

KNOWLEDGE QUEST



**WHY INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND EQUITABLE
ACCESS ARE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TODAY**

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During this unprecedented time in history when a global pandemic forced physical school closings, school librarians got creative to support teaching and learning.

School Librarians Shine during Uncertain Times

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

Certain events are unforgettable and leave an indelible mark on how we view the world. Some may be personal such as a marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. Others are more a part of our national consciousness, such as 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina. So, I am certain all of us will retain a collective memory about the spring of 2020 and its aftermath. By this time of year many of us would be putting the finishing touches on our spaces and eagerly awaiting the start of a new school year. For others whose schools start earlier, formalities would have been completed and we would be settled into a familiar routine working with learners and other educators. Yet words like “typical” and “familiar” are used less frequently now.

While we are all still valiantly trying to adjust to our new normal, nothing has felt normal for quite some time. Ongoing conversations and planning have taken place over the summer about how to best restart schools after our abrupt departure and transformation to online learning last spring. I now wonder if you are back in your school building. Are some of you still working remotely? Is there a segment attempting to perform a hybrid of these options? What previously would have been inconceivable feels completely plausible. Yet in the midst of abrupt school closures, school librarians were a stabilizing and innovative resource for their learning communities. During this unprecedented time in history when a global pandemic forced physical school closings, school librarians got creative to support teaching and learning.

From the start of the coronavirus pandemic, school librarians were at the forefront of educational leadership. AASL’s vision statement describes every school librarian as a leader, and that was never more evident than during spring 2020.

From the start of the coronavirus pandemic, school librarians were at the forefront of educational leadership. AASL’s vision statement describes every school librarian as a leader, and that was never more evident than during spring 2020. Literally over night we were charged with changing how most of us interacted with our learners and educators, while simultaneously dealing with personal lives and wondering about our global future. It has been said, “You never let a serious crisis go to waste...It’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before” (Emanuel n.d.). Well, school librarians did just that. We did not shrink away from challenges. We learned new technologies, created new ways to disseminate information, and built remote learning spaces to connect and collaborate with other educators, learners, and families.

We became a cohesive community that supported and encouraged each other. While some struggled to find basic essentials due to hoarding and fear, our community was generous and selfless with our resources. Many of you became first-time contributors to the *Knowledge Quest* website; an avalanche of digital resources was shared; and Twitter exploded with helpful tips and pedagogical recommendations. AASL Forum members shared a wealth of information that supported teaching and learning, and the weekly AASL town halls provided a space for lively and informative conversations.

While pivoting to online learning, our AASL Standards were indispensable. No one knew we would have to test the standards in such extreme circumstances, but they have proven to be an exceptional source of professional guidance. In the midst of multiple unexpected and sometimes troubling events, school librarians also realized that our learners, educators, and parents want more than resources; they also want community, and we strove to provide them with both.

Sometimes we allow our differences to be at the forefront of our interactions. Some of us are school librarians, some supervisors; some feel isolated, while others are supported. Yet during this time of crisis, we focused on our commonalities and not our differences and facilitated meaningful learning. I am pleased that our efforts have not gone unnoticed and our contributions have been acknowledged. According to one such supporter, Bill Bass, current president of the ISTE Board of Directors, "In this time of uncertainty, librarians have never been more critical to our school" (ESchool News Staff 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how we educate our children. It also exposed profound gaps in Internet and technology access among our learners. While some communities were equipped with the necessary tools and training to quickly adapt to online learning, others struggled due to lack of digital access and devices. This inequity has been discussed and solutions deliberated for a long time, but this disparity has been humanized by the many stories shared by learners and educators. Millions of students between kindergarten and 12th grade do not have computers or speedy Web connections (Camera 2020). This lack of connectivity may stem from economics, geographical location, natural disasters, or a myriad other reasons. Regardless of the reason, learners without adequate connectivity or devices will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide. COVID-19 has shown a spotlight on these inequalities, and we cannot unsee them.

Just when we all were trying to come to terms with COVID-19, George Floyd's death, other atrocities against humanity, and the global protests that followed further revealed inequities that permeate our society. These and other recent events have changed how we view the world, and I don't think things will ever return to the status quo. But change, while uncomfortable, is often to our benefit. Many recent positive, radical changes may have otherwise taken years or even decades to occur. While events are still unfolding and there are no perfect answers to our many educational and societal concerns, we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed or discouraged. We cannot grow weary in our efforts to support our learning communities. We must not become cynical or lament what we do not have. All we can do is our best, and based on what school librarians have accomplished and continue to do during this unprecedented time in history, I know our learners, educators, and communities are in safe hands.

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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Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction.

Advocating for Our Learners' Right to Diverse Points of View

Niccole Mazzola | nmazzola@sd25.org

Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. As school librarians, we must guarantee that right by ensuring access to materials that help learners make decisions and understand the world around them, particularly in this era of fake news where misinformation is rampant and diverse voices are marginalized or excluded completely. The articles in this issue provide resources, case studies, and thought-provoking discussions that will bolster you to continue championing the freedom to access information.

In their feature article, Angela Branyon and April Dawkins detail the history of intellectual freedom, emphasizing its continued importance in school libraries today. They detail the various iterations of intellectual freedom policies as they relate to libraries. This article serves as an excellent primer on intellectual freedom for new and seasoned librarians. Branyon and Dawkins provide historical information, but also summarize the multitude of resources available for school librarians to use to protect our learners' freedoms. It is an ideal advocacy tool for school librarians to share with their administrators and other stakeholders when discussing the absolutely vital role that school libraries and librarians play in ensuring physical and intellectual access to information.

One of the most important resources available to librarians that Branyon and Dawkins discuss in their article is the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*. This sprawling handbook is published by ALA's Office for Intellectual

The fight for access to information has been long and arduous, and the outcomes continue to be contentious as evidenced by the growing number of challenges to materials, programs, and the community's use of library spaces.

Freedom, and the latest edition, available later this year, offers new and improved guidance on some of the most challenging intellectual freedom concerns that we see in school libraries, including information about copyright, censorship and diverse representation in collections, and equitable access especially during periods of remote learning and instruction. Martin Garnar, the editor of the forthcoming 10th edition, Kate Lechtenberg, a school library educator, and Carolyn Vibbert, an elementary school librarian, discuss the manual and intellectual freedom issues prevalent in school libraries.

Stemming from that discussion it is clear that one of the most commonly faced and challenging issues related to intellectual freedom in school libraries is the censorship of materials and ideas. There is often pressure to accommodate views from a majority and sometimes even a minority voice in a school's community, but this can

do irreparable damage to those not represented by that group, and more importantly, it is contrary to the goal of intellectual freedom, a core tenet of librarianship. I have seen just how difficult it is to uphold that right to access information in my own personal practice. While working in an affluent and largely homogeneous district, I received a message from an involved and influential family condemning what they considered to be my over-inclusion of diverse books in the library collection. They asked if I was aware of the demographics of the school community and included a subtle threat of school board interference if I did not comply with their demand to remove some of the materials from the collection and replace them with ones “better suited for our students.”

It was an incredibly stressful experience, especially because I was a new school librarian at the time. However, I knew that protecting the rights of my students to see their own lives and the lives of others represented in the school library collection was the right decision. Removing that material would have been detrimental to all my students because it would have robbed them of the opportunity to develop their own view of the world, and that is precisely the freedom that we are tasked with defending as school librarians.

In addition to being guardians of intellectual freedom and champions of equitable access, school librarians are also essential resources for students to understand their own digital legacies. Associate professor Heather Moorefield-Lang’s article on this topic reminds us about the enduring nature of a digital footprint. While students need free access to the information that will shape their worldview, they also need guidance and direction about the permanence of their online activity. In this article, Dr. Moorefield-Lang details the relationship between digital citizenship and digital legacy and includes several resources to help school librarians incorporate these ideas into their instruction.

In the remaining articles in this issue, Andrea Jamison and Kristen Pekoll address the danger of restricting intellectual freedom. Jamison details incidents of community challenges to various materials in libraries and provides information on how to leverage the AASL Standards and allies to support the right to access information. Pekoll reminds us that attempts at censorship go beyond books, citing the rise in challenges to displays, author visits, and online resources. She notes that identity issues are often at the heart of these challenges. Both articles include real-world scenarios that contextualize intellectual freedom and remind us of the harm that censorship inflicts on our learning communities and society as a whole.

The fight for access to information has been long and arduous, and the outcomes continue to be contentious as evidenced by the growing number of challenges to materials, programs, and the community’s use of library spaces. However, guaranteeing that right to access information is one of the cornerstones of librarianship. For school librarians, universal access to information is one of our six Common Beliefs—the beliefs that create the foundation of our core values and practice—and it is an integral component of each strand of the AASL *National School Library Standards* that we use to direct our interactions with our learning communities.

Taken together, the articles in this issue conclude that even though we are the caretakers of information, we should not be the gatekeepers of information. We must continue to vigorously defend the right to access information even in the face of difficult challenges, and we must be equally vigilant about examining our own biases and resist the urge to self-censor for fear of controversy. However, it is important to note here that this does not mean that we should give equal consideration to inaccurate, racist, or otherwise harmful material that actively devalues or dehumanizes people. We can (and should) both defend intellectual freedom and also create safe and inclusive environments from which to access that information.

As you read through this issue, I hope that you are emboldened to continue advocating for your students and safeguarding their right to access not only your physical space and materials, but also the voices and ideas that will help shape their lives as readers and learners.

Nicolle Mazzola is the LMC director at Westgate School in Arlington Heights, Illinois. She is the awards function representative for the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE) and the publicity cochair of the AISLE Monarch Reader’s Choice Award. She is a member of AASL and serves on the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board and chair of the Inspire Collection Development Grant Committee.

The School Librarian's Role in Reading

The AASL Board of Directors approved the following position statement on January 25, 2020.

The American Association of School Librarians supports the position that “reading is the core of personal and academic competency” (AASL 2018, 11). Ready access to a wide variety of reading materials increases the chances that learners will become readers and choose to read (Krashen 2004). Deep reading for comprehension and meaning making is the foundation for constructing knowledge (Todd 2015, 13).

As literacy leaders, school librarians are positioned to elevate the importance of reading as well as reading proficiency to support all learners’ academic success. Decades of research indicate that there is a positive correlation between learners’ attending schools with full-time, state-certified school librarians and higher scores on standardized reading tests (Gretes 2013).

Reading promotion, instruction, resources, and services provided by school librarians (through the school library) are developed around six essential Shared Foundations—Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage.

As literacy leaders, school librarians are positioned to elevate the importance of reading as well as reading proficiency to support all learners’ academic success.



Inquire

The school librarian designs and teaches engaging inquiry-based learning experiences that incorporate multiple literacies and foster critical thinking. School librarians:

- Foster independent and curriculum-based reading, information literacy, and inquiry skills to support lifelong learning.
- Promote an inquiry process that includes posing questions, finding answers, and developing critical thinking and communication skills through information exploration (AASL 2018, 54).



Include

The school librarian’s role in reading development includes selecting reading materials and resources in a wide variety of formats that reflect diverse and inclusive points of view and

contribute to each learner’s ability to read for informational needs and for personal enjoyment. School librarians:

- Select resources according to principles of intellectual freedom, and provide learners with access to information that represents diverse points of view.
- Enable equitable physical and intellectual access by providing reading-level-free, universally designed environments and adaptive devices.



Collaborate

The school librarian is an instructional partner who models and supports independent reading and the development of reading comprehension through curricular planning, instruction, resources,

and literacy activities. School librarians:

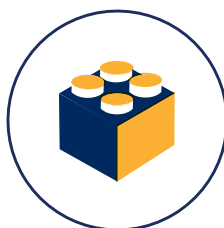
- Co-design, co-implement, and co-evaluate interdisciplinary lessons and units of instruction that help learners increase reading proficiency through inquiry learning experiences.
- Collaborate with classroom educators and specialists to integrate paper and online reading comprehension strategies in library instruction that supports learners' development.



Curate

The school librarian creates a rich reading environment and culture within school libraries and school communities to nurture learners' journeys in finding their passion for reading and lifelong learning. School librarians:

- Organize and maintain a current, diverse, and inclusive collection of reading and information materials in multiple genres and formats that support the developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all learners.
- Create, evaluate, and maintain policies that reflect the principles of intellectual freedom, provide learners with access to information, and protect learners' privacy and confidentiality.



Explore

With deep knowledge of the wide variety of authentic reading materials available in the school library and beyond, the school librarian has a key role in improving learners' reading

proficiency and increasing their learning. School librarians:

- Support reading promotion initiatives in collaboration with classroom educators, reading specialists, public libraries, and community organizations.

- Provide opportunities and advocate for all learners to exercise choice and curiosity in what they read, view, and hear.
- Advocate for learners to explore innovative ideas and produce creative learning products.



Engage

Along with classroom educators and reading specialists, school librarians provide and participate in continual professional development related to library services and reading that reflects current research. School librarians:

- Ensure open access so library stakeholders are served at the point of need.
- Model and advocate for the principles of intellectual freedom and the learner's right to read.
- Lead professional development opportunities to ensure the school community enacts effective practices in reading promotion, instruction, and resource integration.

To read the full position statement, visit
www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/statements.

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FEATURE

WHY INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND EQUITABLE ACCESS



ARE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TODAY

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In a time when circumstances divide us and people are partitioned into factions, libraries still stand as a source of knowledge that can guide us to make informed decisions through the use of credible sources. A balanced collection that provides access to all points of view empowers a community to use information responsibly and make decisions independently. Intellectual freedom and equity of access are still important issues today, especially as we confront uncertain times with the COVID-19 virus and distance education.

In thinking about this issue, the main thoughts that kept coming to us were the idea of every individual as a citizen in a democracy and the hope that democracy inspires that we all will learn to live and work together. Through education and the information found in libraries, democracy allows us as citizens to experience free speech through dialogue not diatribe and to support our opinions with a respect for the diversity of our fellow citizens and a desire to realize equity and justice.

Richard Fitzsimmons stated:

Librarians significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, librarians are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. Librarians have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations. (1998, 2)

From physical access to material selection to policies dealing with challenges to privacy of patron information, school librarians must

demonstrate intellectual freedom to maintain a free and open forum for ideas. School librarians should be protectors of intellectual freedom for minors just as public libraries protect the rights of all citizens regardless of age.

The Right to Receive Information

School librarians should be knowledgeable about the legal precedent protecting the rights of minors because the basic rights of Americans extend to young people even when they are in school.

Although the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly state intellectual freedom as the right of American citizens, the First Amendment has been used to defend intellectual freedom. The First Amendment includes the right to free speech, which has been expanded to include the right to receive information. The Supreme Court refers to the right to access information as the right to receive. The right to receive is an extension of the First Amendment protection given to speakers and to those who receive the information. The Supreme Court first used the phrase "right to receive information and ideas" in *Stanley v. Georgia*. In writing for the court, Justice Black explained, "This freedom embraces the right to distribute literature, and necessarily protects the right to receive it" (1969). The Supreme Court protects the right to receive through four forms of communication: mail, mass media, personal distribution of literature, and public speaking.

While the courts have had problems applying First Amendment rights when the persons involved are minors (Bezanson 1987), the courts have extended the freedom to learn and the right of inquiry through its

defense of the right of expression in *Tinker v. Des Moines*. *Tinker* is the foundation for extending protections to minors within public schools. Mary Elizabeth Bezanson argues that the Supreme Court has implicitly extended the rights of free expression to include the right to have free access to other viewpoints, even when school boards object (1987). In deciding *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the Supreme Court declared that students and teachers do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the school-house gate" (Chmara 2015, 127).

The only court case directly addressing censorship issues in school libraries that has reached the Supreme Court is *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico* (1982). This case was initiated because a conservative activist group compiled a list of nine books it wished to have removed from school libraries. Although a committee of parents and faculty recommended keeping the books in the school library, the local school board removed the nine books from the high school and junior high libraries, referring to them as "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy" (*Pico* 1982 at 857). After board members removed the titles without a formal review process, a group of parents filed a lawsuit against the district claiming their First Amendment right to receive information had been violated. *Pico* was remanded for trial by the U.S. Supreme Court, and the school board voted to return the books to the shelves to avoid further litigation (Klinefelter 2010).

Pico is the first and only Supreme Court decision to address a student's right to receive information; however, it does not provide a clear explanation to what extent a school board can restrict access. All nine Supreme Court justices wrote opinions

on the decision that detail a wide range of views, contributing to the confusion around the issue (Burns 2001). Justice Brennan's opinion emphasized the rights of students, saying the "special characteristics of the school library make that environment especially appropriate for the recognition of the First Amendment rights of students" (Burns 2001, 15). In writing his concurring opinion, Justice Newman explained that the removal of a book from the school library sends the message to students that the book is unacceptable (Bezanson 1987).

In only two cases has the Supreme Court limited minors' rights to receive information when the adults' constitutional rights remained broader. In *Pico's* plurality decision, the court gave school boards latitude to restrict access to information if the school's decision is based on the information being "educationally unsuitable" rather than disagreeing with or disapproving the content. The decision to remove material and declare it "educationally unsuitable" requires a fact-based inquiry and testimony from educational experts. If the decision to remove materials is based solely on the ideas expressed in the books themselves, then that decision was deemed unsuitable (Magi and Garnar 2015).

An additional restriction on minors' rights to receive information came in *Ginsberg v. New York*. This decision allows states to decide that some materials are obscene for minors even if those materials are protected for adults. According to the decision, states can adopt a "distinct, broader definition of obscenity for minors" (Magi and Garnar 2015, 128). Despite this decision, the Supreme Court has made clear that school boards cannot simply ban access to a full category of speech and must not ban material as unsuitable for minors without considering

the entire population of minors, including older teens.

A Core Value of Librarianship

School librarians should be proponents of the values of librarianship, which holds intellectual freedom at the core. Intellectual freedom is one of the core values of the American Library Association (ALA). There are four core ALA statements that act as the foundation for intellectual freedom in libraries: *Libraries: An American Value*, *Library Bill of Rights*, *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association*, and the *Freedom to Read Statement* (ALA 1999; ALA 1996; ALA 2008; ALA 2004).

ALA's cornerstone document for protecting intellectual freedom is the *Library Bill of Rights*. Three of the seven articles in the *Library Bill of Rights* deal with intellectual freedom and censorship, with Article II explaining the need to present all points of view in a collection. In addition, the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee adopted a statement that use of the word "origin" in Article V, which refers to a person's right to use a library, includes the idea of "age." This statement emphasizes that even minors should have access to information.

ALA expands upon the *Library Bill of Rights* through its interpretation of its "Access to Resources and Services in the School Library" (2014).

This document encourages school librarians to fight against censorship efforts from outside forces and to avoid internal barriers, such as restricted shelving and age- or grade-level restrictions (ALA 2014). The most recent amendment to the *Library Bill of Rights* was an addition of a seventh article that explicitly states that all people have the right to privacy and confidentiality in library use.

The *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association* is intended to make known to library professionals and the public the ethical guidelines for librarians and other professionals who provide information services. Article II of the *Code of Ethics* states: "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources" (Magi and Garnar 2015, 17).

The *Freedom to Read Statement* begins with an essay about the need for free access to information as a cornerstone of democracy. Following the essay, the statement includes seven propositions grounded in the U.S. Constitution. Proposition 4 affirms that our society has no place for the restriction and imposition of others' tastes and ideas of suitability. Proposition 4 also details the purpose of guaranteeing the freedom to read:

to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experience in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. (Magi and Garnar 2015, 25)

This statement explains the importance of providing diverse and challenging materials for young people.

Libraries: An American Value statement is written as a contract between libraries and the communities they serve. The statement explicitly mentions that the purpose of libraries is to defend the constitutional rights of all to use the materials, services, and resources of the library. This statement specifically mentions including children and teens as individuals whose rights will be defended (Magi and Garnar 2015).

ALL STUDENTS NEED ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION THAT ALLOWS THEM TO BE INFORMED AND PARTICIPATING MEMBERS OF THEIR SCHOOLS AND THEIR CLASSROOMS.

Additionally, AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* affirms intellectual freedom as a Common Belief central to the profession (2018, 13).

Providing Access to Information

Access has been in the news lately with the COVID-19 pandemic causing school closures and schools shifting to remote learning. All students need access to the information that allows them to be informed and participating members of their schools and their classrooms. If Internet access is either unavailable or unaffordable, then intellectual freedom has been denied.

Having a trained school librarian well-versed in the core values of the profession is essential to provide all learners and educators access to information and resources. School librarians serve as teacher, co-teacher, in-service professional development provider, curriculum designer, instructional resources manager, reading motivator, technology teacher, troubleshooter, and source of instructional support (Lance and Schwarz 2012). The job of a school librarian is necessary to a school's functioning because it provides access to a wealth of educational resources to its community of learners.

Providing a balanced collection that offers differing points of view ensures learners have the opportunity to

expand their knowledge base and become more inclusive; it also allows all students the fundamental right to formulate their own values and beliefs. Providing access to library resources that reflect many points of view falls in line with Article I in the *Library Bill of Rights*:

Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation. (ALA 1996)

By providing materials and information that present all points of view on current and historical issues, school librarians develop collections that represent multiple perspectives, which will encourage learners to look deeper when researching a topic. The school librarian can help students effectively use materials by framing student instruction around guided inquiry, literacy skills, and critical thinking. By choosing diverse authors and materials, school librarians expose students to unfamiliar voices who may have different perspectives about controversial topics. Through this practice, school librarians advocate for intellectual access. By interpreting information and ideas from diverse sources, students can seek and create

their own philosophies and opinions and reexamine previously held concepts and values. By balancing the collection with all viewpoints, school librarians add value to the research of their learning communities. Ensuring these materials come in a variety of formats that accommodate all learners enables every member of the learning community to access the information needed to explore an issue or answer a question. For learners, the school library represents one of our most cherished freedoms—the freedom to speak our minds and hear what others have to say.

Carol Kuhlthau explains in her steps to using an effective information-seeking process that when the search is completed, the student should have established either new meaning or clarified previous meanings, enabling that learner to either explain what the new learning is or put that learning to use in his/her life (2005). A topic is often considered controversial because it addresses basic questions of who a student (or school community) is, how the student (or the school community) should judge others, and how the student (or school community) should judge themselves. These questions are highly subjective and depend on one's view of the world and one's values. Our values become the lenses through which events and knowledge are interpreted and transmitted. By having a balanced collection,



school librarians do no less than help students think critically and formulate their own identities and analyze their own values.

Collection Policies

A collection must be backed up by policies supporting learners' right to access different points of view. Jamie LaRue states, "Too many school libraries still lack fundamental policies; there are growing restrictions to access; and by their own admission, people responsible for material selection are more concerned about avoiding controversy than supporting the curriculum or student needs" (2016). School librarians and school boards should be prepared to face challenges from parents and others in the community by creating and utilizing a policy to handle controversies rising out of book challenges that may arise when a balanced collection is available. More information on writing policies for selection and reconsideration can be found in ALA's "Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit" (2018).

Policies should contain at a minimum:

- A reference to ALA's *Library Bill of Rights* that supports intellectual and academic freedom
- A rationale that explains the importance of exposing learners to a wide variety of material and information, some of which may be considered controversial

- An explanation for how book selection is conducted
- A process for responding to challenges

School library policies and procedures should in no way restrict equitable access or deny access, either physically or intellectually. School librarians often note a fear of creating controversy over materials chosen for their libraries; therefore, many school librarians self-censor (Coley 2002; Dawkins 2017; Garry 2015; Rickman 2010; Whelan 2009). Materials should not be chosen because of anyone's personal bias or beliefs, nor should they be removed because of perceived community disapproval. Policies that contain references to and/or copies of the *Library Bill of Rights* communicate the importance of access to all ideas and viewpoints. "The *Library Bill of Rights* is an important guide to professional conduct in terms of intellectual freedom. It is a standard by which one can gauge daily practices against desired professional behavior in the realms of freedom of access to information, communications, and intellectual activity....A librarian's primary responsibility is to provide, not restrict, access to information" (Evans 1995, 512–513).

Intellectual Freedom in International School Libraries

Although intellectual freedom is a protected right in the United States and a cherished value in school libraries, other countries around the world do not have the protections provided by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. While some

countries do have protected speech, not every country recognizes this fundamental right. To address this, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) developed principles that incorporate the intellectual freedom that is a core value of librarianship.

IFLA encourages its members to promote diversity (2019). Diversity includes race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status. No student should be discriminated against. All children are unique and as such need to find their own identities, their own voices. IFLA affirms this principle of access to all students with the following statements:

- Libraries provide access to information, ideas, and works of imagination. They serve as gateways to knowledge, thought, and culture.
- Libraries provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and cultural development for both individuals and groups.
- Libraries contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help to safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights.
- Libraries have a responsibility both to guarantee and to facilitate access to expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity. To this end, libraries

shall acquire, preserve, and make available the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society.

- Libraries shall ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral, and religious views.
- Libraries shall acquire, organize, and disseminate information freely and oppose any form of censorship.
- Libraries shall make materials, facilities, and services equally accessible to all users. There shall be no discrimination due to race, creed, gender, age, or for any other reason.
- Library users shall have the right to personal privacy and anonymity. Librarians and other library staff shall not disclose the identity of users or the materials they use to a third party.
- Libraries funded from public sources and to which the public have access shall uphold the principles of intellectual freedom.
- Librarians and other employees in such libraries have a duty to uphold those principles.
- Librarians and other professional libraries staff shall fulfil their responsibilities both to their employer and to their users. In cases of conflict between those responsibilities, the duty towards the user shall take precedence. (IFLA 2019)

Conclusion

School librarians should include ideas concerning intellectual freedom into their lessons. Valerie Nye states, "Educating all people about intellectual freedom and free access to information is one of the most important

roles librarians have in democratic societies" (2017). As a profession that holds this right as a core value, we cannot remain silent about this issue.

School librarians house active information centers that are designed to meet the needs of diverse learners and faculty through both physical and intellectual access. The school library is the access point for all users to seek information in various formats. Our role is to provide access to the widest diversity of resources that encourage learners to think critically and become effective and ethical users of information.

As school librarians continue to be agents of change in the twenty-first century they need to respond to intellectual freedom issues by creating and maintaining proactive collection development policies, protecting the confidentiality and privacy of users, and collaborating with other members of the learning community to provide lessons that highlight critical thinking and



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problem-solving skills. Intellectual freedom includes teaching students to choose accurate and reliable information both in print and from the Internet.

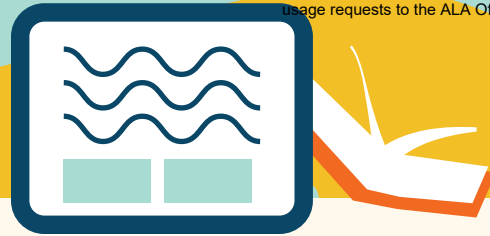
Finally, actively educating our colleagues about intellectual freedom by reviewing court cases, utilizing the tools available to us as members of ALA and AASL, and knowing the seminal tools we have such as the *Library Bill of Rights* will remind all of us that we are on the forefront of protecting our core values and creating a generation of learners who will have the freedom to read and receive information because of our efforts.



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INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES

A Practical Application

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In 2017 AASL released the *National School Library Standards*. The revised standards were streamlined to reflect the attributes that dynamic school librarians, learners, and school libraries should possess. The standards provide school librarians with a framework for creating school libraries that support student growth (Hancock et al. 2019). They also articulate Common Beliefs that represent the core values of librarianship. Among them, still, is the belief that intellectual freedom is the right of every learner.

What Is Intellectual Freedom?

Intellectual freedom, specifically as it applies to students, encompasses two propositions: the right for students to receive information and the right of free speech. These rights are guaranteed by the First Amendment and have been upheld in courts (Chmara 2015). AASL updating its standards does not change the school librarian's commitment to First Amendment tenets, including:

1. Libraries should provide learners with sufficient access to resources that will enable them to pursue a variety of ideas and viewpoints that are of personal interest.

2. Libraries should also provide spaces where learners can engage in mutually respectful exchanges of ideas. (AASL 2018)

The central role of a school librarian is not to censor but to create an environment that encourages responsible inquiry and exploration and one that reinforces the principles of a democratic society.

Challenges Associated with Supporting Intellectual Freedom

While a significant number of school librarians support the idea of intellectual freedom, that support doesn't always translate into practice (McNichol 2016). Internal and external censorship can prevent building ongoing support for intellectual freedom for students. Data from a 2008 *School Library Journal* survey on censorship found that school librarians are most culpable when it comes to self-censoring (Whelan 2009). The survey found that some school librarians admitted to self-censoring. Out of 654 schools librarians, many indicated a tendency to avoid books with sexual content (87%), language (61%), violence (51%), homosexuality (47%), racism (34%), and religion (16%) because they fear parental backlash. Another

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article notes that self-censoring in school libraries is on the rise (Baillie 2017).

Additionally, intellectual freedom challenges come from external sources. As a result of these outside forces, some school librarians may choose to avoid programs, activities, services, or collection decisions that could be viewed as controversial. Such pressures reinforce self-censoring behaviors and prevent school librarians from engaging in advocacy work.

The American Library Association (ALA) urges librarians to think of the dangers to democracy that come

“Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it less able to deal with controversy and difference.”

from censorship. ALA maintains “freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it less able to deal with controversy and difference” (2004).

I’ve personally spent a significant amount of time speaking out against some of the community pushback libraries have received over the years. Some events have brought either local or national attention to libraries. Consider the impact that some of

these events might have had on the overall morale of libraries.

The bill to arrest librarians for providing access to books.

Lawmakers in Missouri proposed H.B. 2044, a bill that would penalize librarians for providing youth access to materials deemed age inappropriate. Under the proposed bill a parental oversight committee would be tasked with deciding whether content for youth is considered age appropriate. If passed librarians who fail to comply with the committee’s directives could receive a fine or serve time in jail. Tennessee proposed similar legislation, H.B. 2721, but the bill “was killed in the House Cities and Counties subcommittee” (Peet 2020).

The banning of Angie Thomas’s *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Hate U Give*, by Katy Independent School District (ISD) in Texas.

The Katy ISD received a challenge to Angie Thomas’s book from a parent, who strongly believed that the book’s use of foul language was excessive and inappropriate. In response the district removed copies of the book from its shelves. Although the district affirmed that the book was not technically banned but under a standard procedural review, the district removed copies of the book during their review process (Brust 2017). In their policy dated January 2018, the Katy ISD states that “access to challenged resources may be restricted during the reconsideration process. The district may deny access to a child if requested by the child’s parent” (Katy ISD



2018). In the case of Thomas's book, removing copies from library shelves implied that access was denied to all students.

The *Forbes* article titled "Amazon Should Replace Local Libraries to Save Taxpayers Money" that ignited a social media tirade.

The now-archived article, written by Panos Mourdoukoutas, argued that libraries were not relevant and detailed the potential tax benefits to residents should libraries close. Mourdoukoutas contended that libraries "once offered the local community lots of services in exchange for their tax money." According to Mourdoukoutas, the dispensability of libraries is due to the fact that other agencies can perform these services. In the article, he recommended that in lieu of libraries Amazon open bookstores in all local communities and Starbucks serve as community hubs.

The Aurora Public Library controversy. Aurora Public Library became the subject of intense scrutiny resulting from a decision to publicly display a controversial poem. The poem, "Hijab Means Jihad," was part of a three-week display featuring twenty different panels of artistry. Words from the poem, which were superimposed over a picture of a Confederate flag, seemed to condone (or perhaps even suggest) violence against Muslim women. However, that was not the author's intent. Author George Miller, a professor at Lewis University, originally intended for the poem to be satirical in nature (Farver 2018). The piece was intended to highlight the attitudes and injustices toward Muslims. Unfortunately, instead of shining a light on these types of injustices, Miller's work became an example

of the abhorrent behavior he was attempting to shun.

The library received a substantial amount of backlash for the display, which culminated in the resignation of the library's communications manager, Amy Roth (Crosby 2018). Roth admitted that she initially thought the piece was offensive but after rereading it she felt that she "had to stand up for Miller's rights to say what he wanted, as his words were not causing any imminent danger" (Crosby 2018). In contradiction to Roth's beliefs, the Chicago office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy group, believed the poem to be blatantly offensive. In a statement, the group confirmed their opinion "that the display itself was presented at face-value without any such context thus working to shock and threaten viewers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, at a time in which anti-Muslim and anti-Hijab animosity is a serious problem" (CAIR 2018). Other community leaders also voiced opposition to the display. In response to community outrage, the library removed the display and issued a public apology on behalf of the library's executive director.

The banning of the book *Stick*. Beaverton School District (Oregon) sent notices to parents that the school's superintendent decided to ban Andrew Smith's young adult novel, *Stick*. The young adult author and high school teacher shared a news article about the book ban on his Facebook page where he was quoted and received an overwhelming amount of support (Jamison 2018). Described as an intense novel, *Stick* follows the life of 13-year-old Stark McClellan as he navigates the complexities of a tumultuous life.

Intense themes related to homosexuality, physical abuse, and bullying are intertwined throughout the story. In a public statement posted to Facebook, the district revealed that a formal complaint requesting reconsideration of the book's availability to students was made by a concerned parent. According to the post, board policies were followed in addressing the matter. A review committee, consisting of a diverse group of stakeholders—including the parent who initiated the complaint and a few district administrators—convened to discuss the appropriateness of the book's content. After deliberating, the committee tendered its recommendation to the district's deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. The committee recommended keeping the book and denied the parent's request for removal. However, the superintendent upheld the recommendation that prohibited middle grades, freshmen, and sophomores from accessing the book.

The story of Dee Ann Venuto and DaNae Leu. DaNae Leu worked in a school district where a parent objected to a children's book depicting the home life of a same-sex family. The parent started a petition to have the book removed. In response to the objection, the district pulled the book and instructed Leu, who worked at a different school from where the challenge originated, to remove copies of the book as well. Instead Leu put the book on display. In Venuto's case, a high school received a challenge to remove three books from its shelves because of subject matter involving LGBTQIA+ populations. The challenge later resulted in the removal of one of the titles (Adams, Leu, and Venuto 2015).

In light of so many challenges that not only threaten to undermine the sanctity of students' rights and delegitimize the professional work of librarians, school library professionals must find a way to keep fighting for the values that we espouse. We must defend our profession against all forms of censorship. The question is, How do we convince school librarians to fully support intellectual freedom when public support is grim?

In light of so many challenges that not only threaten to undermine the sanctity of students' rights and delegitimize the professional work of librarians, school library professionals must find a way to keep fighting for the values that we espouse. We must defend our profession against all forms of censorship. The question is, How do we convince school librarians to fully support intellectual freedom when public support is grim?

Leveraging the Standards

The revised AASL Standards make it clear that all learners should be able to think and grow. Critical thinking doesn't happen in a vacuum. Within the context of school libraries, the prevailing assumption is that critical thinking is a skill that is developed through the process of encountering and evaluating different types of information sources (McMullin 2018). These skills embody information literacy, an area of expertise taught in school libraries. Multiple perspectives add a richness to the learner's experience that is not unearthed by single narratives. Paulo Freire argues that education itself is not neutral; it either oppresses or liberates (1993). By teaching learners how to interact with ideas different

from their own, they can gain a broader understanding of complex issues. When access to different perspectives is stymied, opportunities to recognize biased or inaccurate information is also missed (Preddy 2015). Accept the fact that there will always be some type of opposition to what some may feel equates to the propagation of misinformation, bias, or agenda pushing.

Having standards will not automatically create buy-in. Standards will act as a guideline for professional best practices. While the guidelines may make sense to school library practitioners, they may appear to be nothing more than professional

jargon to others when defending a potential book ban. Therefore, it is important for school librarians to educate their respective communities on the role of libraries in supporting information freedom. Let administrators, teachers, parents, and students know what the standards require. Center discussions around the best interest and the rights of learners. Have collaborative discussions with multiple stakeholders to determine the best approach for using the standards to support intellectual freedom that includes all perspectives. These types of discussions are necessary to demonstrate what a free exchange of ideas represents. As the school librarian, take charge of those conversations. Show parents that a difference of opinion doesn't mean that common ground is unobtainable.

It is important for school librarians to educate their respective communities on the role of libraries in supporting information freedom.

Build Community Allies

Lastly, intellectual freedom supports inclusivity efforts and should not be siloed within communities. In an article for ALA's Office of Diversity Literacy and Outreach Services, I discuss how intellectual freedom supports diversity initiatives (Jamison 2018). By advocating for intellectual freedom, school librarians are working to change the narrative for marginalized groups. Discus-

sions about intellectual freedom are primarily focused on issues related to the censoring of controversial books. The connection between diversity and censorship is often viewed as two independent variables. However, diversity and intellectual freedom are not stand-alone issues. According to Shannon Oltmann, "Many of the most challenged books, year after year, feature voices from diverse communities (including those of women, racial or ethnic minorities, and LGBT people)" (2017). Oltmann argues that intellectual freedom is a vehicle that helps advance diverse perspectives. This, of course, is only true if school librarians are diligent in ensuring that patrons have equity in access to books that represent a myriad of different experiences.

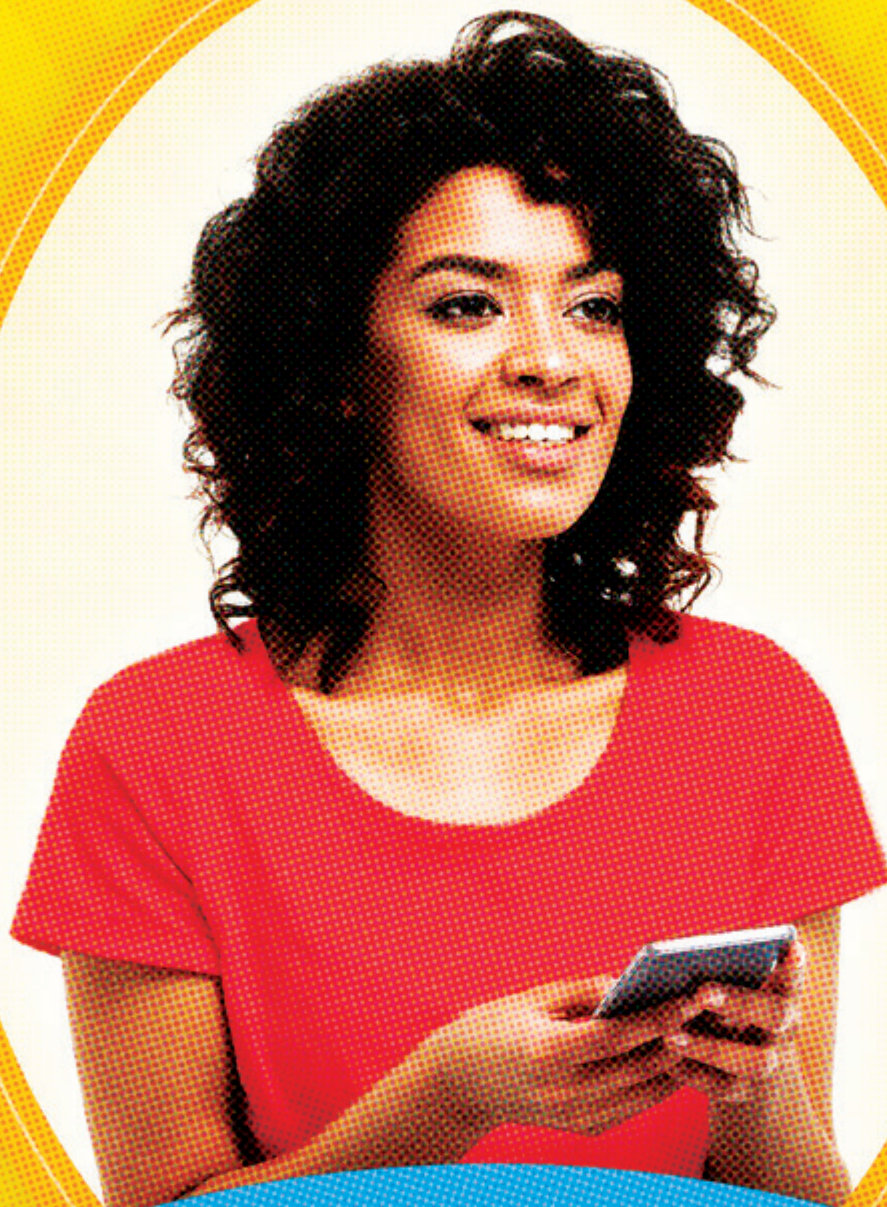


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LEARNERS' LEGACIES AS DIGITAL CITIZENS

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Introduction

I first heard the term *digital legacy* about a decade ago. I was having lunch with a friend who worked as a freelance writer. She wrote articles for a wide range of publications. During our lunch, the conversation turned to technology, and she asked me if I was familiar with the term *digital legacy*. I told her that I had not heard of it and, of course, was intrigued. She was writing a piece on the digital life and information left behind following a person's death, also known as digital legacy (Digital Legacy Association 2019). She told me that your Facebook or Twitter (sorry, no Snapchat or Instagram at the time) accounts don't just disappear. These accounts don't know you are gone. The Internet goes on without you. As much as I work in technology this made sense to me, but it simply had not occurred to me. We as digital citizens were building these lives online that lived on long after we were gone.

The first book I read on the topic of digital legacy was *Your Digital Afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter Are Your Estate, What's Your Legacy?* by Evan Carroll and John Ramano. In the past few years new books have been published like *Digital Legacy Plan: A Guide to the Personal and Practical Elements*

of Your Digital Life before You Die from Angela Crocker and Vicki McLeod. Each book offers practical tips and ideas on how to deal with the lives, files, and materials we have created,

We teach our patrons to search and evaluate the best online information, but do they learn about the digital lives they are building online?

Our students in K-12 and higher education are creating so much digital information, are we instructing them to consider their legacy?

built, and saved online after death. These monographs are directed more toward adults and their estate plans. They are useful and thoughtful books

to start readers thinking about their belongings in a digital world when we so often focus on the physical.

The more I read on this subject the more I thought about how digital legacy tied into our digital citizenship. As a former school and academic librarian, I had taught hundreds of information literacy and research sessions to students. I started to think more on how important digital legacy should be to our students in terms of their digital footprints. We teach our patrons to search and evaluate the best online information, but do they learn about the digital lives they are building online? Our students in K-12 and higher education are creating so much digital information, are we instructing them to consider their legacy?

Death is not a popular topic for discussion, but the legacy we leave behind in both our physical and digital world is important. These legacies deserve recognition. The Order of the Good Death, an organization dedicated to making death a part of life, has eight tenets within their movement. Number two states, "I believe that the culture of silence around death should be broken through discussion, gatherings, art, innovation, and scholarship." In addition, tenet

seven says, "I believe that my family and friends should know my end-of-life wishes, and that I should have the necessary paperwork to back-up those wishes" (n.d.).

Our young digital citizens should recognize the long-lasting legacies they leave online. We as school librarians have an excellent opportunity to work with our students through scholarship to recognize those lasting digital legacies.

Digital Citizenship

When you are defining digital citizenship, it is usually looked at as the responsible and appropriate behavior

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in technology and online use. This behavior can also include digital or online etiquette, ethics, and security. With online bullying and cyber safety a continuous concern, teaching our students to be responsible and aware digital citizens is imperative (Phillips and Lee 2019). School librarians, peer educators, parents, and the learning community at large can work together to aid young people in demonstrating what

being a strong digital citizen looks like. It is so important to develop that digital community (Hollandsworth, Dowdy, and Donovan 2011).

Jerry Fingal details five competencies of digital citizenship on the International Society for Technology in Education's website. These five competencies are inclusive, informed, engaged, balanced, and alert (2019):

- Inclusive means users are open, aware, and respectful of multiple users and their viewpoints.
- Informed falls under information literacy and evaluating resources and information found online.
- Engaged involves using our online world as a responsible citizen to aid, not hinder, our world.
- Balanced means that learners are making good decisions about how their time is being used online.
- Alert is awareness of actions online.

It is in this last competency where digital legacy and digital citizenship cross. Being aware and alert of online action, the lives we build online and the legacy that will remain for years to come.

Digital Legacy

Death and dying is never an easy topic to discuss with anyone, least of all children and young adults. When talking about digital legacy it might be easier to come at the topic from the perspective of lives built or created online as opposed to those lives that are left behind online. Same idea with a different lens. It is more of a focus on a student's digital footprint, what life they are creating online, and understanding the permanent nature of information created and shared in digital environments (Dawkins 2020). Digital legacy falls in well with information literacy and



When talking about digital legacy it might be easier to come at the topic from the perspective of lives built or created online as opposed to those lives that are left behind online.

digital citizenship instruction. As school librarians we are well trained and positioned to be leaders in this topic for our learning community.

Tools You Can Use

The following resources can help school librarians in their digital legacy and digital citizenship instruction:

Be Internet Awesome: <<https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/>>. Brought to you by Google, Be Internet Awesome teaches young people about being good digital citizens. The site offers "The Internet Code of Awesome," lessons for teachers, information for parents, and a fun game called the Interland where young people can play and learn about being Internet safe.

Common Sense Media: <<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship>>. Common Sense Media offers a fully searchable K–12 digital citizenship curriculum. If you are looking for lesson plans to train students on critical digital literacy skills that can be shared within your entire learning community this is a great resource to check out.

IPassword: <<https://ipassword.com/>>. This site enables users to store and share passwords, software licenses, notes, and other items that might be sensitive. It offers users a place where you can set up accounts for your family to share passwords, notes, and other sensitive information.

Gmail Inactive Policy: <<https://myaccount.google.com/inactive>>. Gmail offers a policy to plan for what happens when you die or when you stop using an account. Google gives users options to choose when an account should become inactive or be deleted permanently (for example after three months of inactivity). Users can also choose who to notify if there are long periods of inactivity. A digital wellness check in other words.

Department of Homeland Security: <<https://www.dhs.gov/be-cyber-smart/cyber-lessons#>>. The Department of Homeland Security offers videos, lessons, and information on how to be cyber smart. Some examples of lessons currently include WiFi safety, multi-factor authentication, app sharing, oversharing, phishing, and device protection.

phishing, and device protection.

Cyber Security Awareness

Month: <<https://www.dhs.gov/national-cyber-security-awareness-month>>. This event, sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security, occurs every October. National Cybersecurity Awareness Month is an annual initiative to offer awareness on the importance of cybersecurity. The site offers a toolkit (broken down by grade level), resources, and information to host your own cybersecurity event.

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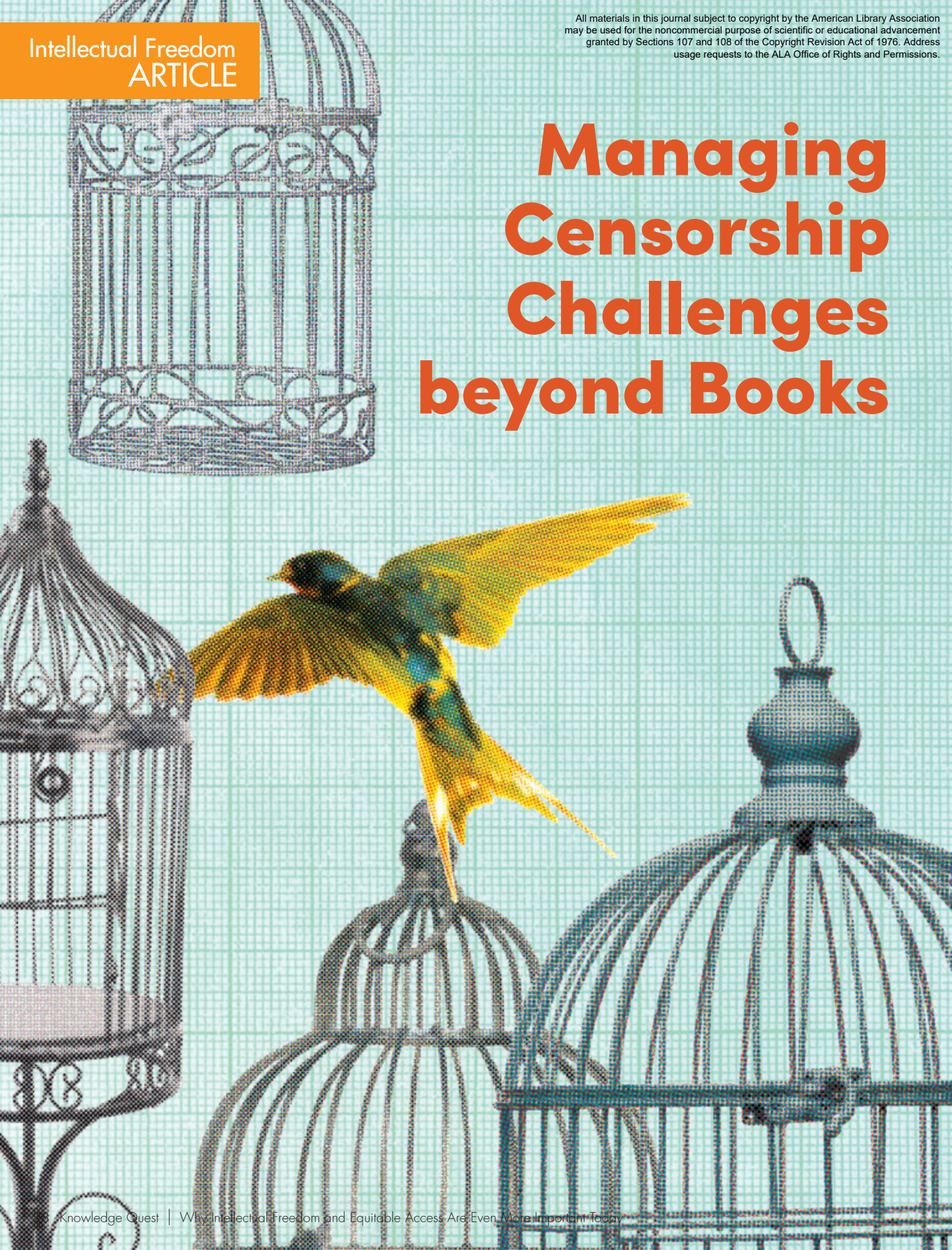


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Managing Censorship Challenges beyond Books



Kristin Pekoll

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School libraries are no longer solely repositories for the information that has traditionally been published in books. School libraries still collect and circulate books in fulfillment of their educational mission, but that mission is much broader now. And the resources used to achieve that mission have expanded as well. School library professionals are providing education and access to information in many different formats and technologies. The role of the school librarian is much more than just literacy; it is about visibility, culture, and access to the world.

Professional school library values embrace equitable access to information for all, including underserved populations. To provide truly equitable access, school librarians need to provide equitable representation of all users and all backgrounds in all types of content.

According to AASL Common Belief 5, "Intellectual freedom is every learner's right. Learners should have the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control their access to ideas and information" (AASL 2018). The school library provides a point of equitable access to resources that allows learners to think critically and form their own opinions.

School library professionals profess that value with more than just books; they profess it by providing access to technology and resources that represent and serve everyone in their community. They provide access to LGBTQIA+ families in their displays, gender identity in their storytimes, and cultural perspectives in their posters and artwork. They provide games for all learning styles and abilities. They provide digital access to all students regardless of location or status. When that access is denied or censored, learners aren't the only ones harmed; the greater society is damaged.

Censorship and Inequitable Access

When providing services and resources to all, school librarians and educators often encounter obstacles that target learners who need them the most. These obstacles can include censorship and inequitable access. ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) receives reports of challenges and bans from the frontline and in the media. It may be commonly known that OIF tracks book challenges that happen in libraries and schools, but what may not be known is that it also tracks challenges and bans of non-book resources and services. In 2019 OIF recorded 607 total materials affected

by challenges and bans. Materials can include displays, artwork, social media, programs, speakers, films, games, music, newspapers, magazines, reading lists, handouts, databases, and electronic resources. Taking down a poster or canceling a database subscription because of a complaint is as much censorship as banning *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou.

Challenges are not just complaints. They are attempts to remove or restrict access to library resources. People may cast judgment on library materials or services, but disapproval is not a challenge. A challenge is defined by the intent of the request to deny or restrict access to others. Challenges can be a written complaint or reconsideration form, which is traditionally how many librarians have determined if a resource or service is being challenged. But challenges can also be a call to action on social media, a letter to the editor of the newspaper, or an online blog. Challenges can be protests and pickets. Challenges can be a public comment at a board meeting. On the other hand, a ban is the removal of materials. Sometimes the ban is a decision made by a committee, and other times it's when an administrator or staff member removes books without following a library's policy.

According to the “2020 State of America’s Libraries Report,” the majority of challenges still target books and the majority of challenges happen in public libraries (ALA 2020). But when OIF analyzed the types of challenges and locations, it found that the majority of book challenges occur in school libraries, while the majority of challenges to programs and displays happen in public libraries.

So why is this information important? The more information that is collected about censorship incidents—what’s being challenged, where it’s being challenged, who is challenging it—the more accurate and timely resources and support can be provided to the profession that’s committed to defending intellectual freedom.

The number one resource OIF uses is ALA’s *Library Bill of Rights* and its interpretations. There are currently 28 interpretations ranging from privacy, equity, and diversity, to programs, displays, and Internet filtering (available at www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/

[interpretations](#)>). Each resource has been carefully and thoughtfully deliberated by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, reviewed widely by the library profession, and adopted by the ALA Council. It can take twelve to twenty-four months for each interpretation to be updated or crafted from scratch. These resources aren’t just to be used during a challenge to defend a specific book or resource, they are also to be used to protect libraries and strengthen policies before a challenge happens.

Programs

Most library workers are familiar with drag queen story hours and have probably heard of a public library where the program has been met with protests and social media outrage. In 2019 OIF recorded 53 challenges to drag queen story hours; that doesn’t include the broad range of LGBTQIA+ inclusive programs like trans IOI and queer book clubs.

Author K.A. Holt was invited to a school in Flint, Michigan, after the

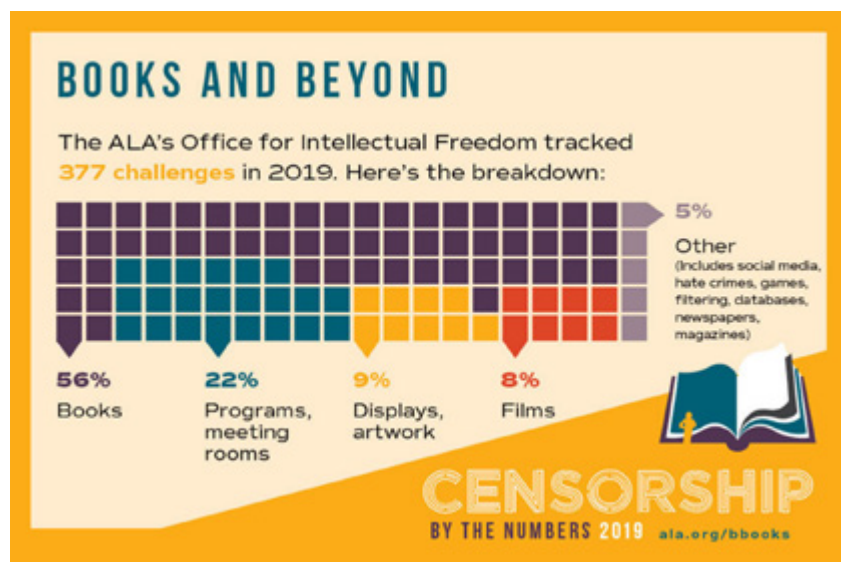
student body read her book *Rhyme Schemer* as a “One Book, One School” summer read. Days before her visit, the school drastically limited participation to allow only high school seniors to attend the presentation. *School Library Journal* recommends the book for 4th- to 7th-graders (Tidman 2014). Students who contacted the author, wishing they could meet her, claimed that the decision was made because the author is gay.

A school in Wheaton, Illinois, invited author Robin Stevenson to talk about writing her book, *Kid Activists*. She was disinvited when parents complained that Harvey Milk was included with fifteen other stories of important activists.

“Mindfulness Moments” was a yoga program used in a Maryland elementary school. It had been funded by a grant and featured a local children’s yoga instructor and a licensed clinical therapist to teach breathing exercises and calming techniques to promote social and emotional growth. It was challenged by a local pastor who claimed that yoga seeks to recruit people and indoctrinate them with false truths. The school canceled the program (ALA OIF 2019c).

Programs are a significant source of information and social-emotional development, particularly to neurodiverse and underrepresented students. The demand for guidance in how to defend programs is rising.

ALA can provide a variety of comprehensive resources to support school libraries in how to write policies for their programs and events. Decisions to cancel or deny access may not be in a school librarian’s hands, but school librarians may have some influence in designing a policy that includes programming as a resource and can advocate for an objective review process before decisions are made.



American Library Association, Office for Intellectual Freedom. “Censorship by the Numbers 2019. Books and Beyond.” Artwork used courtesy of ALA. www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/bannedbooksweek/ideasandresources/freedomdownloads.

The *Library Bill of Rights* has been updated with a 2019 interpretation that emphasizes the role that programs play in supporting the mission of the library by providing students with additional opportunities for accessing information, education, and recreation. The interpretation, "Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource," states:

Concerns, questions, or complaints about library-initiated programs and displays are handled according to the same written policy and procedures that govern reconsiderations of other library resources. These policies should apply equally to all people, including, but not limited to, library users, staff, and members of the governing body. The policies should set forth the library's commitment to free and open access to information and ideas for all users. (ALA OIF 2019b)

While many school districts designate the task of organizing programming and events to library workers, the ultimate responsibility and authority for programs usually rests with the administration and the board. Just as school librarians consider a selection policy when purchasing books that will circulate well, be informative and authoritative, meet the educational needs of a wide variety of learners, and provide diverse viewpoints, they must also utilize these same professional skills in organizing programs.

Online Resources

Online resources are vital now, considering the necessity of distance learning in schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Databases are a popular research tool for students because they offer keyword search, full text, and access from

home. A database has a wide variety of resources distributed from one starting point.

Challenges to databases and online resources are relatively new to OIF reports. Many of the challenges that have surfaced in Utah, Colorado, Indiana, Virginia, Idaho, and Montana were organized by pressure groups broadly accusing database vendors of distributing pornography.

In Colorado, a group called "Pornography Is Not Education" sued EBSCO and the Colorado Library Consortium claiming that they were knowingly distributing materials that were harmful to minors. And in Utah, after a parent complained, the Utah Education Network eliminated database access for 700,000 K-12 students in the state. It was reinstated after weeks of testimony and advocacy by Utah teachers and school librarians.

Because of the ongoing shortage of school librarians there are fewer people who understand the value of these shared databases and how essential these tools are for research and inquiry. Databases are library resources just like books, and the consideration of removing access to them or canceling subscriptions should go through the appropriate reconsideration policy. It can be a gut

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reaction to cancel, delete, or unsubscribe anything that is tainted with pornography, but it's important to consider the resource in its entirety and how it aligns with school district policy. It's not uncommon for school libraries and districts to overlook their well-established policies when complaints are submitted about databases because of the misconceived notion that censorship only affects books.

In 2018 ALA's "Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, and Academic Libraries" was updated to facilitate libraries in protecting resources and the intellectual freedom of their users. The toolkit covers not just books, but also digital resources like databases:

Digital resources and services allow libraries to significantly expand the scope of information available to users. Like all resources and services provided by the library, provision of access to digital resources and services should follow the principles outlined in the *Library Bill of Rights* to ensure equitable access regardless of content or platform. (ALA OIF 2018)

While the digital divide is not considered censorship based on content, it does limit access to the

intellectual freedoms the library profession holds dear. According to recent studies and reports, the digital divide is still very much a reality today. A 2019 Pew Research Survey showed that only 56 percent of lower-income American households have broadband services (Anderson and Kumar 2019). Closing the digital divide would improve literacy, democracy, social mobility, economic equality, and economic growth.

ALA is dedicated to closing the digital divide and ensuring that all libraries have access to affordable high-capacity unfiltered broadband services. Whether it's advocating for #ebooksforall with publishers, recommending active WiFi networks at libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic, or sending bookmobiles equipped with WiFi hotspots out into their communities, the message is clear: libraries are essential to providing online resources and fighting for digital equity.

Displays

Displays serve multiple purposes. They are attractive, enticing, and often welcome users into the school library space. Displays showcase materials that might otherwise get overlooked. They offer opportunities to cross-promote additional services and events in the school library. Displays themselves are a resource. They offer information in a different format, engage users to rethink traditional ideas, and offer opportunities to consider marginal viewpoints. But their ephemeral nature and creative design leave them vulnerable to exclusion as a "library resource" that can be challenged.

School libraries will often use displays to recognize significant or historical events like Black History Month or Rainbow Book Month.

School librarians create displays that bring light to stories and viewpoints that are neglected or to highlight their school library's core values of inclusivity and intellectual freedom.

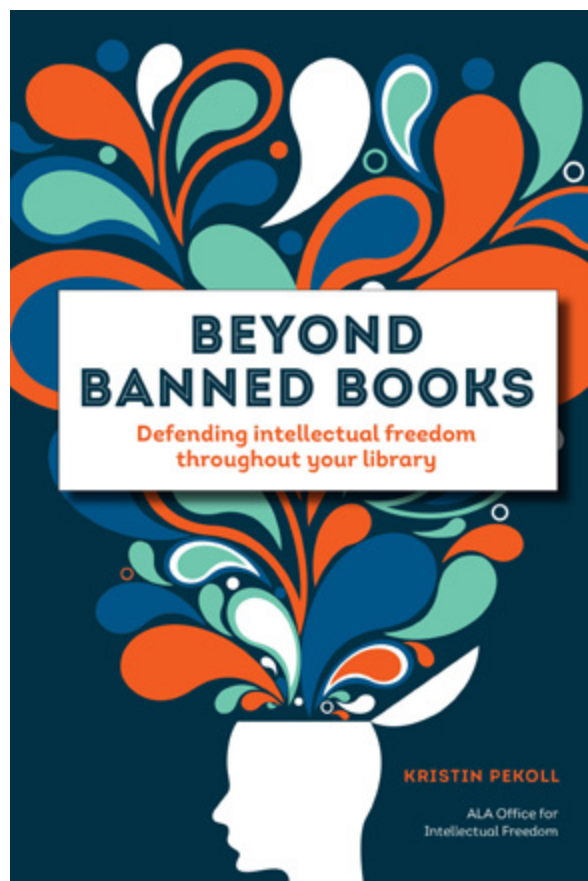
LGBTQIA+ displays, Banned Books Week displays, and displays with racial or political issues receive the majority of complaints. Sometimes a specific book title in the display may be deemed offensive, and sometimes the subject matter of the display is found objectionable. When there are no policies to guide the school librarian in responding to concerns about displays, the display often will be dismantled.

The aforementioned *Library Bill of Rights* interpretation "Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource" is also used to support displays. The keyword is "library-initiated." School libraries not only provide access to information in their collections, they also foster the ability to use those resources through educational programs and instructions. School librarians create a visual environment that nurtures creativity and exploration with displays, instruction, libguides, reading lists, and bulletin boards—all ways that communities use and explore the school library. Those resources are

protected too. School libraries do not need to adopt a policy for each individual resource, but they do need to make sure all resources and services are covered.

Support

Challenges can happen at any time, at any type of institution, and to any type of material or service. Whether a school library is fully prepared with sound policies and a strong foundation of professional values or it is vulnerable and isolated, support is available. During a challenge, OIF can write a letter of support to the school board or provide talking points and reviews to defend materials and services that are under



American Library Association ALA Editions. "Beyond Banned Books: Defending Intellectual Freedom throughout Your Library." Available for use by educational institutions and individuals for educational purposes. <<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/beyond-banned-books-defending-intellectual-freedom-throughout-your-library>>.

reconsideration. OIF can provide information about state statutes and legal cases or help with press relations and social media.

But OIF can't offer support if they don't know about it. Reports of challenges and censorship help everyone. OIF uses the information to track trends and strategically develop resources that can help the profession in protecting intellectual freedom. Only 3–11 percent of challenges are reported. In 2019 377 challenges were recorded. That means that as many as 12,000 challenges are happening in libraries that no one knows about (ALA 2020).

Challenges can be reported confidentially by anyone at anytime. Support from the Office for Intellectual Freedom is tailored to the specific school, community, and situation. Even in situations where support isn't needed or where action can't be taken because of potential consequences, OIF is always available for emotional support and listening. When school library workers are going through a censorship incident, it can feel lonely and hostile. It is stressful and emotional and overwhelming. Having support can make the situation better.

Beyond Banned Books

When OIF analyzes the larger trends and issues that surface each year, there is a continual increase in challenges to library displays, programs, and online resources. *Beyond Banned Books: Defending Intellectual Freedom throughout Your Library* is a helpful resource for librarians when challenges arise that don't fit the traditional book challenges.

The book, categorized by library resource type, offers questions to consider when evaluating policies and procedures and guidance when

updating or creating new policies and procedures. It specifically addresses resources created by library workers and educators and focuses on the need to include and protect diverse voices and ideas when defending intellectual freedom.

Intellectual freedom isn't just celebrated during Banned Books Week or valued only when challenges arise to materials and services. Intellectual freedom is every day. Intellectual freedom isn't about books, it's about the learner. It's the ability to explore and be seen. It's thinking for one's self and the privacy to question ideas outside one's experience. It's the confidence to grow as a global, informed citizen.

Banned Books Week is an event that highlights the harms of censorship for students and the community. It relays the truth that banning books—or any resource—is a contradiction of the First Amendment. As school libraries prepare for Banned Books Week, consider expanding the concept of censorship beyond books. Consider other ways in which students' choice of reading, access to information, and opportunity for educational experiences are curtailed. Use Banned Books Week to champion and protect students' intellectual freedom, September 27–October 3, 2020.

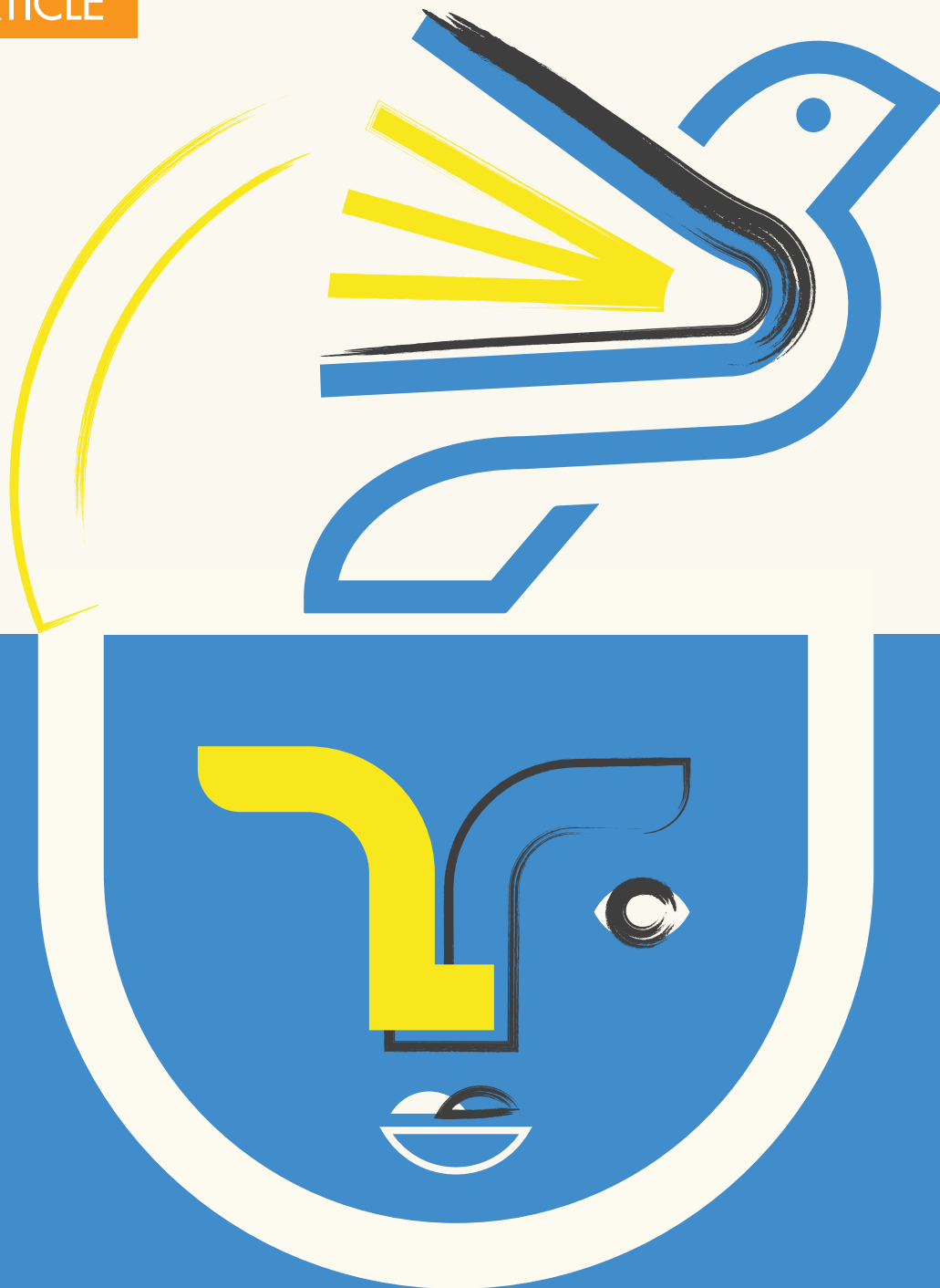


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Beyond Banned Books: Defending Intellectual Freedom throughout Your Library.

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SCHOOL LIBRARIANS *and the* INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM MANUAL

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In 2020 the tenth edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* will be published by ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF). As with each new edition, this one includes guidance on the latest issues, the newest policy statements related to intellectual freedom (IF), and the core documents that outline the library profession's commitment to free expression, free access to information, privacy, and other intellectual freedom principles.

In this article Martin Garnar, editor of the tenth edition, talks with Kate Lechtenberg, a school library educator and former school librarian, and Carolyn Vibbert, an elementary school librarian, about what's new in the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* and how intellectual freedom connects with AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. Changes to the manual include new interpretations of the *Library Bill of Rights* approved by the ALA Council since the last edition, information about when to call the police, an essay about censorship beyond books (e.g., programs, displays, databases, etc.), expanded content about developing library policies that support intellectual freedom, and an expanded "Glossary of Terms."

Martin Garnar (MG): Kate and Carolyn, I'm really looking forward to this conversation about the latest edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*. As always, there's a lot of good information in the manual for library workers of all types, including school librarians. When I'm not editing, I work in an academic library, so I'd love to get your perspectives on the current concerns and issues facing school librarians with regard to intellectual freedom.

Kate Lechtenberg (KL): Martin, thanks in advance for all your work updating the manual! It's such an important resource for all of us, and I look forward to the new edition. As a former school librarian and current school library educator, I look forward to seeing how this important resource grows with the times. I also work on OIF's *Intellectual Freedom News*, a weekly newsletter that compiles current articles about censorship, privacy, First Amendment issues, social media fake news, so it will be interesting to see how policy statements and guidance continue to evolve in an age when new challenges arise every day.

Carolyn Vibbert (CV): I agree with Kate one hundred percent that the work being done to keep resources current related to intellectual freedom in libraries is of critical

importance. As an elementary school librarian, I admit that there are some days that IF issues seem far from the realities of dealing with the day-to-day tasks of keeping a library open. I think many school librarians, myself often included, would underrate their understanding of current issues and best practices related to intellectual freedom. And yet, we face situations every day related to intellectual freedom and may not even realize [it].

In school libraries, one of the biggest challenges is encouraging these hidden champions.

MG: Kate, the new edition of the manual does include topics that have emerged or continued to develop since the last edition, such as Internet filtering, social media issues, religion and politics in libraries, and controversies around meeting rooms and invited speakers. While some of these topics may not always seem germane to school libraries, the underlying principles of equity, access to information, and privacy are still applicable. Having said that, I think what Carolyn said about school librarians is really interesting. As we did in the last edition, the new edition includes some discussion starters for each main topic area, such as access, censorship, and collections. The hope is that

these can be used to spark conversations and provide opportunities for library workers to think about how these principles apply to real-world situations.

For school librarians, what would you say are the biggest concerns regarding intellectual freedom today?

CV: School librarians are champions of literacy as it relates to intellectual freedom. Every day we promote the right to read. At the elementary level, this often means resisting book leveling or reader leveling as the primary selection criteria for book choice. In libraries serving older students, it means providing books students need emotionally and socially without censorship. In these current times, I have faced more challenges related to copyright. Many teachers are unaware that copyright law exceptions are not limitless simply because they are educators. In the past months, I've been more

present in coaching teachers through fair use, copyright law, and how this impacts instruction.

KL: I think the constant barrage of challenges to children's and young adult books that feature LGBTQ characters and issues is one of the most pressing intellectual freedom issues in schools today.

In 2019 Alex Gino's *George* was again the most-challenged book in the country, and eight of the ten most-challenged or most-banned books are due to parents or other adults feeling compelled to act on their belief that representations of LGBTQ children and families are a threat to children's morals, their understanding of family, or their religious perspectives. In addition, many LGBTQ children's books are inaccurately called "sexually explicit" when they include characters who reject non-normative gender identities, despite the fact that gender identity and sexual orientation are two different aspects of a person's identity. To me, this enduring and increasing pattern of attack on books that represent our LGBTQ students and families is a clear call for school librarians to make it clear to families that they have the right to make reading choices for their own children, but that they cannot stop all young people from reading quality literature that represents the diverse peoples and experiences of our community. School librarians need to guard against the pressure to censor or self-censor LGBTQ books, and we need more outreach to our LGBTQ patrons as well.

MG: The manual provides guidance in all of these areas. A number of pertinent interpretations of the *Library Bill of Rights* and the *Code of Ethics* have been updated since the last edition, including "Rating Systems," "Diverse Collections," "Copyright," and "Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender

Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation."

School librarians can find the latest guidance on those issues in those interpretations and can also look to the interpretations in the manual that are specific to school libraries for more support of the librarian's role as an intellectual freedom advocate and expert.

Speaking of school librarians, I've been reviewing the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners*, looking for connections to intellectual freedom. Either directly or indirectly, I can make the case that intellectual freedom is necessary for all of them, whether it's having access to a full range of information; feeling empowered to ask questions about all topics, including unpopular ones; and feeling secure that your research activities won't be held against you. Having said that, I'm curious if there are specific standards that stand out to you with regard to their connection to intellectual freedom.

KL: Intellectual freedom is definitely intrinsic to all the standards, and I think the fact that intellectual freedom is explicitly included as one of the six Common Beliefs attests to its foundational importance. The fifth Common Belief reads, "Intellectual freedom is every learner's right. Learners have the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control their access to ideas and information; the school librarian's responsibility is to develop these dispositions in learners, educators, and all other members of the learning community" (AASL 2018, 13). This statement affirms that freedom of speech, access to information, and the freedom to choose resources are essential for every act of inquiry, inclusion, collaboration, curation, exploration, and engagement.

"I think many school librarians, myself often included, would underrate their understanding of current issues and best practices related to intellectual freedom. And yet, we face situations every day related to intellectual freedom and may not even realize [it]."

—Carolyn Vibbert

CV: Kate is absolutely right about intellectual freedom being embedded into all the standards. With students, the work then begins as we promote specific intellectual freedoms within our instruction. By promoting students' freedom to read "widely and deeply" (V. 4. I. Explore, Think). As we help students understand not only how to cite sources, but why (VI. B. Engage, Create). As we teach a generation of learners to not only curate sources but to analyze those sources (IV. D. I. Curate, Grow) and to include content from diverse perspectives (I. C. I. Inquire, Share). Even with our youngest learners it is important to keep intellectual freedom a focus in our instruction. With strong instruction they will grow as advocates for their intellectual freedom and for others.

MG: I'm heartened to see how intellectual freedom is woven into all the standards, and Carolyn's last comment about developing students as intellectual freedom advocates is a great springboard for the next topic. To help these students become advocates, what do school librarians need in terms of education, training, and support regarding intellectual freedom? More importantly, are those resources available?

CV: Resources are available, but as with most, it takes work on the part of the educator to go find them. I think following the Office for Intellectual Freedom's blog [<https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/>] is a great first step. The Freedom to Read Foundation [<https://www.ftrf.org/>] has resources and an online community to join. As you've reminded us, Martin, the manual has resources included for launching discussions and more. I think beginning the conversation with our peers is critical. I've made strides in adding more LGBTQ books to my collection and have shared my work locally and

"A number of pertinent interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights and the Code of Ethics have been updated since the last edition, including 'Rating Systems,' 'Diverse Collections,' 'Copyright,' and 'Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation.'"

—Martin Garner

at conference sessions. The conversations related to IF need to continue so that we can empower students to do the same.

KL: I agree that it all begins with conversation, whether that's on a blog or online community or with colleagues. And I think one of the most important resources school librarians can draw on is teachers. School librarians don't have to do this work alone; in fact, our message about intellectual freedom will be more effective when we collaborate with colleagues who are experts in their own areas. Elementary teachers will know how to connect the principles of intellectual freedom to their students' levels and to recent learning, science teachers can help us connect to debates about evolution and climate change, social studies teachers can help us examine the constitutional and historical aspects, and so on. School librarians are the point person in a school for intellectual freedom, but we need to expand our conversation so that students, parents, and community members see it as essential to all areas of learning.

MG: Kate, your point about teachers and other allies is really important, and it ties in with what Carolyn said about resources: we're not in this alone, and we need to turn to each other and to what's already out

there for support. Ensuring that our students and our communities are able to access the information they need and have the skills to understand and analyze that information is a group effort, and it's always important to stay up to date on both the basic foundations of and latest developments in intellectual freedom so that we're ready for the next challenge.

As we wind down this conversation, if there's one thing you'd want to tell school librarians about intellectual freedom, what would it be?

KL: I think the key is pro-active communication and education for students, teachers, administrators, and parents. We cannot wait until Banned Books Week or until a book is challenged to start talking about intellectual freedom.

If it really is the foundation of all our standards, school librarians should look for opportunities to embed intellectual freedom principles into every lesson, book talk, program, and meeting we are a part of.

CV: I think perseverance and grit are what we try to teach our students, and it's what we should remember too. One step forward at a time is a step forward. It doesn't matter how large of a step it is. Intellectual freedom

"I think the key is pro-active communication and education for students, teachers, administrators, and parents. We cannot wait until Banned Books Week or until a book is challenged to start talking about intellectual freedom."

—Kate Lechtenberg

seems so vast a topic. Pick one area and read a bit more about it, be a bit more intentional in your instruction, share a bit more with colleagues. Just small steps will make an impact in this endeavor for our students.

MG: Communication, perseverance, and grit—that's a great summary. Making sure people know what our principles and values are is essential to their understanding of why libraries and library workers are so passionate about free speech, free access to information, and privacy.

Perseverance and grit are necessary when we have to defend those principles and values. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Carolyn and Kate, thanks so much for having this conversation with me. I really appreciate your insights on what's important to school librarians, and I hope that they will benefit from the information and guidance provided in the new edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, which should be available in December 2020.



Kate Lechtenberg

recently earned her PhD in education at the University of Iowa, where her research focused on

text selection and teaching controversial issues in classrooms, libraries, and schools. A former school librarian and English teacher, she teaches courses in young adult literature, collection development, and critical literacy, and is also the news editor for the *Office for Intellectual Freedom*.



Carolyn Vibbert is a

National Board Certified school librarian at Sudley Elementary School in Manassas, VA. She is a

past president of the Virginia Association of School Librarians. She has served on several AASL committees and presented at AASL National Conferences. She holds Master's degrees in elementary education from Truman State University and in library science from Appalachian State University. Her wide range of professional interests include connecting new librarians to professional networks, advocacy, gaming in libraries, and intellectual freedom.



Martin Garnar is the director of the Amherst College Library. Previously he served as dean of the Kraemer Family Library at

the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, and as the head of research and instruction at the Dayton Memorial Library of Regis University. His research and professional interests are focused on intellectual freedom, professional ethics, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. He is currently serving as chair of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee.

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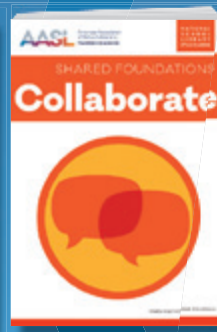
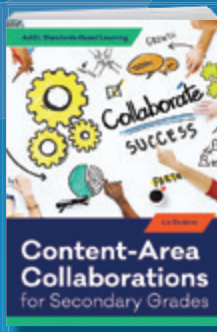


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School and Public Library Collaboration



Opportunities for Sharing and Community Connections

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School and public librarians both strive to offer resources and services to their communities, often with limited budgets. School and public libraries offer different business hours, diverse resources, different online databases, unique facilities and makerspaces, and varying services. Both also collect materials and provide programming for many of the same patrons. It is well established that collaboration between libraries can connect patrons with more resources and services. Through collaboration, school and public librarians can increase opportunities to serve their patrons, ensuring their services and resources are used fully, which would not be possible while working independently. The end result is better service to the community as a whole.

The problem is that even though many school and public librarians share a common goal to serve their community, they seldom work together to share resources and services. In *School Library Journal's* 2018 Spending Survey, only 18 percent of school librarians indicated that they had a high level of partnership with their local public library (Jacobson 2018). There are many legitimate reasons for this. For one, school or public libraries may have inadequate funding, resources,

or available staff to dedicate to collaborate with the other library. School librarians are often needed in the library or school for most of the day. However, some of these same reasons are exactly why school and public librarians should collaborate.

In a *Knowledge Quest* blog post on school and public library collaboration, Elizabeth Pelayo described how public and school libraries share a common goal in that they both want children and young adults to get excited about reading (2019). She suggested that librarians make an effort by e-mailing and finding time to get together in person. She was able to see exactly how the two libraries could collaborate after one visit to the public libraries teen section.

Why Collaborate?

Librarians often want to work with other librarians to help the people they serve. School librarians are motivated to collaborate with others not only for the learners but also to improve their own job satisfaction. Library collaboration can create friendships, inspire new ideas, and develop supportive advocacy networks when it is desperately needed. It also can help secure the support needed for resources, such as funding,

School librarians are motivated to collaborate with others not only for the learners but also to improve their own job satisfaction. Library collaboration can create friendships, inspire new ideas, and develop supportive advocacy networks when it is desperately needed.

materials, space, equipment, staff, and programming.

School and public library collaboration can build community connections, while also sharing resources or improving learning opportunities for students. In their *Knowledge Quest* article, "Beyond the Four Walls," Lori Hancock, Amanda Kozaka, and Allison Mackley explained that school librarians who collaborate with a public librarian are able to strengthen both library programs (2019, 52).

School librarians can explain the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* to the public librarians or suggest the public library attain a copy of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*.

The process of working together to enhance student learning outside of the classroom is also relevant to multiple frameworks and Shared Foundations in the AASL Standards. In the *AASL Standards Framework for School Libraries* (2018), school and public library collaboration is part of the Collaborate and Explore Shared Foundations. The Collaborate Shared Foundation states that the school library should promote and model the library's services to the community, as well as engage in community activities (III.C.3). The Explore Shared Foundation indicates that the school library should encourage members of the community to participate in school library activities (V.C.2) as well as build and advocate for strong relationships with stakeholders (V.C.3).

A Case Study

We wanted to understand how school and public libraries are collaborating. We asked more than twenty school and public librarians in one region of central Missouri about what they do to collaborate with each other. This article presents those findings. We found that every librarian we talked to had at least one experience collaborating, partnering, or communicating with the other library in their area. When their experiences of collaboration were examined for patterns and categorized, we found that all collaborations occurred in three areas: sharing resources, sharing spaces, and sharing programming.

Sharing Resources

Libraries can share resources by collaboratively purchasing resources or developing a system that allows another library's patrons to access their resources. Librarians can also discuss selections and acquisitions by consulting each other about materials or sharing what has been purchased at each library. Resources can include print materials, digital databases, and technology.

The librarians we talked to described how they shared resources or how they each had unique resources to offer one other. Public libraries shared access to their digital collections with school libraries through the use of library cards. The librarians described the benefits of shared access, including providing more awareness to students and improving usage statistics. One public librarian said, "The more access you give to kids through books, the more knowledge [is gained]." Another public librarian said, "By sharing the collection, the funds can be utilized more fully."

Listed below are a few ways that the school and public librarians that we talked to were working together.

Public Library Cards and E-Cards. The public librarian would work with schools to sign up students for library cards or e-cards that allowed students to access digital collections. Many of the school librarians we talked to were working with public librarians to allow students to access e-books by setting students up with e-cards that allowed them to access OverDrive, Hoopla, Zinio, or Tumblebooks.

Books. School and public librarians helped transport books back and forth to each other. The public library could provide additional copies of popular books for school use. Another public librarian

provided curriculum-relevant books as needed during specific times of year. A school librarian also talked about how she sent teachers to the public library to access specific titles or collections.

Technology. The public library often had technology that was useful to the school libraries. One public library offered its copiers, computer labs, launchpads, and iPads for students to use. Another school librarian sent students to check out hotspots from the public library so that they could access the Internet after school for homework.

Sharing Spaces. The physical location of the school and public library buildings can determine the use of the facilities for collaboration. Collaboration is easier if the buildings are close by and are accessible by walking or short bus trips. However, there are times when greater distance inspires librarians to work together, and vice versa. A few schools had programs where students could take a bus to the public library after school. Several school librarians arranged field trips to the public library. A public librarian said that "in one town, the school is just a couple of blocks away and the classes come once a week by walking." Listed below are a few other ways that the librarians in this study worked together to share their spaces.

- **Meetings Spaces.** Space is often needed when serving a large number of people. In one example, the public library used the school's theater building for their summer reading programs because the public library needed more space. The public librarian said, "We used the school's theater because it could hold 60 people [and some of our programs] drew in large crowds." Another public library had space and offered it to schools for meetings and study rooms.

[C]ollaborating to create events for the community is a great way to utilize materials, space, technology, and staff in more productive ways. In addition, librarians can collaborate to write grants or share funding to fund the events.

This is a collaborative way to share the physical library space.

- **Makerspaces.** Several public librarians talked about the technology in their makerspaces that might be useful to students, but they were not aware of what schools were teaching in their curriculum. One school librarian explained how she visits the public library periodically to see what is in their makerspace so that she can direct students there as needed.

Sharing Programming

Creating and executing events is a very task-intensive exercise. Events require many people to plan and advertise and obtain funds, space, and technology. However, collaborating to create events for the community is a great way to utilize materials, space, technology, and staff in more productive ways. In addition, librarians can collaborate to write grants or share funding to fund the events.

The workload can be divided, so that the burden is not too great for either the school or the public library.

Summer Reading Program. The public library's summer reading program is the most common program that is promoted by both public and the school libraries. The majority of school and public librarians interviewed mentioned the summer reading program as a collaborative activity. The public

librarians want the school librarians to promote the summer reading program to their students, and the school librarians want students to attend the summer reading program to prevent summer slide. Several school librarians discussed how they encourage students to participate in the public library's summer reading program. In addition, many school librarians allowed public librarians to come to the school during summer school to conduct summer reading programs. One school librarian said that during summer school, "The public librarian would come at least once or twice a week and do experiments to go along with the summer reading program theme and bring in guest visitors, like from the zoo."

Battle of the Books. The Battle of the Books is a collaborative activity that encourages three different age groups of students to read the Missouri award books (Gateway 9th-12th grade, Truman 6th-8th grade, Mark Twain 4th-6th grade) in order to compete in a question-and-answer game. In one community, the public librarian makes the questions, brings in the book prizes, and provides three spray-painted discarded Stephen King books with pictures of the Gateway Arch, President Truman, or Mark Twain on them to serve as trophies. The public librarian runs the competition and becomes the deciding vote if an answer should be accepted. In the areas that have a Battle of the Books event, the school librarians

encouraged students to participate and form their teams, purchase t-shirts (optional), and arrange transportation and supervision for the students.

Meet Me at the Library. Another collaborative activity mentioned by two librarians was Meet Me at the Library, where students came into the public library after it was closed and played games. A public librarian who participated in this activity said, "One-time students had to solve a mystery of who killed the public library director." The students had to ask the public library director and other staff questions to figure out clues as to the identity of the murderer, much like the game Clue. In one case, a teacher within the school coordinated the event with the public librarian. The school librarian said, "The collaboration was between an ELA teacher, who coordinated with the public librarian to create the event."

Library Tours. In one story of collaboration, a school librarian described a time when she arranged a tour of the public library for the students in her school. This school librarian contacted the public librarian about allowing her students to come to the public library for a tour as a reward for bringing back all of their school library books at the end of the school year. The public librarian opened early for all the classes to come.

Guest Speakers. Several school and public librarians explained how they worked with each other to jointly fund guest speakers. In Missouri the state library offers grant opportunities to fund author visits, with priority going to school and public libraries that work together.

After-School Activities. In some school districts, students are released before 3 p.m. to allow teachers

and staff time to collaborate at the school. Three public libraries run a book club or hold an after-school program on these early release days and provide snacks and crafts. One public librarian uses her own money to provide the snacks and crafts. Another school librarian has a high school and a middle school book club that meet during their lunch hour at the school library. The public librarian has students from grades second and up who walk to the public library on early release days to meet for the public library's book club. Two of the libraries have the students bused there, and one public library is within walking distance. These collaborative activities help the school, the public library, and the parents of the students.

Useful Resources for School and Public Library Collaboration

There are several resources that school librarians may find useful for planning collaborations with public libraries. AASL, ALSC, and YALSA created a guide for school-public library collaboration called the "Public Library and School Library Collaboration Toolkit." (<www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/professional-tools/school-public-library-partnerships>). In it they recommend that librarians start a partnership by identifying their counterpart in the other library, and then begin regular communication and meetings. The toolkit also provides examples of what school and public libraries can do to work together. They list a few opportunities that are relevant to both types of libraries as a way to start working together, including partnering on National Library Week, Teen Read Week, or Library Card Sign-Up Month. ALSC also provides an extensive list of cooperative programs that school and

public libraries are doing at <www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/external-relationships/schoolplcoop>.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Talking to librarians helped us to understand how many opportunities there are for school and public librarians to work together. One lesson learned from this study is that collaborating helped to improve the services for each library by making them more efficient. At the same time, the librarians involved felt that their partnerships created improvements and created more access for students.

In addition to the examples listed in this article, school and public librarians can work together to co-teach or collaboratively facilitate programs. They can share funding or projects to collaboratively bring in guest speakers or build collections. Also, simply communicating periodically with the public librarian in your area can be a great way to start a collaboration or at least improve the information flow between the two institutions. Many of the librarians in this study communicated with their public librarian by e-mail once a semester to share ideas, events, and new resources.



Denise Moreland, EdS, MLIS, is a graduate of the University of Central Missouri. She recently earned her certification in

school librarianship and previously worked as an adult reference librarian at a public library. She is a member of the Missouri Association of School Librarians. She has published in *School Libraries Worldwide*.

We encourage all school librarians to take steps to develop a relationship with the public library in your area. Start by visiting the public library to see what is offered, then follow up with an e-mail to a public librarian to get the conversation started.



Jenna Kammer, PhD, MA LIS, MA Ed, is an assistant professor at the University of Central Missouri. She

is a member of the Missouri Association of School Librarians where she serves as a sitting director and a member of the new membership committee and the editorial board of the *School Libraries in Action* journal. She is also the president for the Central Regional Association of School Librarians. She is a member of AASL and a member of the Educators of School Librarians Section. Jenna has published in *Library Hi Tech*, *IFLA Journal*, *Library and Information Science*, *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*, and *School Libraries Worldwide*.

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ADVOCATING FOR THE SCHOOL LIBRARY THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS



Melanie Lewis

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When I was a candidate in a school library preparation program (circa 2005–2006), my instructors informed me that I would need to continually advocate for my school librarian position. The rationale was based on the reality that school libraries are regularly underfunded and the first to be cut during lean budget times. I was taught to advocate via two methods: first, to design presentations to deliver to various stakeholder groups and second, to develop an elevator speech to quickly communicate why the school library should be supported. I dutifully complied and put these practices to frequent use as I began my career as a school librarian. However, I quickly discovered that not many people had the time or desire to listen to a full presentation. Though listeners would nod politely or perhaps get a little excited about the possibilities I presented, I often did not reap tangible results from either effort. After transitioning into the role of an educator of school librarians, I began to question what was actually driving the need for these perpetual advocacy efforts and if there was a more effective method to employ.

This questioning led me to the subject of my dissertation research, in which I sought to develop an understanding of why California

K–12 public school administrators distribute instructional leadership responsibilities to either instructional coaches or school librarians and how the two roles compare within the context of the implementation of the California Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts/Literacy (CCSS ELA). In California schools have hired large numbers of instructional coaches to assist site administrators with instructional leadership with CCSS ELA implementation. Though school librarians have been trained and credentialed to do this, administrators generally have not considered them for this task. In my study I found a potential reason to explain this disparity: administrators' previous working relationships with instructional coaches or school librarians either positively or negatively affected how they chose to select and utilize individuals serving in those roles. Unfortunately, if the administrators had any previous experience working with school librarians, that experience tended to be negative (Lewis 2018).

The administrator participants who regularly worked with instructional coaches shared that they had little experience with the instructional role of a school librarian. A few had only encountered the traditional role

as "keeper of the books." District administrator Laurel described her experience:

Most of the librarians that I have worked with—I haven't done that in California at all, but in Arizona, Texas, and Ohio, there was one at the school that I subbed a little bit in in Ohio, they seemed to just do book checkout. They didn't do any type of instructional or any standards or anything like that. It was mostly just managing the books, resources.

Two administrators had no knowledge of the school librarian position. When asked how she learned about the role of the school librarian or if she knew what that was, site administrator Angela responded, "No, I don't know what that is and I'm not even exactly sure what that is." Site administrator Joanna similarly admitted:

What I'm familiar is what we have is our library media tech. When you—when this kind of came our way, your research study came our way, instructional coach Julie and I have been like, "Huh, what is this all about?" Here, our library media assistant and our [International Baccalaureate] instructional

coach, their roles are so vastly different and so we've been very curious to learn more about "What is this?" It seems like such a—that it couldn't overlap, but I think it's something that I just don't know about.

District administrator Alice also shared how a negative model impacted her perception of the role of the school librarian:

When I first came to this district, we were out of compliance and we were assigned a retired teacher librarian, and no offense, she was like 100 years old and she was all about the Dewey Decimal System and keeping track of our collection. That is not what we're after. We can't have that.

Lack of knowledge and understanding of the instructional role of the school librarian has prevented many administrators from working with their school librarians to provide professional learning within daily instructional practice. Administrators generally view school librarians as experts in research and the management of instructional materials whom they can call on to provide occasional instructional support to teachers. This support may include access to instructional materials and technology resources, assistance with the implementation of new curriculum and technology initiatives, and the teaching or co-teaching of research lessons. This provision of support can be limited by a lack of administrative vision, leadership, support, and ongoing training for the school librarian role (Lewis 2018).

Reflecting upon these results, I made a clear connection to the relationship I had with the principal that hired me for my first school librarian position. Thankfully, he held a positive perception of the instructional role of the school librarian.

This perception was formed through his experience with a school librarian with whom he worked in his first teaching job. Having made this connection, I called Mr. Alvarado to ask for more details about his experiences. Mr. Alvarado was happy to talk and shared with me that he began his career as a high school science teacher. As a classroom teacher, he knew he had some responsibility to teach students how to conduct research and cite sources, but he struggled with how to best accomplish that despite his efforts to try to figure it out on his own.

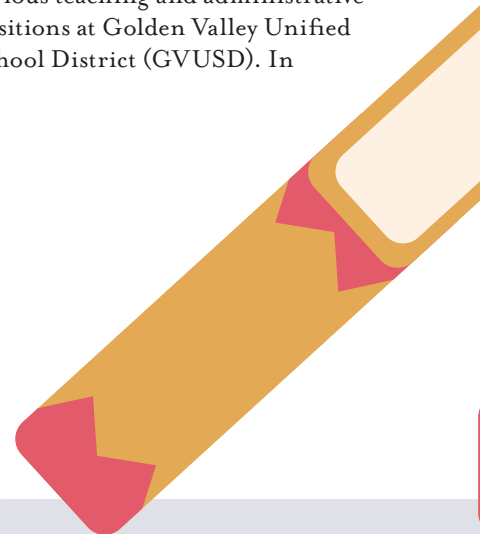
Lack of knowledge and understanding of the instructional role of the school librarian has prevented many administrators from working with their school librarians to provide professional learning within daily instructional practice.

Carol López Doerksen was the school librarian at the high school where Mr. Alvarado began his teaching career. I happened to know Mrs. López Doerksen, so I called her to inquire about her perspective of this shared experience. She responded that in those days there was a need for interdepartmental collaboration with research, so she organized those efforts with the English, science, and social studies teachers. One of those efforts was a cross-curricular project between freshman science and English in which the students

researched science-related content within their science courses and completed the writing portion of the project with their English courses. It was this project in which Mr. Alvarado learned about the instructional leadership potential of the school librarian.

Mr. Alvarado said he was greatly impressed with Mrs. López Doerksen's efforts to expertly guide students through the research process. She taught them how to navigate the physical library and the Internet, find relevant resources, and organize their information. He described watching the students' eyes light up when they learned how to effectively use the information that was available at their fingertips. He shared that it never would have happened with just him trying to teach this. Mr. Alvarado also said he greatly appreciated the cross-curricular nature of working on a joint project between science and English. He said, "It just made sense," and that the rapport that Mrs. López Doerksen had with him, the other teachers, and the students made it a positive learning experience for everyone.

Mr. Alvarado eventually left that school and moved on to serve in various teaching and administrative positions at Golden Valley Unified School District (GVUSD). In



his first year as principal at GVUSD's Liberty High School (LHS), Mr. Alvarado and the superintendent attended a Model Schools Conference facilitated by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE). They were so impressed by what they learned that they immediately devised a plan to integrate ICLE's "The Rigor/Relevance Framework" (2019) into the LHS curricular program. They decided they wanted to achieve this through the design and implementation of cross-curricular research projects that incorporated a high level of rigor and relevance. They knew that none of this could be accomplished without strong, positive relationships between the administrators, teachers, and students. So, they adopted the school-wide theme of "Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships" and rolled it out with a plan to transform the LHS curricular program in 2006. Little did I know that I would play a pivotal role in this plan.

I was hired as LHS's first full-time school librarian in April 2006, just as the administrators began to

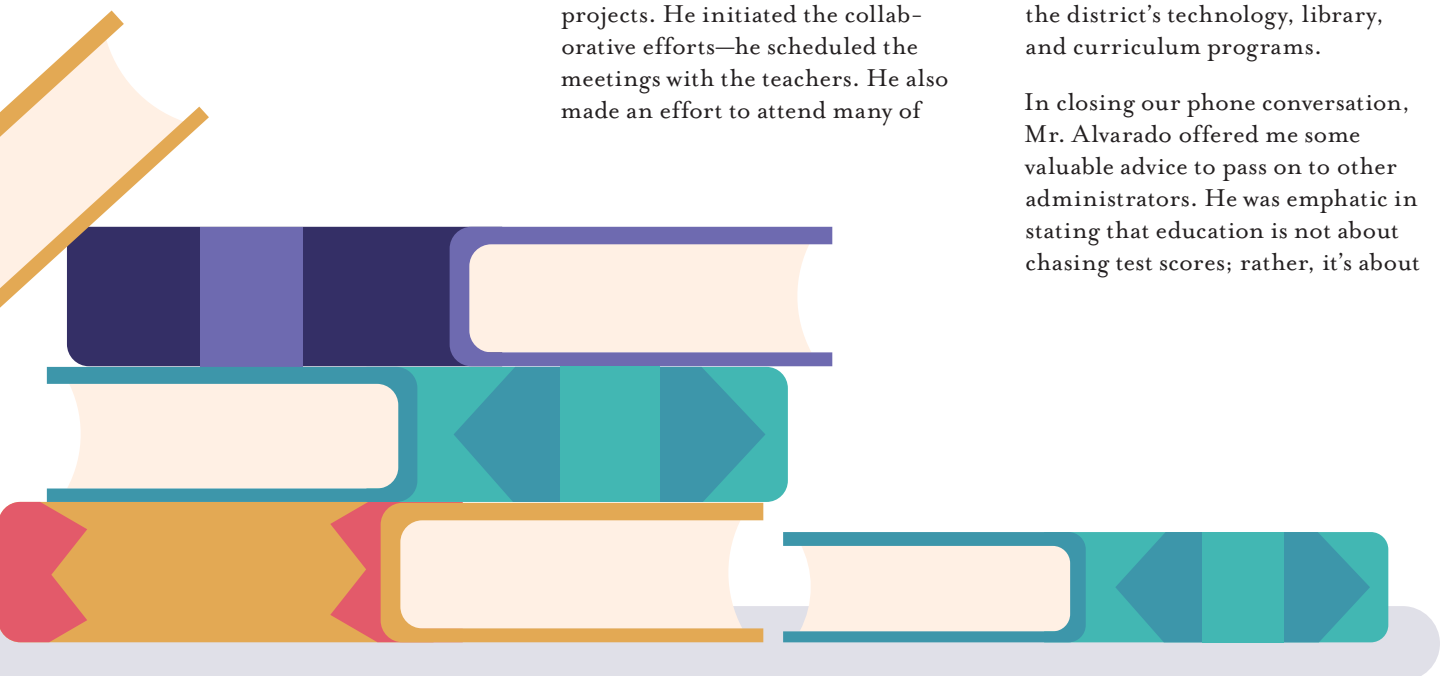
implement their "Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships" plan. In one of his first directives to me, Mr. Alvarado stated, "I want you to collaboratively design and deliver cross-curricular research units for each grade level—all teachers and students will participate. I will facilitate the meetings with teachers to get this started, you just let me know what you need." Given that I had just begun the job mid-semester, was only half-way through my school librarian certification program, and had never heard of the Rigor/Relevance Framework, I found this to be more than a bit daunting. However, I accepted the challenge and spent the next eight years working with Mr. Alvarado and the classroom teachers to develop and implement large-scale, cross-curricular research projects with English, science, social studies, and math courses. There were a lot of bumps in the road to implementation, but we eventually experienced a measure of success with student achievement and positive relationships between all involved in these projects.

Mr. Alvarado's support was integral to the success of these projects. He initiated the collaborative efforts—he scheduled the meetings with the teachers. He also made an effort to attend many of

these meetings, during which he reiterated to all in attendance that he had full confidence in my skills and expected them to work with me in the planning, delivery, and assessment of the projects. If I ran into a problem Mr. Alvarado quickly addressed it so that we could move forward. His door was always open to me, and we met frequently to discuss progress. In addition, when I needed additional resources such as books, research databases, and technology applications, he found a way to purchase them as soon as possible. He supported all my requests to seek out professional development for my role and promoted our successes by co-presenting at local educational conferences with me.

Mr. Alvarado eventually moved into the district office, first as assistant superintendent and then superintendent. Throughout those moves, he and I continued to collaborate together on how to best meet the needs of the district's students through each school's libraries. My role eventually evolved into a full-time administrative position in which I served as part of his leadership team, overseeing the district's technology, library, and curriculum programs.

In closing our phone conversation, Mr. Alvarado offered me some valuable advice to pass on to other administrators. He was emphatic in stating that education is not about chasing test scores; rather, it's about



building relationships. Without a relationship, an administrator can't develop teachers or build upon their expertise and experience. He believes that success with student achievement begins with leadership; a leader must be able to effectively guide teachers and students to reach their goals. Given his positive instructional experiences with school librarians, he believes that administrators need to include school librarians as members of their school's leadership team so that they can enable teachers to "do what they need to do with their students."

Mr. Alvarado's advice closely mirrors what I found in my study—that administrators truly want to provide support to their teachers but are limited in their ability to accomplish this due to the competing job responsibilities. They greatly appreciate having another individual on site that can serve as an instructional expert, especially one that has time to provide the support teachers need to help students succeed. These administrators viewed their relationships with their instructional coaches or school librarians as the key to enabling them to realize their instructional visions for their schools.

Reflecting upon this, I see now how relationships can serve as a powerful form of advocacy. Mr. Alvarado's relationship with Mrs. López Doerksen directly affected how he chose to design his future instructional plans and partnership with me as the school librarian in his next position at LHS. Mr. Alvarado is now superintendent of Central Unified School District in Fresno, CA, and his relationship with all of the previous school librarians with whom he worked are now guiding his decisions for intentionally integrating school librarians into the Central USD instructional program.

Practical Advice for Developing Positive Relationships with Administrators and Teachers

Through my experience and research, I've gleaned the following principles that may help guide school librarians in developing positive relationships with administrators and teachers:

- I. Focus on fulfilling the school and/or district's mission and vision and serving students. If you don't yet know your school's mission and vision statements, learn and commit them to memory now. Continually connect to your

Though presentations and elevator speeches can be useful in certain contexts, the relationships you develop with these individuals just might be your most powerful advocacy tool.

school's mission by demonstrating how you are fulfilling that mission through your daily tasks. Harness the power of social media by highlighting positive relationships with teachers, administrators, and students. Show how you are impacting the instructional program through your collaborative instructional projects and efforts to promote literacy through free voluntary reading.

2. Meet regularly with your site administrator to discuss goals and progress. Yes, the administrator is often busy and his or her schedule may not have room for a formal meeting. You

might have to get creative about how you will meet with him or her. Try scheduling an informal lunch meeting, perhaps even provide the meal. Invite him or her to stop by the library at any time to have a cup of coffee and quick chat. Try the "walk and talk"—walk alongside the administrator as he or she is walking to a meeting or classroom observation. Ask to sit in on classroom visits and talk about them on the walk back to the office after the observation concludes.

3. Build credibility with teachers. Teachers must first value what you have to offer before they will let you into their classrooms or bring their students to you. Therefore, engage in the same work as the teachers; strive to learn what they are teaching and become familiar with the content standards for each subject area. Seek out resources to support lessons based on these standards and look for opportunities to share them. Attend faculty meetings, professional development sessions, and professional learning communities even if you are not officially invited. Should you show up without an invitation, it's unlikely you'll be turned away if you greet attendees with a statement such as, "I'm just here to listen so I can learn how to best support you and your students."
4. Model lifelong learning and improvement. The school library and instructional technology fields are evolving at a rapid pace, so make continual efforts to stay current. Your administrators and teachers need to see that they can rely on you to keep them informed and up to date to meet the needs of their students. Determine the best method for regularly sharing the information and resources you

gain through collaboration with your colleagues and attendance at professional learning events.

5. Listen to the concerns of the teachers and exercise patience with them. Some teachers will be resistant to your support at first. Exercise patience with these teachers, because once they see how you positively interact with other teachers and their students, they will be more open to your support. Observe what teachers are teaching and then offer your assistance to support them in a specific area. When classes would schedule time in my library's computer lab, I would implement what I liked to call the "sneak attack lesson." I would spend some time observing the lesson or task the students were asked to complete and then ask to interrupt for a few minutes to deliver a mini-lesson that either enhanced or extended their learning. I don't believe one teacher declined that request, and most often he or she expressed gratitude for the support and was excited to have learned something new!
6. Protect confidentiality. Administrative assistants, custodians, and librarians are the school personnel that interact with all members of a school's community on a regular basis. They are often privy to confidential information of both students and staff, whether that comes through personal interaction or the viewing of confidential records. If you provide a comfortable and welcoming environment in your library, the teachers will enjoy visiting and inevitably come to you with issues and concerns. It is important to provide a listening ear so you can discern the needs of your students and staff, but equally important to protect

confidentiality of sensitive information they may share (within reason, of course—as a mandated reporter, you are compelled to share confidential information in certain situations).

7. Demonstrate trustworthiness by following through on your offers and others' requests for support. If you're not able to fulfill a request right away, keep them updated as to when you will be able to do so.
8. Be personable, approachable, visible, and available. Provide a warm and welcoming library environment, and greet everyone with a friendly countenance. Keep in mind that for some the default perception of a school librarian is an unapproachable individual that sits behind a desk with the singular task of checking books in and out. To change that perception, you must remove the barrier of the circulation desk. It's your responsibility to take the first step, which is away from the circulation desk. Get up and talk with the teachers and administrators that visit your library. Circulate the library and talk with students. Be proactive and assertive; don't be afraid to reach out or wait for individuals to come to you. Find out what they need and how you can help them. Don't let the absence of a library assistant prevent you from doing this! There are many creative ways to solve this problem, such as setting up and training students to use self-checkout; training parent volunteers or student aides to provide basic customer service and fulfill basic operational tasks; or using a mobile device to receive and respond to requests via a messaging application.

Overall, strive to set a positive example as an instructional leader of multiple literacies to your admin-

istrators, teachers, and students. Though presentations and elevator speeches can be useful in certain contexts, the relationships you develop with these individuals just might be your most powerful advocacy tool.



Dr. Melanie Lewis
is currently assistant
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focuses on identifying and mitigating barriers to the full implementation of the instructional leadership and information specialist roles of the media specialist. Dr. Lewis currently serves on the AASL Practice Committee and as an AASL-CAEP Program Reviewer. Her dissertation, titled "A Collective Case Study to Examine Administrators' Instructional Leadership Perspective of the Role of Instructional Coaches and Teacher Librarians in California Public Schools," was featured in American Libraries "Notable Dissertations 2019."

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Improving School Library Practice through Research

Audrey Church

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It is an honor to write the first of what will be a regular “Research into Practice” column for *Knowledge Quest*. To get started let’s unpack what we mean by “research into practice.”

The *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* defines “research” as “systematic, painstaking investigation of a topic, or in a field of study, often employing hypothesis and experimentation, undertaken by a person intent on revealing new facts, theories, or principles, or determining the current state of knowledge of the subject” (Reitz 2020). (Sidebar: I am slightly troubled by the use of the word “painstaking,” although I understand that it implies care and preciseness.) Merriam-Webster defines the noun “practice” as “actual performance or application” (2020).

If I were to define these terms more simply in my own words, I would suggest that research involves gathering and reporting empirical evidence to answer questions on a topic of interest and that practice is what we do as school librarians on a daily basis. The question then is how does research inform practice? What makes research findings practical and useful? As a practicing school librarian how can I use findings from research to improve my school library, enhance my instruction, and, quite simply, be a better school librarian?

My primary area of research interest is administrators’ perception of school librarians’ instructional role, and my studies have shown that 92 percent of principals in Virginia learn what school librarians do from the librarians with whom they work. Administrators are not typically exposed to the instructional role of the school librarian in their educational leadership coursework, the journals they read, or the conferences they attend (Church 2008, 2010). *Research into practice*: Each of us must communicate clearly and consistently with our administrators to make sure that they understand the essential role that we play not only in fostering a love of reading but also in enhancing instruction through the curation of quality resources and in teaching critical information and digital literacy skills. *Takeaway*: Administrators learn what we do from us.

As we explore the usefulness of research into practice, I look to my school librarianship educator colleagues and the research they have done. Dr. Karla Collins’s primary research interest is in color vision deficiencies. Approximately eight percent of our male K–12 students experience color vision deficiency, commonly referred to as color blindness (2013). Yet how often in our school library environment and instruction do we code things

by color? Think handouts, signage, directions, spine labels, and more. *Research into practice*: Training should be provided to ensure that school librarians (and other educators) are aware of the prevalence of color vision deficiencies, and we should use multiple methods to communicate information rather than rely solely on color. *Takeaway*: We need to be cognizant of and careful with our use of color to convey information in our libraries.

Dr. Jen Spisak has investigated the difference in secondary students’ perception of their information literacy skills and their actual skill level. The results of her study show that all groups—6th, 9th, and 12th graders—overestimated their information literacy abilities and, as their self-efficacy levels increased, their overestimation also increased (2018). These findings come as no surprise to us as school librarians, yet our administrators and fellow educators often assume that today’s learners are information and digitally literate. *Research into practice*: While our students have grown up with devices in their hands and ready access to information, they do not possess the skills necessary to effectively evaluate and use that information. It is essential that we teach students to access information efficiently, evaluate information critically, and use information ethically. *Takeaway*:

Today's students need information and digital literacy instruction.

Looking beyond two of my Longwood colleagues' research I'll highlight two recently published articles from the 2019 volume of AASL's scholarly refereed research journal, *School Library Research*.

Dr. April Dawkins and Dr. Karen Gavigan explored the circulation and use of e-books in high school library collections. They found that e-books are most utilized when they align with curriculum needs and student interest and when they are marketed effectively to students and teachers (2019). *Research into practice*: We can easily apply the methods that were used in this study to determine the use of e-books in our own collections and consider Dawkins and Gavigan's recommendations when purchasing e-books. We can also implement some of the strategies they identified to market our existing e-book collections. *Takeaways*: Many factors are involved in e-book collection development, and marketing is needed if e-books are to be used to their full potential.

Danielle Bolden, Lauren Pellegrino, and Joanna Gerakios studied action research as a method of professional development. They found that when practicing school librarians engaged in year-long action research as structured professional development, collaboration with various stakeholders increased, support for the school library increased, and school librarians felt personally validated (2019). *Research into practice*: In addition to serving as professional development, action research provides data to improve practice and raises awareness of the role of the school library and librarian in teaching and learning. *Takeaway*: Action research has many benefits.

AASL adopted a new strategic plan in June 2019, and the third of its three

goals is Research, "AASL advances research that informs school librarian practice." Three objectives are outlined under this goal:

- Facilitate evidence-informed school librarian practices.
- Increase visibility of research related to school librarians.
- Communicate research findings to practitioners and other leaders. (2019)

With the advent of this new "Research into Practice" column, our professional association will address each of these objectives. In future issues this column will provide a vehicle to communicate research findings from the field, increase the visibility

of research around school libraries and school librarians, and seek to facilitate evidence-informed practice in your school library.



Dr. Audrey Church

is professor and graduate program director of school librarianship at Longwood University in

Farmville, VA. She is a past president of the Virginia Educational Media Association (now the Virginia Association of School Librarians), past president of AASL, and current editor of *School Library Research*.

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Any material, though, can be taught with care, with compassion, with love, with empathy.

The Importance of Providing Challenging Materials to Students

Mark Oshiro

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During my very first school visit as an author, a teacher nervously shoved a thick stack of papers across a table at me. He gave a terse smile and then explained that he had not given his students *Anger Is a Gift* to read. Not only that, he had not brought any of them to the event, either. Instead, he made a photocopy of the scene in which Moss asks his mother, Wanda, if he can go on his very first date with another boy. “I asked my students whether or not it was realistic for a mother to let her son do this,” he said, tapping the stack of copies. “Their thoughts are written on the back.” He then handed me another set of pages. “And these are all the mistakes in grammar and spelling I found [in your book]. You should probably have your publisher check for these.”

I was struck instantly by how far from home I was—my publisher

had graciously sent me to a pre-publication event where I got to meet with students who had luckily been able to read *Anger Is a Gift* as an advance reader copy. I didn’t know a single person in that room. So I thanked him and moved on as quickly as I could.

Later, I read through the essays, and most of his students recognized the biased framing of the assignment. I particularly enjoyed the student who wrote that they knew their teacher wasn’t going to read this, so they instead crafted an essay on why Bulbasaur was such a good starter Pokémon. Still, the moment shook me. If this was my first school visit, what would the others be like? Just two weeks prior, at my very first appearance at a librarian conference, a librarian derailed the LGBTQ YA panel I was on to publicly deride me for writing a book that wasn’t

When adults tell students that they shouldn’t read about “challenging” topics, it sends a disturbing message: If your life is a “challenging” topic, you shouldn’t share that either.

pro-metal detectors. She had not even read *Anger Is a Gift*, but still felt compelled to challenge my book, to call it dangerous and thoughtless. She later followed me around the conference to the point where I had to hide in the restroom.

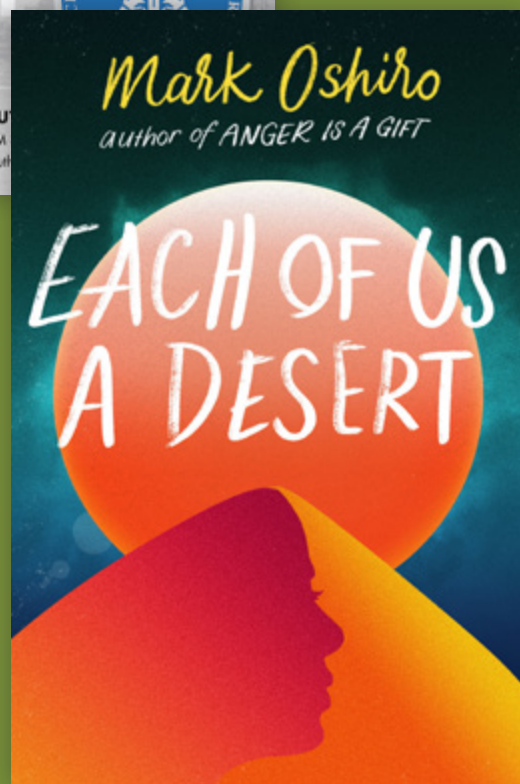
Anger has been out for over two years, and I’ve lost count of how many visits I’ve done. And with just one exception—oddly not far from where

my first visit took place—I have never had pushback from a student on my book. Kids will ask insightful, difficult questions, make no mistake. They have challenged me time and time again about what I wrote, and I welcome that. Why? Because unlike the man at my first school visit, they ask *questions*. Often, something in the book made them uncomfortable, and they're struggling to find out *why* that is.

Take the kid who truly did push back against it. He thought the book was unfair against police officers. I asked him if there was someone in the service in his family; he said his father. I did my best to explain my intentions in writing a book about police brutality that is unflinching, that does not turn away from some of the uglier parts. When I was done, he said something I haven't forgotten: that while he may not ever like my book, he finally understood why I wrote it. "I don't think I've ever heard your side of the story before," he said.

As a creator, can you really ask for anything more?

We underestimate our youth. We hear this all the time: that giving them "challenging" stories is not good for them. Students should not be uncomfortable when they read, and they certainly shouldn't be exposed to the darker parts of the human condition. Exposure to these ideas is dangerous, unfair, and—I've heard this, too—immoral. Any material, though, can be taught with care, with compassion, with love, with empathy. The problem I see with this logic, though, is how many *students* it leaves in the dark. What about the kids who are dealing with racism? With police brutality? Who are struggling with the effects of PTSD, like Moss does in *Anger*? What about teens dealing with depression? When adults tell students that they shouldn't read about "challenging" topics, it sends



a disturbing message: If your *life* is a “challenging” topic, you shouldn’t share that either.

I have sympathy for anyone who bristles at teaching disturbing or challenging content because it hits too close to home, and I’ve come across kids who struggled to get through *Anger* for that reason. Fiction that is crafted from a traumatic place will always toe that line, but when I think about the teacher at that event? Or that librarian? Or the countless adults who have pushed back against kids reading my work or the work of anyone who writes about challenging subject matter? None of those adults were talking about protecting kids *already* traumatized. Those kind of students were afterthoughts at *best*.

What I fear is that some educators wish these topics—and the students

actually affected by them—to remain afterthoughts, both out of sight and out of mind. If they can ignore them, so will their students. As an author I can take the hit to my ego if someone does not like my work. What I resent is at the heart of the two examples above. Do these educators truly have such a low perception of their students? Do they believe that children cannot think for themselves? Or perhaps it is more that they wish an insidious thing upon them: the desire to control what they believe, especially if that belief might challenge the current system the *adults* are in charge of.

We need to believe in the brilliance of youth rather than assume the worst. They’ll soon get the message if we don’t: that we don’t think they are capable at all. And I would like to imagine a much less cynical future.

Mark Oshiro is the Hugo-nominated writer of the online *Mark Does Stuff* universe (*Mark Reads and Mark Watches*), where they analyze books and TV series. Their debut novel, *Anger Is a Gift*, won the 2019 Schneider Family Book Award and was nominated for a 2019 Lammy Award. Their forthcoming novel *Each of Us a Desert* will be published in September 2020. When they are not working they engage in social activism online and offline. Their lifelong goal is to pet every dog in the world. Please visit them online at www.MarkOshiro.com and follow them on social @markdoesstuff.



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