

GROWING FORWARD

A Report of the Libraries.Today
Spring 2023 Forum

Prepared by the EveryLibrary Institute

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<https://libraries.today>

Growing Forward - Spring 2023 National Forum

The second Libraries.Today Forum, “Growing Forward,” convened a series of conversations among the library sector and outside experts that was intended to translate the finding from the Fall 2022 Forum into actionable advice through deeper discussion and reflection. The Growing Forward Forum was organized online in February and March 2023 and aimed to unpack the challenges and opportunities in the field of school librarianship. Sessions were all hosted online, with some panels presented live to an audience and some pre-recorded for asynchronous viewing. For the live sessions, attendees were able to submit questions and provide feedback anonymously using Padlet. The Spring 2023 Forum will be followed by a convening of the Libraries.Today National Advisory Board in June 2023 to craft recommendations for policy and practices in school librarianship. The project's final report and recommendations will be shared at the 2023 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.

Libraries.Today is funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the primary source of federal support for the nation’s libraries and museums, and is supported by the School Library System of the Genesee Valley BOCES. Project staff are Dr. Christopher Harris, Project Director, Julie Hengenius, and Emilee Williamson of the Genesee Valley BOCES (NY) School Library System with evaluation by Dr. Patrick Whipple, Genesee Valley (NY) BOCES.

The National Advisory Board includes:

- Dr. Jen Cannell, St. John Fisher (NY) College Graduate School Library Program
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- Alicia Thompson, Director of the Erie 1 BOCES (NY) School Library System

This report of the Spring 2023 Forum is intended to provide a thorough overview of the discussions. This report was produced by the staff of the EveryLibrary Institute, a non-profit public policy, tax policy, and education policy think tank for libraries. This report attempts to capture and relate the substance of each speaker’s comments accurately. The recountings of the Spring 2023 Libraries.Today National Forum in this report were taken from the contemporaneous transcripts of each session and were verified against the archived video.

Speaker comments and quotes are edited for clarity and brevity. The Spring Forum was divided into Keynotes, Strategic Discussions, Thought Pieces, and Author Messages. The video archive of all sessions is available at <https://libraries.today/gallery/> under “Growing Forward”.

Executive Summary

Forum Welcome

The Forum began with a welcome from Librarian of Congress Dr. Carla Hayden, who recognized the importance of libraries and librarians and emphasized their role in providing accurate information, celebrating identity, and empowering dreams. Dr. Hayden acknowledged the challenges faced by libraries and staff but assures them that their work is recognized and valued by students, families, and the public. She highlights the joy of connecting the right book with the right child and mentions the endless selection of authors and books available today. Hayden concluded by encouraging librarians to continue their good work and stay strong.

Dr. Christopher Harris convened the Forum by underscoring the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and advocacy in the face of challenges such as book bans and censorship. He talked about how the Fall 2022 Forum brought to light a critical lack of understanding about school librarians' role and value among the public and administrators. To address this significant advocacy shortfall, Libraries.Today partnered with GapingVoid to create an eBook called "The Day The Librarians Disappeared." The eBook aims to raise awareness and inspire action in support of school libraries. Advocacy and activism are crucial to change the perception and restoring the integrity of librarians. The focus is on reframing the narrative and engaging with the broader educational community.

Keynotes

In “Why Libraries,” Julia Torres discussed the role of libraries in education, particularly in relation to diversity and inclusivity. She used several metaphors to illustrate the potential of young minds, emphasizing the need for collective effort in educating and strengthening library communities. Torres reflected on the history of the residential school system, highlighting the suppression of individuality and uniqueness. She urged librarians to examine institutional policies that may privilege certain groups of young people and emphasized the power of words in shaping self-perception and worldview, and challenged the Libraries.Today community to consider whether some learners or readers are underprivileged while others are overprivileged. She asserts that libraries should address the diversity gap in children's literature to promote recognition and understanding of diverse cultures and experiences. Torres calls for support for school librarians, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive spaces where everyone feels welcome.

In the second keynote, David Lankes emphasized the importance of well-trained librarians and building networks of trust in “Next Steps for School Libraries”. He argued that libraries are not neutral but actively promote scholarly achievement and diverse information sources. Trust is built through clear, consistent, inclusive, and transparent actions. Lankes discussed librarians' response to disruptions, the need for adaptation, and the shift towards a student-centric focus. He critiqued generative AI and highlights the challenges it poses. Lankes addressed materials challenges and the role of librarians in building trust and empowering students while encouraging librarians to stand up against censorship. He sees the libraries' attempts to reflect local communities as a positive.

Strategic Discussions

In “Where are we going next?” panelists Courtney Pentland, Dustin Hensley, Lauren Mobley, Suzi Tonini, and Suzanna L. Panter discussed challenges and strategies in their roles as librarians. They covered topics such as barriers to success, stress in the profession, and hopes for the future of education. They emphasized advocacy, collaboration, and community building among librarians. The future of school libraries was discussed, highlighting the need for creativity, innovation, and information literacy. The integration of AI and assisted search technologies were also addressed, along with the importance of teaching students critical thinking and adapting to technological advancements. Barriers to success included limited recognition and support, a shrinking supply of certified librarians, and negative perceptions of the profession. Strategies for advocacy, support, and self-care were shared. They emphasized the importance of listening to students as a pathway to improving policies for libraries.

In “Representation On Both Sides Of The Book”, Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada, Breanna J. McDaniel, Zinnia Bayardo, and Michelle Martin discussed the impact of book bans on young children, highlighting the harm caused by dismissing their experiences and identities. They focused on the need for safe environments in schools, particularly in the face of censorship. The conversation stressed the importance of ongoing efforts to find and promote diverse books and not becoming complacent. They encouraged librarians to acquire and promote diverse books despite challenges or opposition. The panelists emphasized the importance of authentic representation in literature and the profession, allowing individuals to see themselves as both creators and librarians. They discussed the need for diverse perspectives and cultures in books and the benefits of embracing diversity for all students. They clearly identified that removing LGBTQ+ content from shelves is harmful to students and emphasized the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for students.

Advocates Stephana Ferrell, Taylor Lyons, and Kasey Meehan shared insights into opposing book bans and cultivating a pro-library movement in “Building Stakeholders for School Libraries”. They emphasized the importance of forming diverse coalitions, centering affected populations, engaging students, communicating effectively with the media and stakeholders, and involving education unions. They provided practical advice to school librarians, including

how to leverage supportive parent voices, national organizations, and local diversity groups. The importance of addressing equity in library programs and advocating for staff, funding, and support was highlighted. Collaboration, community engagement, and external resources were stressed as key strategies in the fight against censorship and for authentic equity in school libraries.

Panelists Mark Ray, Dr. Ouida Powe, Liz Phipps-Soeiro, and Sam Helmick discussed the need for librarians to shift perceptions and promote themselves and their services to decision-makers in “Growing A Support Network”. They emphasized the importance of understanding your administrators' goals and supporting those goals in our work. Panelists see incorporating critical pedagogies and aligning with new initiatives as crucial for the success of library programs. Librarians were encouraged to be their own advocates, communicate their value through stories and data, and engage in activities beyond the library to build credibility. Building professional learning networks and actively participating in associations and legislative efforts were also seen as ways to combat isolation and amplify the collective voice of librarians.

In “Speaking With A Collective Voice”, panelists Jason Allen, Becky Calzada, and Cindy Baron discussed the challenges and opportunities in the field of libraries and literacy, emphasizing the importance of community, unity, and innovation. School librarians were recognized for their role in promoting student reading outside of classwork and addressing the impact of modern technology. They highlighted that advocacy for both librarians and students, particularly in meeting the needs of students with learning exceptionalities, was necessary and important. The conversation also touched on education policy, highlighting the need for adequate funding, access to libraries, and supportive policies. The power of a collective voice was emphasized, particularly in finding support networks and engaging diverse stakeholders in the conversation.

Mychal Threats’ “Diversity In Libraries” focused on the importance of creating inclusive environments where everyone feels safe and belongs. Threats suggested that libraries should reflect the diversity of their students and communities, stocking books that represent a wide range of experiences. Threats also raised concerns about the lack of diversity in the library profession, highlighting the cost barriers associated with obtaining a Master's degree and questioning whether it is truly necessary to become a librarian. School library programs need policies and hiring practices that align with the goal of creating safe and inclusive spaces in libraries.

In “The Challenge Of Being Seen, Heard, And Respected When You’re One In A Building”, Dr. Joette Stefl-Mabry and Dr. Michael Radlick presented research on the contributions of school librarians to K-12 education. Their findings emphasized the essential role of school librarians as information literacy educators, instructional consultants, information specialists, and technology integrators. However, this influence is often unrecognized beyond the school library profession, highlighting the need for a school-wide and district-wide effort to acknowledge and leverage their skills. Dr. Stefl-Mabry and Dr. Radlick made recommendations for librarians to

develop education policies, emphasizing the need for rigorous program evaluation and a commitment to assessing learning goals and outcomes. They stressed the responsibility of public education to provide equal educational opportunities and called for institutions to promote critical thinking and digital information literacy, essential for a democratic society.

In “Telling Your Story”, Dr. Harris shared about the strategic partnership between Libraries.Today and Gapingvoid to create an eBook called "The Day The Librarians Disappeared." It aims to raise awareness and inspire action in support of school libraries. Advocacy and activism are crucial to change the perception and restoring the integrity of librarians. The focus is on reframing the narrative and engaging with the broader educational community. Dr. Harris and John Chrastka then discussed the need for advocacy and activism to restore the integrity and reputation of school libraries. They emphasized that librarians should be seen as more than just custodians of books but as consultants and connectors who bring ideas to life. They called for a change in the narrative and perception surrounding the role of librarians.

Thought Pieces

In “The Trauma Of Book Bans And Censorship”, Kelly Jenson talks about the impact of politicized book bans and personal attacks on librarians and how to build resiliency into your practice as a school librarian. She emphasized that trauma and book bans are health issues, as sustained pressures can affect people's brains, bodies, and behaviors. Jensen discussed trauma-informed librarianship and its application in engaging with students, families, colleagues, and the public. She also humanized the issue of book bans, acknowledging that not all book challenges come from a place of bad intent. Decisions are often made by individuals trying to navigate complex issues in education.

Amy Mikel talked about the “Brooklyn Public Libraries Books Unbanned” initiative to share banned books with youth across the country. The initiative aims to combat book censorship and provide young people with access to diverse books. The campaign gained significant attention, resulting in over 6,000 eCards being issued and more than 70,000 books being checked out. They also established a Teen Intellectual Freedom Council, a Teen Book Match program, and partnered with PEN America for the Virtual Freedom to Read Institute.

Kirsten Zlanguard Muma shared pre-publication research in “Politics And Children’s Books: Evidence From Public School Libraries” and explored the relationship between local politics and book availability in public school libraries, highlighting the chilling effects of book challenges on acquiring new LGBTQ titles. Disparities in library resources are found between high-income and low-income areas, with wealthier schools having better collections. Muma's study also reveals the negative impact of laws restricting discussions on certain topics. Despite challenges, the research emphasizes the important role of school libraries in providing access to diverse and

challenging material, underscoring the need for vigilance in monitoring the systemic effects of book challenges on library collections.

In “Shore Up Your Boundaries,” Pernille Ripp emphasized the importance of setting personal boundaries and maintaining a healthy work-life balance for school librarians. She highlighted the systemic pressures within the education system and encouraged librarians to prioritize their health and well-being alongside their professional responsibilities. Ripp emphasized the need for self-care, setting boundaries, and practicing relaxation to counteract the unique challenges faced by school librarians.

Author Messages

Josh Funk discussed the impact of coding on animation, apps, and website storytelling. He highlighted the exciting aspect of coding and expresses his hope that the librarians attending the forum will enjoy their own work.

Jarrett Lerner shared that he believed reading and literature save and enrich children's lives. He urged the audience to view the author community as both allies and combatants in the fight to protect their work and jobs.

Torrey Maldonado sent a message of support to school librarians in *Libraries: Being Rainbows In Everyone's Clouds*. He reflected on his uncles, comparing them to trees, and mentioned his Uncle Larry, who was described as a tall tree or a symbol of the library. Maldonado expressed gratitude for the shade and support provided by Uncle Larry and concluded by encouraging librarians to continue their important work.

Ellen Hopkins highlighted the value and importance of librarians to the author. She mentioned that her author friends, avid reader kids, and more people appreciate and value libraries and librarians. She said there is a real need for the librarians to continue their good work and encouraged them to persevere.

Mindy McGinnis shared in an interview with Julie Miler that the challenges faced by librarians, particularly the potential legal implications of their work, are ridiculous. “I was a librarian during a time when you couldn't get sent to jail for being a librarian”, she said. She mentions that education is an often unforgiving profession. She highlighted the possibility of being charged with a crime for simply doing their job, which she finds ludicrous, and expressed her support for those in the profession, acknowledging the difficulties they face in a world that has "gone crazy".

Neil Schusterman said that he would keep writing books if librarians kept being librarians.

Proceedings: Keynotes

“Why Libraries?” with Julia Torres

Summary and Insights

Julia Torres provided a rich and detailed discussion on the role of libraries in education, particularly in the context of diversity and inclusivity. She used various metaphors to illustrate the potential of young minds, comparing them to galaxies full of intellectual bodies. She emphasizes the importance of collective effort in educating young people and strengthening library communities, stating that "we shine brighter when we shine together." Her galaxy metaphor illustrates the vast potential of young minds, emphasizing the collective effort required to educate young people and strengthen library communities.

Torres recounted the history of the residential school system, which prioritized indoctrination over individuality. This is an important reflection on the way that the educational system can be used to suppress individuality and uniqueness in students. She urged librarians to reflect on how institutional policies and procedures may inadvertently privilege certain groups of young people. There is power in words and their capacity to shape young people's self-perception and worldviews. "We forget often about the people who have been disenfranchised," says Torres. "We also tend to over-privilege or over-represent the people whose stories are of the dominant." School library leaders should consider how policies and procedures often privilege certain groups of young people. Libraries should be places where individuals can discover each other and their authentic selves.

Torres directly challenges the Libraries.Today community with this question: "Do we under-privilege some learners or readers and over-privilege others? That's a question we always need to come back to again and again. Do we privilege learners or readers that demonstrate the behaviors that we recognize? This happens in library systems too. We tend to welcome the young readers to the teen advisory board that are showing the behaviors that we showed or that are showing the behaviors that we stereotypically would align with somebody who is a good or a strong reader."

If libraries are repositories of intellectual thought, stories, and the evolution of humanity, then school librarians must address the diversity gap in children's literature. Torres draws a correlation between the lack of diverse stories and the disappearance of school libraries. She argues that this lack of representation can lead to a deficit in the recognition and understanding of diverse cultures and experiences.

The current crisis in education extends beyond the shortage of school librarians. But school librarians, as solo practitioners in schools, need unique support from other staff and administration to effectively do their jobs. "So what can libraries do?" asks Torres. "Again,

continue to invite in not just those that conform to the idea of the perfect library customer, but also remember that their libraries... are spaces where everyone is supposed to be welcome."

Speaker Biography

Julia E. Torres is a nationally recognized veteran language arts teacher, librarian, and teen programs administrator in Denver, Colorado. She is a teacher/activist committed to education as a practice of freedom. Her practice is grounded in the work of empowering students to use Language Arts to fuel transformative resistance and social progress. Julia has been awarded the 2020 NCTE Colorado Affiliate Teacher of Excellence award chosen as a 2020 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and serves educators as a member of the Educator Collective, Book Love Foundation, and as a Co-founder of #DisruptTexts. Through her work with The Educator Collaborative, and other organizations, Julia facilitates workshops and professional conversations about anti-bias/anti-racist education, social justice, and culturally sustaining pedagogies in Language Arts, as well as digital literacy and librarianship. Her work has been featured in several publications including NCTE's Council Chronicle, NPR, AlJazeera's The Stream, PBS Education, KQED's MindShift, NY Times Learning Network, The Chicago Tribune, ASCD's Education Update, Rethinking Schools, School Library Journal, and many more. Her co-authored title *Liven Up Your Library: Design Engaging and Inclusive Programs for Teens and Tweens* is just the first of many forthcoming publications for librarians and educators.

Keynote

“Next Steps In School Libraries” with David Lankes

Summary and Insights

David Lankes discussed the importance of librarians being well-trained and having an activated network of trust, including administrators, teachers, students, and professionals at various levels while he emphasized the importance of building hyper-local networks of trust and the need for clear, consistent, inclusive, and transparent policies about materials challenges. Lankes perspective is that libraries are not neutral entities but are institutions that actively work towards advancing scholarly achievement, improving literacy, and promoting diverse information sources. He argued that this is not a political stance but an ideology that libraries put forward.

Trust, in his telling, is built not through neutrality or objectivity but through clear, consistent, inclusive, and transparent actions. He presented a compelling argument for the active role of libraries in societal discourse, the importance of trust and transparency in their operations, and the need for libraries to reflect and serve their local communities. He suggested that as libraries navigate these challenges, they will begin to reflect their local communities more accurately.

He continued with a discussion of the experiences of librarians and their response to disruptions in the field of librarianship. Librarians have faced various significant shifts and changes that have affected their work and the society they serve. Unfortunately, our initial response to these disruptions is often fear, with concerns about job security and the potential replacement of traditional roles. However, Lankes suggests that fear can also serve as a signal to pay attention to the changes and understand their implications.

Librarians tend to lean in when disruptions hit. They write articles, share links, create info guides, and immerse themselves in the information space. They accumulate knowledge in order to understand and interpret new developments. Next, librarians will categorize and catalog the disruptions, seeking to break them down into manageable parts and gain a sense of control and ownership over the changes. This cataloging process stems from the historical emphasis on organizing and disseminating collections in the field of library science. As librarians become more familiar with the disruptions, they begin to adopt and incorporate them into their work. However, the most crucial step is an adaptation, where librarians manipulate and tailor the disruptions to suit their specific environments and student needs. This step emphasizes the importance of customizing and leveraging the changes to maximize their impact.

Throughout this process, the profession shifts from peer-focused collaboration to a student-centric focus. Initially, librarians share knowledge and seek guidance from their peers, but as they navigate the disruptions and adapt to them, their attention shifts toward the impact on

the students they serve. In highlighting the iterative nature of technology adoption and adaptation in education and libraries, Lankes emphasizes the importance of embracing new technologies, understanding their potential, and incorporating them effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

He also explored the disruptive shift from the profession using the term “school librarian” to “school library media specialists” and back to being school librarians again. Partially, this was the profession shaping its own identity in response to evolving technology and pedagogical trends. This habit of school librarians adapting to various disruptions over time, from the introduction of personal computers to the current era of AI and material challenges, suggests that school librarians have a unique position in these disruptions.

He turned the discussion toward the topic of generative artificial intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, a language model that can generate human-readable text. His extensive critique of AI models included several observations. One is that AI systems can draw on limited, biased, or our out-of-date datasets, which can lead to discriminatory outcomes. For example, an AI-powered hand dryer failed to recognize hands with darker skin tones because it was trained only on examples of white hands. He also noted that while the text generated by ChatGPT may be coherent, it doesn't necessarily guarantee accuracy. The model can sometimes make up information. The challenges and limitations of generative AI, including the need to address these core challenges, are being actively explored. In summary, school librarians need to be engaged societally in consideration of ethical practices in the development and implementation of AI technologies.

Shifting to the topic of materials challenges, Lankes unpacked the current climate of culture wars and political debates. Many of the material challenges faced by libraries and schools are due to differing ideologies and the modifications of obscenity laws. Several times he returned to the theme that our sector can only build trust through clear, consistent, inclusive, and transparent engagement. Lankes views school librarians as crucial figures in education, not just as gatekeepers of information but as active participants in building trust, empowering students, reflecting their communities, and adapting to technological disruptions. He emphasizes the importance of school librarians being well-trained and having expertise in their field. This expertise is not just about neutrality or objectivity but about providing equitable support to students based on their needs.

Lankes highlighted the fact that materials challenges and restrictive anti-access laws are being crafted by the same people who put together an anti-abortion bill like SB01 in Texas. That bill allows any citizen to sue an institution or private citizen for a bounty if they aided and abetted an abortion after six weeks. This same technique of offering a bounty is being proposed about obscenity, materials related to critical race theory, pride displays, and other controversial topics. He suggests that there is an important role for students as well as librarians in standing up against censorship. He also suggests that teaching students that they have a voice and

power is crucial. He sees this as a positive evolution, arguing that libraries should look more like their communities rather than conforming to a standard model of librarianship.

Speaker Biography

R. David Lankes is the Virginia & Charles Bowden Professor of Librarianship at the iSchool at the University of Texas at Austin. Lankes has always been interested in combining theory and practice to create active research projects that make a difference. His work has been funded by organizations such as The MacArthur Foundation, The Institute for Library and Museum Services, NASA, The U.S. Department of Education, The U.S. Department of Defense, The National Science Foundation, The U.S. State Department, and The American Library Association.

Proceedings: Strategic Discussion

Where Are We Going Next?

Session Description

School librarians with a vision for the future share innovative programs and aspirational concepts for what is coming next.

Panelists

Courtney Pentland, Dustin Hensley, Lauren Mobley, Suzi Tonini, Suzanna L. Panter

Summary

Panelists discussed aspects of their roles as librarians, including the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. The panel addressed several topics, including real and perceived barriers to success in the library world, working under stress, and their hopes and concerns for the future of education. Panelists shared their strategies for advocacy and outreach and emphasized the importance of collaboration and community building among librarians, both within their schools and through state and national organizations.

The future of school libraries as more than just repositories for books. They should be hubs for creativity, innovation, and collaboration, serving students, teachers, and the community. Libraries should promote programs that enhance information and digital literacy, helping students navigate the vast amount of information they encounter daily. This includes teaching them to discern between true and false information and empowering them as content creators. The future school library should foster critical thinking and innovation within its community.

Colorado School librarians and leaders have defined a concrete vision for the role of librarians and the value that certified librarians can bring to students. It is important for librarians to be leaders in culturally responsive inquiry, connecting students with the information literacy skills they need in a way that respects their identities. It is important to recognize and leverage the unique skills that school librarians already possess while also advocating for their roles within school communities. They highlighted the need for continuous communication about the work librarians do and how it connects to currently relevant issues. This includes areas such as fostering creativity and innovation, evaluating sources in an ever-changing information landscape, and staying at the forefront of new developments, like Chat GPT. Librarians should embrace continuous learning and share their knowledge with their communities.

There is a significant need for librarians to be prepared for the integration of AI and assisted search technologies into regular search engines. Panter believes it will be an "all hands on deck" situation when these technologies become mainstream. Information literacy plays an increasing role in the growth of artificial intelligence (AI) in our daily lives. With search engines like Bing and Google incorporating machine learning, there are implications for teaching research and

inquiry. For example, the International Baccalaureate Group recently decided to allow students to use Chat GPT in assessments, provided it's properly cited. Librarians stay ahead of these advancements and position themselves as information professionals in their schools.

Due to the rise of AI and automation, mental agility, motivation, passion, and purpose skills are paramount. School libraries are uniquely positioned to cultivate these qualities in students, as they allow students to explore their own interests. Librarians, who have been fostering self-led learning for years, can guide classroom teachers as education evolves. Our ultimate goal should be to teach students how to learn independently and adapt to various situations, equipping them with the skills to navigate the future of work and find their purpose in life.

Barriers to a Success in the Library World

Suzi Toni identifies three main barriers to the effectiveness of school librarians. First, librarians have to have a seat at the table when it comes to school and district decision-making. Librarians should be included in professional development sessions for school leaders to better communicate their role and impact. Second, we must address the shrinking supply of certified teacher librarians. As a sector, we should explore alternative pathways for state licensing, particularly for MLIS librarians who currently cannot earn a teacher's salary due to licensing restrictions. Finally, if our focus is on reading instruction at the expense of reading enjoyment, this may cause students to choose not to read by middle and high school. Independent reading is essential to foster a love of reading in students.

Another obstacle is the lack of administrator support. It's crucial for us to enhance our visibility so that administrators understand the role of school librarians and the significant benefits we bring to the school. This understanding can impact their willingness to provide the necessary funding.

Suzanna Panter notes that the most significant barrier to success for school librarians is the rapidly changing educational landscape and the attacks on public schools in America. Librarians often bear the brunt of these challenges, which could deter potential candidates. There is already a struggle to maintain a pipeline of certified librarians, with many districts not requiring certification and employing paraprofessionals instead. Panter argues against lowering certification standards, as the role of a librarian combines the responsibilities of a librarian and a teacher, but worries that the recent negative portrayal of the profession could deter potential candidates.

Courtney Pentland shared that there must be a greater emphasis on the importance of advocacy for school libraries, not just from librarians themselves but also from other stakeholders such as students, administrators, and teachers. We have to share real stories about the impact of school libraries with decision-makers at both local and state levels. Pentland has experience of collecting positive messages about their work and creating an

infographic, which she then shared with their director and principal. She proposes a shift in thinking, encouraging librarians to share these positive stories more broadly with decision-makers, such as local and state school boards and elected officials on education committees. A flurry of positive messages about school libraries, particularly from students, can counteract any negative voices and significantly influence decisions that impact school libraries, their staff, and ultimately, their students.

Libraries Under Stress

According to Lauren Mobley, it is vitally important to find your community within the library profession. Despite often being the only librarian in a school, building relationships with other librarians can provide a valuable support network. Forming friendships with nearby librarians and building a professional learning network online can provide support and understanding in challenging times.

Courtney Pentland continued that there needs to be mutual support within the library profession. Not everyone may be in a position to volunteer their time through an association, but it is a good way to build close friendships. It is important for those organizations to show their appreciation and support for colleagues, particularly those facing challenges. Send a note of thanks or any small gesture that shows that their efforts are seen and valued.

Dustin Hensley shared that as the only high school librarian in his district (without a supervisor), he has felt isolated and had to figure things out on his own. He described this situation as living in "library limbo". To overcome this, he has built an online community and joined the state association. More importantly, he used Twitter for professional development and networking, following and interacting with other librarians. Despite the initial awkwardness of reaching out to strangers online, these connections are legitimate and have contributed to a sense of community.

Hopes and Dreams

Panelists urged school library leaders to listen to their students, acknowledge their awareness of the wider world, and use their insights to inform your library's practices and policies. The panelists discussed their wish lists for improving the role and recognition of librarians in schools. They recommend that school districts and states adopt clear policies requiring certified librarians based on student numbers, distinct job descriptions for librarians and library paraprofessionals, and systems for managing one-to-one technology issues. They also emphasize the importance of flexible scheduling and using evaluation tools that accurately reflect the librarian's responsibilities, which often extend beyond teaching. Finally, panelists stressed the importance of understanding who influences decision-making in the district and providing them with professional development to better understand the role of a school librarian.

Panelist Biographies

Courtney Pentland is a high school librarian in Nebraska, was an elementary librarian for a hot minute, and has worked in a district level library services department. She is adjunct faculty for the University of Nebraska-Omaha School Library program and has served on the Nebraska School Librarians Association board as board member at large, president, and chapter delegate to AASL. She has been elected to be the 2023-2024 AASL President. Follow her adventures on Twitter @livlulvlibrary

Dustin Hensley is the librarian at Elizabethton High School in Elizabethton, TN. He also teaches courses in History and Manga Literature. In 2021, he was named as one of Library Journal's Movers and Shakers. He is passionate about student voice and providing safe spaces for all learners.

Lauren Mobley serves students and teachers as the school library media specialist at North Clayton Middle School in College Park, Georgia. She earned her Ed.S in Instructional Technology from the University of West Georgia, her M.Ed in English Education from Valdosta State University, and her B.A in English Education from the University of Georgia. Mobley is a member of the American Association of School Librarians and the Georgia Library Media Association, where she serves on the Awards Committee. Mobley is committed to improving literacy and education by collaborating with teachers and supporting all students. She believes in and strives to empower student joy, voice, and choice.

Suzi Tonini is the School Library Consultant for the Colorado State Library and supports school library programs across the state of Colorado. Suzi received her M.Ed. in K-12 English as a Second Language, Early Childhood Education and Special Education from George Mason University and a M.A. in Information and Learning Technologies from the University of Colorado at Denver. She is a librarian with 22 years of experience serving ECE-12 students in Virginia and Colorado. Suzi is passionate about ensuring library collections reflect the unique identities and lived experiences of every student and supporting equitable access to high quality library programs.

Suzanna L Panter is the Program Manager for School Libraries in Tacoma WA where she provides leadership and professional development for 43 Teacher Librarians. She has served on the board of AASL and was a Lilead Fellow. Her latest excitement is discovering ways AI can help her Teacher Librarians work smarter.

Strategic Discussions

Representation On Both Sides Of The Book

Session Description

The #DiverseBooks movement is enjoying more success, but what next steps can we look towards to extend diverse reading into more diverse school librarianship and diverse authorship?

Panelists

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada, Breanna J. McDaniel, Zinnia Bayardo, Michelle Martin

Summary and Insights

Panelists discussed the impact of book bans on young children, particularly those in the LGBTQ+ community. They argued that children are capable of self-reflection and understanding complex issues and that dismissing their experiences and identities is harmful. The panelists also noted the importance of creating safe environments for students, particularly in the face of book bans and censorship.

The conversation emphasized the importance of not becoming complacent in the movement for diverse books. Panelists emphasized the need for continued effort in finding and promoting diverse books, even after some level of success has been achieved, and stressed that the work is not done and that there is a need to keep pushing for more diversity in literature. Librarians should not be scared to promote diverse books, even in the face of challenges or opposition.

Panelists discussed the importance of having diverse stories from all different perspectives and stressed the importance of following policy and standing up for what is right. If we only have white texts in our libraries, it can give white students an over-inflated sense of themselves in the world and that a whitewashed curriculum doesn't do anyone any favors. Even the most well-intentioned authors may not fully understand the cultures they are trying to write about without the authentic lived experience of growing up in that culture.

What Happens if the #diversebooks Movement Succeeds?

Don't get lazy when it comes to finding and promoting diverse books. When teachers or other librarians claim they can't find diverse books or don't know where to find them, be the resource. While there may not be enough diverse books, there are more and more out there. Popular books like "Frederick" and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" are always easily accessible (similar to cereal boxes displayed face-front in grocery stores). However, it is crucial to highlight and promote books that are in publication, emphasizing the importance of reading them, not just their existence. Success is achieved when children are actively sharing and recommending books to each other rather than solely relying on adults to introduce them.

Don't get scared, and stay committed to the work of promoting diversity and inclusion in book collections. These are challenging times. However, remember that what they are doing is the right thing and necessary. Fear can arise when we are faced with challenges or angry individuals. Follow the established policy, which involves a committee review and decision-making process and trust in the knowledge and training you have received.

As a banned author, Brenna McDaniel believes that the movement for diverse books is a continuous journey rather than a fixed destination. One's understanding of inclusion, diversity, and equity evolves as one learns – especially from the younger generation. Moving past fear leads to purpose.

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada shared that promoting diverse stories to children is an ongoing journey rather than a definitive endpoint. As society evolves and children's identities and experiences develop, the stories they need to see will also change. Libraries need to adapt and tell stories that reflect diverse experiences based on race, gender, sexuality, and other identities. We need to challenge the notion of success and reflect on what success really looks like. There will always be a next step or someone whose story may be overlooked.

How can we move diverse readers into becoming diverse authors, diverse teachers, and diverse librarians? How can we take people who have a vested interest in this to another level?

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada suggests that a lack of awareness about the profession may contribute to the prevalence of second-career librarians. It is important to expose people of diverse backgrounds to different career paths, particularly in the context of librarianship. She relates a personal story that she did not realize that librarianship was a viable career option until encountering librarians in a bookstore.

There is a real need for an early introduction to the librarian career through recruitment efforts, career days, and even storytime sessions in libraries. The field of librarianship is very white. Economic and financial barriers, as well as toxic work environments that disproportionately affect people of color, are impediments to library careers. There needs to be a systemic change in library schools, institutions, and public library systems, as each operates differently based on funding and local contexts. The profession needs to continually educate itself and call out inequitable practices. Those in positions of power and privilege must encourage a mindset of equity, diversity, and inclusion mindset.

Zinnia Bayardo stressed the significance of having librarians who can not only provide representation through stories but also share those stories with children, particularly in the form of bilingual and Spanish books. As a school librarian, Bayardo sees more Latino librarians and individuals who can demand Spanish and bilingual books from publishers. Like colleagues, Bayardo didn't discover librarianship until later in life when a librarian at their school suggested

it. Library leaders need to actively promote librarianship as a career; many people may not be aware of it or perceive it as a viable profession.

Michelle Martin shared that in South Carolina, there is a mentorship and career pathway program called Teacher Cadet. (This is an initiative aimed at providing high school students with firsthand experiences and exposure to the teaching profession. The program allows students who are interested in pursuing a career in education to gain practical knowledge and skills through classroom observation, assisting teachers, and engaging with younger students.) Martin suggests the implementation of a Librarian Cadet program similar to the Teacher Cadet to provide students with the opportunity to explore and engage with the field of librarianship at an early stage. Pipeline programs like this are very important in encouraging individuals who may not have had early exposure to the profession or family members in the profession to consider it. Martin hopes for increased African American representation in i-school and MLS/MLIS faculty, citing recent hires at her own institution as positive progress. Being able to see oneself in a particular role fuels aspirations and possibilities.

What is the impact for students to see themselves not only in the books on our shelves but in the authors and librarians that write and provide the books?

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada shared that authentic representation allows individuals to become whole and visible in the narratives that depict their cultures. In her own experience as a mixed-race native Hawaiian woman growing up in California, she recalled reading a book called "Dance for the Land" by Clemence McLaren, a white woman, which featured a mixed-race native Hawaiian character who moved from the mainland to Hawaii. While parts of the story resonated, something felt slightly off. This book lacked authentic representation and highlights the boundaries between imagination and appropriation when representing other cultures.

Panelists noted that diverse representation in books and librarianship not only promotes positive self-esteem and academic engagement for marginalized students but also benefits all students. It helps broaden their understanding of the world and exposes them to different cultures and perspectives. By embracing diversity, students can develop a more interconnected worldview. It is crucial to move beyond a whitewashed curriculum and explore the richness found in human stories from various perspectives. Such inclusivity prevents an over-inflated sense of self in white students and allows everyone to benefit from the diverse tapestry of narratives.

Panelists expressed concerns when books with LGBTQ+ content are removed from shelves while others with heterosexual content are not. They emphasize the strong message it sends to young readers, implying that their identities are not valued or accepted. Dialogue can help erase the harmful message and create a culture that embraces diversity and multiple perspectives. However, safety for these students is paramount. School librarians can and should

create environments where students can find safety and support, even if they don't see themselves fully represented in the larger societal context. It is up to the adults to stand up against discrimination and fight for safe and inclusive communities.

Panelist Biographies

Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada is the 2022-23 President of the American Library Association and Adult Services Assistant Manager at the Palos Verdes Library District in Southern California. She was the 2019-2022 Executive Director and 2016-2017 President of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA). In 2022 she received the American Library Association Elizabeth Futas Catalyst for Change Award and was named a Library Journal Mover & Shaker in the advocacy category. Much of her work focuses on advocating for equity, diversity, and inclusion in libraries and librarianship. She lives in San Pedro, California with her poet husband, Chrisitan Hanz Lozada and their menagerie of pets.

Dr. Michelle H. Martin is the Beverly Cleary Endowed Professor for Children and Youth Services in the Information School at the University of Washington, and from 2011-2016, she was the inaugural Augusta Baker Endowed Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina. She published *Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002* (Routledge, 2004) and co-edited (with Claudia Nelson) *Sexual Pedagogies: Sex Education in Britain, Australia, and America, 1879-2000* (Palgrave, 2003). She is currently co-editing with Tammy Mielke and Sarah Hardstaff *Song of the Land, Critical Perspectives on the Works of Mildred D. Taylor*, a collection of 14 essays and 3 poems, forthcoming from University Press of Mississippi (tentatively in 2024). She is the co-founder of Read-a-Rama (www.Read-a-Rama.org), a non-profit that uses children's books as the springboard for year-round and summer camp programming.

Breanna J. McDaniel is the author of the picture books *HANDS!*, *IMPOSSIBLE MOON*, and *GO FORTH AND TELL: THE LIFE OF AUGUSTA BAKER*, *CUTE TOOT* plus two more forthcoming titles. She is also a book reviewer, education consultant and researcher. She holds an MA in Children's Literature from Simmons University and a PhD from a university in the UK. Her research focused on representations of black children in contemporary picture books. She's the co-founder of the conference and network *Researchers Exploring Inclusive Youth Literature (REIYL)* and although she splits her time between the US and UK she is proud to have been born and raised in Atlanta, GA.

Zinnia is a book-loving, techie, Chicana teacher-librarian that celebrates her bilingual, bicultural identity, working to bridge the linguistic divide one libro at a time! Promoting LIBROS, CULTURA, y COMUNIDAD - BOOKS, CULTURE, and COMMUNITY!

Strategic Discussion

Building Stakeholders For School Libraries

Session Description

Securing the future of school libraries is going to involve more than just librarians. Learn how parents, students, and others are coming together to create strong stakeholder groups that speak up and support libraries.

Panelists

Stephana Ferrell, Taylor Lyons, Kasey Meehan

Summary and Insights

The speakers shared their insights into building a pro-library movement and opposing book bans. They emphasized the importance of forming diverse coalitions, centering affected populations, engaging students, communicating effectively with the media and other stakeholders, and leveraging the role of education unions. The speakers also offered practical advice to school librarians, underscoring the need for collaboration, community engagement, and leveraging external resources. This summary presents the key points from the panel discussion, providing a roadmap for librarians, educators, and advocates in their fight against censorship and their efforts to promote equity in school libraries.

Coalitions are Key to Opposing Book Bans and Building a Pro-Library Movement

The panelists discussed several key points for power building, especially as it relates to creating and sustaining a diverse coalition. In any coalition, there are members who are either involved positively in order to fix a problem or are involved in a negative way to oppose an ongoing systemic issue. In these efforts in public libraries and school libraries to oppose book bans, there is evidence from the panel that both types of coalition partners are present and engaged. The high-level principles of coalition work they stressed included:

1. Identify supportive parent voices in your community: Parents are a cornerstone of any coalition. Reach out to them because they often will say things that cannot be said by librarians or staff in public forums. They can testify on your behalf and advocate for you in ways you may not be able to.
2. Leverage organizations: National organizations certainly play a role in calling out instances of censorship. They can provide a network of support and advocacy tools. But local population-focused and issue-focused organizations are even more critical. They lend authenticity and legitimacy to any local action.

3. Form a committee: Presenting as a pro-library or anti-censorship committee can demonstrate community support and buy-in. Organized, community-led efforts can effectively push back against book banning.
4. Tailor your message to your audience: Understand your community, segments of your community, and tailor your message to resonate with them. The issues may include the First Amendment, but it does not end there. Speaking about more than the right to read can help get people on board if they understand that they have a stake in the fight.
5. Engage with local diversity groups: Reach out to local diversity groups for support and partnership. They can be a valuable partner in the fight against book banning.
6. Keep stakeholders informed and engaged: Use strategies like creating a public database with all necessary records for advocacy, as done by the district media specialist in Escambia County. This helps equalize the playing field and doesn't require hundreds of dollars in public record requests to get information.

Center affected populations such as LGBTQ and BiPOC communities in your work.

Book bans disproportionately target LGBTQ+ and BiPOC communities. These inequities should be highlighted when forming a coalition or speaking to stakeholders and the press. We cannot be silent about these inequities and the need for everyone to speak up, even if it doesn't directly affect their own child. For example, the book banning movement in Florida didn't receive national attention until classroom libraries were shut down and students, particularly white students, started coming home without books. In Duval County, 70% of the students are from minority populations. Schools with more diverse school library collections appear to be targeted more frequently. Book banners there target diverse books and are trying to restrict the use of students' pronouns.

Include students and student groups in your advocacy campaigns.

The speakers discussed the challenge of finding student activists. If it is at all possible, it is helpful to welcome students from different schools to avoid the perception that the activism is centered around one particular school or program. They also mention the importance of finding parental voices within the community who understand the landscape and can provide significant advocacy support. It is critically important to talk with students and answer their questions. Ethically, it is important to provide facts without imposing personal views.

PEN America hosts youth advocacy institutes, where they work with students from across the country who are interested in becoming advocates and activists in defending the freedom to read. They emphasize the importance of helping students step into the role of defending the

presence of diverse books in their classrooms and school libraries. While social media use cuts across all ages, it is important to understand what ages use which social media. Effective advocacy work takes place on social media platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. Focus on bridging between local groups, educational stakeholders, and even authors. Encourage sharing information, building support, and connecting with authors whose books are being banned.

Communicate with the media and other stakeholders.

The speakers discussed how a message opposing censorship can appeal to people from different political perspectives. They note that they have found traction by repeating the point that censorship is un-American and that choosing a book that speaks to you is a deeply sacred practice and an American ideal. It is very important to be transparent when communicating with stakeholders and the media. They suggest finding authentic parental voices who understand the landscape and can advocate for educators. Take the time to identify and approach already-existing parent groups and provide them with the information they need to speak out against book banning.

Invite education unions to this advocacy work.

Unions may not be as aligned around the First Amendment as librarians would think. However, unions care very deeply about the dignity of work and the students you serve. It is smart to approach union leadership about why book banning is a problem and what it could mean for the future of education. Unions can play unique and helpful roles like filing public record requests and bringing members to meetings. These can be significant resources.

Practical advice to school librarians.

According to our speakers, successful anti-censorship actions share several characteristics. Identify supportive parent voices in the community and reach out to them, as they can often voice concerns in public forums that educators may not be able to. They also recommend leveraging national organizations to call out instances of local censorship and provide a network of support. Forming committees and presenting as a union or association rather than as an individual can give more power and influence. They suggest reaching out to local diversity groups and other community members for support and partnership.

In many places, book bans are taking hold because there are no school librarians to push back or counter the censorship argument. As a sector, we need to stress the equity of access to resources and books in libraries. Book bans are a stark reminder that school library programs should be staffed, funded, and supported by the administration at the school level and the district level and that school libraries are welcoming and safe spaces for all students. We should

highlight the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and leveraging external resources in the fight against censorship and for the promotion of equity in school libraries.

Panelist Biographies

Stephana Ferrell is a public school parent of two students currently enrolled at the elementary school level. In the fall of 2021, book banning came to her school district and within a month was happening all over the state of Florida. Stephana teamed up with fellow Orange County public school parent, Jen Cousins, to form the Florida Freedom to Read Project in early 2022. Raegan Miller, another public school parent in Pinellas County, joined as the third leader just as the three censorship laws of 2022 were making their way through the Florida Legislature. The mission of FFTRP is to inform and rally public school advocates across the state to support and protect the freedom to read in public schools.

Taylor is a Co-Founder and Community Outreach Director for the grassroots social activist organization, Moms for Social Justice. What began as four concerned moms back in 2018 has grown into a community of thousands across the country and growing. Moms for Social Justice serves the community in a variety of initiatives and volunteer efforts, and are strong advocates for equitable public education and intellectual freedom.

Kasey Meehan is the Freedom to Read Program Director at PEN America, leading our initiatives to protect the right of students to freely access literature in schools. Previously, Kasey served as the Associate Director of Postsecondary Policy at a mission-driven education research organization in Philadelphia, Research for Action. Kasey's research centers students, educators, and school leaders' experiences in identifying strategies for reform and capturing emerging best practices and strives to connect research to policy and program change. Kasey holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and a MPA from the Fels Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, along with a Certificate in Politics.

Strategic Discussion

Growing A Support Network

Session Description

What can school librarians do to cultivate a network of support within their professional spheres?

Panelists

Mark Ray, Dr. Ouida Powe, Liz Phipps-Soeiro, Sam Helmick

Summary and Insights

This panel focused on the disconnect between the perceptions of school libraries/librarians and the realities of how the profession self-identifies. The panelist emphasized the need for librarians to shift the mindset and mythology of decision-makers about libraries. They suggested that librarians need to promote themselves and their services, as people may not understand what they do. They also stressed the importance of understanding school and district administrators, their goals, and how librarians can support them.

Panelists shared that they believe that libraries do best when incorporating critical pedagogies in every aspect of the curriculum. They also suggest that libraries are poised to support whatever new initiatives are brought by district leadership. School librarians need to be their own biggest advocates and “step into their power.” School library programs support the breadth of activities in a school, whether it is social-emotional or curricular. Panelists suggest that library leaders should keep track of their positive experiences and communicate them to demonstrate the value of the library.

The panel opened with each panelist offering observations on the state of library advocacy and tips for increasing one's effectiveness. There are strong mythologies associated with libraries. Some people may see libraries simply as repositories for books and computers, while others may see them as extensions of social-emotional learning, safe places, or maker spaces. There's a need to shift these perceptions and explain what school libraries are today.

Librarians need to be promoters of themselves and their services. We should not assume that people know what they do. We need to communicate their value and the impact they have on student outcomes. This could be through stories, elevator pitches, and data. Likewise, librarians should also strive to understand their school and district administrators. We should know what the administrators' goals are and how we can support them. This understanding can help librarians communicate better with administrators and make our case more effectively.

Librarians should get to know the curriculum in their district and anticipate the needs of the teaching teams. We can create resources in advance and present them to the teaching teams.

This proactive approach can demonstrate the value of the library. It is important for librarians to build their credibility by getting involved in school activities outside the library. This could be coaching a sports team, volunteering for a committee, or doing the morning announcements. These activities can help librarians build their brand and reach students who may not come to the library.

Panelists stressed the importance of professional learning networks. They shared their experience of expanding their professional learning networks, which opened them to different perspectives and ideas. They encourage librarians to find thought partners who are not librarians, as this can make them stronger as professionals and librarians. The panelists talked about the importance of making sure that your work shows up in the data shared by colleagues you are in partnership with. While we are our own best advocates, it helps to have other people carry the message of your value and the impact of your work. Find ways to ensure that your impact shows up in documents that are coming from other spaces in their schools.

Many school librarians feel isolated in their schools and districts. A functional and supportive professional network extends beyond the school to local and state membership associations. There was wide agreement that becoming more involved in association work helps connect people and amplify the collective voice of librarians. Panelists mentioned legislative efforts to strengthen the language around basic education associated with school libraries and legislative days where librarians come together to have conversations with legislators. The panelists emphasized that a posture of collaboration and trust in promoting the role of libraries should extend to active involvement in legislation connected to school libraries, media literacy, and educational technology.

Panelist Biographies

Mark Ray is a former teacher librarian, district administrator, and 2012 Washington State Teacher of the Year. Mark Ray continues leading, teaching, and supporting school librarians at the national and regional level. He has helped lead the Future Ready Librarians initiative since 2016 and is currently part of the IMLS-funded SLIDE research project examining national school library staffing. In Washington State, he teaches in the teacher librarian certification program at Antioch University Seattle and has led grants focused on instructional partnership, instructional technology, media literacy, and educator professional learning. In addition to his 2016 TEDx Talk, he has presented internationally and has written for a dozen professional publications and blogs.

Dr. Ouida Powe is the Director of School Counseling for the Community Lab School, a 6-12 public charter school in Charlottesville, Virginia. She started her counseling career as an IB Counselor and Counseling Chair at Eastside High School in Gainesville, Florida, a well-decorated IB school at the time. The 20 years between her School Counseling posts at Eastside and CLS

were filled with various positions in postsecondary education. Beyond her school halls, she enjoys training college-access professionals in student transitions and success, and spending time with her family.

Liz Phipps-Soeiro is the Director of Library Services for Boston Public Schools and is heading an unprecedented re-investment in school libraries for every child in BPS by 2026. Liz is also the founder of the Cambridge Book Bike, and was named a 2017 Library Journal "Mover & Shaker" and 2017 School Library Journal School Librarian of the Year: Hero of Family Outreach. Her work focuses on developing criticality in children and educators, justice based and antiracist educational practices in libraries and schools, and empowering children to take action in the world around them through grassroots and civic initiatives. Liz holds a BSEd from Lesley University, an MLS from Simmons University and an EdM from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Sam Helmick is the Community and Access Services Coordinator for the Iowa City Public Library and currently serves as the Iowa Library Association President and on the Executive Board for the American Library Association.

Strategic Discussion

Speaking With A Collective Voice

Session Description

School librarians should not (and cannot!) be the only voice speaking up for libraries in their communities. This session will explore how librarians, students, parents, and others can work together to speak with a collective voice.

Panelists

Jason Allen, Becky Calzada, Cindy Baron

Summary and Insights

This conversation provided a look at the challenges and opportunities faced by librarians and educators today and underscores the importance of community, unity, and innovation in the areas of libraries and literacy. Panelists discussed the critical role of school librarians in fostering student reading outside of classwork, the impact of modern technology in libraries, and the significance of sharing the stories of librarians' work amidst challenges like censorship. This discussion included insights into the way that librarians should not only be advocating for themselves but also the importance of advocacy for students and parents. There are significant challenges in meeting the needs of all students, including those with learning exceptionalities. Panelists shared about the importance of starting small and building a collective voice for advocacy.

The conversation touched on several aspects of education policy, particularly state legislation and rules which support literacy, access to libraries, and the role of librarians in education. Panelists highlighted the need for adequate funding for education and libraries and the adoption of policies that ensure these resources are available and accessible to all students. The discussion included reflection on the question of what policymakers could do to advance the work of libraries, parents, and students.

Panelists focused on funding for education and the availability of books. One panelist mentioned the New Jersey Digital Literacy bill that was recently passed, which they believe should be adopted by every state. This bill is a new way to ensure access to literacy resources. One noted that in their state, the funding per child is \$2.50 per year, which they believe is insufficient. The discussion mentioned the Right to Read Act, filed by Senator Reed and Representative Grijalva, which includes a provision for grants that would fund Innovative Approaches to Literacy, funding to aid the recruitment of librarians and protections for reading in the current climate.

There was agreement that power comes from a collective voice. When many librarians speak up, it creates a variety of voices that can be more impactful than just one person speaking all

the time. Like in other panels, the topic of professional isolation came up in discussion. Panelists talked about the feeling of isolation and the importance of finding "your people" or "your tribe." While everyone's professional journey is different, everyone needs support. They mentioned the importance of continually sharing what's happening in their media centers or libraries, which they liken to "collective advertising". This collective voice grows stronger when different groups, like parents, students, business owners, and unions, join in the conversation. With the current social and political climate, it is helpful to find additional voices in the community, like retired librarians, who can speak freely.

Panelist Biographies

Jason B. Allen is the National Organizing Director for the National Parents Union. He is a veteran educational leader, advocate, storyteller and teacher. He resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

Becky Calzada is a 35-year Texas educator who is currently the District Library Coordinator in Leander ISD. She is a school library advocate, and recipient of the ALA's Robert B. Downs Intellectual Freedom Award, the American Association of School Librarians' Intellectual Freedom Award, and the Texas Library Association's Libraries Change Communities Award. Becky is a member of the ALA Intellectual Freedom committee, an advisory member for The ALA Center for the Future of Libraries Advisory Group, on the Legislative Committee for the Texas Library Association, and Past Chair for the Texas Association of School Librarians.

Cindy Baron is the president of the Volusia Association for Media in Education. Media Specialist in Volusia County Florida for the past 7 years. Educator of students PreK to undergraduate for 39 years. Avid gardener.

Strategic Discussion

Diversity In Libraries

Session Description

Mychal Threets talks about the need for diversity in libraries as well as the challenges to meeting this goal.

Summary and Insights

Mychal Threets discussed the importance of diversity in library collections and suggested that libraries should be places where everyone feels safe and belongs. It is important to create an inclusive environment in libraries. This can be achieved through diverse representation in both staff and materials. DEI principles should serve as guideposts for school librarians when creating local school policies. It should be a matter of policy that school library collections reflect the diversity of their students and should stock books that reflect the diversity of broader communities.

The lack of diversity in the profession is also a concern for Threets. First, the cost of obtaining a Master's degree is often prohibitive. Second, there is an open question of whether a Master's degree is truly necessary to become a librarian. If libraries are places where everyone feels safe and belongs, and this is achieved when patrons see people who look like them and books that reflect their experiences, then our policies and hiring practices need to align with those goals.

Speaker Biography

Mychal Threets is a Supervising Librarian for Solano County Library. He is proud to work for the library where he got his very first library card. He is passionate about representation in books and libraries, believing that everyone belongs and should feel seen in both.

Strategic Discussion

The Challenge Of Being Seen, Heard, And Respected When You're One In A Building

Session Description

Research on speaking out as a lone school librarian in a building.

Speakers

Dr. Joette Stefl-Mabry, Dr. Michael Radlick

Summary and Insights

The presentation by Dr. Joette Stefl-Mabry and Dr. Michael Radlick discussed six years of research funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) that shed light on the contributions of school librarians to K-12 education. They distilled findings from 14 peer-reviewed papers and found that school librarians play an essential role within school communities, particularly during the challenges of the pandemic. Their research revealed that school librarians are, first and foremost, information literacy educators, instructional consultants, information specialists, and technology integrators. Their influence, however, is often difficult to identify and is rarely acknowledged beyond the school library profession.

One of the key findings from their research was that school librarians' teaching competence should be viewed as evidence of their practice. Half of the respondents to the research survey referred to their students' information literacy competencies as an indicator of their contributions. The research also highlighted the need for a school-wide and district-wide effort to enable school librarians to provide evidence of their effect in K-12 communities. Their findings underscore the importance of recognizing and leveraging the skills and contributions of school librarians in enhancing student outcomes.

The presenters were empathetic to the challenge of being seen, heard, and respected when school librarians are often solo professionals at their schools. There is professional isolation that we need to acknowledge as well. While school librarians are professionally trained to provide information literacy instruction to all learners in K-12 schools, their teaching competence is rarely acknowledged beyond the school library profession. There is a universal misconception about the role of school librarians among other educators. This affects perceptions in countries around the world, including Australia, Canada, Nigeria, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, India, Asia, Sweden, and the United States.

The presenters note that information literacy is fundamental to educational proficiency. Information literacy helps to ensure a country's development through the education, advancement, and emancipation of its citizens. Educational attainment of citizens has a direct

influence on the economic health of cities, states, and nations. They note that there is an international agreement in relating information literacy to an individual's proficiency in accessing, using, and evaluating information. Recent educational reform efforts have called upon school librarians to teach these skills. Their academic paper focused in detail on the role of school librarians in providing information literacy instruction and the challenges they face in being recognized for their expertise.

Dr. Stefl-Mabry and Dr. Radlick made several recommendations that would be useful for a librarian developing local education policies. Namely, because information literacy is fundamental to a country's development, the educational attainment of citizens has a direct influence on the economic health of cities, states, and nations. The goal of school librarians is to collaborate with teachers to prepare all students to share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of a democratic society. However, the long-standing ignorance of the teacher library profession appears to be universal among school library administrators.

Public education has a legitimate responsibility to ensure educational opportunities for all. For too long, new educational programs have been adopted without any serious effort to systematically assess and evaluate the learning goals and learning outcomes of prior programs. We need to make a genuine commitment to rigorous program evaluation for all types of educational interventions and programs from K through 12 through higher ed. Educational institutions should do more to help people become discerning producers and critical consumers of digital information. Our society and its democratic institutions depend upon it.

The full paper can be found at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328703967_Evidence_of_school_library_effects-Empirical_findings_challenge_long-held_professional_beliefs

Panelist Biographies

Joette Stefl-Mabry, PhD is an Professor and a tenured faculty member in the Department of Information Science; an Research Professor in the School of Education and the Director of the School Library Program at the University at Albany. Dr. Stefl-Mabry's area of research is educational assessment and evaluation. She focuses on documenting evidence of practice by understanding the attainment of student learning outcomes (objectives) at a granular level – actual classrooms. Dr. Stefl-Mabry is also a program evaluator (K-12 through higher education) and works with educators, librarians and educational programmers on issues related to curriculum, instruction and assessment and its effect on student achievement.

Dr. Michael Radlick is the President and CEO of Learning Technology Visions, LLC. Albany, NY, providing research and evaluation consulting services under contract to schools and other public sector organizations. He is a seasoned educational consultant and former Director of Planning, Evaluation and Technology for the NewYork State Education Department for 16 years.

Radlick is an educational researcher and program evaluator with decades of successful state, national and international-level experience working with schools, libraries, universities, public agencies and other public-sector organizations on assessment and the evaluation of teaching and learning programs. He is a demonstrated leader with vision and career commitment to the transformation of teaching and learning, especially through the use of evidence-based decision-making, statistics, data visualization and more effective uses of information and technology for learning.

Strategic Discussions

Telling Your Story

Session Description

How can we make use of “The Day the Librarians Disappeared” as a way to tell the story of school librarianship across the country? This session will explore how some libraries have already used the resource and suggest new ways you can bring the story to your community.

Panelists

John Chrastka, Dr. Christopher Harris

Summary and Insights

Dr. Harris opened the panel with the observation that during the Fall 2022 Libraries.Today Forum, it was evident from numerous presentations that there is a lack of understanding regarding the true role and value of school librarians among school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community. To address this issue, Libraries.Today commissioned a new project called "The Day The Librarians Disappeared" from the cultural development firm GapingVoid. This eBook tells a compelling story of school librarianship by exploring what would happen in education if school librarians were not there to collaborate with faculty and administrators or help and encourage students to grow and thrive.

Gapingvoid, a renowned cultural design firm, was chosen as a partner because of their expertise in reframing complex issues to create new understandings and perspectives. The collaboration aims to ensure that the story of school librarians is heard and understood. Failure to do so means continued misrepresentation of our work and the undervaluing of school libraries. The primary audience for "The Day The Librarians Disappeared" is the public, including community members, parents, school administrators, and teachers. The focus of the project is found in its three key intents: awareness, will, and action. The first step is to increase knowledge and create awareness about the roles and contributions of school librarians. By educating and informing the public, it becomes possible to instill the will and motivation to take action in support of school libraries.

Download the PDF of "The Day The Librarians Disappeared" at <https://media.gapingvoid.com/impls-ebook/full-view.html>

Dr. Harris and John Chrastka then went on to discuss advocacy and activism for librarians. The conversation underscored the need for advocacy and activism to restore the integrity and reputation of school libraries and public libraries. Like in the “Day the Librarians Disappeared”, it is important that librarians are seen as more than custodians of books. A librarian is a consultant and a connector. They are someone who talks through ideas and brings them new

energy and life. This dynamic role, however, is often misunderstood and undervalued, leading to a call for a change in narrative and perception.

Given the current social and political climate around censorship and across education, it is important for library stakeholders to engage with people who want to restore the integrity of education. The speakers also acknowledged past failures in advocacy efforts. Our sector expended a tremendous amount of effort on awareness building or on messaging that feels nice to librarians. We need a sustained commitment and action to reframe the image of the profession in order to effectively advocate for school library programs. Advocacy and activism are crucial for school librarians to reclaim their narrative and demonstrate their indispensable contribution to the educational ecosystem.

Activism in school librarianship is about taking action to effect change. It's about challenging the status quo and pushing for reforms that recognize and enhance the role of school librarians. Dialogue is a powerful tool in advocacy and activism. There should be a common cause among educators who have a stake in the success of their schools. Effective advocacy and activism makes connections about the impact and reputation of school libraries in order to connect us to the broader educational community that should also care about school libraries.

Panelist Biographies

John Chrastka is the Executive Director of EveryLibrary, the national political action committee for libraries. Mr. Chrastka is a former partner in AssociaDirect, a Chicago-based consultancy focused on supporting associations in membership recruitment, conference, and governance activities. He is a former president and member of the Board of Trustees for the Berwyn (IL) Public Library (2006 – 2015) and is a former president of the Reaching Across Illinois Libraries System (RAILS) multi-type library system. Prior to his work at AssociaDirect, he was Director for Membership Development at the American Library Association (ALA).

Dr. Christopher Harris is the Director of the School Library System for the Genesee Valley BOCES, an educational services agency supporting the libraries of 22 small, rural districts in Western NY. He was a participant in the first American Library Association Emerging Leaders program in 2007 and was honored as a Library Journal Mover and Shaker in 2008. In 2022, Dr. Harris was named a Senior Fellow for the American Library Association for school libraries and youth policy issues. Dr. Harris received his Ed.D. from St. John Fisher College in 2018 for dissertation research on helping teachers become more confident teaching computer science.

Thought Pieces

The Trauma Of Book Bans And Censorship

Session Description

Kelly Jensen talks about the real trauma of book bans and censorship and how to build resiliency as a school librarian.

Speaker

Kelly Jensen

Summary and Insights

Kelly Jensen unpacked the topic of trauma and book bans in libraries and how these attacks on the profession, our programs, and the collection can impact mental health. She emphasized that trauma and book bans are health issues. Sustained personal and professional pressures can shift and change people's brains, their bodies, and the way they act and respond. She reviewed several articles on trauma-informed librarianship that can inform a sector-wide perspective of how librarians can engage with their students, families, colleagues, and the public using a trauma-informed approach.

Jensen discusses the importance of creating a safety plan for those who do not feel professionally or personally safe in their current work environment. This could involve finding a space to turn to in moments of crisis, such as going to sit in a car, making a phone call to a friend, family member, or therapist, or going to another office. Jensen also highlighted the human aspect behind book bans and censorship, reminding us that there are people behind these decisions. She emphasized that these decisions are often made by individuals who are trying to navigate complex issues, not because they have ill intent.

Speaker Biography

Kelly Jensen is a former librarian who has found a passion for writing to teen audiences, as well as those who work with them. She works as an editor for Book Riot (bookriot.com), where she runs the weekly "What's Up in YA?" young adult newsletter, the biweekly "Check Your Shelf" newsletter for librarians, cohosts the "Hey YA" podcast about young adult literature, and writes weekly columns and other features. Her books include (DON'T) CALL ME CRAZY: 33 VOICES START THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH and HERE WE ARE: FEMINISM FOR THE REAL WORLD, both from Algonquin Young Readers. She's also a well-known and long-time co-blogger at STACKED (stackedbooks.org). When not writing or reading, Kelly teaches classical vinyasa-style yoga, as well as practices photography. She lives in the Chicago area with her husband, three cats, and rabbit. She is on Twitter and Instagram as [@veronikellymars](https://twitter.com/veronikellymars).

Thought Pieces

Politics And Children's Books: Evidence From Public School Libraries

Session Description

A discussion of research on the long-term impact of book banning.

Speaker

Kirsten Slungaard Muma

Summary and Insights

School library collections are a battleground in contemporary culture wars. Kirsten Slungaard Muma discussed her recent working paper examining the relationship between local politics and the types of books available in public school libraries. She compiled data on the availability of hundreds of books in public school library catalogs from a large sample of elementary, middle, and high schools. The criteria included meta information such as award winners, recent bestsellers, or books dealing with controversial content like LGBTQ stories or characters, abortion, or racism.

In the working paper, Muma studied the relationship between being in a school district that was subject to a book ban in the past school year and the probability that the school library had one of the 65 recently published LGBTQ titles in the library. She controlled these estimates for the number of older LGBTQ titles that were present in the library when she searched in the spring of 2022. The findings suggest that book challenges in the 2021-22 school year have had chilling effects on the acquisition of new LGBTQ content in school libraries. Schools and districts that were subject to book challenges in the past school year were 55% less likely to have added a recently published LGBTQ title in the fall. This represents a significant reduction in the likelihood that a school library anywhere in America will have new titles in these subject areas.

Muma's research also revealed significant differences between schools in high-income and low-income areas in the availability of library resources as well as the recency and relevance of the collection. Schools serving larger shares of white students, located in areas with higher average incomes, and situated outside of rural areas, tend to have better-resourced and more up-to-date collections than their counterparts. The gaps are especially large between libraries in low-income and high-income areas.

New laws in several states restrict how educators talk about certain topics, such as race, racism, gender, and sexuality, and are having a negative impact on the presence of LGBTQ titles in elementary and middle school libraries. Muma suggested that these laws are influencing the types of books that libraries choose to include in their collections. The data shows that these restrictions have a chilling effect on the acquisition of new LGBTQ content in school libraries. Muma notes that book bans, censorship, and anti-access legislation will have repercussions for

the types of content that students have access to in school library spaces. She emphasizes the importance of paying attention not only to specific removals of books but also to thinking about what the systemic effects of these book challenges might be (Page 13).

Despite these difficulties, Muma's study offers a glimmer of hope. "Most libraries, even in the most conservative areas, had at least some of these controversial titles," Muma says. "If you think that an important role of school libraries is to promote access to diverse and challenging material, perhaps even including material that some parents or politicians would find objectionable, then I think you should be encouraged by this finding." Muma's research underscores the importance of school libraries in providing access to diverse stories, ideas, and information that can impact students in ways not captured by test scores. It also highlights the need for continued vigilance in monitoring the systemic effects of book challenges on library collections.

Speaker Biography

Kirsten Slungaard Mumma is a postdoctoral fellow at the Wheelock Educational Policy Center at Boston University. Her research is in the economics of education. She holds an M.Ed. in Education Policy and Management and a PhD in Education Policy and Program Evaluation from Harvard University.

Thought Pieces

Shore Up Your Boundaries

Session Description

Pernille Ripp talks about setting boundaries and limits as a form of self-care for school librarians.

Speaker

Pernille Ripp

Summary and Insights

Pernille Ripp discussed the challenges and pressures faced by educators, with a focus on the importance of setting personal boundaries and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Ripp is an experienced educator with a career in both America and Denmark. Her talk highlighted the systemic pressures within the American public school system that often lead to self-sacrifice and exploitation. While self-care may seem like a luxury for school librarians, our profession needs to push back against these systemic pressures.

Ripp highlighted the need for librarians to prioritize their health and well-being alongside their professional responsibilities. One takeaway from the presentation was the importance of prioritizing our health alongside our professional responsibilities. The speaker noted, "I want to have a better work-life balance so that my body can feel better so that I can live longer so that I can be more present and not have all of these chronic and chronic stress things affecting my body because this will break your body down." Balancing professional responsibilities and personal well-being requires setting boundaries, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and practicing relaxation.

School librarians face many unique challenges in their work life. Ripp underscored the often under-appreciated importance of self-care and boundary-setting in the face of systemic pressures in educational settings.

Speaker Biography

Pernille Schmidt Ripp - Since Pernille Ripp was a child growing up in Denmark, she knew she wanted to work with kids. She has loved being a 4th, 5th, and then 7th-grade teacher in the American public school system, as well as an educational coach for adults. In her co-created teaching spaces, students' identities are at the center of the explorations that they do, as well as considering how to fight for change. Recently, Pernille moved home to Denmark, where she is expanding her knowledge about children's development and needs through her work in early childhood education.

Thought Pieces

Brooklyn Public Library Books Unbanned

Session Description

Amy Mikel talks about the Brooklyn Public Libraries' Books Unbanned website to share banned books across the country.

Speaker

Amy Mikel

Summary and Insights

Amy Michael shared learnings from Brooklyn Public Library's Books Unbanned anti-censorship initiative and emphasized the need for educators, literacy coaches, and adults to support teens in learning about their rights and navigating library policies, as well as empowering them to raise their voices. The initiative was launched in response to efforts to restrict or remove books from school and library shelves. They created a Teen eCard, granting young people aged 13 to 21 from anywhere in the United States access to their entire digital collection. The campaign gained attention and went viral, resulting in over 6,000 eCards being issued and more than 70,000 books being checked out. They also established a Teen Intellectual Freedom Council, a Teen Book Match program, and partnered with PEN America to launch the Virtual Freedom to Read Institute. Through these efforts, they have received stories from young people facing censorship or challenges to access, highlighting the importance of providing access to books freely. The library's Books Unbanned team was awarded the 2023 Librarians of the Year honor by Library Journal.

Speaker Biography

Amy Mikel is the Director of Customer Experience at Brooklyn Public Library, responsible for implementing exceptional library services in the areas of reference, circulation, and collections across 61 branch locations. She oversees the Library's circulating print, media, eBooks, and database collections, as well as the processes and policies which govern patron account management and materials circulation. Amy is part of the team recently named Library Journal's 2023 "Librarians of the Year" for their efforts on the Books Unbanned anti-censorship campaign.

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