

KNOWLEDGE QUEST



TRANSFORMING PRACTICE: SCHOOL LIBRARY SUCCESS STORIES IN CHALLENGING TIMES

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225 N. Michigan Ave.
Suite 1300
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800-545-2433, Ext. 4382
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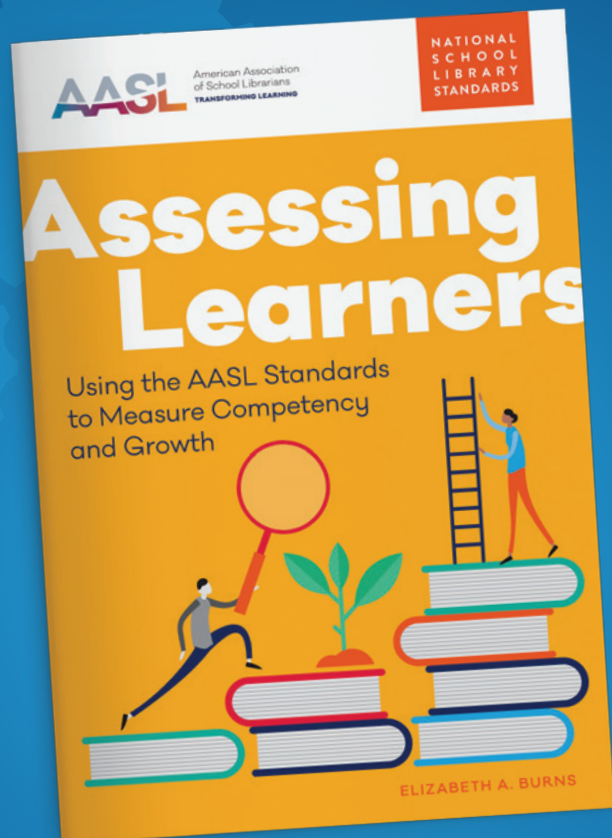


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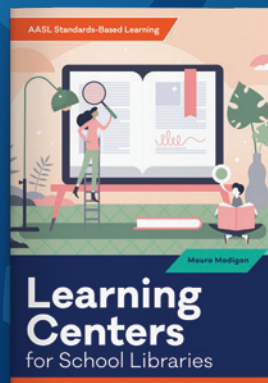
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Meg Featheringham;
phone: (312) 280-1396;
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The COVID slide is real, and school librarians must work with other educators to evaluate students and establish ways to supplement gaps in their education.

Lessons from the COVID Chronicles

Kathy Carroll, 2020–2021 AASL President | aaslcarroll@gmail.com

If I could talk to my March 2020 self, I would say that you are about to embark on an unimaginable journey filled with challenges and self-discovery. I would say this is a marathon, not a sprint; embrace change; and realize that necessity truly is the mother of invention. As educators have continued to adapt to virtual and hybrid learning, we have witnessed the transformation of instruction, and I do not think we will ever return to the status quo. I think many of these changes would have happened eventually, but the pandemic and other variables sped up education's evolution. So, whether a Luddite or a technophile, we must acknowledge that components of virtual and hybrid learning are now a permanent part of education.

Our transition to virtual learning began abruptly. There was no comprehensive preparation, no systematic distribution of devices, nor unified training for educators and students. When we were thrust into this new world, school librarians promptly implemented ways to support our learning communities. There were many missteps, yet somehow, we persevered. I clearly remember in the early days how school librarians worked with school personnel to quickly distribute devices to students, some of whom spent hours in parking lots and other locations to access the internet. We sought ways to best interact with our learners and intensified our collaborations with colleagues, caregivers, and our communities. We school librarians were in uncharted territory but consistently embodied the best parts of our profession.

When we were thrust into this new world, school librarians promptly implemented ways to support our learning communities.

One early lesson I learned during the pandemic was that sometimes too much is simply too much. An abundant number of resources was suddenly made available when we abruptly shifted to virtual learning. Vendors, publishers, and other groups generously offered their wares in an effort to help support learners. Many of us quickly shared these resources with our faculty and parents but soon realized the need to carefully curate and distribute them. This lesson learned reinforced my belief that our best work happens when we exercise discernment and rely on AASL's *National School Library Standards* for guidance.

The loss of classroom communities, daily structure, and continuity impacted learning. The COVID slide is real, and school librarians must work with other educators to evaluate students and establish ways to supplement gaps in their education. We can't assume "They will just have to catch up." We have to be strategic in creating plans to identify and help students who need additional support.

I learned that when we ignore inequities, there will eventually be a day of reckoning. Some schools were poised to shift to a virtual environment, while others struggled. Students without reliable, fast internet, suitable devices for schoolwork, or trained educators to guide them are at an unfair disadvantage. I believe that education and equitable access to technology will continue to be the cornerstone for success in the future.

I have a new respect for our need for personal connections and rites of passage. Throughout the pandemic educators have sought to maintain a semblance of normalcy, and school librarians continue to provide academic and personal support to our learners. From the onset of remote learning, we provided virtual book clubs and read-alouds. Virtual crafts, games, and general daily gatherings were used to encourage learners to stay connected. We helped parents and caregivers navigate the technology so crucial to their children's success. We have consistently found ways to do what is needed for our learning communities.

AASL has offered town halls for school librarians to communicate with each other. Through these town halls, AASL and school librarians from across the country provided resources to assist in working with our learning communities. More importantly, these town halls offered us a sense of community. Universally, society created ways to celebrate milestones. Birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths, and every other human experience were somehow acknowledged during this time. I have learned that regardless of the challenges, nothing will ever replace our need for human connections.

I've learned that school libraries are no place for cowards. There were numerous times during the pandemic when moving forward was unnerving, yet staying complacent was not an option. Across our country, school libraries were turned into classrooms, colleagues served as substitute or classroom teachers, and programs were diminished or eliminated. This has been a time for us to show a united front and extol our role as essential workers, not optional staffing. We are frontline workers in education and need policies in place to cement our roles. In the AASL Strategic Plan, the education policy goal is to "influence local, state, and national policy to ensure that school libraries are well-funded and fully staffed with full-time, certified school librarians and dedicated support personnel" (2019). In January 2021, AASL played an integral role in crafting a letter to then President-Elect Joe Biden's transition team stressing how school librarians are an equity-oriented solution to some of the most pressing concerns facing educators at this moment. When I announced this on social media, I

This has been a time for us to show a united front and extol our role as essential workers, not optional staffing. We are frontline workers in education and need policies in place to cement our roles.

included the hashtag #ProactiveNotReactive. We must be tireless and strategic advocates for ourselves.

This is my last column as president of AASL. It has been my honor to represent school librarians. I have had the opportunity to serve during one of the most eventful times in recent history. Yet regardless of what transpired, I could always count on our members to do what is best for learners. Thank you all for your contributions—our association is only as strong as our members. School librarians are an amazing group of professionals, and I know we will continue to make great advancements. I am excited for what lies ahead for our profession. Thank you all for your hard work, commitment, and dedication. I have never been prouder to be a school librarian, and I know that our future is bright and that the best is yet to come!

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.

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AASL. 2019. "AASL Strategic Plan." <www.ala.org/aasl/govern/strategic-plan> (accessed Feb. 2, 2021).



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

The Lessons We're Still Learning

Barbara Gabaldón | gabaldon_ba@aps.edu

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

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

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

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

Our contributors all reveal responsiveness, or real-time futurecasting, while supporting the Shared Foundations in our National School Library Standards: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barbara Gabaldón is a teacher-librarian at Atrisco Heritage Academy High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is the social media co-chair for the Land of Enchantment Book Award Selection Committee for New Mexico. She is a member of AASL and serves on the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board. She authored the article “Regard More, Not Regard Less” in the January/February 2020 issue of Knowledge Quest.

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Position Statement on Labeling Practices

The AASL Board of Directors approved the following position statement on February 18, 2021.

Background:

School library collections are places where learners can explore interests safely and without restrictions; they are not merely extensions of classroom book collections or classroom teaching methods. A minor's right to access resources freely and without restriction has long been and continues to be the position of the American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). The AASL *National School Library Standards* emphasize the importance of a school library collection that "is physically and intellectually accessible" and where access is "best met at the time of need" (2018). These standards describe the school librarian's ability to work "with learners to ensure that they are able to independently evaluate resources and make responsible and ethical decisions regarding the use of these resources" (AASL 2018, 117). Furthermore, the International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) *School Library Guidelines* (2015) affirm the ethical responsibilities of school librarians to promote intellectual freedom, access, and privacy. IFLA guidelines maintain that school librarians "must endeavour to put the rights of the library users before their own comfort and convenience and avoid being biased by their personal attitudes and beliefs in providing library service" (2015, 30).

These commitments have implications for school librarians' labeling practices related to classification and shelving practices, labeling content and reading levels, and protecting learners' privacy.

Position:

Classification and Shelving Practices

School librarians' classification and shelving practices should support learners' ability to meet their information needs while avoiding

reductive classification choices that narrowly define readers and/or books.

Librarians use classification systems and spine labels to organize and identify library resources by call number to help patrons locate general subject areas or specific fiction, non-fiction, reference, audiovisual, or other items. Best practice in school libraries includes books and other resources being shelved using a standard classification system that also enables learners to find resources in other libraries, such as a public library, from which they may borrow materials. School librarians should teach learners how to navigate their library classification systems, as well as how their classification system may differ from other libraries, such as public or academic libraries.

Classification by genre can be a valid shelving practice when done with attention to systematic classification, established subject headings, or other commonly used genre labels. School librarians considering reorganizing or reclassifying their library collections by genre should consult current research on genre-based classification in school libraries as well as collaborate with other librarians, educators, learners, and families to balance the many benefits and constraints of such systems. For example, B. Trott and V. Novak (2006) weigh the potential for creating more browsable collections against the possibility of reductive labels or classification choices that narrow the audience of a book. Furthermore, school librarians should consider cultural biases and power relations when creating genre-based labels related to a book's content, as discussed in the next section.

Labeling Content

School librarians should avoid using prejudicial and identity-based labeling practices.

The ALA's "Labeling and Rating Systems: An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights*" (2014) makes a distinction between viewpoint-neutral directional labels that increase learners' access to information and support their First Amendment right to read and prejudicial labels, which are based on value judgments used to warn patrons or limit access to certain materials. A label that describes materials as "controversial" or warns readers of "mature themes" is an example of a label that contains a value judgment, since what is defined as controversial varies widely from person to person. Moreover, the National Council of Teachers of English (2018) argues that reducing books and materials to isolated, potentially controversial features serves to reduce learners' access to books both for leisure reading and for inclusion in classrooms. Labels that make determinations about a book's content are an infringement of a learner's First Amendment rights to free speech and their ability to make determinations about what content is appropriate for them. Instead, school librarians should support each learner's right to make determinations about content.

School library professionals should also exercise caution when creating labels that may serve to further stigmatize a historically marginalized identity group (e.g., books by or about LGBTQIA+ authors or Black, indigenous, and people of color). Labeling practices that separate marginalized groups from the collection may seek to narrow the audience for a book or make accessing these resources more difficult. For example, labels signifying LGBTQIA+ characters and content could make materials difficult to locate for patrons who are not specifically looking for LGBTQIA+ titles but may be browsing for romance or science fiction (both genres that contain LGBTQIA+ books). Likewise, when using content labels such as "urban fiction," school librarians should carefully consider their definition of "urban" and ensure that it does not suggest monolithic identities based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status or experiences that focus on stereotypes of urban crime or violence.

Reading-Level Labels

School librarians should resist labeling or arranging books by any readability scale and should instead advocate for the development of policies that do not require library staff to restrict access to books based on reading or age level.

Some school librarians face pressure from administrators and classroom educators to label and arrange library collections according to reading levels. However,

commercial leveling systems are an imperfect predictor of a book's reading level since they generally rely on a single quantitative measure that ignores other aspects of text complexity included in the Common Core State Standards like the text's qualitative complexity (e.g., the level's meaning or the structure of a text) and considerations specific to the reader (e.g., motivation or background knowledge) or the instructional task or purpose. Moreover, learner browsing behaviors can be profoundly altered with the addition of external reading-level labels. When reading-level labels are tied to rewards or grades, learner browsing becomes mainly a search for books that must be read and tests completed for individual or classroom point goals and/or grades.

School libraries that serve broad age and grade levels (e.g., a single library that serves grades K–12) may also feel pressure from administrators or parents to restrict younger learners' access to certain parts of the collection. These contexts present clear challenges for school librarians charged with serving a diverse group of learners within a school library, and whenever possible, the school librarian should work with administrators, educators, and parents to create library policies that reduce unnecessary or arbitrary distinctions between ages or grades. Providing information to educators, learners, and families about how the school library is organized and encouraging families to be engaged with their own child's reading selections is preferable to requiring written permission or restricting access to certain library sections based on a learner's age or grade, since the needs, interests, and readiness levels of two children of the same age may be vastly different.

It is also important for school policies to recognize the distinctions between a school library's need to be accessible to all learners and a classroom library's more narrowly targeted collection, which may focus on the needs of a specific age group or instructional goal. Because the school library's goal is to meet the needs of its entire community's information-seeking, curricular, and leisure reading goals, its collection and labeling practices will necessarily be more inclusive and less restrictive than some classroom libraries.

Protecting Learner Privacy

School librarians have a responsibility to protect learner privacy and confidentiality when considering any practice that places a label on the outside of a book or on library shelving.

Labeling and shelving a book with an assigned reading level or an indicator of content on its spine allows other learners to observe the reading level and reading interests of their peers and should be avoided. When it comes to reading levels, only a learner, the child's parents or guardian, the teacher, and the school librarian (as appropriate) should have knowledge of a learner's reading capabilities. I. C. Fountas and G. S. Pinnell, creators of a widely used text-leveling system, argue that "levels have no place in classroom libraries, in school libraries, in public libraries, or on report cards" because their goal was to create a system of leveling books to aid teachers in instruction, not to place labels on learners (Parrott 2017). Any classification system that relies on external labels for readability levels labels the reader and violates First Amendment rights to privacy.

Additionally, some content labels may infringe on learner privacy as well and can impede a learner's ability to read and access materials of interest (see "The Freedom to Read Statement"). This is particularly important when considering LGBTQIA+ materials. Labels indicating LGBTQIA+ characters and issues could be stigmatizing and hinder access to materials for some learners who may fear being outed to their peers or adults (Rainbow Round Table 2016). All learners and users of a school library should be free to choose books without leveled or labeled restrictions.

Appendix:

Questions to Guide Practice

When creating policies and practices related to the labeling of books by genre, content, or reading level, ask yourself these questions to determine whether you have addressed concerns of privacy, learner First Amendment rights, and potential behavior modification in browsing and reading motivations. Consider:

1. Whom might these labels help to find or access resources? Whom might they deter from finding or accessing materials?
2. Are the labels restrictive (limiting access for some learners) or directional (making resources more accessible)?
3. Are the labels related to determinations about controversial content? Who would think this content is controversial?

4. Are the labels marking one identity group as different from "normal" identities? Do the labels center stereotypical understandings of marginalized groups?
5. Are the labels providing information about the reading level or potentially controversial content of the book? Are those labels violating learners' First Amendment right to privacy (meaning they are prominent and visible to anyone who can see the book)?
6. Do the labels make judgments about content, level, or "appropriateness" that should more appropriately be made by learners and their families?

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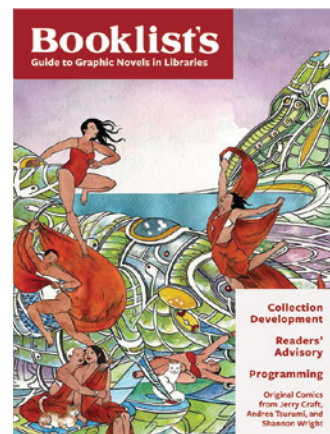
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The Critical Need for and Responsibilities of District-Level School Library Supervisors

The AASL Board of Directors approved the following position statement on January 14, 2021.

Position:

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) believes that a qualified, district-level school library supervisor is a fundamental component of college, career, and community readiness for students in PreK–12 education. By providing leadership, vision, and support, the school library supervisor collaborates with district- and building-level administrators, school librarians, and dedicated support staff to create and sustain effective school libraries. The school library supervisor facilitates high-quality curricular development and delivery through equitable access to diverse print and digital materials, dynamic physical and virtual learning environments, development of multiple literacies, and the creation of participatory learning and guided inquiry experiences for the district and school community.

The district-level school library supervisor:

- Formulates, oversees, and administers, in collaboration with district stakeholders, a progressive district-wide school library vision in alignment with the district's mission, goals, objectives, and strategic plan.
- Advocates for equity in both human and financial resources to strategically support the learning community's needs.
- Leads school librarians in implementing the *National School Library Standards* to support learners and educators at all levels.

- Guides and promotes adherence to policies and procedures regarding intellectual property, privacy, and digital citizenship in accordance with the district's code of ethics.
- Provides exemplary professional development to foster innovation in school libraries and classrooms using various technologies, instructional strategies, and research-based methods.
- Evaluates the effectiveness of school librarians and school libraries in partnership with administrators.
- Promotes dialogue on the school library's impact by collecting and sharing data and evidence of practice.
- Guides district-level curation of resources and the acquisition of high-quality materials that are diverse and inclusive, current, and relevant.

Background:

District-level school library supervisors are essential in the implementation of effective school libraries. In the first data reported nationwide since the 1970s, studies identified supervisors as having significant responsibilities in leadership, personnel, teaching and learning, facilities, technology, finances, and professional development for their school districts and school libraries (DiScala et al. 2019; Weeks et al. 2017). These responsibilities are echoed throughout the AASL *National School Library Standards* as the supervisor “develops an effective plan and process for providing school libraries that support the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the school

district" (2018b, 174). This position statement provides guidance for school district leaders and administrators in the necessity and justification for placing qualified individuals in the district administration to supervise and coordinate school libraries and services to achieve the district's mission.

Definitions:

- **Appropriate Staffing for School Libraries:** "Every learner in every school...should have access to an updated school library with a full-time, certified school librarian" (AASL 2019).
- **District-Level School Library Supervisor:** A member of the district-level administrative team, with school library certification or experience, who is responsible for supervising and coordinating district- and building-level school libraries.
- **Effective School Libraries:** "An effective school library has a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every student" (AASL 2018a).

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The poster features a background image of a stack of books. On the left, a circular logo for IASL 2021 is shown, with a map of Texas and the text 'DENTON, TX USA'. The main text is centered on a white rectangular area. At the bottom, there is a red circular graphic containing a grid of speaker portraits and a URL for a full listing.

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TRANSFORMING PRACTICE

School Library
Success Stories
in Challenging Times

Leanne Ellis

LEllis3@schools.nyc.gov

Melissa Jacobs

MJacobs7@schools.nyc.gov





During the first week of March 2020, election coverage dominated the news. A few headlines mentioned COVID-19 as a new flu-like illness originating from China, but even the first reported case in New York City on March 1 changed few behaviors or captured much attention. Two weeks later, schools shut down. The New York City School Library System (NYCSLS) had one day to absorb this abrupt disruption. Educators knew they had to be strategic with next steps. The shift to remote learning meant a significant change in library programming, instruction, and resource delivery.

As director of NYCSLS, I (Melissa Jacobs) saw this as an unprecedented opportunity to create lasting change for school libraries to address issues of equitable access, diversity, and digital literacy. For years, school libraries have been marginalized and, in some cases, eliminated completely. Prior to the pandemic, a shortage of qualified school librarians increased nationally, and many graduate programs that have been educating the next generation of school librarians closed their doors.

The swift pivot to remote teaching was a good opportunity to demonstrate the significant value school librarians add to instruction and literacy. School librarians are instrumental in supporting remote learning and have been providing blended learning opportunities for years. School librarians are typically early adopters of technology and are proficient in e-resources, electronic databases, copyright, and access. School librarians identify themselves as instructional leaders, and now it was time for them to be acknowledged as such by K–12 education.

Defining Virtual School Library Practice

To start, I had the NYCSLS team of library coordinators use our “School Library Job Practices” document, sourced from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) “School Library Media Program Rubric,” to build a tool to help school librarians adapt to their new work environment. By adding a second column for remote practices, we aligned each role and responsibility of a school librarian and translated it into a virtual practice. Just like that, we had a new foundational document: “The Translation of Practice for School Librarians.”

Once completed, we posted the “Translation of Practice” document to our system website (available at <http://nycdoe.libguides.com>) and shared it on our city-wide listserv, NYCSLIST, and with other school library system directors from New York state. The document provides guidance for best practices during remote learning, from collaborative teaching to collection development to applying the *Empire State Information Fluency Continuum*, the New York state continuum of information and media literacy skills lesson plans are built on. The document helps school librarians articulate their role in teaching, programming, professional development, and resource access for themselves, their administrators and teachers, their students, and their families. It provides a framework for how school librarians support learning communities with professional learning, resources, collection development, grants, and programming.

A City-wide E-Book Platform

At the beginning of the pandemic, New York City school districts had been trying to acquire a single platform for e-books. It’s an initiative that had been in process for

the past decade plus. Many unsuccessful attempts had left a patchwork of platforms that were either publisher specific or dependent on Destiny Library Automation, thus limiting the content available and adding obstacles to accessing e-books. Unfortunately, schools without a school librarian ultimately did not have access to digital content that extended beyond the publisher platforms. Although the majority of these platforms marketed themselves as “libraries,” they routinely assessed students after each book, limited the content to just their own imprints, and taught kids how to read rather than how to love reading.

New York City needed an e-book platform and the shift to remote learning exasperated the need even more. Enter Sora, an OverDrive platform developed exclusively for the K–12 audience. Sora provides a bridge to the public library system, allowing readers to search the Sora collections and the public library catalog. Users can add multiple public library systems to extend access. For a city like New York, with three very unique and autonomous public library systems, this is a game changer.

Implementing this system allowed users to conduct one search on a single platform, allowing discoverability of titles in all systems. Users can borrow titles from any of these systems with their public library card. Alternatively, if a public library system authorizes Sora to connect and authenticate users, a library card is not required. School and public librarians working together lead to lifelong reading, higher library usage, and a deeper understanding among the public of the significant role libraries play in our lives. School librarians are instrumental in bridging the gap between K–12 education and adult library use, and Sora can help make that bridge a reality.

The swift pivot to remote teaching was a good opportunity to demonstrate the significant value school librarians add to instruction and literacy.

Professional Development

NYCSLS offers ongoing support and professional learning opportunities to school librarians and classroom teachers. Prior to the pandemic, professional development and organized professional learning communities all met in person. With schools shut down, we knew we had to adapt our approach to professional learning and update our listings to align with the distance learning needs of educators. The early focus of these training sessions was on developing websites, designing virtual classrooms, adapting lessons for remote learning, and teasing out tasks from the “Translation of Practice” document.

Our revised professional development plan shortened sessions to thirty minutes to an hour, creating meaningful learning experiences that could have immediate applications. Sessions incorporated breakout rooms for small group work; used interactive digital tools such as Google Docs, Jamboard, Flipgrid, Pear Deck, and Padlet to engage users in the learning process; and built on past knowledge of librarianship, online research and instruction, and blended

learning. Additionally, all sessions are recorded to build up a library of professional development offerings for educators to access at their leisure.

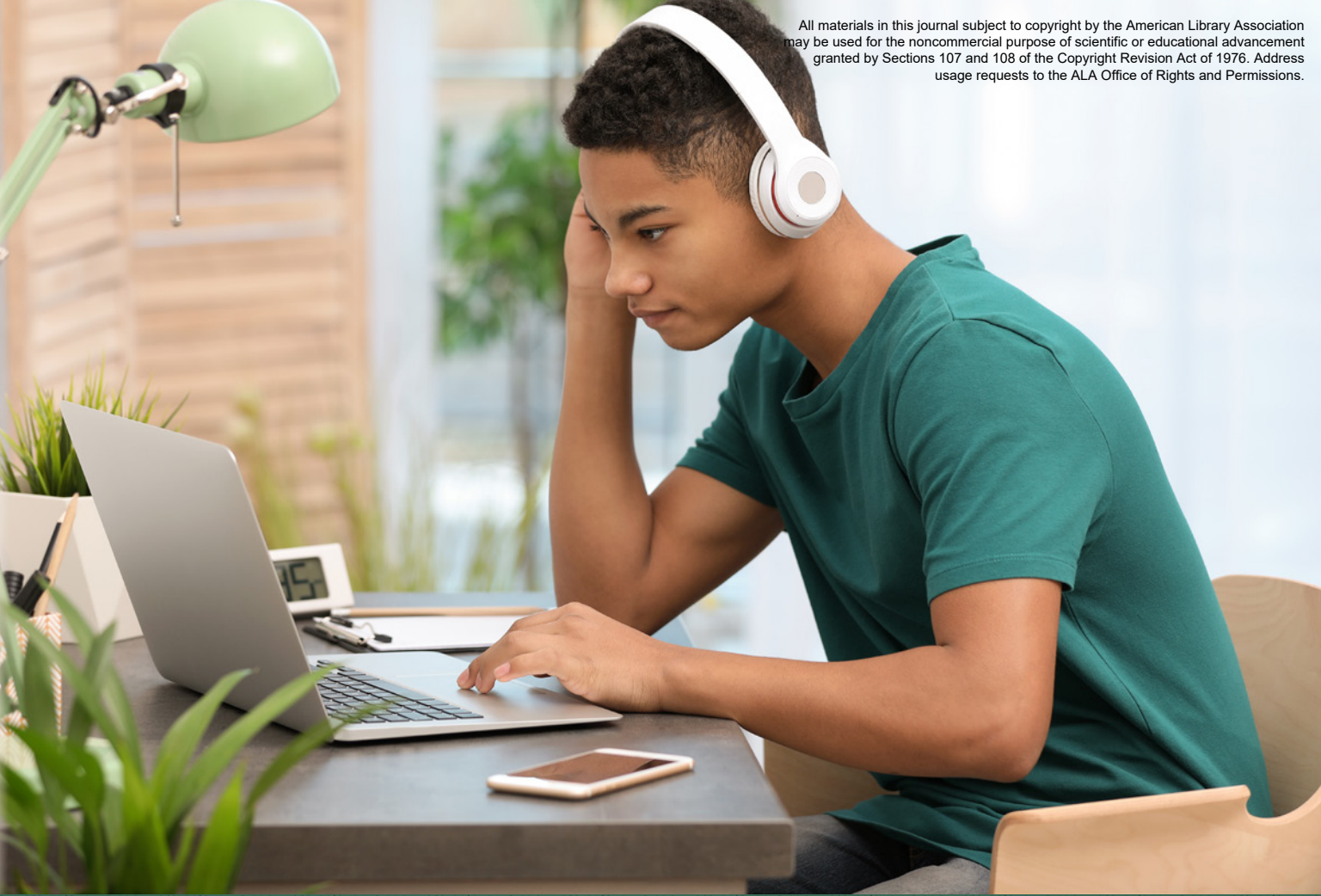
As we move into the second year of the pandemic and reflect on the year of teaching and learning, there are professional practices we will sustain post-pandemic. The past year has taught us how to adapt our teachings to a variety of learners, integrate collaborative technology, and maximize opportunities to engage adult learners. When normalcy returns, these changes will be incorporated into our regular professional development plan because we are committed to continuing our offerings of remote learning opportunities.

Digital Presence and Technology

The library website is the new library space. Since students cannot walk into physical libraries to check out books, use computers, see displays, and take part in in-person instruction and programs, the library website brings the resources and events to them. We teach Google Sites to librarians and educators so they know how to display curated

resources, add interactive widgets from databases to virtual gaming, post events and news and video how-tos, share examples of student work and images, and make appointments for office hours.

We also teach librarians how to integrate essential technology tools into their sites and programming, such as Wakelet, Animoto, Smore, Canva, and Jamboards. In November 2020 NYCSLS partnered with the magazine *Teaching and Learning* (T&L) and the NYC DOE Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support and the Office of Digital Inclusion to offer our first day-long virtual conference, titled “Beyond Access Forum” (<www.techlearningevents.com/BeyondAccessForum2020>), with three strands for technology, libraries, and digital citizenship. T&L worked with each department to choose presenters and handled the registration of vendors, presenters, and participants. We had close to 2,000 participants, compared to 500 for our typical in-person conference with universally positive feedback. We plan



The existing relationships between school and public librarians in MyLibraryNYC member schools allowed students to quickly pivot to utilize their electronic library cards at home, access remote resources efficiently, and continue benefiting from the assistance from outreach librarians.

to replicate our virtual conference success with spring and fall 2021 offerings.

Information Literacy

If nothing else, the pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning and instruction. The *Empire State Information Fluency Continuum* (<<https://slsa-nys.libguides.com/ifc/home>>) is the backbone of information literacy skills instruction for New York state. Dr. Barbara K. Stripling and Dr. Jen Cannell revised this compendium of skills and assessments in 2019 with a team of librarians and system directors who had first-hand experience using and implementing the ESIFC since its inception. The updated ESIFC focuses on digital and media literacy, student agency and reflection, design thinking, and social responsibility. NYCSLS created lesson plans (<<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/Irt893LA-6njYAOgaGeykuAMbawVdZVPt>>) for each of the benchmark skills for preK through 12th grades during the summer of 2020 to articulate how to teach a process-based lesson with the information literacy skill as the learning objective. NYCSLS wanted to give school librarians the tools needed to take on leadership roles within their buildings for instruction, resource access, and professional development. Our ESIFC workshops center on remote and in-person learning with the lessons and detail how to integrate them across grade levels and curricula, such as digital citizenship.

Speaking of digital citizenship, with more people using social media and communication tools, it is no surprise conspiracies, disinformation, misleading context, and biased viewpoints increased online. So, NYCSLS chunked our misinformation series for educators into one-hour webinars on topics from reading laterally to analyzing bias

to teaching students to recognize logical fallacies in claims without evidence. The series presents highlights from various curricula—Stanford History (<<https://cor.stanford.edu>>), Common Sense (<www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/curriculum>), PBS (<www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/tag/media-literacy/page/2/>)—to help educators add those lessons and resources into their instruction with students.

Community and System Partnerships

Partnerships are vital for effective instruction. Thrust into remote learning with little warning, educators had to problem solve from multiple perspectives and share ideas, strategies, and resources to support student achievement.

MyLibraryNYC

MyLibraryNYC is a nearly decade-long partnership between NYCSLS and the three public library systems—New York, Brooklyn, and Queens. The partnership allows participating schools to request the free delivery of teacher sets (multi-title topic sets on subjects from civil rights to health and hygiene and sets for book clubs, storytelling, hands-on learning, games, and manipulatives) to support learning and instruction.

Additionally, teachers and students receive public library accounts with enhanced borrowing privileges including no fines and fees. MyLibraryNYC Outreach Librarians build strong relationships with member schools through site visits, office hours, ongoing professional development, family workshops, and events like author visits and gaming days.

When the pandemic shut down New York City, the support provided by the public library systems was

needed more than ever. The existing relationships between school and public librarians in MyLibraryNYC member schools allowed students to quickly pivot to utilize their electronic library cards at home, access remote resources efficiently, and continue benefiting from the assistance from outreach librarians.

Digital Teacher Sets

The switch to remote learning and introduction of Sora provided a golden opportunity to build and offer digital text sets to teachers. Currently, there are two pilots running in which participating schools and campuses (libraries that serve different schools in the same building) request book club sets to assign to students in the Sora platform by school, grade, or class. The process involves a collection specialist identifying popular print teacher sets and new titles/series, investigating e-book availability and licensing and, in some cases, seeking alternative title suggestions, and then procuring the titles. Pilot schools request the titles and copies they want via e-mail. We confirm the number of sets needed by each librarian and create the carts in Marketplace, OverDrive's ordering portal, for student access.

School librarians are thrilled to finally acquire the books students and teachers want and need. As Lisnerva Nuez, an elementary librarian at P.S. 4 Duke Ellington, a pre-K to fifth-grade school, told us, "I've been struggling to give the kids access to the books they want." The school has MyOn and Epic, but "the books the kids want to read are not on these platforms." She went on to say, "I was happy to see *The One and Only Ivan* [as a selection for the MyLibrary Digital Teacher Set Pilot] because it was one of my book clubs because that's something that I can actually send the kids and have access to. I mean, yeah, I have 11 book clubs.



I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to schedule them all" (2020).

Students having access to the books they want is a significant challenge during remote/hybrid learning. We stepped up outreach to schools to encourage the promotion of public library access for students and families. Not only do students significantly increase the number of e-book titles available by joining the public library, but they also increase their connection to databases, virtual programming, homework help, and primary sources. The MyLibraryNYC School Outreach Coordinators have doubled and tripled efforts to connect students to available resources during the constant shifts of school openings and closings, in-person learning to hybrid to remote and back. We also restarted the delivery of physical teacher sets to schools in January 2021.

Common Sense Media

With more schools using remote and blended learning, teachers turned their focus to digital citizenship and media literacy. The pandemic

offered NYCSLS an opportunity to partner and collaborate with Common Sense Media to align the *Empire State Information Fluency Continuum Lesson Plans* and assessments with Common Sense's newly revised "Digital Citizenship Curriculum" (www.common sense.org/education/digital-citizenship).

Collaborative workshops were presented virtually to educators to familiarize them with the new digital citizenship curriculum alignment to the ESIFC lesson plans (<https://nycdoe.libguides.com/digitalcitizenship>), including suggestions on how to integrate the curriculum to their current instruction. For example, the ESIFC lesson plan on bias is an opportunity for educators to extend student analysis of the 12th-grade Common Sense Media lesson on hate speech by examining bias and perspective. Another example is the fourth-grade Common Sense Media lesson titled "Super Digital Citizen." Students create their digital superhero as a closing activity. By pairing this lesson with ESIFC lessons, students develop opportunities to hone critical visual analysis

skills, examine story elements, and create a netiquette checklist.

Connecting to Students and Families

School librarians have successfully and creatively found ways to connect to their students and families throughout this challenging year by using our "Translation of Practice" document, Sora e-book platform, professional workshops, and networking events to learn and share ideas, tools, and strategies. Lisnerva Nuez spent her first year as a librarian devising student inquiry projects to align with classroom content. Projects included having fifth-grade students design which type of house could withstand a natural disaster and having second-grade students code animal movements. This year found Lisnerva pulled for lunch duty during hybrid learning, so she pushes into classrooms but finds students "get excited when I go to them because they know that I have something planned for them to do. And they know that I'm going to teach them something, and they want that" (2020). And she is teaching

She finds appearing in her students' homes every day brings a face to the school library for parents.

her students to problem solve and be innovative thinkers.

For a unit on journeys, she had students read the book *My Librarian Is a Camel*. She explained there are many countries and communities in the world without libraries, so the student assignment was to design solutions for places that don't have access to libraries. Lisnerva told us how her lessons resonated with students beyond the classroom: "Afterwards, their teacher was telling me how they were connecting the word innovation to other things. I'm like, 'Listen, you have to think outside the box.'" Lisnerva's students keep her motivated and engaged. "It's just remembering that we're doing this for the kids and that the skills that we can impart with them are things that with this pandemic is demonstrating are needed and are going to be needed" (2020).

Lori Feldstein-Gardner, an elementary librarian at P.S. 112M Jose Celso Barbosa in Manhattan, a pre-K to second-grade school, decided to use a daily school-wide read-aloud as a means to bring a fractured school community together

around a fun and meaningful experience. She uses puppets for the read-aloud and gets e-mails and posts from students asking about Alan Gator and Mindy Moose. She finds appearing in her students' homes every day brings a face to the school library for parents. Whereas before, Lori might have had twenty parents for a monthly workshop, she now sees 50 to 75 online in the evening. Also, Lori goes online ten minutes before the read-aloud so she can build one-on-one relationships with students. She says, "Building a relationship with me that is strong will translate to them having a strong relationship with the library" (2020).

Cynthia Turnquest-Jones, known as T.J. to her students, does a read-aloud at noon every day for her students and creates interactive activities. Cynthia works as a librarian at P.S. 46 Arthur Tappan in Harlem, a pre-K to 8th-grade school. She shows clips from Storyline Online (www.storylineonline.net), which streams videos featuring celebrities such as Oprah or Michele Obama reading children's books alongside creatively produced

She says, "Building a relationship with me that is strong will translate to them having a strong relationship with the library" (2020).

illustrations. During one of the discussions, a student told Cynthia how terrible COVID-19 is and how he misses his friends and cannot stand it. So she began Wellness Wednesdays "because I found books that were geared towards social and emotional learning and yoga and breathing, and I told them to bring out their blankets or the towels on Wednesdays, and they were there" (2020).

Cynthia also knows many of her students do not have books at home, especially after posting titles to read to go along with their classroom studies. She remembered all the books lying in various closets and book rooms from past curriculum initiatives and programs. So, she asked her principal if she could



arrange to give the books away. Her principal agreed it was a great idea, so Cynthia began to gather a book, a bookmark, and a mask in a bag to give away to families when they dropped off their child for in-person learning (about forty percent of the students come in on different days of the week). She grouped the books by theme and posted questions and activities students could do with them. And Cynthia makes sure to give the books away when greeting parents at the start of every school day to take their child's temperature. She volunteered to be out front to make those connections with families—whether by telling them where they could do early voting or giving away free books. And her next move? Distributing free books from Disney! A connection with the mayor of the town where she lives led to a call saying, "We have six pallets of books that we need to shut out of this warehouse, and can you get them? And I was like 'Yeah'" (2020).

Teacher Collaboration

Jhenelle Robinson started her first day at Lehman Campus just after the pandemic hit last March and schools closed. She was introduced remotely but didn't hesitate to help teachers set up their Google Classrooms

and facilitate chats with students. Having the "Translation of Practice" document available "empowered me to go up to [teachers] and say, 'This is a menu of services that I can present to you all.' So the book club was something that I presented to one of the administrators, and they jumped on it" (2020). Jhenelle plans to develop these relationships further when schools resume in-person learning. Remote learning helped her lay the groundwork for successful collaborations with multiple schools and teachers. "I do think it has been fairly successful communicating with them and letting them know that I am available to be awesome for them" (2020).

For Lori Feldstein-Gardner, remote learning presented untold opportunities for her to rise to collaborative preeminence with teachers. After schools closed, teachers had a few days of professional development to transition to remote learning. They had to set up their Google Classrooms. Many panicked. So Lori stepped in and offered to help.

"That was a huge game-changer in my relationships with pretty much all of the teachers... And so being somebody who they could call anytime, text anytime, set up a video

chat with, and could walk them through how to do things that were mind-boggling for them was huge. They immediately started to see me as someone who could help them" (2020).

Lori finds teachers seek out the support she had always offered because they need it right away. She makes lists of resources and creates webpages by grade level with linked book cover images to direct students to the appropriate e-book. Lori instructs teachers on how to help students access e-books from different platforms.

Lisnerva Nuez also finds teachers "are more receptive to the help than they would have been before" (2020). In her case, being assigned to the library at the beginning of the 2019–2020 school year brought tension and resentment from other teachers. They perceived the library role as an easy one reserved for senior staff near retirement, eager to get away from the classroom's perceived demands. The school hadn't had a library program for years, but in working with our team, the school administration realized the significant impact of a strong school library on students. So they selected Lisnerva for her passion for inquiry

and reading, critical thinking, and problem solving. During this past year, Lisnerva has done several professional workshops for teachers on practical topics like making PDFs editable or creating a Google Slide:

So things that I thought would be useful to them. And a lot of them were like, 'This was good. Thank you, this was helpful. Can you break it down for me next time?' So I made them resources on Google Classroom, where I posted the step-by-step videos that I did for them. I also e-mailed it to them. So the relationships are there, and we're trying to help each other out. (2020)

Lessons from This Untraditional Year

More than anything, the pandemic and remote/hybrid learning taught us how much we need to learn. But we can learn anything as long as we have a growth mindset to welcome challenges, experiment with instruction, and push forward with change. As Lisnerva told us: "With times like this, it's very easy to get discouraged, and it's very easy to be swayed... But if you are persistent and if you are tenacious, and if you remember who we were here for, which is for the kids, then I think it makes things a lot easier" (2020). And Lori said it

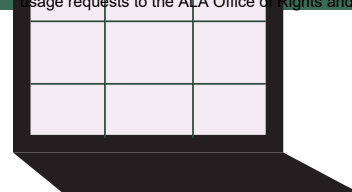
best about how to position the school library throughout this pandemic:

How can this be an opportunity to show that the library can help solve things? That's what's constantly on my mind. How can I, in every situation, use this as a chance to show that the library can make this easier or can solve



Melissa Jacobs is the director of library services at the New York City School Library System.

She is an executive board member of the METRO Metropolitan New York Library Association. She serves as a member of the New York Library Association Pathways to Librarianship Task Force. She is a member of AASL and is serving on the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation. She authored the November 2020 School Library Connection article "Making Curricular Connections with Book Awards," the November 2020 CSA News article "The Librarian Is In," and the June 2020 Booklist article "School Librarians Leading through Crisis." She is a board member of Reading with Pictures.



this or can take over part of what you're doing? So you can do something else. (2020)



Leanne Ellis is the school library coordinator for the New York City School Library System. She also

manages the Destiny Library Catalog and the MyLibrary.NYC Project with the three public library systems and delivers extensive professional development. She is a member of AASL and serves on the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board and is a blogger for the Knowledge Quest website.

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HANK FELLOWS

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READING THE ROOM

Sustaining Our Libraries by Identifying
and Responding to the Needs of Our Communities



Suzanne Sannwald
suzannesannwald@gmail.com

Like many school librarians, I love to read. But this past year, doom-scrolling Twitter and refreshing news feeds aside, I have had far less capacity to read as much as I typically do. When our school first closed in March 2020, I packed up stacks of books to help fill my quarantine time. As it turned out, I could not focus on reading books at all, and yet as I reflect on this past year, I did engage in plenty of reading of a different sort: reading the room.

What Do I Mean by Reading the Room?

This year, I also started teaching school library professionals through San José State University's School of Information. I had the opportunity to engage with new and aspiring school librarians as they figured out their role under wholly unprecedented circumstances. As a new school librarian, it can be hard enough to establish new collaborations, but working with other educators is made extra challenging with distance learning. I recall some library school students expressing frustration that they did not have many people at their sites reaching out during this time, but this did not surprise me. Why? Below are a few reasons I shared from my personal experiences:

- **People are busy.** Most educators have more to do than time to do it. Even if we believe that our collaboration may lessen workloads, others may feel that the idea of collaboration is one more thing that will require extra time and effort. And, this is often the case when it comes to substantive collaboration, which takes an investment work-wise in order to create higher-quality learning experiences for students.

It comes down to me observing others in my community, identifying what they need, and then figuring out what I can do from my position to help meet those needs.

- **People don't want to impose.** When I say that people are busy, that includes school library professionals. Teachers at my school are sensitive to the many responsibilities that I juggle and have reached out to me on numerous occasions, opening with, "I'm sorry to bother you..." I remind them that they are never a bother, that I love hearing

from them anytime, and that I prioritize opportunities to work with them.

- **It's on us.** A lot of my workload is not generated from outside the school library but from within. I do not assume others will think of the school library. I cannot wait for others to reach out. It comes down to me observing others in my community, identifying what they need, and then figuring out what I can do from my position to help meet those needs. To me, this is what reading the room is all about. It's about constantly asking myself, "What does my community need now and how can I uniquely contribute?"

Implications of Room Reading

When introducing the concept of reading the room, Rebecca Knight writes:

In every conversation at work, there's the explicit discussion happening—the words being spoken out loud—and the tacit one. To be successful in most organizations, it's important to understand the underlying conversations and reactions that people in the room are having. (2018)

Along these lines, reading the room to identify the needs of our community means figuring out what underlying needs exist, even when people may not explicitly articulate or formally request help. In fact, I think it's common that people may not have consciously identified needs or may lack the language to label them. Sometimes it's hard to know what's missing when it doesn't exist!

Successful room reading also requires that we examine our assumptions. In "Here's the Right Way to Read a Room," Ted Leonhardt reminds us, "While you're busy checking out what everybody else is doing, you project your own experiences (replete with all your personal and cultural biases) onto your perceptions, which could be dead wrong" (2016).

Thus, it is critical that when we believe we have identified what others need, we mindfully test the accuracy of our assessments. After all, to read the room implies that we are in fact noticing and decoding what others are telling us, just indirectly. This demands we interrogate our interpretations to ensure the power dynamic is not about us deciding what others need for them but sensitively receiving signals that reveal needs. It's about intentionally centering others.

A casual framework I find helpful is the Platinum Rule. Countering the Golden Rule to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the Platinum Rule urges us to "treat others the way they want to be treated" (Rutgers n.d.). In other words, is this a need we think they have or one they indeed have? Is our response one that we want to provide or one that they in fact want?

An obvious way to check ourselves is to invite direct conversation and feedback. Another way is to

gauge reactions and note changes in behavior and attitudes. When encouraging sustainable thinking for libraries, Rebekkah Smith Aldrich explains that if we "really listen to communities and hear what it is communities are either struggling with or dreaming of" and if we make sure to align our programming and services accordingly, we will see a shift in their support, because "they'll invest when they see their own goals reflected" (Thomas 2018, 4:02-4:19). We can ask ourselves: Do we have their support? Are they invested?

With the rapidly changing environment, room reading has meant being less planned out and more attuned to the current moment.

Room Reading versus Strategic Planning

Identifying and meeting needs are not new. Under normal circumstances, this is just the type of thing we do when strategic planning for our school libraries. We set goals based on our school and library missions, and these goals are informed by the needs of our community. We may normally have a mix of short-term (e.g., quarterly, semester) and long-term (e.g., annual, five-year) goals, but with the pandemic, it's sometimes felt like goals have been set day to day or even minute to minute. With the rapidly changing environment, room reading has meant being less planned out and more attuned to



Table 1. Identified community needs and responses.

An Initial, Immediate Need: Connecting our community to information and technology resources	
Ways We Responded: - Developing a district-wide "Distance Learning Library Site" with an "Ask A Librarian" Google Form: guhsdlibraries.weebly.com - Offering a distance librarian help line, forwarding my work phone to a dedicated Google Voice number, and offering video-conferencing appointments - Creating a distance learning hub of information resources and links for students and parents: bit.ly/whhs-hub - Creating and crowd-sourcing help guides and tutorials and then sharing them in a searchable Awesome Table embeddable on any district website: bit.ly/guhsd-tutorials - Creating a distance learning launchpad template to help students organize class links and information: bit.ly/whhs-launch - Providing curbside library book and technology services until libraries re-opened for in-person service - Expanding and promoting digital reading resources: bit.ly/guhsd-ereading - Stepping up existing social media with use of Instagram Stories and Live (@westhillslib) and creating "Tech Tok" TikTok tutorials: bit.ly/guhsd-techtok	
An Emergent Need: Connecting people to build community in new ways	
Ways We Responded: As individual site school librarians collaborated with classroom teachers as usual, a new development was the introduction of two major district-wide initiatives.	
Initiative #1: Our first district-wide summer reading program "Growing Readers" - We created a gamified program using the https://gameful.me/ platform designed by two district teachers Mike Skocko and Mick McMurray. - The program offered a variety of reading-related quests for students to complete in order to earn points, level up, and buy prizes. - School librarians monitored and responded to student submissions and hosted other activities such as book discussions.	Initiative #2: Our first district-wide "one book" read - We became a partner with San Diego County's One Book, One San Diego. The 2020 title selection was George Takei's <i>They Called Us Enemy</i>. - Our county library system offered e-book checkout to the title without wait, which we easily promoted thanks to our district's integration of Sora that allows students single sign-on access to the county's digital collection using their school Google account. - In addition to promoting county-wide one book events, we hosted an online discussion specifically for our district, and students, staff members, and administrators across sites attended.
A Persistent, Underlying Need: Connecting efforts to work toward systemic changes related to equity, diversity, and inclusion	
Ways We Responded: In addition to the pandemic, 2020 has also highlighted the critical need for our whole society, including our schools, to improve in the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion. As our district engages in this important work, we as school librarians have found our roles particularly well-matched for contributing to efforts to update curriculum.	
- We started by creating and sharing a resource "Updating Our Classroom Texts: Developing as Culturally Responsive Educators" (bit.ly/rst-texts). - Our district's Diversify Our Narrative (www.diversifyournarrative.com) student chapter organizers reached out to us, and we have been meeting weekly to coordinate efforts. - Collaborating with our district's English language arts curriculum specialist, we helped analyze what English classroom texts are being taught: bit.ly/guhsd-texts-taught.	- We have been applying for grant funds to overcome the barrier of lack of funds to purchase new texts. - With support from the district office, we are hosting our first professional development book study offered as a paid opportunity for teachers. The title we are starting with is <i>The Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People</i>. - As our district works on implementing more systemic changes, including a "Course Representative Analysis Workshop Series," we plan to actively participate in this work alongside and in collaboration with classroom teachers.

the current moment. I have had to set aside existing agendas, nimbly shifting and reinventing the way I work based on ever-changing circumstances and needs.

Reassuringly, even with all the pivoting, the driving mission for my school library has withstood all of the changes. Perhaps more of a tagline, but underpinning all my work nonetheless is the unifying idea: We Connect Here. My adoption of this three-word mission was initially inspired by advice from Aldrich regarding library sustainability. When she posed the challenge to consider “why we do what we do instead of the specifics of what we’re doing” (Thomas 2018, 26:06–26:18), I reflected on the big “why” behind my work and landed on connection-building. (Check out my library vision video: <https://youtu.be/k87KfYDCg5Q>.)

What has remained constant throughout this turbulent year is my aim to connect those in my community, whether it has been connecting them with resources or with one another.

Room Reading in Practice

Given that I did not share physical space with others at my school for a lot of this past year, what did reading the room look like in practice? Two concrete strategies that I use are: 1) using questions as clues and 2) accepting frustration as feedback.

1) Using questions as clues: Just yesterday, I received several e-mails from teachers needing help resetting passwords for their students. I responded to each of the e-mails, but while doing so, I connected the dots that these questions stemmed from

a new change that the district made now requiring students to complete attendance check-ins through our student information system. This change exposed how not all students know how to log into their accounts.

I forced myself to stop what I was working on and invest time in creating a comprehensive help resource (bit.ly/guhsd-ichelp) that could be shared out to teachers, parents, and students across our district. It is ideal to proactively anticipate these kinds of needs, but short of that, I was able to use questions as clues to address wider-scale needs as I became aware of them.

Worth noting, the questions are not always ones that I field directly. I learn a lot through casual conversations that I have with other staff



What has remained constant throughout this turbulent year is my aim to **CONNECT** those in my community, whether it has been connecting them with resources or with one another.

*If our work in fact sustains
our communities, hopefully
our programs will endure
and thrive as well.*



members, including teachers as well as our front office staff, administrators, and counseling department. In all these cases, I reflect on whether questions are indicative of a more common need and if there is something I can do to respond to that need.

2) Accepting frustration as feedback: During the pandemic, spotting frustration has been unavoidable. There have been moments of colleagues breaking down in tears, informal venting occurring on Zooms before or after the official agenda or via the chat, and people vulnerably sharing concerns on their personal Facebook feeds. Sometimes the issues have been beyond the scope of my work (e.g., working in the midst of a worldwide pandemic for starters), but I am always looking out for opportunities to contribute from my unique skill set and position.

For example, when students first started distance learning, an immediate major frustration was their inability to successfully join Zoom meetings. This generated a lot of complaints from students and their families for teachers and administrators. While I could have observed the frustration from the sidelines, the need was one I could help address. In addition to working with our technology department to pinpoint issues and confirm common best practices, I worked

with other school librarians to create tutorials, set up help lines, and offer screensharing sessions to walk students through troubleshooting. Already used to directly helping students in our physical school libraries, this digital transfer of services was seamless and natural.

Reflecting on Need Trends

Reflecting on the past year, I realize that my efforts have shifted over time as the needs of my community have evolved. There was the period in spring and early fall 2020 when all the needs were immediate and concrete, most often of the tech-related variety. But, as students and teachers adjusted to new systems and routines, I was given more time and space to address other emergent needs, as well as those of a more persistent, underlying nature, and my responses have become my work.

Earlier in this article, I wrote that it can be hard to know what's missing when it doesn't exist. But, each time that we step up to meet the genuine needs of our communities, I like to think that we bring into existence services and programs that people come to depend upon and would indeed miss if gone. If our work in fact sustains our communities, hopefully our programs will endure and thrive as well. So, as we start thinking about the next school year, let us consider: What will I bring into the rooms that I read?



Suzanne Sannwald

*has served as the teacher
librarian at West Hills
High School in Santee,
California, since 2014.*

She became a San José State University iSchool lecturer in the fall 2020. She was a 2015–16 ALA Spectrum Scholar, 2016 California School Library Association Leadership for Diversity Scholar, 2017 school site Golden Apple Teacher of the Year, and 2018–19 AASL Induction Program member. She authored the May/June 2017 Knowledge Quest article "Practical User Experience Design for School Libraries," co-authored the chapter on intellectual freedom for Core Values in School Librarianship (2021) edited by Judi Moreillon, and regularly contributes to School Library Connection.

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The TRANSFORMATION of a SCHOOL LIBRARY



Christopher A. Stewart
christopherastewart8@gmail.com

It was March 10, 2020, at 10:36 a.m. when I sent the following e-mail to my colleagues:

Good Morning! Be comforted in knowing that we are in this health scare together. Please look at the Coronavirus (COVID-19) tab on the Bell High School Library website. Please share with students, parents, and family members. Staying informed and health conscious is key. Also check out the interactive web-based dashboard to track COVID-19 in real time, created by Dong and Gardner of Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering...

As the school librarian at Bell High School in Washington, DC, I serve some of the most amazing students, parents, educators, and community members in the world. As our school shutdown began, my desire was to make sure that my school community had the tools needed to feel comforted with a reformed educational roadmap as we shifted to a virtual format. I was grateful that two years prior, I created a high school library website that had resources for students, parents, and educators. As our school shut down, I enhanced the library website with additional tabs, including virtual learning tools, exceptional student

(special education) resources, and a parent tab. I also included a rather unique and varied list of webinars to ensure that all stakeholders received robust services, even if they weren't in-person.

As we explore this new educational terrain, during this hybrid learning environment, I have opted to continue providing outdoor learning and classroom opportunities through an outdoor classroom/library one day a week, as opposed to once a month pre-COVID. I don't believe it's wise, at this juncture, to open school buildings. I also believe that we are the school, each custodian, administrative assistant, teacher, librarian, parent, and student. Exploring outdoor education is key to providing safe and equitable educational opportunities. Post-COVID, the Bell Library would enjoy 50+ students for lunch. Popcorn, films, with discussions and deep-diving conversations in the Peace & Love Room, a dedicated room in the library created to give students, parents, and educators a space to have respite, where they could read, meditate, cry, laugh, and practice restorative justice, when the heart is bruised. This space also has a clothing closet.

Though our physical book collections aren't being touched during

the pandemic, we are offering new e-book and audiobook collections and virtual author talks. My school provided hot spots, laptops, and tablets to students. Comcast also offered my school district a reduced rate for its high-speed internet, and virtual tutorials and guidance were available for students and parents who had difficulty logging on or working out any glitches.

Classroom virtual pop-ins and mailing books and snacks are just a few of the activities that I have begun during hybrid learning. Ingenuity has been my best friend. Creating an essay contest, giving gift cards, and providing Uber Eats deliveries are just a few ideas that have helped encourage students to explore something new, whether it be virtually or safely in their communities.

Supporting Student BLM Protests

It wasn't just coronavirus that impacted the lives of my school community; another virus also impacted my students: racism. A war cry was heard throughout the world when George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others were killed at the hands of law enforcement in 2020. Typically, students would rush into the school library

before the first morning bell rang to talk about current events including music, politics, and entertainment. However, those rich conversations weren't as lively online, so I began to meet up with students at protests with water, snacks, books, and milk, in case we were teargassed.

I needed them to understand that their lives not only mattered but that they are the hope for a more just, compassionate, and loving world. Through them, bigoted systems will change and hearts will be transformed. I needed them to understand that distance and the four walls of a school building do not change my zeal to serve and love them.

Student Ambassador Program

A transformative and non-complacent school library breaks down barriers by building relationships and creating robust collections that speak directly to students' hearts, minds, and souls. I have found joy in enhancing my library collection with author talks, field trips, and library lectures and by creating the Bell Library Brand Ambassadors. Preparing the next generation of amazing library scientists includes starting early.

The Bell Library Brand Ambassador program was birthed in February 2020 as an opportunity to encourage students to learn more about the field of librarianship and become familiar with library collections. The program's goal is to prepare students for post-high school studies and offer an employment opportunity that teaches them financial literacy and the importance of saving. Students shelve books, print event flyers, attend library programs such as author talks, and help arrange library field trips. After our school closed in March 2020, students continued to encourage their classmates to read and give me book suggestions to order for the library.

Each student receives \$20 an hour; 25 percent goes toward college and/or trade school, 25 percent goes toward a down payment for their first home, and 50 percent goes directly to them to use as they please. I picked up a second job to cover the stipends that the students receive. I operate out of a truth and trust policy, so once students have graduated from high school, they will receive two separate checks, one for college and one for a

down payment toward the purchase of their first home. If students need to reallocate those funds based on life events, that is more than okay. The goal is really for them to get in the habit of saving and working toward a goal.

Seeing Potential in All Students

As school librarians, we see potential where others may not. Pre-COVID, I provided SAT prep to students for eight weeks after school. As a result of this program, students' scores went up an average of 150+ points over the average student's SAT score. As a requirement for the program, students had to check out three books every two weeks. We would discuss the books, even if the students didn't finish them. Genres ranged from mathematics to biographies to classics. Understanding the story and knowledge of others means that students can become better problem solvers while seeking to understand the narrative of all characters. During hybrid learning, I added an SAT prep tab to the library website, which had several tools and resources for students and parents.

An illustration of a student with dark hair and a yellow backpack, wearing a blue shirt and pants, climbing a tall stack of colorful books. The student is reaching up towards a red flag on a pole that is also on top of the books. A large blue arch, resembling a rainbow, frames the student and the books. The background is white with a few small white clouds.

I needed them to understand that their lives not only mattered but that they are the hope for a more just, compassionate, and loving world.

Outreach has been an important aspect of my school library. I continued the Brunch & Book Discussions throughout Washington, DC. The brunch is held in front of public libraries and in front of my school. Providing outdoor educational options has been a great way for students to safely social distance and receive new books, food, masks, and socialization. Consistent book distributions and access to online books and resources are essential to ending *book apartheid*. Book apartheid is a systemic racial and prejudicial human-created system that starves communities of literary resources, including but not limited to book stores, public and academic libraries, and school librarians. Book apartheid is intentionally and methodically designed to educationally blind impoverished communities, which are all too often black and brown. As Ida B. Wells-Barnett noted, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them."

Teaching Untold Stories

As school librarians, we are creatives; we have the capacity to develop when there is a void. I had the immense pleasure of developing and teaching the course "A Conversation: Critical Approaches to Race, Ethnicity, and Representation" (available at <https://raceandethnicity.wixsite.com/chec>). In this course, we discuss topics that range from ending homelessness and poverty to the birth-to-prison pipeline. Learning about all people's history and narratives from a plethora of continents and regions is what ensures our students see the world through an empathetic lens. As a community advocate, ensuring everyone has access to information and knowledge means exposing myths and biases and revealing

truths. As I currently teach this elective course at my school, students are discovering historical anecdotes that will forever shape their personal and educational existence.

As we step into a new phase of librarianship, I believe it requires an imagination that exceeds our wildest dreams. I am dreaming of library institutions within institutions that are incubators for creativity, boldness, and truth-telling narratives. Close your eyes: can you imagine a school district where each student is offered the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue coupled with historical anecdotes and lessons pertaining to race, racism, and representation? Particularly a history that is often not shared, in this case, black history, and no, not just in February.

These historical truths that would be taught would place meaningful value

on untold names and events, such as François Toussaint Louverture, a former enslaved Haitian who led the only successful enslaved human revolt in modern history. He not only fought to gain Haiti's independence from France and Spain, but he was also the catalyst for additional revolts throughout the world.

Students would learn about Bayard Rustin, an openly gay civil rights activist, chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and adviser to Martin Luther King Jr., who was active in organizing marches in the 1940s and 50s. In 1941 Rustin joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and co-founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Rustin served as field secretary and organizer of workshops on nonviolence direct action for FOR, and eventually became the race relations director (Stanford, Martin Luther



King Jr. Research and Education Institute n.d.).

He not only spoke about combatting injustices, he embodied it by taking a stand. CORE organized an inter-racial bus trip across state lines. This act of bravery would inspire the Freedom Riders in 1961, but it would also cause Rustin to spend 22 days on a North Carolina chain gang. Rustin published a report detailing the horrific practice of chain gangs; this report would lead to sweeping changes (Stanford, Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute n.d.).

Activist and political, civil, and voting rights leader Fannie Lou Townsend Hamer passionately sounded the alarm against injustice. In 1961 Hamer received a hysterectomy by a white doctor without her consent; she was supposed to have surgery to remove a uterine tumor. It was commonly referred to as a “Mississippi appendectomy,” and it was a common practice performed on black women. In June 1963, Hamer registered to vote along with several other black women and was arrested for sitting in a whites-only bus station restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina. Hamer and many of the women were brutally beaten, leaving Hamer with a blood clot in

Providing historical relevance to a course and encouraging and empowering students to simply believe are essential to preparing future-ready world leaders for what can be daunting tasks that lie ahead: combating hatred, never ceasing to ensure justice, and being slow to anger and quick to listen.

her eye and kidney damage (Howard University n.d.).

In 1964, a seat opened up in the Mississippi House of Representatives, but Hamer was barred from the ballot. In 1968, she began a pig bank to provide free pigs for black farmers. A year later she founded the Freedom Farm Cooperative, buying up land that blacks could own and

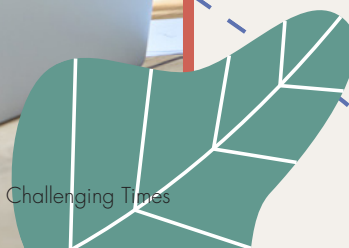
farm communally. Hamer purchased 640 acres and launched a co-op store, boutique, and sewing enterprise. She also provided 200 units of low-income housing (Howard University n.d.).

As we approach the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre (not Tulsa Race Riot), where more than 300 blacks were murdered, teaching such a history would shine a familiar light on our current state. In a course like this, students would learn that the massacre occurred over an 18-hour period, between May 31–June 1, 1921, when a white mob attacked residents, homes, and businesses in the predominantly black neighborhood of Greenwood, founded by O.W. Gurley (Johnson n.d.).

Some students might be surprised to know that Greenwood was commonly referred to as *Black Wall Street* because of its thriving black-owned businesses. Black Wall Street, particularly Greenwood Avenue, had schools, “hotels, cafés, newspapers, clothiers, movie theaters, doctors’ and lawyers’ offices, grocery stores, beauty salons, shoeshine shops, and more” (Johnson n.d.).

Providing historical relevance to a course and encouraging and empowering students to simply believe are essential to preparing future-ready world leaders for what can be daunting tasks that lie ahead: combating hatred, never ceasing to ensure justice, and being slow to anger and quick to listen.

I encourage other schools and school districts to teach these and other untold stories. Having open conversations that are justice and solidarity themed with our students ensures



their knowledge and appreciation of the human experience. This rich history that resides in the very DNA of the United States of America and the world deserves new observers and researchers. We do our future a disservice when we don't reveal the truth-telling narratives of all pre- and post-founding mothers, fathers, and contributors.

Conclusion

As we find ourselves pivoting to new types of learning, I believe we must keep our finger on the pulse of the world around us and create centers of study within our educational institutions and separately. These institutions would provide literary training for educators, community members, and parents, with an intentionality placed on differing groups' learning needs. The library institutions would publish texts for

students, universities, and training manuals for educators. In addition, educators could receive anti-racist, collection development, library branding, web development, and additional training modules.

I do believe the school librarian's voice has become one to listen to during this past year. Our technological astuteness, coupled with the varied hats we wear, may have shocked the educational world, but they haven't seen anything yet. We will continue to provide creative educational alternatives.

As we prepare for the future, we must see ourselves in each part of the world. Developing an international school librarian consortium where students and educators would have access to neighboring countries' and nation-states' collections would provide our future world leaders

with an insight and intelligence that would be paired with empathetic responses.

I am so full of hope as I think about my students and how the field of library science will serve them and our educators. As we navigate new territory, please be encouraged in knowing that your voice, your story, your knowledge, and your love are all that your school community needs. Practice self-care and change the world.



Book List:

- *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram Kendi and Jason Reynolds
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson
- *How the United States Racializes Latinos: White Hegemony and Its Consequences* by José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, Joe R. Feagin
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
- *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander
- *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X
- *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon
- *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* by Arlene Dávila
- *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* by Jack D. Forbes
- *The Making of Asian America: A History* by Erika Le
- *E. J. Josey: Transformational Leader of the Modern Library Profession* by Renate Chancellor



Christopher Stewart

is a high school librarian in the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) System in Washington,

DC. He received the 2019–2020 DCPS Highly Effective Award. He authored the winter 2020 article "Black and Brown Narratives: School Libraries Creating Truth-Telling Collections" in *The CRAB*, the digital magazine of the Maryland Library Association. He is the treasurer of the Washington Teachers Union's Executive Board and is the chair of the Washington Teachers Union's Equity Collaborative Steering Committee. He's also a member of the board of directors for An Open Book Foundation. He is an AASL member and is serving on the ABC-CLIO Leadership Grant Committee. His Twitter handle is @christopherpaix, and his blog is available at <<https://bellhighlibrary.wixsite.com/chec>>.

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Elevating the Profession and Practice through School Library Systems

Kerrie Burch

Kerrie.Burch@questar.org

Susan LeBlanc

sleblanc@moboces.org



Introduction

New York state is fortunate to have a network of school library systems that provide continuous learning opportunities, innovative services, leadership, equity, and more for school librarians and school libraries. The New York State School Library Systems were established in 1984 for the purpose of providing professional development, consulting about library programs and practice, coordinating cooperative collection development, facilitating interlibrary loans, and supporting regional and state-sponsored electronic resources. There are currently forty school library systems serving more than 3.2 million students, teachers, and administrators in more than 4,200 public and nonpublic schools across New York state. Each system, be it in a city, suburb, rural area, or a mix of those area types, is able to respond to the unique needs of its region, which are shaped by geographic, economic, and cultural factors.

In November 2020, the School Library Systems Association of New

York State partnered with the New York State Library to develop a presentation for the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries highlighting the school librarian's role in remote and hybrid instruction. The New York State School Library System Directors worked together to solicit examples of innovative practices and programming from a diverse cross-section of librarians during COVID

Whether it was setting up virtual book checkout and delivery; creating tutorials for teachers, parents, and students; or creating websites with multilingual resources for parents focused on social and emotional health, school librarians found creative ways to support their communities.

school closures, and to collaboratively develop and coordinate the presentation. School librarians and school library systems were showcased during the two-hour long "Regents Advisory Council on Libraries Convening: The Role of School Librarians in Remote and Hybrid

Instruction" presentation. The presenters included school librarians, administrators, and students who shared exemplary programming and practices in the areas of digital equity, family support and engagement, social-emotional learning, information literacy, and collaboration. New York City's "Translation of Practice" document was also highlighted.

Clear takeaways from the presentation were the innovative practices that school librarians developed in the midst of the pandemic. Whether it was setting up virtual book checkout and delivery; creating tutorials for teachers, parents, and students; or creating websites with multilingual resources for parents focused on social and emotional health, school librarians found creative ways to support their communi-

ties. Throughout the presentation many school librarians noted their accomplishments wouldn't have been possible without assistance from their respective school library systems.

Facilitating Communication and Idea Sharing

It is not uncommon for a school librarian to be the sole librarian in their building or district, which can feel isolating. New York state's school library systems offer continuous opportunities for school librarians to be part of a larger professional community. Each system supports a variety of school situations, bringing them together in a greater regional network of professionals.

The school library systems facilitate communication in a variety of ways, including through listservs that promote discussion between the system and the librarians and among the librarians themselves. Listservs provide a safe place to ask questions and share ideas. Karen Fronhofer, K–12 librarian at Salem Central School in the Warren Saratoga Washington Hamilton Essex (WSWHE) School Library System, values the ability to communicate and collaborate with fellow librarians, noting that as the sole librarian in her district, she values the collegiality that comes from communicating with others in her region. "Sometimes I just need to talk to librarians" (Fronhofer 2020).

In addition to e-mail communications, systems began relying on videoconferencing more regularly during COVID closures to bring their school librarians together as a community. Recognizing their need to connect with their colleagues, decompress emotionally, and share promising practices for unprecedented circumstances, many school library systems hosted weekly, and sometimes daily, meetings for their school librarians. School librarian Sarah Amarese of the Churchville-

Chili Central School District noted that the weekly videoconference meetings hosted by the Monroe 2-Orleans School Library System "helped all of us with our own mental health," and she was inspired to hear about the "wonderful things other librarians in our region [were] doing" (2020).

The school librarians of the Broome-Tioga School Library System provide evidence of how a dedicated professional community of librarians can and do elevate each other's practice. Through the regular virtual meet-ups facilitated by their school library system during COVID

School librarians are seen as experts regarding instructional technology integration, resources, and students' social and emotional needs, and COVID-related school closings heightened the demand for their expertise in these areas from fellow educators, students, and parents.

closures, the group had the opportunity to brainstorm regularly to share best practices. One focus was a challenge they were all facing: how to best communicate with students and families with whom they had little or no contact. The support from their school library system was fundamental in helping them craft multifaceted solutions to a complex issue. School librarian Carrie Randall of Homer Brink Elementary stated, "Our [school library system] leaders asked and listened and coached and supported us throughout that unprecedented time. Their flexibility and knowledge allowed us to have the room and resources in order

to think collectively and try various approaches. We put 'can't' and 'don't' and 'haven't' aside for 'try'..." Carrie noted that many proactive practices came from these sessions. "Our results [included] home book deliveries, curbside book pick-ups, online bitmoji classrooms, research database lesson collaborations with classroom teachers, providing resources about COVID-19, YouTube channels centering on read-alouds, collecting student and teacher COVID experience stories—to name a few!" (Randall 2021).

As a result of their participation in a regional professional development series, five school librarians from the WSWHE School Library System collaborated to create an activity in Google Slides that allowed students to choose an adventure while learning about the databases their school provides. One of the collaborators, school librarian Jennifer Casabonne, reflected on the fact that before this professional development, she was not as skilled at incorporating information literacy into her lessons. This "Choose Your Own Adventure" collaborative project "took a long time to work on and it's been a great project to introduce...databases and give lots of choices to kids" (Casabonne 2020). Because of this professional learning experience, these librarians not only extended their learning experience through the collaborative process, but also developed a product that was customizable for each school.

Promoting Leadership

School librarians have the potential to be leaders in their buildings, and school library systems help them attain that goal through mentoring and leadership training. School

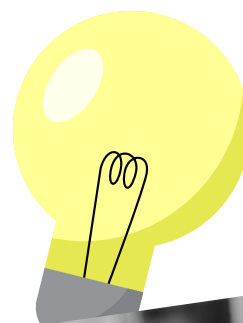
librarians are seen as experts regarding instructional technology integration, resources, and students' social and emotional needs, and COVID-related school closings heightened the demand for their expertise in these areas from fellow educators, students, and parents.

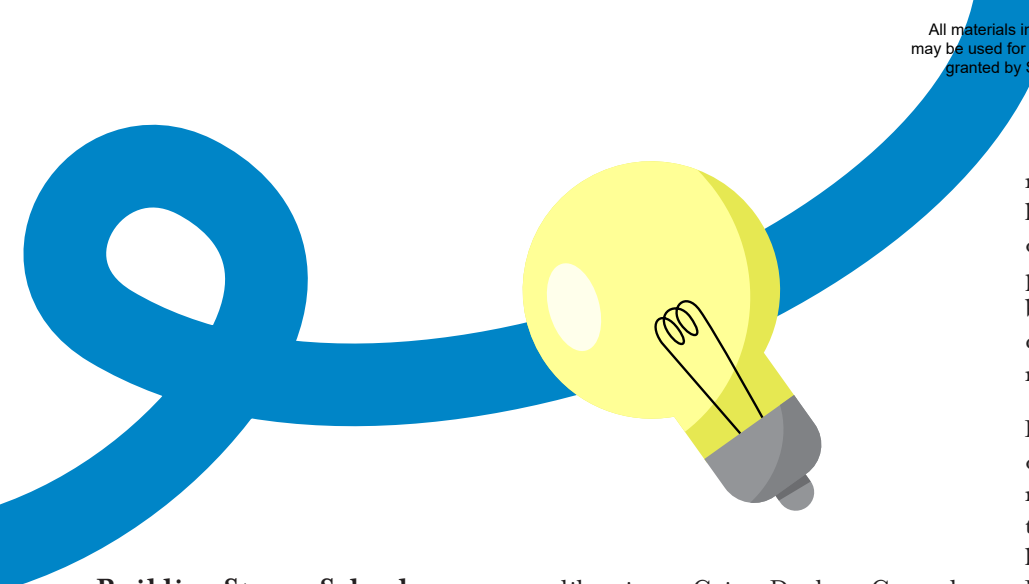
Individual school library systems provided valuable professional development on the resources available to districts. For example, the Questar III School Library System staff created professional learning workshops that focused on Teaching-Books.net, Rosen's Power Knowledge Science Suite, and Sora to support school librarians and other educators in the region. Nancy Pine, librarian at Cairo-Durham Junior Senior High School, was grateful for the extra training provided. "The review of these resource tools and how to use and leverage them gave me the information and confidence to move forward, reach out and support

teachers, students, and struggling parents suddenly thrown into the world of remote learning" (Pine 2021).

School library systems may cover a large area geographically, but they are adept at creating resources for their librarians that are unique and can meet the particular challenges of a region. As a result, the individualized support they provide can bolster school librarians and assist them in leading within their school community. The Genesee Valley School Library System created an instructional guide titled "How Can School Librarians Support Instruction?" that aided school librarians in supporting instruction during the pandemic. Kristie Miller, K-12 librarian at Alexander Central School, used this document to lead in many ways and appreciated how it seemed tailored for her school situation. She stated, "A guiding document, created from outside

my district but regionally that [addresses the] unique challenges that we face geographically, economically, and culturally, can help urge us into action." The guide helped her problem solve and transition seamlessly when it was necessary. "[T]he kind of problem solving that we are used to can take on a new meaning and create opportunities for conversations for paths that don't normally cross. The 'Instructional Guide' helped me reshape my thinking and remake my practice" (Miller 2021).





Building Strong School Librarians

Schools with certified school librarians and strong libraries have students who are more successful. Certified school librarians who are well versed in current practices in education and librarianship are better able to meet the needs of their students. School library systems help build strong school librarians and thus help build strong school libraries. One way in which systems build strong librarians is through professional learning opportunities.

In New York state's Capital Region, four school library systems collaborated to bring their school librarians together for a series of workshops during school closures. The professional learning focused on using the re-imagined *Empire State Information Fluency Continuum* and New York City's "Translation of Practice" document to transition lessons into the online learning environment, brainstorm ways in which school librarians could support families and students, and outline how school librarians could empower learning through reading and literacy. This work led to continued professional learning during the summer that focused on reopening school libraries and teaching in hybrid, in-person, and remote learning conditions. This sustained professional learning prepared school librarians for an unpredictable year. Nancy Pine,

librarian at Cairo-Durham Central School, summed up the impact of the Questar III School Library System's support when she stated, "It is only through these professional development opportunities that I felt prepared, had a plan in place, and continued to promote the library program in our district" (2021).

School library systems provide the important connection that school librarians need in order to be successful and bring about high levels of student achievement.

Assistance in Providing Digital Equity

New York State School Library Systems are also charged with providing equitable access, ensuring that no matter the geography or income level of families or schools, the students in their regions can access high-quality educational resources. One way that systems have historically achieved this is by providing the infrastructure for and

management of robust inter-library loan networks, multiplying the power of individual school collections by providing the means by which any book owned by a member school can be easily shared with any other member school in the system.

However, when COVID closures cut off many students' access to physical materials, it was the digital collections already developed by school library systems that took center stage. Meredith Bruno, school librarian at Watson Williams Elementary School in the Utica City School District, noted that when her district shifted to a fully remote mode of teaching and learning, the Oneida/Herkimer School Library System's Sora e-books collection became the only source of books for many of her students. For her students, 91 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged and 20 percent of whom are English language learners, the Sora e-book collection became a lifeline to literacy. Reflecting on the extended COVID closures, Meredith stated, "My students haven't been able to take out physical books for months...and they often don't have a robust home library or books at home at all," so the school library system's Sora collection has "allowed these students to access a whole library with the click of the button" ("Regents Advisory Council on Libraries" 2020). Meredith noted that the diverse modality of e-books provided by the school library system, including narrated read-alouds and audiobooks, are especially helpful for the large number of developing readers at her school, as well as for those students whose parents are non-English speaking.

This access to rich, relevant collections of resources and the associated training and support enabled school librarians to shine as instructional leaders by ensuring digital equity. Beyond technical

aspects such as access to broadband, devices, and software, the New York State Department of Education's definition of digital equity identifies digital literacy skills and a community of support as critical components. School librarians have taken the lead in ensuring students and teachers not only have the necessary digital literacy skills to access educational platforms and content, but also an ever-present community of support through their school libraries. Superintendent Martha Group of Vernon-Verona-Sherrill School District in the Madison-Oneida School Library System sees her district's school librarian team "as the backbone of the instructional program across the entire school." She stated, "they [have] a full understanding of the technology and curricular needs of our teachers" ("Regents Advisory Council on Libraries" 2020). During school closures, the work that they took on included providing instructional technology support for teachers, students, and families, which included daily tech tips and video tutorials, as well as daily open office hours. As Group explains, "Rather than inundating teachers... they were able to provide bite-sized pieces of technology information that our teachers were able to use with our students at the moment in time at which they needed them" ("Regents Advisory Council on Libraries" 2020). Vernon-Verona-Sherrill school librarian, Tina Laramie, noted that the databases provided by her school library system, as well as the technical support provided for the integration of those resources, were fundamental in helping support teachers in their immediate needs. "I feel fortunate to have another avenue of support that's a huge piece of why we can be successful," she states. "With a system in our region, we have someone else looking out for us" (Laramie 2021).

Conclusion

School library systems provide the important connection that school librarians need in order to be successful and bring about high levels of student achievement. As regional entities serving multiple districts with diverse needs, school library systems are uniquely poised to deliver services effectively. This includes not only the efficient networking and exchange of robust physical and digital collections, but also individualized consulting and professional development services that require knowledge of each library program's unique needs. Additionally, by facilitating a regional learning

community able to meet both in person and virtually, school library systems facilitate a rich intellectual exchange that supports the success of the school librarian and the school library.

The school library system provides that multifaceted support to librarians, other educators, and families. We are better together because of school library systems.



Kerrie Burch is the School Library System, Model Schools and Arts Director for Questar III BOCES in Castleton,

New York. She is a member of AASL and is the president of the New York School Library Systems Association. She presented at the 2019 AASL National Conference on collaborating. She also presented at the New York State Library Association Annual Conference and the New York Library Association Section of School Librarians Annual Conference.



Susan LeBlanc is the coordinator of School Library System and Media Services for Madison-Oneida School Library

System in Verona, New York. She is the vice president for advocacy for the New York State School Library Systems Association and is the president of the Educational Media Technology Association. She is a member of AASL.

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CREATING A SPACE FOR VIRTUALLY ANYONE



Karina Quilantan-Garza

cuethelibrarian@gmail.com

Grab a piece of paper, a writing instrument, and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do you love about school librarianship?
2. What motivates you to be a better educator?
3. What scares you?

When I asked fellow librarians the last question at a workshop in October 2020, the most common answers were budget cuts, illness, and uncertainty. Many of these answers were a response to the pandemic and current state of affairs, and rarely did the answers reflect responses to the first two questions.

Consider this: There was a life prior to the pandemic and the strengths and skills that equipped you for the field of librarianship are what will help you move forward post-pandemic.

So, in the spirit of self-reflection and introspection, think about the before and make a list of everything you love about your school library. I can almost guarantee that the majority of the activities you have outlined are dependent on the physical space and its contents. Readers advisory? Books and bookshelves. Technology lessons? Computer lab. Makerspaces?

Tinker area. Clubs? Tables and chairs. Patrons? The school library.

When I sat down to reflect on my own practice after our school shut down, I wondered if my experiences in the physical library could possibly

There was a life prior to the pandemic and the strengths and skills that equipped you for the field of librarianship are what will help you move forward post-pandemic.

transfer to a completely virtual environment. Spoiler alert—they did! After a bit of hyperventilation about the upcoming changes that my district announced during school closures, I asked myself:

1. How is my district responding to online learning and community ordinances?
2. What will my school need to know about online learning?

3. Which technology applications will we use the most?
4. Which tools do we already know, and how many tutorial recordings do I need to create?
5. How can I reach both students and staff while also respecting their time?

I recorded my answers during this exercise and began to work on a plan of action that would assist my students, parents, teachers, and administrators during our transition to a fully online learning environment. As a middle school librarian who serves high percentages of at-risk students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, one of my practices is to strategically assess the needs of my students on a regular basis. I often reference the Future Ready Librarians Framework (<<https://futureready.org/thenetwork/strands/future-ready-librarians/>>), the AASL *National School Library Standards*, and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards (<www.iste.org/standards>) to help me identify gaps in my library programming. This ongoing practice allowed me to set a foundation of digital inclusion that made the transition to a virtual library seamless.

While many of the digital tools and pedagogical tactics I learned prior to the pandemic offered me insight into the successful implementation of a library's resources, the question of how I would leverage our library's services has evolved into opportunities of reevaluation, growth, and transformation during a global pandemic. My role within my school's community influenced the preparation needed to take our classes fully online during our district-wide shutdown. Fortunately, the professional development opportunities that I sought during the pandemic extended my skill set and gave me the foresight necessary to evaluate the systemic obstacles that we would encounter through virtual learning.

I worked diligently during the summer and early fall of 2020 to earn many digital certifications including Google, Microsoft, Newsela, and Clever Trainer credentials because they were the most popular applications used in our district when we transitioned to distance learning. I turned to technology to teach me what I felt I needed to know to help me craft the message that my school library was ready to equip our campus with the training and resources needed to survive a school year with many uncertainties. With checklists in hand, a computer, and a stable internet connection I was ready to begin a new endeavor and venture into a new realm of possibility.

Getting Organized

Planning for the week usually depends on the needs of my students and staff. If I notice a trend in help questions or in circulation statistics, I try to offer my services to target those areas to the best of my ability. At the moment, the majority of my time is dedicated to major responsibilities such as monthly programming events, curation, tutorials,

I turned to technology to teach me what I felt I needed to know to help me craft the message that my school library was ready to equip our campus with the training and resources needed to survive a school year with many uncertainties.

webinars, lessons, and technical assistance. I divide these activities into separate days throughout the week so I know that I am targeting each area of librarianship that I feel will contribute to the success of my students and teachers, all the while maintaining my sanity and stamina.

I created an interactive library planner on Google Slides for staff members in case they want to view the school library's available time slots prior to requesting a day and time for virtual visits. On the days that work best for library management tasks, I use the time to update the library's online databases, record book-talks, plan online events, and answer questions queued in the library's help desk forum. Each task is carefully considered and, if necessary, recorded for students and staff to view at a later time on the library's YouTube channel or social media pages.

The simplicity of an idea such as schedules may have organizational advantages, but it is ultimately a method of accountability, a demonstration of my commitment to advancing the school library's initiatives, and a form of documentation

of the continued services that could possibly benefit a post-pandemic library.

Personalized Learning

I began personalizing curated resources. I sent a survey to my students on my school library's social media channels asking which devices they use to access their online classes and student e-mail. The survey results revealed that the majority of my student population were working on mobile devices with limited access to the internet. This information provided insight needed to create personalized tutorials for my students. In my tutorials on how to navigate the learning management system or e-mail, I would need to include side-by-side reflections of how their platforms would be viewed on a desktop computer or mobile device. This accommodation enabled me to reach a variety of students and cater to their individual technological needs. It also proved to be helpful when modeling positive digital behaviors during library orientation and ongoing digital citizenship lessons.

I then focused on my teachers and their professional development to build a foundation for our online transitions. I sent out opportunities for lunch-and-learn webinars for teachers that preferred to learn during their lunch period and appy hour sessions for those that preferred after-school hours. Sessions highlight one application that our district utilizes, and I sent a follow-up to teachers after the session with how-to tutorials for quick reference. For example, at the beginning of our school closure period the majority of our training covered how to organize their virtual assignments on Google Classroom and the functionalities of Google for Education tools. These segments were no longer than half an hour and included a digital badge incentive

LEARN With Mrs. Q!
#RemoteLearning

JEMS LIBRARY SCHEDULE - 2020-2021						
Schedule	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Notes
Virtual Library Visits	6th Grade Virtual Visits Booktalks Makerspace Dig. Cit	7th Grade Virtual Visits Booktalks Makerspace Dig. Cit	8th Grade Virtual Visits Booktalks Makerspace Dig. Cit	Open for Virtual Library Reservations & Tech Support	Open for Virtual Library Reservations & Tech Support	Teachers, featured is a tentative schedule that you may refer to when requesting Library Virtual Visits. Please use this link to reserve a day and time. Mrs. Q. will get back to you via email regarding scheduling.
Library Programming & Support Services	Book Club Meetings 2:30pm	Virtual Library Management Tasks	Book Club Meetings 2:30pm	Appy Hour Webinars 2:30pm	Virtual Library Management Tasks	
Daily Tasks	Student Password Resets	Teacher & Student Tutorial Requests	Teacher & Student Tech Support	Reading Progress Reports	Library Lesson Planning	

system to motivate educators to explore the various features of the platforms we would use throughout the year.

While I felt that these initiatives were successful, I did not dismiss the need for feedback and reflection. Every session was followed by a feedback survey and responses that guided the topic, pace, and strategy for future learning opportunities.

Meaningful Partnerships

I created a Library Ambassadors program with a group of students to help me promote library programming events in the hopes of giving them a voice in policy creation and ownership over their school library. The purpose of the program was to include at least two to four students from each grade level to help me come up with ideas on how to best reach our student audience when promoting library programming ideas. In the past, this included creating student book-talks and promotional materials for events, learning the library's book circulation procedures, and learning the library's media to help troubleshoot

technical issues when students visited the computer lab for research.

Now that our library is fully online, the Library Ambassadors record book-talks to promote our e-books, vote on virtual events they would like to see on our social media channels, and record student-made tech tutorials for their peers. Engagement and feedback have increased in our library's Google Classroom when posts include information about book club meetings, virtual makerspace events, and our library's Mote help desk forum.

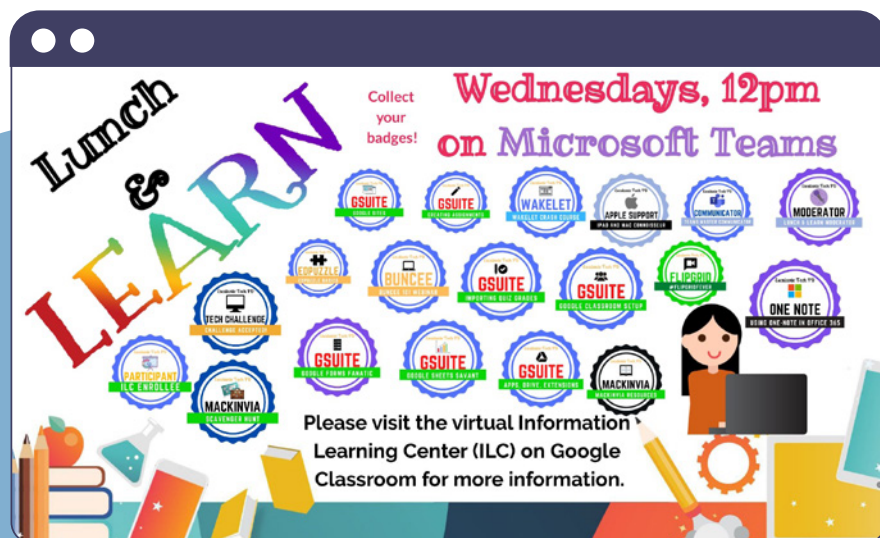
In addition, I invited teachers to collaborate on classroom projects using the library's resources. We meet during their planning time once or twice a week (days of the week vary) and decide on a skill that the students would benefit from learning. The content of each lesson depends on the unit of study and the library resources that best align to their curriculum. I then schedule a time slot during the week to visit classes on Google Meet to cover a specific technology application or a live demonstration of a craft activity that complements their content topic of the week.

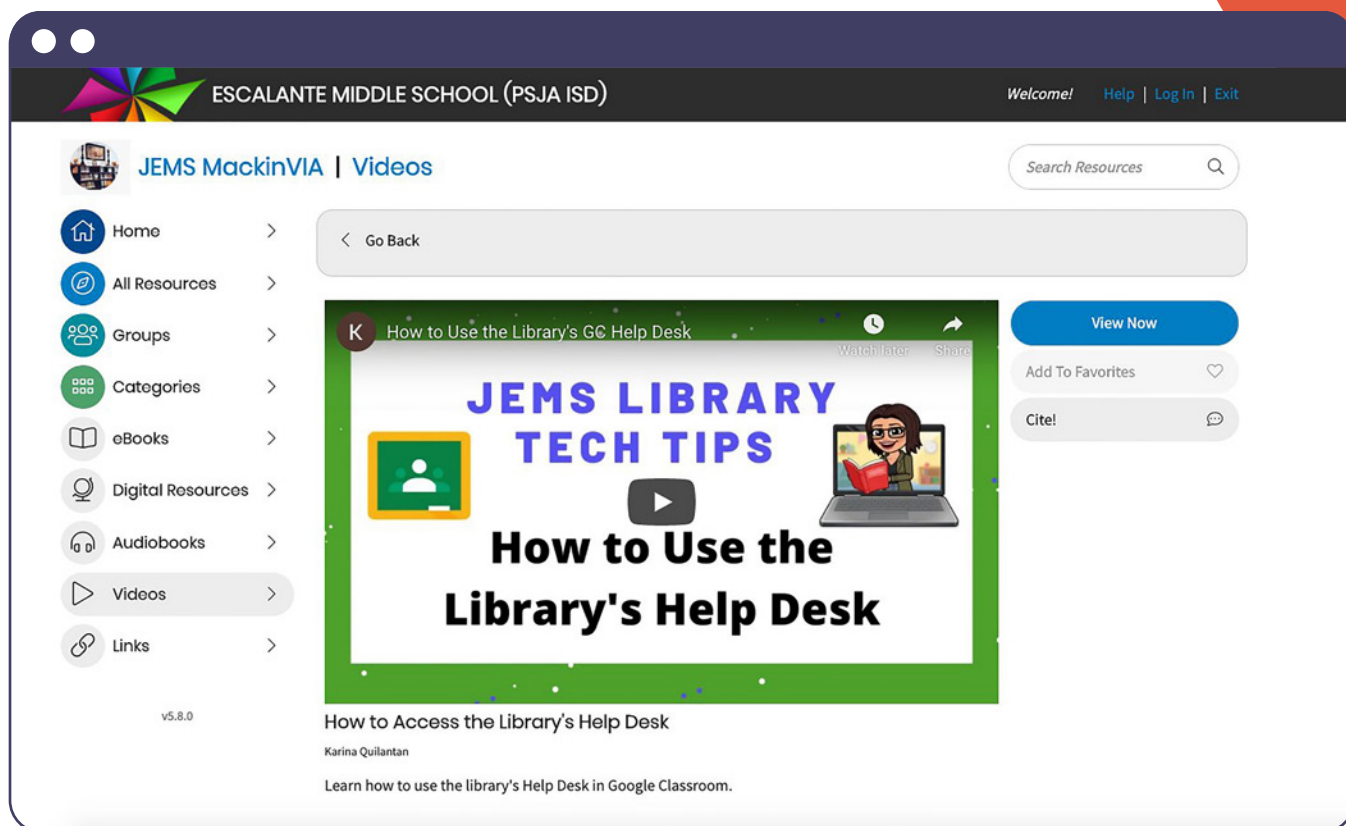
I also built a virtual space for my staff where they could find resources related to their own learning and queries. For example, I created a virtual information literacy center for staff and included information about upcoming webinars, training recordings, curated reading lists, technology application guides, and an online calendar where they could request virtual library visits. Students and staff interact with each other on the discussion board streams, post private messages to ask for assistance, and answer daily polls or questions. These virtual classrooms act as a localized center for exploration, inquiry, communication, and camaraderie.

While I feel like a superhero on most days, there are instances when I need my own technical support. I implore librarians to connect with their library department peers, instructional technology departments, and IT network administrators if they exist in their districts. In my experience, the partnership with my district's network administrator of software (through online messaging and e-mail) has provided me with insight on how to troubleshoot e-mail systems, desktops, software, hardware, security tools, and essential IT operations that were, in the past, outside of my expertise. The lesson I learned was that although I was teaching my school community how to navigate their virtual realities, my reality also called for adaptation, resourcefulness, and resilience.

A Social Library

My first year as a school librarian in 2015 was isolating. There was clearly a misunderstanding of what it meant to have a great school library, and I knew I had to document the changes that reflected inclusive programming, technology integration, and student-led projects. I needed to find a way to





reach multiple audiences through a specific mode of communication. As part of a district-wide library services initiative, our library publishes an e-newsletter every marking period to share on the campus, district, and library websites or social media channels. This practice quickly evolved into an integral method of communication and an everlasting factor toward our department's advocacy practices. The acclaim from our district's stakeholders has shaped how our community views the significant and critical role of a certified school librarian.

In 2015, our school library considered social media a tool to document the library's impact on students, staff, and parents. Prior to creating a social media page for my school library, I first communicated with my district's public relations

department for district approval and usage guidelines. This resulted in my piloting the first Instagram library account for our district. Since then, the school library has seen an increase in patron interaction and activity. Authors, librarians, students, and educators from around the globe have reached out via our Instagram account to gain insight to certain events, techniques, or ideas. Currently the platform is used to announce important information regarding school closures, COVID-19 testing sites, online club meetings, contests, book recommendations, and visual collages that highlight student work and achievements.

One of the most popular events that my students enjoy is our monthly Monday Maker Live that is streamed

as an Instagram Live event. All the library's recordings, whether a live event or short recording, are saved and uploaded to our library's Instagram TV, YouTube channel, Microsoft Stream channel, and Google Classroom. Each posting destination makes it possible for multiple audiences to engage with our online content and establish connections. Our library uses a variety of design applications such as PicCollage, Adobe Spark, and Canva to create announcements for our social media feed. The content highlights our students' work and accomplishments. This allowed our students to see themselves in the library's programming and resulted in more participation and engagement in our monthly advertised library events. Our library's Instagram @libraryjems has

garnered more than 1,500 followers and continues to gain recognition at the local, state, and national levels, but most importantly continues to work alongside its library's patrons to shape messages of inclusivity, ingenuity, and community.

Empowering School Librarians

I am a huge proponent of using social media to build professional learning networks (PLNs) and participating in discussions where commonalities in technology interests, pedagogy, and interest groups can be shared. I co-founded and moderated an online PLN named RGV Library Squad for librarians located in the Rio Grande Valley. The group was hosted on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to connect with librarians from across the Rio Grande Valley. Monthly Twitter chats were scheduled and usually centered around library issues, debates, and ideas that seemed to be popular at that point in time.

Once the pandemic hit and based on the conversations on social media, we found that there was a need for free virtual learning opportunities in the areas of libraries and mental health, e-sports, e-book promotions, virtual spaces, and podcasting. In June 2020 we decided to launch our own virtual one-day summer camp and used Zoom to schedule five 45-minute webinars that focused on the aforementioned areas of interest. Participants were given an option to register and reserve their spot prior to the event and were e-mailed the conference links the day of the conference. We

took to social media to advertise and promote it virtually using the hashtag #RGVLibCamp2020. We reached more than 100 librarians from the Rio Grande Valley and across the country. We received phenomenal feedback and we hope to offer future opportunities for school librarians who want to grow their library squad.

Online learning communities have helped expand my own learning and growth and helped me identify where to find information on other certification and workshop sessions. However, learning without a community is counterproductive

In June 2020 we decided to launch our own virtual one-day summer camp and used Zoom to schedule five 45-minute webinars that focused on the aforementioned areas of interest.



so I reach out to my local education services center and state associations for presenting opportunities to help me evolve my skills as a presenter and teacher. Not only has this been a great way to stay abreast of association functions, but it also has served as an extension of my professional family.

Conclusion

There may be an air of uncertainty in any routine you decide to establish in your virtual spaces, but remember that your school library is a key to the fundamental right and pursuit of knowledge. Consider what is important to your patrons' needs, consider your community's culture, and trust in yourself that you are doing the best you can with the resources you have available. If a school librarian's passion for what they do is reflected in the environment they create for their learners, ask yourself what you have yet to learn.



Karina Quilantan-Garza is the library media specialist at Jaime Escalante Middle School/Pharr-San Juan-Alamo

ISD in Pharr, Texas. She is a member of AASL, TxASL MVP Committee, TMGNRL Committee, and TCEA Lib-Sig VP. She was awarded the 2019 TxASL MVP Award, 2021 TCEA Library Media Specialist of the Year Finalist Award, 2021 TxASL Branding Iron Award, and the Spirit of PSJA Award in 2019 and 2020. Her blog, *Cue the Librarian*, is available at www.cuethelibrarian.com.

Resources:

Cue the Librarian. <www.cuethelibrarian.com>.

JEMS Library Instagram: <www.instagram.com/libraryjems>.

JEMS Library Webpage: <<https://www.psjaisd.us/domain/2285>>.

RGV Library Squad Twitter: <<https://twitter.com/rgvlibrarysquad>>

Microsoft Educator Center's "Innovation in the Library with Microsoft Education & Buncee": <<https://education.microsoft.com/en-us/course/d46fe679/0>>.

"Tech It Over Webshow and Podcast": <<https://techitovershow.weebly.com>>.

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Establishing Reflective Practice in Preservice Coursework

Elizabeth Burns | Eburns@odu.edu

Like many of you, I am a parent. Even though my children are growing up and are less dependent on me, I still find myself continuing to dole out advice. I know that children resist the advice parents lovingly bestow upon them. We may convince our children that something is in their best interest or will reap rewards in their future but getting them to act today is not always within our control. I remember many times I warned about eating too many treats, only to find myself soothing a crampy child later. Or cautioning against staying out too late, only to find myself attempting to rouse a late and cranky teen.

Becoming a Reflective Practitioner

One component of AASL's *National School Library Standards* is "Questions for the Reflective Practitioner." The questions prompt practitioners to consider what they read in the text and interrogate their ideas of the standards in relation to research and best practice for effective school libraries. They ask practitioners to be reflective, but reflection is not always easy and it is not intuitive behavior (Applebaum 2014). These questions are easily skipped over, welcomed as a good idea and put aside for a later day. For reflection to be used in everyday practice, it needs to be more than suggested or introduced. It needs to be practiced.

Over time I have come to realize some of the best practice and evidence-based pedagogy I teach in my courses is perceived as well-reasoned advice

today but tucked away for future use. Reflection seems to fall into this category. As a school library educator, I realized that like my own children who require more than a sage warning, my students require more than cursory advice about the benefits of reflection. Direct instruction and guided practice on *how* to reflect on practice was needed if reflection was going to be embedded into their daily behavior.

Establishing Practice

Reflection is a skill school library educators hope to foster in their students. This can be achieved by teaching reflection in pre-service coursework. One type of reflective pedagogy is journaling. Reflective journaling easily aligns with the text-based nature of library and information studies coursework, especially as more library schools are available online (Kymes and Ray 2012). To become an established practice for new professionals, reflection must be taught, coached, and scaffolded through development, with point values assigned to ensure pre-service students view the assignment as meaningful. I use dialogic journaling where I read and respond to student reflections to coach and encourage reflective thinking. To highlight the scaffolded process of this journaling pedagogy, I highlight three phases of working with students in a recent study: Awareness, Acceptance, and Adoption. The study chronicled the journey of five school library students as they progressed through their coursework and early field experiences into their

first year of practice. It explored the use of structured dialogic journaling as an adopted pedagogical approach that shaped the reflective practice of these new school librarians.

Awareness. Reflecting on practice informs personal growth. Being aware of the benefits of reflection and understanding the key behaviors required to make the reflective process effective are not intuitive. Without guidance students describe observations without connecting their observations to their learning. Studies show that unless instruction occurs on *how* reflection is useful, student journals are "generally disappointing" (Dyment and O'Connell 2011, 95). To be effective in reflection, students must do more than write about their experiences.

Study participants benefitted from journaling as a teaching tool when used to promote more-reflective practice. Students were introduced to journaling in an early course in school library methods. In that course, they were asked to observe experienced school librarians in the field and reflect on those observations in a shared student-faculty journal. These early journaling experiences asked students to observe the teaching of others, provided guided questions and prompts to assist their observations, and connected to course materials. Instructor feedback was essential to guide connections to the ideas expressed. In this first course students were asked to focus on specific areas of observation such as the assessment component of a lesson or how the school librarian engaged learners in a lesson. Journal entries were tied to course content, and instructor feedback helped guide further interrogation.

Acceptance. The students returned to journaling when completing a faculty-supervised practical experience, working as school library interns. During the internship, each student reflected on his or her practice in a journal shared with the faculty member. Feedback and constructive guidance remained benefits of a shared student-teacher journal. These journaling activities bridged the theory of coursework with practice in the field as students actively engaged as school library interns. Using the reflective practitioner model (Schon 1987) in dialogic journaling, the pre-service students were able to explore their emerging beliefs by examining personal decisions in practice while engaging in an open exchange of ideas and dialogue with a mentor. Questions brought to their mentor further contextualized beliefs and understanding about best practice. The reflective process allowed for enhanced development of the attitudes, skills, and values of emerging school librarians working with a mentor faculty member.

Adoption. Students were encouraged to continue their reflective practice as they transitioned to practicing school librarians. Here, reflection became more self-directed without the requirement of a course assignment or the response of a faculty reader. After the benefit of instruction, new practitioners are armed with the tools and habits for reflection and can decide to adopt this as personal practice.

A final reflection was gathered after participants' first year in practice. This document mirrored the journal format used during coursework and was intended to capture participants' reflective practices as school librarians, interrogating the perceived benefits and challenges of reflecting on practice as new practitioners. In these reflections, participants discussed their successes and sustained involvement, continuing the reflective practices introduced in pre-service coursework.

What Are the Findings?

This study demonstrates the benefits of using dialogic journals for school library educators. Reflective journals offer a teaching tool and an opportunity to guide course conversations and instruction. Used this way, school library educators can refine content and address individual concerns or, if needed, address common concerns, similar wonderings, or questions expressed by multiple students. Journals can show instructors what issues are most relevant to a student population. Dialogic journaling provides a space and place for instructors to interact with students and provide an opportunity to respond to student concerns.

As teaching tools used for reflection, reflective dialogic journals helped the pre-service participants become more intentional about their reflection and think more critically about their

practice. Findings demonstrate that when introduced in coursework and conducted with reciprocal feedback, greater reflective practice was developed. This establishes a practice by which new practitioners are open to examining how they are impacting student learning. When presented with reflective practitioner questions, such as those in the AASL Standards, this task of connecting theory and practice becomes less intimidating. The dialogue style of the journals and sharing their reflective process with a critical friend, mentor, or teaching peer were beneficial and created lasting benefits most participants carried forward. Collaborative relationships that include discussion of strengths and weaknesses after a co-taught lesson are strengthened for those practitioners who engage in reflective practices. Those participants who used reflection in coursework reported continued reflective practices at the end of their first year as a school librarian. School library educators can nurture reflective practices in students by teaching reflective strategies in preservice coursework to establish this behavior.



Elizabeth Burns is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University. She is a member of AASL and serves as the

co-editor of *School Library Research*. She is also a member of the AASL CAEP Coordinating Committee, the ALA Committee on Education, and co-chair of the ACRL Standards Committee. She authored the 2020 *School Library Research* article "Reflective School Library Practitioners: Use of Journaling to Strengthen Practice," the 2020 *Teacher Librarian* article "New School Librarians: Finding Community in Practice," and the 2020 *School Libraries Worldwide* article "AASL National School Library Standards: Progress toward Implementation." She also coauthored the 2020 *School Library Research* article "Pre-service School Librarians' Perceptions of Research Pedagogy: An Exploratory Study." She was awarded the 2019 Darden College of Education Sara and Rufus Tonelson Award.

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“Laughter is indeed the best medicine,” she tweeted, “and thankfully we don’t need a vaccine to experience it.”

Connecting with Young Learners during the Pandemic (and a Thank You to School Librarians)

Debbie Ridpath Ohi

When I first heard about the virus now known as COVID-19, I felt for the residents of Wuhan. Back then, the word *pandemic* evoked memories of dystopian novels as well as the name of a board game that my husband and I enjoyed playing. It didn’t affect me or anyone I knew personally, not in any real-world sense.

That changed, of course.

Everyone had their own way of coping. Some were able to immerse themselves in their work and were extra-productive. Some, like me, were the opposite. Early in the pandemic, I found it nearly impossible to focus on my usual creative pursuits.

I found that the only activities that could drag me away from doom-scrolling and stressing about things that were out of my control were

learning how to sew masks and learning new tech skills. What also helped was that both skills could help me help others.

Educators were (and still are) facing such a challenging time, having

I began hearing from educators, who sent me photos and screenshots of student work, along with messages thanking me, saying that their young learners were excited about my creative challenges.

to repeatedly pivot as quarantine guidelines change. I saw so many posts by school librarians who were finding ways to keep supporting their young learners despite schools being closed and despite their own at-home stresses. Researching how to create and edit videos of my creative process to share with educators and their students prompted me to find out more about lighting, audio, and live streaming.

Before publishers had started posting their official online reading guidelines, I e-mailed Justin Chanda, my editor at Simon & Schuster Children’s, to ask if it was okay for me to put together a cover-to-cover video reading of some of my books, for use by educators during the pandemic. He said yes, so in early March 2020, I put together a video of me reading *Where Are My Books?* aloud, did an art activity, and

included the crowd-sourced related music video. Michael Ian Black offered to do video read-alouds of some of our books. I also began offering free, daily activities for those working with young creators at home, posting them online with the hashtag #KidsDailyDebbieOhi and encouraging them to share (via an adult) their art and writing with me. With their parents' permission, I included some of these in the videos I had started posting on my YouTube channel, and compiled all of them in a resource for educators at DebbieOhi.com/homelearn.

I began hearing from educators, who sent me photos and screenshots of student work, along with messages thanking me, saying that their young learners were excited about my creative challenges. And for the first time during the pandemic, something kindled inside me that I hadn't felt in months.

Something *good* and full of *hope*.

As many schools began to start e-learning, I yearned to reconnect with more young readers, but I wasn't familiar with some of the new platforms. When I put out a call to educators on Twitter asking for advice about Google Meets, teacher-librarian Susan Bowdoin volunteered to help. She and a group of fellow New Mexico school librarians met with me in Google Meets to show

me around and offer tips. I was moved by their generosity, especially since I knew they were all dealing with so much already because of the pandemic.

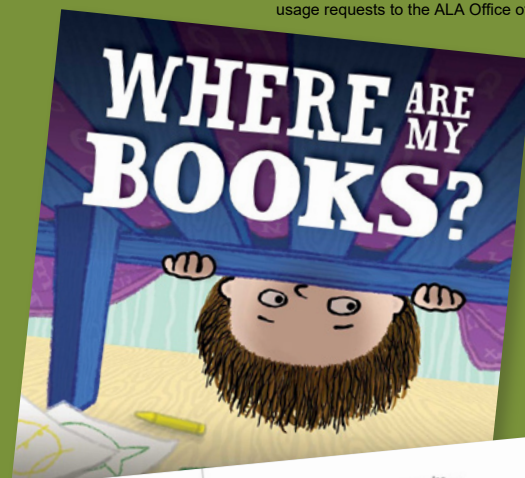
Teacher-librarian Lara Ivey also responded and invited me to participate in the Old Hundred Elementary virtual book fair with BBGB Tales for Kids. I did a read-aloud of *I'm Worried*, then invited the young readers at home to do an art activity with me and gave them a sneak peek of my new picture book.

Launching a book during the pandemic was a challenge on multiple levels. In the beforetime, I had been hugely excited about sharing this new book. The story text of *Gurple and Preen: A Broken Crayon Cosmic Adventure* was

Young readers needed humor books more than ever, some said, to keep readers engaged during virtual learning.

written by Newbery medalist Linda Sue Park, and I got to use found-object art in my book illustrations for the first time! During the pandemic, however, it felt weird talking about our book when so many terrible things were happening around the world.

Talking with educators helped me be more at ease about *Gurple and Preen* posts. Young readers needed humor books more than ever, some



said, to keep readers engaged during virtual learning. One educator thanked me and Michael Ian Black for the *I'm... picture books* (*I'm Bored, I'm Sad, and I'm Worried*). "Laughter is indeed the best medicine," she tweeted, "and thankfully we don't need a vaccine to experience it."

Simon & Schuster Children's had originally planned to send me on a physical book tour to help celebrate the launch of *Gurple and Preen*, but of course that had to change. My publicist, who was working from home, asked if I knew of any educators who might be interested in hosting me in virtual visits at their schools. I put her in contact with the New

Mexico librarians, and it was a joy to speak with many of their students during my virtual book tour.

Afterward, the New Mexico librarians sent me this amazing thank-you gift:



Here are just a few of the things I have learned so far during the pandemic:

- Doing things to help others gave me perspective as well as a positive focus.
- Being flexible is essential. Everyone is coping as best they can, seeking out creative solutions.
- Connecting book creators with young learners is more important than ever.
- The more I find out about what educators have been doing for young learners during the pandemic (through frequent pivots, challenges, risks, at-home stresses), the more I'm blown away.

To the school librarians out there:
THANK YOU.



Debbie Ridpath Ohi is the author and illustrator of *Where Are My Books* and *Sam & Eva* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers). Her illustrations also appear in books by Judy Blume and Michael Ian Black, among others. Her newest book is *I'm Sorry*, written by Michael Ian Black and illustrated by Debbie, launching from Simon & Schuster BFYR in August 2021. She offers virtual school visits through TheAuthorVillage.com, and you can find out more info about her books at DebbieOhi.com.

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