understanding of the school librarian’s role. We must give our librarian the opportunity to learn and develop a growth mindset that is supportive of advocacy work. This also calls for all parties to “let go of their privilege,” meaning that we must maintain a global view so that everyone takes part in advocating for your fellow school librarians regardless of employment status. We must adopt the attitude that we are all in this together. Throughout the country, school libraries have also been grossly impacted in some rural and suburban communities, along

Tracking digital resource usage for our digital resources can also reveal how students utilize supplementary materials; the digital resource use statistics are a direct extension of the lessons taught in the classroom.
with cities and states. If we would all take a stand together and advocate for change, we could maximize our voices for positive action.

Here’s a couple of tips to remember when dealing with adversity while advocating for your school library:

• Communication is the key. Working with others requires communication, and communicating can benefit all who are committed to advocacy work.

• Be respectful. Understand that everyone can contribute at their own comfort level; everyone’s opinion and views are valid.

• Gently “check” or “correct” your peers. Sometimes we have to pull our peers to the side and correct them with love rather than hostility.

• Establish boundaries. This work is tough and it’s important that you have a healthy work/life balance so that you can deal with the stress of tackling challenges you are faced with.

• Value your past mistakes. Learn from your mistakes—they will make you strong and more reflective, and they will help guide you as you continue advocating for change.

• Adversity provides valuable insights. Adversity challenges us to look within and reflect on our most inner thoughts and feelings.

• Embrace adversity as a chance for opportunity. What have you learned from your advocacy efforts? Adversity helps build character, which is an important trait to possess even during the toughest of times.

• Refuse to give up. There’s always light at the end of the tunnel. Don’t give up!

• Keep a positive mindset. Despite the obstacles and setbacks, embed in your mind that you must remain positive even when dealing with the toughest of opposition.

School libraries are more than backdrops for photoshoots and district press conferences. They are special places in each school where students can access information, explore materials, voice their opinions, and be their true and authentic selves. It’s a place where the shyest of students will meet new friends from similar/different backgrounds and find their voice in the world through print/digital discovery and collaborative activities. Facilitated by caring, skilled, and credentialed school library practitioners, libraries are truly the heart of the school.

Advocating for school libraries and school librarians is arduous and challenging work; simply stated it’s hard. I truly believe school librarians are up for the task; we have the talent, intelligence, and drive to perform this special work. I am forever the dreamer, optimist, and school librarian who will fight for her students’ rights. I want the same experience in school libraries for my students that I had as a curious child. I want to see students beg for a pass to the library just like I did when I was a student at Hickory Elementary, and so should you. It’s time to stand up and speak out. Let’s support each other in doing this work—our students deserve it.

K.C. Boyd is the library media specialist at Jefferson Academy in Washington, DC. She is a member of AASL and the Association for Library Service to Children. She serves as the District of Columbia ALA DC Chapter Councilor and as a member of ALA’s Ethnic and Multicultural Exchange Roundtable. She received the 2020 Distinguished Service Award from the Washington DC Library Association and the 2015 Leadership Award from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. K.C. was also recognized as a “Mover and Shaker: Change Agent” by Library Journal in 2015. Her website is <www.kcboyd.com>.

Works Cited:


Unpacking Black School Librarianship
As a Black school librarian in Texas, there’s one set of rules for my colleagues and another for me. It’s the daily wondering “What will they fire me for today?” or “How will my accomplishments be ignored and/or usurped?” or my least favorite “What passive-aggressive, prejudice affront will I have to ‘give the benefit of the doubt towards’?” It’s knowing that “traditions” and “family” include a history rooted in my oppression as seen in the yearbooks with so few people of color. The excitement I felt at seeing those black faces plummeted when I realized those faces belonged to the food service staff. Or worse, the black-faced student who thought it costumed fun to pose as an Eddie Murphy character from a movie with his face shoe-polished or otherwise smeared black, like disgraced Virginia Governor Ralph Northam. After all, it’s tradition and it comes from an acceptable time period in society.

As an educator for almost twenty years, I hesitated to even join this opportunity because the engrained slights and negative experiences I have endured can nonchalantly be thrown into the category of “she’s just a bitter employee” or “she’s just an angry Black woman.” But you see, that right there is an issue. I’m not allowed to be upset by intentional ugliness. I have to consistently turn a blind eye to injustice. Writing this article threatens my entire career because I will more than likely be labeled “difficult” when I am really searching for equality in professional growth and job protection when I speak up about sensitive topics like implicit bias and racism. How can I tell my new employer that I left my old place of employment because of silent racism? How can I explain that I know when my accomplishments are being ignored? I have to go high when they go low.

Quite honestly, if former First Lady Michelle Obama can be labeled as “an angry Black woman,” I didn’t have a snowball’s chance at escaping the same stereotype. I don’t even wear or own pearls! All jokes aside, in her memoir, *Becoming*, she states, “Even when it’s not pretty or perfect. Even when it’s more real than you want it to be. Your story is what you have, what you will always have. It is something to own” (Obama 2019).

This is my story as a Black school librarian in America in 2020. It isn’t a rosy picture. It’s written from the perspective of the thorn to keep everyone humble and to keep my story true to me and those I serve.

**Creating Inclusive Programs**

So how does this history of oppression translate to my role as a school librarian? In several ways. I’ve had to create inclusive programs that address the setbacks to Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) caused by predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These PWIs suffer an acute and debilitating lack of self-awareness and community for BIPOC students, regardless of whether they exist in the public or private sector, academic or corporate sector, or secondary or postsecond-

ary education. These institutions are a blight across the board in America, no matter the setting.

For example, when the novel *The Hate U Give* was released, I collaborated with an English teacher to bring her classes down to the school library to connect the book to an article on privilege written thirty years prior. The teacher had the students annotate the article on white privilege in education, titled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh (1989).

The instructor (a white woman) warned me that she intentionally chose McIntosh’s article because it was an article she said “woke her up to the bullsh*t her privilege granted her.” She was so inspired that she wanted to “do that to the campus,” and I was the “perfect person to connect the realism of life to the article.” The students were shocked that nothing had changed since the article was published. In fact, they’d gotten worse. They were shocked. I wasn’t. My everyday life of racism away from academia prepared me for thirty years of snail-slow progress. Being a Black school librarian and bringing my whole self to work is taking a class on how racism can damage Black students’ mental health so that I can be more empathetic to myself and others.

During the book talk and excerpt readings, an invigorating discussion developed among the students about prejudices, discrimination, and the mental exhaustion from both. The pinnacle moment came when a quiet male student raised his hand to pour out his humiliation and horror when traveling, how he’s always pulled aside, patted down, and was at one time bullied by a TSA agent for being Hindu. It was one of the first fissure cracks in the discussion about diversity and was a first step in healing on the campus.

That moment was brought to the campus by a Black school librarian.

After such an authentic teaching experience, I made sure to add multiple copies of *The Hate U Give* to our collection, and others, like *Internment* by Samira Ahmed, were new "shelf members" in the library. Adding *Internment* to our collection is what motivated the aforementioned student to speak up about his experience at the airport. It was only after pulling him aside that I learned this recounted scene from *Internment* inspired him to speak:

We all look like ants marching in this dust straight into a giant trap where we’ll be stuck or where we’ll be fed poison that we inadvertently spread to the rest of the group. I bite my lip, but I don’t even feel it. What’s that thing people always say about history? Unless we know our history, we’re doomed to repeat it? Never forget it? Isn’t that the lesson? But we always forget. Forgetting is in the American grain.

Someone yells out ahead of us. There’s some kind of tussle. “NO! NO! NO!” I hear a boy scream and then see him run away from his mom—I suppose it’s his mom—a middle-aged woman wearing a bright-blue turban-style hijab. The boy, with curly chestnut-brown hair, is maybe eight or nine years old. She runs after him and grabs him, speaking to him in Arabic. The crowd parts around them. Then her son hits her in the face. There’s a collective gasp from the crowd. When the woman reaches up to her cheek, the boy breaks free, pushes against anyone standing in this

Young people know the power of video footage to combat the usual white bias seen in the retelling of racially charged incidents and are using social media to spur on protests and action against racial injustice.
way, and starts running back toward the main gate, where the buses entered. He doesn’t get far. Three Exclusion Guards draw guns and aim them at him. A kid. They’re pointing their weapons at a kid. A fourth guard grabs him and pins him to the ground. I’m frozen. I literally can’t move. (Ahmed 2019)

Understanding the Trauma of Discrimination

Bringing my whole self to the library means that I understand the trauma of being discriminated against, receiving “uncouth violence” at the hands of authority figures, and having to defend helpless students against educators who present *To Kill a Mockingbird* like it’s a national treasure, when from the Black perspective, it’s a blight on our history that supports a “white savior” mentality that most BIPOC are completely done with.

Why reach back to the colloquial racism of our past with books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* when modern, relevant, and engaging books like *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas address the injustices of our legal system with a context students can see on any screen?

The main character, Brianna, faces an unjust suspension when a rogue white officer body slams her to the floor in retaliation for a search-and-seizure shake-down upon entering the metal detectors at her school. The story directly mimics a news report not long ago that made national news about a white officer body-slamming a girl from her desk in class. It sheds light on the fact that more students of color are suspended than white students, especially young Black girls, which I blogged about in my post “Erasing Black Girls’ Education” (<www.awakenlibrarian.com/2020/03/erasing-black-girls-education.html>). More importantly, it shows how young people respond to the archaic mindset of prejudice that keeps Black Americans stuck in a post-slavery, Jim Crow America.

Young people know the power of video footage to combat the usual white bias seen in the retelling of racially charged incidents and are using social media to spur on protests and action against racial injustice, the same way television was used during the 1960s civil rights movement when white and Black freedom riders were beaten. Videos can sometimes save Black lives (R.I.P. Philando Castile), and also help in speaking more truth to injustice from the Black perspective (i.e., video doesn’t lie).

Not only does this perspective represent what’s happening now, it represents your students. More importantly, it aligns with the AASL Standards.

From the Create Domain of the AASL Standards:

1. Interacting with learners who reflect a range of perspectives.
2. Evaluating a variety of perspectives during learning activities.
3. Representing diverse perspectives during learning activities.

From the Think Domain of the AASL Standards:

Learners contribute a balanced perspective when participating in a learning community by:

1. Articulating an awareness of the contributions of a range of learners.
2. Adopting a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in information resources and learning products.
3. Describing their understanding of cultural relevancy and placement within the global learning community.
From the Share Domain of the AASL Standards:

Learners exhibit empathy with and tolerance for diverse ideas by:

1. Engaging in informed conversation and active debate.
2. Contributing to discussions in which multiple viewpoints on a topic are expressed.  
(AASL 2018)

*To Kill a Mockingbird* doesn’t offer a range of perspectives. Neither author nor intended audiences know what it’s like to be Black and on trial in America. But I know what it’s like to be accused and viewed guilty when I am innocent. And so does any BIPOC student. I know what Angie Thomas thought about when she wrote the scenes for Brianna. I know the perspective her books offer.

Much like this article, being seen matters. Being heard matters. Being represented matters. Being treated like your humanity is essential, matters.

**EDI Lesson for Grades 6–12**

One of the facets of Black librarianship I enjoy the most is when I inspire students to get involved, not just sit back and whine about injustices. Recently, Yelp said it would start flagging businesses accused of racist behavior (Gross 2020). Having been racially profiled in businesses before, I wondered if there was a positive and more effective way to get students involved in this bit of modern civil rights. I created a lesson designed to have students examine and get involved in their community to break the systemic racism present.

**E. R. A. S. E. (Grades 6–12)**

**End**

**Racism**

**And**

**Stereotypes**

**Everywhere**

**Student Purpose:** To establish opportunities for learners to adjust their own perspectives and values while evaluating differing perspectives and how these varying perspectives affect their community.

**Librarian Purpose:** Cultivate partnerships within the school and local community (including families, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, public and higher education libraries, businesses) to promote engagement and provide a platform for equality, diversity, and inclusive (EDI) initiatives.

The library will address EDI for students from the aspect of civil and social justice. This lesson

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*Inspiring students to fix the wrongs they see in life not only directs their purpose and focus, but also opens doors for civic engagement and duty.*
addresses BIPOC students who want to advocate for social justice causes specific to their own community.

With the help of current students, restaurants and businesses within the community are rated with an EDI score based on a points rubric centered on the following categories:

- Are the owner and/or employees welcoming to all customers?
- Does their restaurant/business cater to a certain type of customer?
- What community outreach initiatives does the restaurant/business take to support EDI?
- Does the business have visible diversity within their employees (this includes disabled, racial, and gender-specific diversity)?
- Does the business establishment offer coupons for the economically disadvantaged?

The rubric would be based on frequency and categorized as follows:

- Rarely or Not at All (0 points)
- Some of the Time (1 point)
- Usually (3 points)
- Always (5 points)

*The rubric will include an open-ended response section for specifics. A reviewer’s race/gender will be required.

Technology Component: The findings will result in a website posting the EDI rating and true narrative posts/reviews of their experiences. Those restaurants with satisfactory ratings will receive a “EDI Excellence” display sticker and a 3D-printed trophy of excellence.

Artistic Component: Students will create a video diary documentary series of their experience, seek an audience with city leaders, and present their EDI ratings to foster “restorative dialogue” for those businesses receiving unsatisfactory ratings.

Community Involvement: The community will sponsor uplifting events to encourage local businesses to improve communication and equity within the community via a library series titled “Are Your Values My Values?” that features EDI guest speakers, business owners, city officials, and advocates.

The perks of this lesson are embedded, but the biggest pay-off is shifting the learning outside of the classroom and applying it to life as we know it. Inspiring students to fix the wrongs they see in life not only directs their purpose and focus, but also opens doors for civic engagement and duty.

Conclusion

Showing up as my whole self is being welcomed by Black students, who were in disbelief to have a Black school librarian based on the joy on their faces. I received immediate support and love from them, and not from the grown-ups who should know better. These brilliant and wonderful students almost went their first 18 years of life having never had a Black school librarian. That meant from age 5–18, every book they read, lesson they had in the library, and encouragement for the love of reading was from a person that never endured the silent racism every BIPOC faces regularly. There’s an empathy, an ownership, and a shared experience Black school librarians can give every student. Period.

Black school librarians know all the thorns of life because we’ve had to bandage our own wounds from every poke, prod, and hollow-point of surviving in a predominantly white field. Very rarely is the stage set and ready for all the veracity that is being Black in America. I’m grateful for this opportunity to enlighten the world with my experience because it’s as necessary as the oxygen we need to survive. Supporting Black school librarians is like putting the oxygen mask on yourself first before rendering aid to others when the plane is decelerating at rapid speed.

Jean Darnell is a retired librarian in Houston, TX. She’s been an educator for 19 years. Her current career passion is becoming an EDI advocate for librarians and schools. She is a member of AASL and serves on the 2020 Caldecott Book Selection Committee. She is also a member of the 2020 PBS NewsHour Education Advisory Board. Her blog, Awaken Librarian, is available at <https://awakenlibrarian.com>.

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Making a Mark on White Space

My Experience as a Black School Librarian
It was late 2013 when I found myself seriously considering a career change. I was working full time for a nonprofit organization and desperately needed a different profession that would challenge me. In the evenings and on weekends I worked part time as an academic mentor and tutor in the student-athlete center at a university. For seven years, I met, built relationships with, and helped collegiate athletes succeed academically. Growing up I had no intention of becoming an educator; working for that athletics department is what brought me to librarianship. After spending a great deal of time considering my strengths, weaknesses, and passions, becoming a school librarian was the obvious choice.

Why does my backstory matter? My mantra has been and will continue to be “Tell your story.” My backstory lays out the thought process and intentionality about my decision to change careers. After all, shifting careers means researching educational and licensure requirements, enrolling in graduate school, reviewing salaries and the possibility of relocating—all things that weigh heavily on such a life-altering decision. I didn’t think about my past librarians or my experience as a user of libraries. What I considered most were the students I worked with at the time and future collegiate athletes. I wanted to provide them with information and digital literacy skills. My experience as a mentor and tutor taught me how important it was that these student–athletes know how to conduct research for assignments, how to accurately give credit when referring to others’ works, and how to properly craft an e-mail to a professor or other professional among other things. What I never considered during this time was what being a Black school librarian would look like.

White Space

Historically, the school library profession has been overwhelmingly White and female. Having attended a predominantly White institution, I am accustomed to being part of a demographic that represents a smaller portion of a whole, but it wasn’t until I began pursuing a school library career that I realized I would oftentimes feel different in the library spaces I would navigate.

Having attended a predominantly White institution, I am accustomed to being part of a demographic that represents a smaller portion of a whole, but it wasn’t until I began pursuing a school library career that I realized I would oftentimes feel different in the library spaces I would navigate. meet school librarians, and attend sessions. I achieved all these goals and appreciated being welcomed to take advantage of the learning. However, one thing stood out to me in that library: there was only one Black school librarian in a room of over 80 certified librarians and district-level library services staff. This picture of school librarianship so clearly mirrored how a masterful
illustrator uses white space on the page of a children’s book.

Although this is my reality, I have consistently worked to ensure my Blackness isn’t diminished as I perform my responsibilities in my school’s library and contribute to the school library profession. In some ways, I could be described as a chameleon because of my ability to adapt to most any environment. For the Black community and other people of color, being an active participant in majority White surroundings means we are likely required to adapt in addition to code switch, or “mixing languages or patterns of speech in conversation” (“Code Switch FAQ” n.d.). As a Black school librarian, showing up as my whole, authentic self is subconsciously shown in the way I move about my workspaces, (e.g., purchasing certain titles, being antiracist in my teaching, embracing and not diminishing my heritage, etc.), especially in buildings that include an ethnically diverse population. How I exhibit who I am and the pride I have in my culture and background sets an example for those in my learning community to feel confident in authentically showing up as their whole selves every day in our building.

As the school librarian, I am not simply a gatekeeper of knowledge or the bookkeeper (no pun intended). I am responsible for having “an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (AASL 2018). Fostering an inclusive and globally aware environment contributes to the development of well-rounded learners, who will become productive citizens who contribute greatly to society and respect and value diverse people and viewpoints. I cannot stand firm in creating a space where they feel secure in their backgrounds, beliefs, and truths unless I am rooted solid in my own Blackness and how it shows up. Reflecting on my first position in a school library, I was one of two Black staff members learners interacted with instructionally. The number of Black staff members was not reflective of the student population. However, being one of two Black faculty did provide countless opportunities for learners to build relationships with me and have someone they could relate to. And while the number of mirrors they could look into among the adults in the school community were few, the impact remains six years later. Now young adults who will soon graduate college or have already become part of the workforce, we communicate regularly about life and their goals, and they sometimes ask for reference letters and help with résumés.

Over the years, I have had many learners, friends, and people I meet in the community exclaim “I’ve never seen a Black school librarian before.” It’s one of the reasons behind my Instagram moniker, @notyomamaslibrarian. It’s also why I am so passionate about being vocal in conversations with colleagues about the need for more school librarians of color. It has been especially important for me to display my authenticity within professional associations and advocate for ways in which associations can increase recruitment of Black and Brown people as school librarians.

The demographics for our profession should mirror that of the widely diverse population of students in our country. While Black youth make up approximately 15 percent of school-age children in the United States, only 6 percent of school librarians self-identify as Black (Long 2020). I work in a significantly diverse middle school in a large urban district. Serving just under 900 learners, my school is one of the largest middle schools in our district. Forty percent of our learners are Black, 35 percent are Hispanic/Latinx, 18 percent are White, more than 6 percent are Asian, and less than 1 percent are Native American (“Thurgood Marshall Middle School” n.d.).

School librarians have long heard and held to Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s ideology that library collections should contain books that provide readers windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (1990). I would argue that windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors exist not only for literature, but representation in librarianship as well. It is why in December when I had the bright idea to support a Black school library student, I set fear aside and sent a direct message on Twitter to fifty school library colleagues in my professional learning network. In it, I reminded my colleagues of my commitment to increasing diverse representation in school librarianship and asked if they might be willing to join me in contributing monetary support for a current Black school library student to join ALA and AASL and register for the 2021 AASL National Conference. Had Twitter allowed me, I would have sent it to more people. I originally thought a few individuals might find it a worthy cause and trust me enough to donate to a Venmo account all because they respect my reputation.
What they proved to me, however, is that they see the larger problem just as I do. It is one thing to talk about an issue; it’s a bigger deal to take action. The commitment of these school librarians and school library educators to be part of the change our profession desperately needs, has provided six Black school library students an ALA and AASL membership and registration to the AASL National Conference.

Learners should encounter school librarians who offer views into worlds unfamiliar to them—librarians as windows. Even more so, school librarians should offer opportunities for learners to step into those worlds to experience them—librarians as sliding glass doors. Most importantly, learners should be provided the experience of having a school librarian who reflects their own world—librarians as mirrors. Our profession currently mirrors author/illustrator Christian Robinson’s style of illustration in which he utilizes a great deal of white space. I will admit his illustrations are creatively brilliant, but my hope is that the demographics of school librarians begin to resemble the beautiful collages author/illustrator Oge Mora creates, reflecting the depth of the diversity that makes up our nation. Because I am a staunch believer that we must practice what we preach, I strive to always create a school library that reflects not only our student population, but the world as well—from media to signage to cultural traditions.

#OwnVoices

During a Twitter engagement in 2015, writer Corinne Duyvis originated the #OwnVoices hashtag. She used it as a call for recommendations for kid-lit titles about protagonists written by authors of the same diverse identity to highlight their authentic voices (Duyvis 2015). Despite Duyvis’s intentional choice not to moderate the hashtag, the #OwnVoices movement has taken on a life of its own, so much so that it’s prominent on Instagram and in articles and on book lists, especially related to kid and YA literature. AASL’s National School Library Standards Competency II.C.2. states, “The school library facilitates opportunities to experience diverse ideas by promoting the use of high-quality and high-interest literature in formats that reflect the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all learners and their communities” (2018). The significance of #OwnVoices is that these works meet the challenge of providing mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.

Learners in my school come and have heritages from all over the world. Their lived experiences are unique to each of them, as mine is unique to me. I was 34 years old when I first read a book that I could call a mirror; it was Angie Thomas’s The Hate U Give. As a Black woman, I sometimes feel shame in that. It didn’t take me that long to see myself in a book because I failed to read growing up. It was because the books I read growing up failed to reflect what life was like for a young Black girl rather than how history and society degraded the Black community. I want a different experience for the young people I serve. They deserve a different experience. Each of them deserves to see themself in a book before the age of 34. Hopefully, they all can say they have already seen themselves in more than one book. In the event they haven’t—and even if they have—a priority of my collection development each year is that the volumes in my school library include a significant representation of not only diverse books, but titles that represent #OwnVoices.

Because the demographics of our school vary tremendously, I am intentional about my search for titles to purchase. A significant number of diverse and #OwnVoices titles are about or written by Black authors. In a school where 40 percent of the learners identify as Black, this is great, right? You, dear reader, might think so. I, on the other hand, end up second-guessing myself. It’s a train of thought that goes something similar to this: “Am I buying this book because the person on the cover is Black? Am I purchasing book only because the author is Black? Am I purchasing too many ‘Black’ books? Are people going to say something? Wait, maybe I should take this one off; the reviews aren’t stellar so I may not have a case for adding it.”

Does this happen to you? Of course, these instances make me doubt my expertise, but they also push me to provide as many titles as I can find that reflect the learners and educators around me. When students see themselves in the books on our shelves, the conversations we have, the assignments about global perspectives, they are more prone to continue being patrons of our school library, the public library, and for some, an academic library. Without the exposure to #OwnVoices, learners are left with a narrow view of what literature can offer. Thus, it is important that as the school librarian, I “facilitate experiences in which learners exhibit empathy and tolerance for diverse ideas” (AASL 2018).

Author Visits

One of the things I feared most about becoming a school librarian was providing author visits for learners. The cost of an author visit, while not exorbitant, seems enormous to a librarian in a school that lacks a PTA and where book fair sales don’t result in enough cash to host an author.
There's an inequity in which schools can afford them and those that cannot. Oftentimes, I feel insecure because my school community is one without the additional resources PTAs can provide. As one of the largest middle schools, it's unfathomable that we do not have a PTA. Our district funds can be used only on materials and resources.

I have been determined not to let these limitations stop me from offering author visits to my students. However, where does one find the money to host an author? I’ve had to get creative and pretty much deplete the account balance I’ve inherited to offer my students author visits. My first year at my current school, I had the chance to meet author Ibi Zoboi in person. We had previously connected via social media, and a conference allowed us the chance to speak briefly. She shared she would be in my city a few months later for a university event and mentioned wanting to add a school visit. I couldn’t pass up this opportunity. I couldn’t let the author of an #OwnVoices novel about gentrification come to Nashville and not speak to students who look like her and were experiencing and studying gentrification during that time.

With some remaining dollars from previous years’ book fairs, I was able to bring Zoboi for an author visit with our 8th-grade Cambridge ELA classes. I would need to buy books for the students, even though there was no remaining money to do so. Like every other school librarian, I went into hustle mode to find a sponsor to provide the books. It wasn’t a seamless process, but it worked out. It also made me feel inadequate. I was a Black school librarian asking for a handout from a big-box retailer miles away in a majority White suburb for an #OwnVoices novel for my kids in a majority Black school in a majority Black neighborhood. This is when being Black in librarianship is hard, but you put pride aside because everything you do is for the kids you serve…because they deserve the same experiences as other learners their age.

**Project LIT Community**

The opportunities for author visits seem hopeless now. Our remaining funds measure up to the cost of a kind-hearted author or illustrator requiring a nominal fee for a thirty-minute virtual visit. But there are other outlets to offer learners the opportunity to visit with #OwnVoices authors. The Project LIT Community has provided space for me to continue exposing the learners I work with to authors and illustrators of #OwnVoices literature. This “grassroots literacy movement” is dedicated to empowering readers by providing access to high-quality, culturally relevant books to promote a culture of reading. The folks leading the work of this movement are rock stars and go getters; they never take no for an answer. And because of that, my middle schoolers have the chance to interact with the creative minds behind the books we read during our live sessions and for book club. I am grateful for their collective work to discover #OwnVoices titles and commit to using them in the classroom and for book club discussions, but mostly I’m blessed that because of their work, this Black school librarian doesn’t feel so ashamed that she can’t single-handedly provide them diverse experiences they deserve.

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Being an effective school librarian involves more than keeping a well-stocked library or teaching students how to navigate information sources. Beyond these important duties, AASL's National School Library Standards reinforce the importance of positive workplace behaviors critical to professional success. The AASL Standards cite specific dispositions exhibited by skilled school librarians such as a willingness to collaborate, an enthusiasm for life-long growth through self-reflection and professional development, and a spirit of open-mindedness and tolerance (AASL 2018). When these dispositions are demonstrated on the job, they contribute to a positive school environment for everyone. However, unlike specific job tasks, these behaviors cannot be mandated by one’s principal; positive traits such as collegiality and empathy must be given freely by the school librarian.

To better understand the relationship between professional deeds and behaviors exhibited by highly effective school librarians, I conducted a study of eight school librarians in my state (Reed and Tharp 2020). I hoped to better understand the range of voluntary extra-role behaviors they performed.

**Background**

Dennis Organ sought to understand why some employees chose to exhibit positive workplace behaviors beyond what was required by their employer (1988). His Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) theory categorized ten distinct and voluntary extra-role behaviors such as courtesy, loyalty, and peacemaking. Organ’s OCB theory realized the importance of these behaviors to a company’s bottom line in improving employee efficiency.

Aaron Elkins applied the OCB theory to the work of school librarians and questioned the conditions associated with the demonstration of extra-role OCB behaviors (2015). He recognized that there were environmental factors that contributed to the school librarian’s ability and/or willingness to display these actions with students and colleagues.

Anit Somech and Izhar Oplatka applied the OCB theory to teachers’ work and delineated the voluntary behaviors into proactive deeds and kindnesses (2015). Their Teacher Citizenship Behavior (TCB) theory labeled the voluntary deeds as OCBs and the voluntary kindnesses as emotional citizenship behaviors (ECBs).

Although the TCB theory has been used to analyze the work of teachers and administrators, I wanted to apply it to the work of school librarians. For my study, I recruited eight school librarians who were prodigious volunteers outside of their paid jobs. Some participants volunteered with their state’s professional school library organization, while others organized regional young adult literature conferences. I chose to speak with these individuals because I felt that outside volunteer work was an exemplar for the school library profession.

I interviewed each school librarian separately but used the same set of open-ended questions to get them to talk about their training, work, and professional mentors. I used a phenomenological methodology to try to understand the common experience of my participants in their own words, and I coded their statements using a framework developed from the components of the TCB theory.

**Findings**

Using the TCB theory’s bifurcated classification of behaviors into OCBs (voluntary deeds) and ECBs (voluntary behaviors), I examined the demonstration of behaviors at three levels: the organization (school-wide and within volunteer work), the team (with colleagues on the job), and with students. I also found moderator factors that enhanced or suppressed an individual’s ability to exhibit OCBs and ECBs on the job.

I found the following results in my study:

**OCBs and ECBs were demonstrated in a range of ways.** One participant described the importance of staying abreast of the latest in YA literature so her students would trust her book suggestions. Another described bringing unsolicited research articles to her busy assistant principal, a woman struggling to juggle the demands of work and home while pursuing her doctorate. Others described how they worked to cultivate a warm and welcoming school library.
their kind behaviors (ECBs). Participants were strongly motivated to go beyond the defined requirements of their jobs and work harder because they cared deeply for their students and colleagues.

Caring about their students and colleagues made participants want to engage more heavily in their profession. They wanted to learn more to better handle the questions that came their way. They looked for additional ways to get engaged with other school librarians, such as joining professional organizations and taking leadership roles in their schools and professional organizations. They reported such connections helped rejuvenate their passion for this work.

Participants with the highest number of exhibited OCBs and ECBs spoke repeatedly about the importance of positive relationships with students and colleagues. For example, one participant stated, “I feel this job is 100 percent about relationships, relationships with students and relationships with the teachers as well. You have to care about what they want and what they need. If you don’t, you have no business being here because your job is to serve and support them.”

Several barriers to teacher collaboration were cited. One school librarian reported that her new principal had changed her schedule to one less conducive to co-teaching; her classroom collaborations had plunged as a result. Another discussed the difficulties in securing teacher trust when teachers view the school librarian as a rookie.

Implications for Practice

Employees who care about the people they interact with on a daily basis contribute to a positive work environment, and school librarians are no exception. When school librarians choose to go beyond the defined tasks of their job, the entire school benefits. Students who know they can count on their school librarian for great book recommendations and a friendly ear become frequent visitors to the school library. Teachers who know they are valued and supported by their school librarian will typically reciprocate. This environment is the structure needed for student success.

While state and professional standards dictate many job duties, it is often up to a principal to set exact parameters on the school librarian’s instructional role (Church 2010, 2008). It is in the principal’s best interest to cultivate a school environment in which school librarians are empowered to demonstrate OCBs and ECBs. If structural problems such as scheduling issues are preventing this fuller expression of the school librarian’s instructional role, these problems should be brought to the attention of school administrators.

My research showed the demonstration of OCBs and ECBs can positively impact the school environment. But as much as I would encourage school librarians to demonstrate these behaviors, I would also caution that school librarians need to make sure they sustain themselves first before they can adequately help others. Beyond the measures of self-care to protect physical and mental health, school librarians should seek out opportunities for professional development. Getting involved with state and national professional organizations is a great way to provide the nourishing contacts with others in the school library field, a step frequently cited by participants as a source of strength. There are now a greater range of online opportunities to transcend barriers like time, physical location, and cost.

Karen Nourse Reed, PhD, is an associate professor at Middle Tennessee State University. She is a member of AASL and was awarded the 2020 AASL Research Grant. She was the 2019 recipient of the L. Anne Clyde Memorial Research – Best Conference Paper Award. She authored the articles “An Interdisciplinary Approach in Service Learning and Community Partnerships through STEM in Higher Education” in the September 2020 issue of Serve inDEED, “Applying Gamification to the Library Orientation: A Study of Interactive User Experience and Engagement Preferences” in the September 2020 issue of Information Technologies and Libraries, and “Application of the Teacher Citizenship Behavior (TCB) Theory to the Extra–Role Work of the School Librarians” in School Libraries Worldwide.

Works Cited:


People often ask me how to expand the study of Black history in the library and classroom, beyond Black History Month. It’s a question that leaves me scratching my head because the answer, in my humble opinion, is simple: Expand Black history in the library and classroom beyond Black History Month.

CBC COLUMN

Years ago in grade school, I sat in a room filled with Black children and parents, about to celebrate Kwanzaa, a seven-day, African-American culture celebration. It was held at the Black Theology Center (the Center for Study and Application of Black Theology) in the heart of the Black community in Des Moines, Iowa, where I grew up. The center’s mission was to help foster an awareness of the need for Black unity, pride, and self-identity.

Parents were dressed in colorful dashikis and wore large proud Afros. Tables were decorated with kinaras—seven-branched candleholders with red, black, and green candles—and with foods that represented a plentiful harvest.

The evening opened with the singing of the Black National Anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson. The celebration continued as we played games like marbles and Mancala, the oldest game in the world, which originated in Africa. We recited Kwanzaa’s Seven Principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

A month later, we celebrated Black History Month, with musical productions and plays. But that observation didn’t end on February 28. We learned about all sorts of Black historical figures year round, such as Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, and others.

Fast forward a few years later, when, for whatever reason, my family no longer participated in the center’s programs. I entered fifth grade and was bused to a school farther away, in a more affluent area of town that was mostly white. I was the only Black kid in many of my classes. We had no Black teachers.

In history classes, there was no mention of Blacks—or any other kinds of people, for that matter. We studied world explorers, like Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan, who were white. We learned about the Founding Fathers and the Framers of the Constitution, like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, who were also all white. And then there were the great American inventors, like Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford—white, white, and white.

Then came Black History Month, where we learned about the “slaves.” Then we learned more about the “slaves.” And even more about the
“slaves.” These lessons usually came through bite-size blurbs in text-heavy books, books that told stories that dehumanized Black people as objects who were beaten, burned, bombed, or whatever white people wanted to do to them. Unlike today, there weren’t many picture book biographies that allowed readers to get to know Black people as human beings, who like to learn, create, love, dream—who make important contributions to our world.

From my studies at the Black Theology Center, I knew there was more to Black history and Black people than what was being taught at that mostly white school. But I was a shy kid who would never speak up.

I am fifty-seven years old today but in many ways, I am still that shy kid. Thankfully, however, I now have a megaphone that I can use to trumpet Black history stories that need to be told. As a children’s book author and illustrator, I have the privilege of creating picture book biographies of these little-known historical figures.

Recently, I illustrated a book about the Father of Black History himself, Carter Reads the Newspaper, written by Deborah Hopkinson, highlights the life of Dr. Carter G. Woodson and his work. In 1926, Woodson created Negro History Week (the precursor to Black History Month, which started in 1970). He was motivated to create an official celebration after a college professor suggested to him that Black people had no history. Woodson set out to change that perception.

I have also illustrated books about baseball executive Effa Manley, astronaut Ronald McNair, inventor Lonnie Johnson, and the high-flying Harlem Globetrotters. As an author, I’ve written stories about outsider artist Bill Traylor, enslaved poet George Moses Horton, and football-playing artist Ernie Barnes (to be released later this fall). My stories explore the lives of Black people in the sciences, agriculture, politics, and law, as well as those who were artists, athletes, and activists. My stories humanize a people historically misrepresented in literature and portrayed as stereotypes.

My most recent book, William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad, highlights the life of a Black abolitionist in Philadelphia who helped hundreds of freedom-seeking people escape slavery on the Underground Railroad. In addition, he documented the stories of people like Harriet Tubman, William and Ellen Craft, Henry “Box” Brown—some of the same people that Carter G. Woodson would later write about.

People often ask me how to expand the study of Black history in the library and classroom, beyond Black History Month. It’s a question that leaves me scratching my head because the answer, in my humble opinion, is simple: Expand Black history in the library and classroom beyond Black History Month. Period. Today, there are many terrific picture book biographies on Black people to share with students. Below are some resources to help find them:

• The Brown Bookshelf is an online initiative where I am a co-contributor. Our mission is to highlight books by Black children’s book creators. Our flagship initiative is called “28 Days Later” (<www.thebrownbookshelf.com/28-days-later>), which we observe during Black History Month, each day highlighting a Black creator and their books.
This year, we started a new initiative called “Generations Book Club” (<www.thebrownbookshelf.com/2020/06/15/generations-book-club-community-culture>). Each month, we offer a themed selection of books for all ages that shows the Black experience in all its shapes and forms.

- I have also been active in the We Need Diverse Books campaign (<www.diversebooks.org>), whose goal is to put more books featuring diverse characters into the hands of all children. Resources and programs can be found on the WNDB website.

- Here Wee Read: Contemporary Living for Book Loving Families (<www.hereweeread.com/podcast>) is a website and podcast with a focus on books featuring Black people.

- The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation (<www.ezra-jack-keats.org/about-the-ejk-award>) gives awards to books that reflect our diverse population, the universal experience of childhood, and the strength of family.

- The Coretta Scott King Book Awards (<www.ala.org/rt/emiert/csbookawards>) are given annually to outstanding African-American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African-American culture and universal human values.

- Lee & Low Books (<www.leeandlow.com>) is the largest multicultural children’s book publisher in the United States.

Black history is American history, and therefore all children benefit when it is included in school curricula. But, for the sake of Black children who need to see themselves and their history represented authentically in books, and for other kids who need to learn about and empathize with other people and cultures, that history needs to expand beyond the one month. Erasure is another form of dehumanization.

I am a more confident Black man knowing more about the rich history of my people and the contributions they’ve made to our world.

Don Tate is the award-winning illustrator of numerous books for children, including Swish! The Slam-Dunking, Alley-Ooping, High-Flying Harlem Globetrotters (Little, Brown, and Company), Carter Reads the Newspaper (Peachtree Publishing), No Small Potatoes: Junius G. Groves and His Kingdom in Kansas (Knopf), and Whoosh! Lonnie Johnson’s Super-Soaking Stream of Inventions (Charlesbridge). He is the author and illustrator of William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad (Peachtree Publishing), Strong As Sandow: How Eugen Sandow Became the Strongest Man on Earth (Charlesbridge), Poet: The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton (Peachtree Publishing), for which he won the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award, and It Jes’ Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw (Lee & Low Books), for which he won the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Honor.
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