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Professional Learning is Personal Learning

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Cassandra Barnett has been a school librarian for 48 years in elementary and secondary school libraries. She has served on American Library Association and American Association of School Librarians committees and is a past-president of AASL. She is currently program advisor for school libraries at the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, providing professional development, promoting best practices in school library programs, and advocating for school libraries.

This issue's theme is about professional learning. I submit that being an educator is not all about teaching; it has to be balanced with learning. I am pretty sure my career experience is not that much different (just longer) from most of you.

Certainly, I did not learn everything I needed to know about being a school librarian in my undergraduate and graduate studies. Working with more experienced school librarians in my district gave me models to emulate. Attending conferences provided me with lots of great ideas and strategies to try in my own library. It also enabled me to travel to cities I would not otherwise have had an opportunity to explore. Participating in my state and national professional organizations gave me opportunities to connect with school librarians and vendors from all over the country and resulted in many lifelong friendships. The authors in this issue offer a variety of approaches to professional learning.

Rebecca Hardin explores ways that professional development can be transformed from the standard fare to learning that can have a positive impact on professional practice. She describes how, as her school district's library services specialist, she worked to build a culture where the librarians have become mentors, innovators, and leaders. My takeaway from her article is the importance of looking for meaningful and useful professional learning, even if you have to look outside your school district to find it.

James Allen takes a look at professional learning from a state school library supervisor position. As part of his role, he works to connect the school librarians in his commonwealth of Kentucky to the opportunities offered by the state library associations, educational cooperatives, and other options. The Student Technology Leadership Program he describes takes a totally different approach to learning: The learners are teaching the adults. As a state library supervisor myself, he offers some ideas that I plan to borrow.

Samantha Hull describes her personal learning experience as a researcher (and mother) on a Fulbright Fellowship in Finland. Her research question: "How do public libraries in Finland support K-12 learning and media literacy development, and what scalable frameworks could be applied in the United States?" One result of her research is a pilot framework for structured public library-school partnerships. I was not surprised to find out that not only did she come away with some significant professional learning, but the personal takeaways were equal if not even more noteworthy.

Laura West and Wendy Harris have combined both professional and personal learning through educator travel programs. They offer some very practical advice on participating in these programs and where to find out about them. Based on the experiences they relate, they are definitely old hands at it.

Carl Harvey and Audrey Church conducted a study looking at the impact of attending conferences on school librarians. They interviewed nine school librarians from the rural regions of Virginia to learn about the benefits they gained from participating in their state conference. They also identified some of the challenges that might prevent them from attending a conference.

Church expands on the four currencies (credentials, competencies, connections, and cash) put forth by Stephanie Malia Krauss in her book, *Making It: What Today's Kids Need for Tomorrow's World*. Church explores the idea that while a formal education is important for us as school librarians, continually developing our professional competencies and cultivating connections are equally important. The

reward for those efforts, "our cash," is reflected in the experiences we carry forward and the lives we have touched.

I am a firm believer that learning new things keeps your brain young. Recently, I have expanded my learning life to include personal interests. I am fortunate that I live close to the William J. Clinton Library and Museum, the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History, and the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. So, even though the learning opportunities they offer don't directly connect to my work, I have been taking advantage of what they have to offer.

In the last year, I did a deep dive into George Washington's Farewell Address, got up close and personal with Art Nouveau, and attended a very elaborate quinceañera. I have been silversmithing and created some beautiful (if I do say so myself) jewelry. I also learned how to enamel, made glass swivel sticks, and a cutting board. I spent a day on a group tour exploring the art and architecture of the Arkansas State Capitol, which included some very interesting conversations about the memorials on the grounds. One of my favorite continuing series is MacArthur at the Movies. Once a month, a group of interested people gather at the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History to eat popcorn, drink beer, and watch a documentary connected with the military. So far, the two that really captured my interest were the one on the civilian artists who documented World War II through drawing and painting and the one on the Donut Dollies who served in Vietnam.

An unintended consequence of my recent personal learning journey has been an increased improvement in self-care. I have found that I have a better balance between my professional life and my personal one. It has given me an opportunity to nurture curiosity, creativity, and reflection. Plus, I get a chance to meet and interact with new friends and old.

I hope that you become inspired by the authors who have contributed to this issue and find new ways to continue your professional and personal learning.

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