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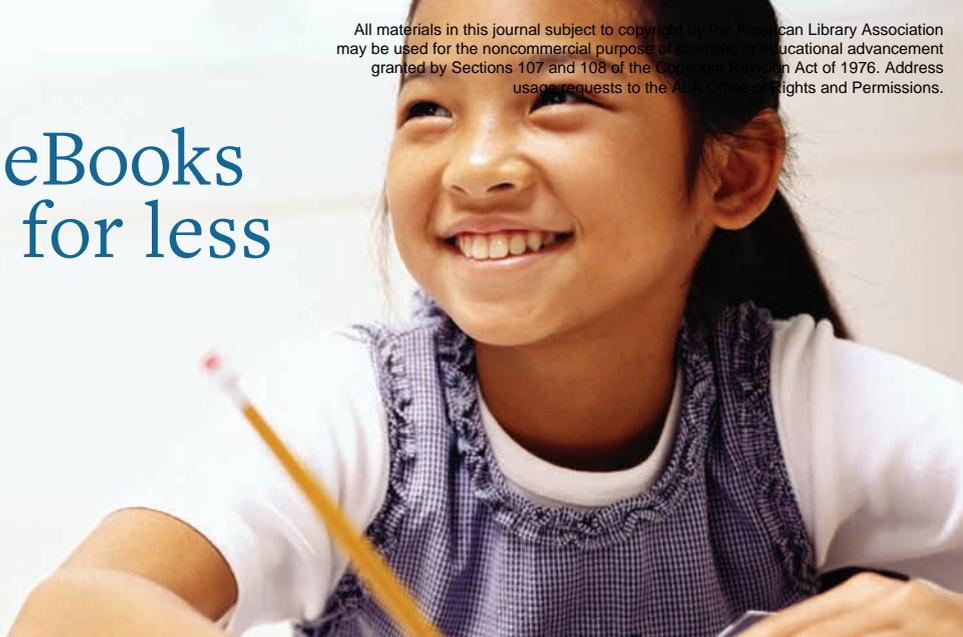
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FEATURES

ARTICLE

My goal is to make sure that the library is as user-friendly to students walking in for the first time as it is for those who use it daily.

Practical User Experience Design for School Libraries —*pg 38*

COLUMN

DEPARTMENTS

Look for these icons throughout this issue of *Knowledge Quest.*

They will point you to additional resources online!

KQ   Knowledge Quest

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In our administrators' offices, in school and school district conference rooms, in the offices of our local and state boards of education, and in the halls of our state legislatures, we must be visible and vocal.

Looking beyond the Horizon: People, Places, and Things

Audrey Church, 2016–2017 AASL President | churchap@longwood.edu

Although I am writing this column in mid-January, the May/June issue of *Knowledge Quest* should arrive in your mailboxes in early May as another school year is almost complete. This will be my last column as your president for 2016–2017, so perhaps it is a good time for all of us to reflect and look forward. Join me, please, in looking beyond the horizon to what I have categorized as key people, places, and things.

People

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, we hear the voices of pre-service school librarians. Our authors and their contemporaries are the newest people in the field of school librarianship. They will build upon the work those of us currently in the field have done and move the field forward, inspiring children to read, think, create, share, and grow. As an educator of school librarians I have the privilege of seeing, on a daily basis, the passion, energy, and enthusiasm our new librarians possess.

Members of AASL and school librarians in general benefit every day from the work of the people of ALA. Our AASL staff, housed at 50 E. Huron Street in Chicago, work daily to move school libraries and school librarians forward, but at that same address we also find the offices of ALA. The people in those offices, from the Office for Intellectual Freedom to the Office for Library Advocacy to the Public Awareness Office and others, support and assist us in our battles against censorship, our advocacy efforts, and in a myriad of other ways.

Finally, the people of AASL are us—state delegates to Affiliate Assembly; volunteers who serve on the AASL board, committees, and task forces; members who are willing to step up as the need arises and work for the common goals that we share of providing students equitable access to information, the services of a full-time certified school librarian, and instruction in the literacies needed to be college-, career-, and community-ready.

Together as people we will move school libraries beyond the horizon!

Places

As places our school libraries serve our students in many ways. The library provides a safe place—physically, emotionally, and intellectually. When I worked as a high school librarian, I told my library assistants to think of the library entrance as the Statue of Liberty, symbol of a place where everyone is welcome. Libraries are places where students can become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. They are places of reading, inquiry, and personalized learning.

We must be working in other spaces and places as well, however. In our administrators' offices, in school and school district conference rooms, in the offices of our local and state boards of education, and in the halls of our state legislatures, we must be visible and vocal. As ESSA implementation moves to the state and then local

levels, we must be in the places where the key conversations are occurring. And while I wrote this in January and the political landscape has changed since then, we know the ESSA language will not change. Using the tools provided from our state ESSA workshops <http://essa.aasl.org/state-workshops>, we must work to build coalitions of stakeholders whose goals align with ours and to have our elevator speeches ready with data, story, and the ask. Effective school library programs are named specifically in ESSA, but we—each of us—must keep them at the forefront as implementation progresses.

The work that takes place in these spaces will move school libraries beyond the horizon!

Things

Many studies demonstrate the correlation between strong collaborative school library programs staffed by certified school librarians and higher student achievement. In an attempt to move school library research to a new trajectory, and with the assistance of grants from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, AASL is exploring *Causality: School Libraries and Student Success* (CLASS). We are currently in the first of three long-term research phases outlined in the CLASS I final report, available at <www.ala.org/aasl/CLASS>. Three research teams are involved in CLASS II, striving to discover what works at that intersection of formal and informal learning in the school library learning space. They are also working to provide reliable information by which to assess the impact of specific actions in school library programs and by certified school librarians <http://knowledgequest.aasl.org/class-ii-looking-evidence>. Keep your eyes on the horizon for CLASS updates.

We look forward with great anticipation to the release of our new national standards for learners, school librarians, and school libraries. The revision process that began in August 2015 with online surveys and focus groups is right on schedule in January 2017 as drafted manuscripts move to copyediting and layout, and the development of implementation tools begins. Our new standards will launch in fall 2017 at our national conference in Phoenix, Arizona. For more about the revision process and implementation schedule, go to <www.ala.org/aasl/standards/revision>.

And yes, AASL's 2017 National Conference and Exhibition, themed "Beyond the Horizon," will be held November 9–11, 2017. Make plans now to join us in Phoenix for an amazing professional development learning experience with school library colleagues. We'll have preconference sessions as well as concurrent sessions that feature our new standards. The IdeaLab returns along with a variety of author events. As in Columbus in

As ESSA implementation moves to the state and then local levels, we must be in the places where the key conversations are occurring.

2015, state affiliates will be recognized at the opening general session and, once again, complimentary registration for your administrator is available with your full conference registration. For more information, go to <http://national.aasl.org>.

It is through activities and events such as this that we, together, will move beyond the horizon!

Looking Ahead

As we look to the future, we will listen carefully to the voices of those new to our profession, for they have much to share. We'll appreciate that school libraries are part of a larger library ecosystem and value the support provided by that larger body of diverse colleagues. We'll look in the mirror when we talk about AASL because AASL is we, the people. In this virtual world of instantaneous access, we'll continue to value the school library as a place and to make sure that we are visible and vocal in places where we can share that school librarians transform learning. We will look forward to the work that emerges from CLASS II and to our new learning standards and program guidelines. And we'll move beyond the horizon in Phoenix as we celebrate school libraries, school librarians, and the difference we make in student learning.

It has been an honor to serve as your president for 2016–2017. Thank you for allowing me this privilege.

Audrey Church *is a professor at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, where she is coordinator of the School Librarianship Program. In 2015 she received the Longwood University College of Graduate and Professional Studies Faculty Research Award and Longwood University's Maria Bristow Starke Faculty Excellence Award. She is the author of "Performance-Based Evaluation and School Librarians," published in* School Library Research *in May 2015. Her newest book is* Tapping into the Skills of 21st-Century School Librarians: A Concise Handbook for Administrators *(Rowman and Littlefield 2016).*

> *All of us have opportunities to mentor, encourage, and set the example for new librarians, and these articles will provide ideas of how you might work with a student or someone new in the field.*

Seeing the School Library from Pre-Service Students' Perspectives

Karla Collins | collinskb@longwood.edu

Think back to your first years as a school librarian. What thoughts, feelings, and fears did you have? What were you most excited about? Do you remember how you planned to change the world, one book and one student at a time?

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest* we have an opportunity to look through the window and see the view from the perspectives of school library students. You will find their views are quite varied, but some common threads run throughout. You will read about partnerships: between school and public librarians, between classroom teachers and librarians, even between students and e-books. You will also read about what happens when new school librarians are confronted with the reality of daily life within a school library. Most of all, you will read about the wonderful, exciting community of school librarianship by seeing it through the eyes of its newest members.

All of us have opportunities to mentor, encourage, and set the example for new librarians, and these articles will provide ideas of how you might work with a student or someone new in the field. One of the best things about our profession is the comradery and collaboration among us. I have never been to a library conference or meeting where ideas were not shared nor resources exchanged. The excitement generated by a room full of librarians is contagious and lasts far beyond the conference. We become better as we share our experiences with others and make someone else's ideas work in our space.

School library students enter the profession knowing the ideal of a school library, and they might be hit hard with reality when they start their first job. It can be isolating to be the only person in the school who knows what's involved with leading an effective school library program. New librarians need to know that beyond their schools' walls they can find support and someone to talk to about their successes and struggles. They need to feel like they are now part of this great collaborative community. We can all encourage pre-service and new librarians we meet to join AASL and their state affiliates to take advantage of face-to-face and virtual opportunities to share and grow with other school librarians.

This issue of *Knowledge Quest* includes the voices of students in library programs from around the country. Their stories are varied, and each has had unique experiences, but their collective excitement about entering the profession is clear. They speak of the need to be supported and mentored by experienced professionals as they are learning the ins and outs of being school librarians. They offer new ideas, new research, and new perspectives.

As you read their stories, think about how you can make a difference in the experience of a new librarian. These enthusiastic young librarians are ready to go to bat for the profession and for the pressing need to maintain and grow the presence of school libraries.

I hope you enjoy reading their stories and learn from them. I know I have!

Karla Collins *is an assistant professor at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. A member of AASL, she serves on the* Knowledge Quest *Editorial Board and chairs the Educators of School Librarians Section. She also serves on the Association of American University Presses Book Selection Committee. Among her recent publications is "Reaching All Learners in the School Library," which appeared in the May 2016 issue of* School Library Connection.

it's in our HANDS

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AASL IS CELEBRATING 65 YEARS OF SERVICE

to the school librarians with a giving campaign to help ensure the future of the school library profession. Campaign funds will support scholarships to student members and the development of an AASL Induction Program.

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The AASL Induction Program, scheduled to launch at the 2017 AASL National Conference, will offer a comprehensive program to ensure that members are prepared to actively shape the future of the K-12 education landscape as leaders within their schools and the association.

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TRANSFORMING LEARNING
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Susan Altman
susan@susanaltman.org

Truly Getting to Know the Students

Benefits of Being a Library Assistant while Studying for an MLIS Degree

Introduction

On the stage before me was a rambunctious third-grader, pounding away on a set of drums. Shortly after, a beloved second-grade teacher took the stage with a few of his students in tow, and they started dancing in sync. During both of these events, the rest of the crowd—the entire student body, as well as faculty and staff, of Forest Heights Elementary School in Columbia, South Carolina—were going wild. The room rang with laughter, applause, and encore requests. But despite the joyousness surrounding me, I had to wipe away several tears. This was the school's talent show, one of the concluding events of the entire school year. Suddenly, it hit me that, like the fifth-graders soon moving on to their various middle schools, I was going on to my next stage too.

Two years prior, I had been hired as the school's library assistant, despite the guarantee that I would not be staying long term. The school librarian at Forest Heights, Linda Lundeen, and the principal were aware of my ambitions from the start. I was already taking classes in the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) Program at the nearby University of South Carolina, intent on becoming a school librarian myself.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work as an assistant at Forest Heights, and because of my positive experiences I hope that all school librarians reach out to pre-service school librarians from nearby universities. If you have an opening for a library assistant, consider an MLIS student for the job, even if doing so means you have to go through the hiring process again sooner than you might prefer. If you can't afford an assistant—a luxury, I know, in this budget-strapped world—consider offering ongoing volunteer opportunities for pre-service school

librarians. You will serve as a mentor to those entering the profession. You may also find they have knowledge and alternate perspectives to offer your school library program.

I consider my time as the library assistant at Forest Heights to have been an apprenticeship. While my MLIS required that I take two internships, these are short-term affairs. Being immersed in a school for two years provided me with a lot of practical knowledge that I will take with me when I become a school librarian elsewhere. Below are just a few of my personal takeaways, along with a few notes about how a school librarian can benefit from having a pre-service school librarian on staff.

Overall Elementary Experience

When I enrolled in the librarian preparation program at the University of South Carolina, I had middle or high school librarianship in mind, as I had recent experience working with those grade levels by judging historical papers and websites on National History Day. (Unlike many school library certification candidates, I had no experience as a classroom teacher.) Prior to working at Forest Heights, the last time I had entered an elementary school had probably been during my little sister's sixth-grade year over a decade ago, when I was still in secondary school myself. I am

not yet a parent, and I never babysat. I was a little nervous about my ability to interact effectively with elementary school students.

As it turns out, catching on didn't take long. At the time, the school library was on a mostly fixed schedule, which has since changed to fit best library practices. At the time, though, I benefitted from the fixed schedule because I was able to see the majority of the students at least once a week. Due to this constant exposure I quickly was able to intuitively recognize the developmental differences among students in various grades. I was also able to pick up on aspects of elementary school that had changed since I had been a student.

The phrase "criss-cross applesauce" entered my vocabulary; while the seated position had been one my own elementary school teachers had requested frequently, they referred to it by another name. Other more significant aspects of elementary school life that had changed included the layouts of classrooms. While some teachers still wanted desks in neat rows, many used alternate set-ups, with standing desks and bean bag seating often being put into the mix.

Another benefit of seeing the students each week was that by paying close attention during checkout I was able to memorize many students' names, and I saw how this effort helped out tremendously in the

long term. Students initially were surprised I knew them by name without having to refer to the computer screen, and many warmed up to me afterwards. The simple act of calling students by name can cause them to feel as if the library is their space.

Promoting the Collection

In library school, I adored my children's and young adult literature classes. They gave me a reason to catch up on my Newbery, Caldecott, and Pura Belpré winners! Working at Forest Heights gave me a chance to promote these critically acclaimed works via readers' advisory.

Being immersed in a school for two years provided me with a lot of practical knowledge that I will take with me when I become a school librarian elsewhere.

However, I also learned a lot about students' interests, such as professional wrestling, origami, and, of course, princesses. Some of my favorite moments involved helping a clearly excited student locate a book featuring a Disney princess! When I have my own school library I will always order the national award winners each year but will also be sure to keep up with topics that interest students so that I can frame the award winners appropriately. Knowing the details about topics popular at a school definitely helps "sell" books. For example, at Forest Heights I was inundated by WWE wrestlers' names for the first time in my life, and I tried to use this new knowledge to my advantage during booktalks and one-on-one conversations. When I entered a graduate school program, the sentence "Our biography about Big Show is currently checked out, but how about this book, *Niño Wrestles the World,* by Yuyi Morales?" may not have been something I'd ever imagined saying, but it intrigued many students!

Getting Acquainted with the Faculty and Staff

Once I started to get to know the faculty and staff at Forest Heights, I wished I could somehow jump into a time machine to visit my own elementary school faculty and staff to see them from my adult perspective. I was amazed by the array of talents and interests at Forest Heights, which ranged from a talented illustrator to marathon runners. I worked with a very interesting group of people; my own elementary school teachers were probably equally fascinating!

My interactions with Forest Heights teachers helped me develop a mindset for planning collaborative endeavors when I am in charge of a school library program. As library assistant I also saw that most first-year teachers were especially receptive to overtures from the school librarian. I saw firsthand the importance of having a draw to the library; the school librarian for whom I worked kept a candy stash in her office!

Teachers could—and did—stop in for a treat, providing an opportunity for the librarian to initiate all kinds of conversations. I heard one about the idea of participating in video conferences with other classes from all over the world and another about the librarian and teacher working together to help students develop the skills they need for science fair research.

Also, I got to know the majority of the "classified" members of the school, such as the instructional assistants, the database specialist, the bookkeeper, and the building supervisor. Even one of the members of the cafeteria staff enjoyed unwinding in the school library at the end of each day. Talking to these people helped me comprehend just how much goes into the running of the school, and how a team with diverse skill sets helps ensure student success. Many staff members even aided the library program in some way, such as an instructional assistant who brought her personal items and

created a Kwanzaa display in the space in December every year. Others helped out during our special events. I will always share a kinship with classified (that is, nominally non-teaching) employees, as I have been one. I'll always want *all* members of the school staff to know that their expertise and voice are always welcome in the school library.

Outside Resources

Forest Heights Elementary is a Title I school. At times, working the register at our book fair could be depressing, as many students were not able to afford books they desired. On the flip side, I was able to see the power of literacy organizations such as Reading Is Fundamental, First Book, and Open eBook, and companies such as Epic!, all of which provided our students with an array of books, either paper or digital. My eyes were opened to the wealth of literacy-related resources available, and sometimes all it takes to use them is a little time to research them and register online.

Professional Development

The school district I worked for, Richland County School District One (aka Richland One), has oversight of library programs through its Instructional Technology Services division. The division regularly holds professional development sessions, even for library assistants. These half-day sessions spread throughout the school year provided me with useful insights into the other school library programs throughout the district. Participants were able to visit other schools to get ideas that we might be able to use in our own schools. At each host school, the school librarian, principal, and assistant principal informed us about the unique aspects of their school and library. Other library assistants, many of whom had held the position for decades, also shared their expertise during these sessions. Several library assistants had worked under a string of librarians and had had to train them in many ways!

The Instructional Technology Services division also encouraged school librarians and library assistants to join the state's school library association, the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL). This encouragement led me to participate in SCASL events sooner than I probably would have otherwise; I attended the SCASL conference, summer institutes, and other workshops whenever I could. During the smaller events, I was often one of only a few library students in attendance. Not only were the sessions informative, but all of the events were great opportunities to network and hear about the actual goings-on in school libraries across the state.

Programming

The Forest Heights school library had two major events during each of the school years that I was there. The first, Polar Express, was an annual tradition just before winter break and involved having a guest reader from the community come to the school and read a story of his or her choice to a class or two at a time. Students were given hot chocolate and a cookie. The second, Literacy Day, took place just before school let out for the summer and included a summer-reading kickoff with the public library, literacy-related activities—such as following directions to make lemonade—and other fun stuff.

The school librarian for whom I worked did the major planning and scheduling for these events. I was able to sit in on some of the planning sessions she held with members of the library advisory committee. Therefore, I was able to comprehend how much planning and work actually went into both events—valuable insight to take with me to my first job as a school librarian.

I grasped how much careful attention to the logistics of everything mattered. For example, I saw an experienced

My interactions with Forest Heights teachers helped me develop a mindset for planning collaborative endeavors when I am in charge of a school library program.

school librarian plan the Polar Express schedule that would best work for the readers and the classes, calculate how many packages of cookies were needed to last through an entire day, determine how long it would take a whole class to make lemonade on Literacy Day, and other such details. All of the planning I saw made me realize how seemingly simple events can require extensive planning and preparation when scaled up to apply to the entire student body. I also saw that, if all of the effort provides the students with fond memories, the work is worthwhile!

Technology

Richland One adopted the 1:1 technology model during my last year at Forest Heights, providing its students with Dell laptops. All of our third- through fifth-graders received one. It proved to be a transformative moment for our school library program. Not only were we able to promote our e-book collection extensively for the first time, but we were able to see and hear firsthand about how the laptops were initially being used in the classroom. The school librarian and I also had to troubleshoot them fairly often, as our IT technician was assigned to multiple schools. The troubleshooting gave me a chance to talk with the students about what they were learning in class, what they were reading, and how they were using the laptops.

How Does All of This Benefit the School Librarian?

To begin with, having a library student as an assistant ensures that both the librarian and the assistant highly value literacy and education and share goals for the school library program based on standards and proven best practices in the profession. Like the librarian, the library student wants K–12 students to become ethical and effective users of information, lifelong readers and learners, and critical thinkers. Of course, grad students in other fields

School librarians can also encourage library students to incorporate their new knowledge into the library program, as the lessons pre-service librarians are learning reflect the most up-to-date best practices in the field.

can believe in these ideals too, but a library student has already dedicated herself to the profession and can be expected to be especially motivated during her limited time at your school.

Many pre-service school librarians are already familiar with books enjoyed by young readers. Ideally, all pre-service school librarians already have some working knowledge of libraries, at least as a regular user of public and academic libraries, and know how to shelve in the correct sequence, use online catalogs, check out materials, and use reference sources.

School librarians can also encourage library students to incorporate their new knowledge into the library program, as the lessons pre-service librarians are learning reflect the most up-to-date best practices in the field. Pre-service school librarians can also be encouraged to contribute to the library program in creative ways. For example, letting them try out new ideas they have for the space and displays may make the library more appealing to kids!

Looking Ahead

My experiences in the Forest Heights Elementary School library confirmed that I made the correct career choice. One of my largest realizations came very early in my employment at the school, as I attempted to settle into a routine and discovered that no two days were ever the same in that school library—as I am sure is the case in the majority of school libraries! Although the occasional challenge arose, I learned something new all the time. I liked the atmosphere. All of my experiences as an assistant in a school library reaffirmed my decision to become a school librarian.

In the long run, any school librarian who gives a pre-service school librarian a chance for some hands-on experience will, through the protégé,

play a major, if indirect, role in the library program of another school. I constantly reflect about what I learned at Forest Heights; I'm sure other pre-service librarians would be similarly affected by their time at an elementary or secondary school. I plan to keep in touch with the school librarian I assisted; Linda Lundeen has already had a big impact on my preparation for leading a school library program—and I'm sure I'll ask her for advice down the road. I hope, too, that when I have my own school library, I can pay it forward and have a similar positive impact on another school library student!

I will always fondly remember those two far-too-short years with the faculty, staff, and, of course, the students at Forest Heights Elementary. Having the opportunity to help them reach their goals was an honor. I hope you will consider providing a library student with a

chance to get to know and become a contributing member of your school. A good way to start? The next time you have a job opening for an assistant or opportunities for volunteers, ask the closest MLIS program administrator to spread the word among the university's MLIS candidates. You'll be glad you did!

Susan Altman *is an MLIS candidate at the University of South Carolina, with an anticipated graduation date of May 2017. She is a member of the South Carolina Association of School Librarians and received the Nancy Jane Day Award in 2016. Beginning in the 2017–2018 school year, she will serve as the school librarian at Eau Claire High School in Columbia, South Carolina.*
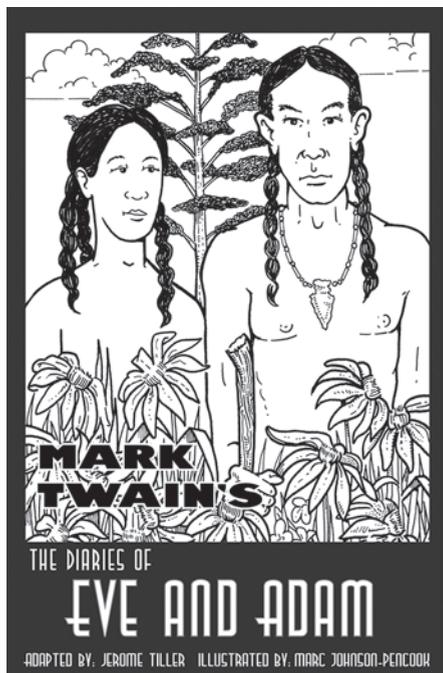
Getting Out of the Discussion Boards

The Benefits of Practical Experience

William Henley
whh1196@gmail.com

I lived in discussion boards, e-mail threads, Wix, and Google Drive for three semesters. Collection development, privacy, intellectual freedom, makerspaces, and many other topics were discussed, dissected, and debated as I pursued my graduate degree completely online. My time as a University of Kentucky grad student prepared me to be an effective school librarian on day one. I am not just saying this in hope of getting extra credit; I'm writing this in January 2017 and graduated in December 2016. The work done with my professors and peers has built the knowledge, skills, and mindsets I need to provide powerful informa-tion-literacy learning opportunities for students and staff, to create a vibrant culture of reading in a school, and to maintain a collection that represents a diverse set of viewpoints across many formats and many lines of difference.

However, it would be naïve of me to assume that any of this would be *easy* to do on day one. As a former English teacher, I know the on-the-job learning curve for a school librarian will be as steep as it was for a classroom teacher. Before my first day of teaching, I felt mildly prepared. My feeling of preparedness quickly turned into an overwhelm-ing feeling of unabated terror when my block one students walked in for the first time. These students' English instruction was solely on my shoulders. I truly believe that no school of education or alterna-tive route program and no amount of student teaching or portfolio-assembling could have prevented that feeling.

My first day of teaching was over six years ago, but that feeling of responsibility and subsequent terror has been omnipresent in the back of my mind. As a graduate student, I wanted to do everything in my power to mitigate the first-day terror of school librarianship. I knew this meant I needed to get as much practical experience as possible. I worked with practicing school librarians and teachers on assignments as often as possible. I completed my school library practicum at a school that aligned with my personal beliefs and profes-sional goals. I substituted for school librarians, and I was a long-term substitute for a high school library assistant. I also interned in a public library, an experience which, despite how much I enjoyed and learned, showed me that I had made the right decision in pursuing school librarianship.

> These experiences have added layers of invaluable context to what I gained from my courses. A lively conversation on a discussion board about privacy was informative. However, physically holding an overdue notice that is about to be sent to the parents of a high school junior who has not returned books on safe sex and teenage pregnancy is enlightening in an entirely different way.

These experiences have added layers of invaluable context to what I gained from my courses. A lively conversation on a discussion board about privacy was informative. However, physically holding an overdue notice that is about to be sent to the parents of a high school junior who has not returned books on safe sex and teenage pregnancy is enlightening in an entirely different way. Writing a report on censorship was difficult. However, convincing a teacher to put *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* on a summer reading list after the teacher has said, "The parents won't go for the gay characters," is another level of challenging. These practical experiences forced me to grapple with the real-world implications of theories, concepts, and ethics that float around the academic ether.

While those two experiences are the most memorable, my time outside of the discussion boards was filled with instances that both shaped my beliefs and illuminated realities about libraries and the services they provide. In my graduate courses we discussed overdue fines as a barrier to access. I left those readings and discussions with the belief that overdue fines were a barrier, and that a patron should be charged only if an item was lost or damaged beyond repair. My long-term substitute position as a library assistant was in an affluent suburban high school that has a student parking lot filled with BMW and Mercedes vehicles. It was in a district that charges high school students a nickel a day for overdue items and a flat fee for lost/damaged items. Even though virtually every student could afford to pay fines, I quickly realized that hassling a student over fifteen cents discouraged them from checking out books and even from visiting the library. In my courses, it never occurred to me that a lost fine might not be enough to replace an item, but I

quickly found out that the flat fee rarely covered the replacement cost of an item. Neither type of fine was a legitimate source of revenue, and they both deterred students from using the library and its collection. I left that experience with a strengthened belief in fines as a barrier, and, in case I ever work in a school that charges fines, I also learned how quick and easy it is to cancel fines in the integrated library system.

One of the major reasons I decided to become a school librarian is to provide students with a diverse collection that allows them to explore their own multifaceted identities and to promote acceptance and empathy about aspects of identity that are different from their own. I learned how important this exploration is during my first year of teaching in the Mississippi Delta when we were reading *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah. One of my students, an avid reader, raised her hand and commented that this was the first book she had read that featured a person of color as the protagonist. My students were in the ninth grade, and all but one were African American. That single moment was the gut check my white male privilege needed, and it set me on the professional path I am on today.

Five years after that moment, I was enrolled in a school library administration course. We were completing a collection-development project. I partnered with an elementary school librarian and decided to focus on the biography collection because I quickly noticed a dearth of titles about people of color. I developed a lengthy list of possible texts to add to the collection. I justified these additions by citing academic research and the school's racial/ethnic demographics, by aligning the titles to state standards, and by linking the titles to projects and units the

teachers were already leading at that school. I felt like I was acing collection development. Then I asked the librarian how much money she could realistically spend on biographies. Given the many other needs of the collection, $500 was the most she could justify. When I added up the total cost of the titles on my list, I was shocked. As ridiculous as this is going to sound, at that moment I realized how expensive nonfiction titles are. I whittled the list down to eighteen items, and I was still thirteen dollars over.

At this point, I truly realized how budget constraints make collection development a tightrope walk. If I had purchased every biography on my original list, there would have been no money left over for the new Diary of a Wimpy Kid book or for revamping the worn-out 612.8 section for the kindergarten's annual five senses unit. While budgets were something that we covered in my courses, they seemed to exist far away from the cozy utopian bubble of graduate school. My work with the elementary school librarian popped that bubble, and my time in other schools and libraries showed me that many school librarians would be ecstatic to have $500 to spend on one section.

But what does this mean for you? If you are a library science student, online or on campus, get out of the lecture hall or discussion board and into a library as often as possible. If you are a full-time teacher who is also pursuing a degree in library science, collaborate with your school librarian early and often to create units and projects for your class that you can use with your students. All of this can be as formal as your practicum or as informal as shelving books in a school library. Take what you learned in the bubble to the real world. Reconcile the differences between academia and practice by

One of my students, an avid reader, raised her hand and commented that this was the first book she had read that featured a person of color as the protagonist. My students were in the ninth grade, and all but one were African American. That single moment was the gut check my white male privilege needed, and it set me on the professional path I am on today.

asking as many questions about what you are learning in your courses as possible. I have yet to meet a librarian who did not love talking about libraries, and their actual lived experiences have led to nuanced opinions and points I often did not see in my courses.

If you are a library science professor, design more assignments that encourage your students to partner with a practicing librarian or teacher. The assignments on which I worked with a librarian or teacher were by far the most impactful and memorable. I also feel more prepared to collaborate with stakeholders in the future because these assignments provided a low-stakes situation in which I could practice fostering relationships with other professionals.

And most importantly, if you are a practicing school librarian, I would encourage you to open your space

and collection to library science students. You are in the trenches and have a breadth of experience and insight that comes only from running a program. If you live near a library science program, reach out to the university about hosting practicum students and inquire about creating a volunteer opportunity with their student organizations. If you do not live near a program, contact your alma mater and say you are willing to partner with students on assignments that allow for virtual collaboration. This action is not purely altruistic. The library science student might create a unit plan you can use. When I visited libraries, I was often convinced to stay a few minutes extra and do some shelving. Who doesn't want a volunteer who already knows Dewey?

That morning in August when students walk into the school library for the first time is fast approaching.

However, I know that my courses have taught me well, and, just as importantly, my practical experience has given me a concrete foundation to meet many different challenges. Day one as a librarian is going to be scary. It is not going to be terrifying.

William Henley
recently graduated with an MS in library science from the University of Kentucky. He taught for five years and is a proud 2010 Mississippi Delta corps member with Teach for America. While in graduate school, he completed an internship at the Homer Public Library through the Alaska State Library, and he completed his school library practicum at the International School of Ulaanbaatar (ISU) in Mongolia. In August he is moving to Mongolia to become the teacher librarian at ISU. You can follow his adventures in school librarianship on Twitter @Lanky_Librarian.

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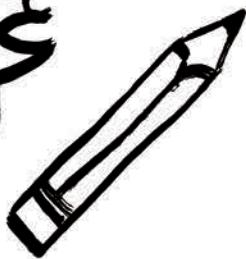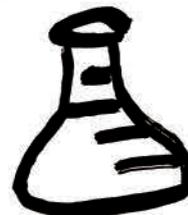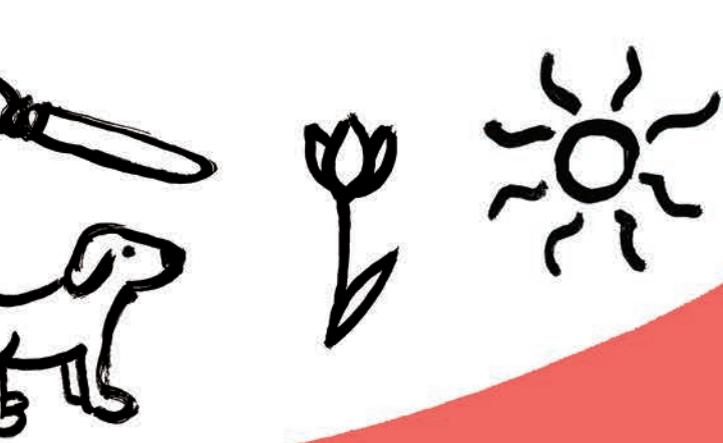
Two Libraries Working toward Common Goals

Tonya Potter
tonyaanddennis@gmail.com

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Kara Johnson
kara.johnson-1@mnsu.edu

School libraries, the bustling hubs of school buildings, provide students with an abundance of resources. Students look to their school library to find new books, seek information, creatively solve problems, and use technology. School libraries play an essential role in students' academic growth and development of lifelong learning skills. In 2012 ALA posited a lofty representation for school libraries, and the AASL 2016 position statement continues the tradition: "Beyond its curricular role, the effective school library program gives each individual member of the learning community a venue for exploring questions that arise out of personalized learning, individual curiosity, and personal interest." All of the wonderful resources and services that school libraries provide are easily accessible to the population of the building during the school year. But where do students access resources when summer arrives?

Public libraries would seem to be natural partners, sharing the same student patrons as school libraries. Public libraries are vast repositories of knowledge and fiction, offering innovative and engaging youth programming. Endless information is available to students, in both digital and print form—and these services are available year-round. Students who are able to get to the public library have the world at their fingertips. But not all students are able to access the public library. How can the public library provide services that reach all students?

In addition to accessibility issues, school and public libraries have had to deal with significant budget cuts. Although the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a piece of legislation allowing federal dollars to be directed to school libraries, was passed in late 2015, historical downtrends in school budgets have left school libraries deficient in staffing and resources (Peet and Vercelletto 2016, 12). School libraries are not the only public institutions facing fiscal concerns. Public libraries continue to struggle with ongoing budget cuts, specifically decreases in state grant allocations proposed in the fiscal year 2017 budget request put before Congress in February 2016 (Peet 2016). Operational restraints created by diminishing budgets do not lessen student patrons' reliance on resources made accessible by these public institutions.

In an effort to meet the needs of shared student patrons, school and public libraries look to collaborative ventures, sharing not only resources but also curriculum and programming objectives. What arrangements can be made to allow both libraries to overcome the obstacles they face when trying to meet the varied needs of student patrons? Real-life examples presented below can serve to stimulate thinking about collaboration beyond the school walls.

Students Who Need Help

Several student subgroups may benefit from cooperative programs established between the school and public library. These groups include, but are not limited to, prolific readers, students identified as struggling readers, and preschool-aged children. High-quality reciprocal programs that consider the needs of outlier student subgroups can not only support students' academic performance, but also lay the groundwork for the engagement and motivation of lifelong readers.

Prolific Readers

How many times has a prolific reader excitedly searched for the school library's copy of a book, only to

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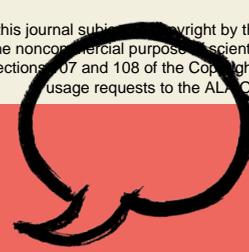
Coordinated summer reading programs not only increased student participation, but also promoted the roles of the school library and public library in the community.

find that the book has already been checked out? A reciprocal relationship between the school library and the public library could alleviate this problem. In 1997 Matthew Lighthart and Creedence Spreder looked at Virginia Beach's school library dilemma. Virginia Beach's school library was in need of renovation, and the local public library was too small to meet patrons' needs. To solve the problem, a joint library was built. One obvious benefit of the project was that reciprocal lending agreements dramatically increased access to materials (2014, 33).

Struggling Readers

Struggling readers often fall further and further behind their peers who can read proficiently, especially during the summer months. Richard L. Allington asserted, "Struggling readers just participate in too little high-success reading activity every day. This is one reason so few struggling readers ever become achieving readers" (2013, 525). The best way to improve reading skills and comprehension simply comes down to volume of reading. Students who read, read, and read are more likely to find

literacy success. But more often than not, struggling students don't take advantage of summer reading programs offered by public libraries.

A documented benefit of a well-run school library is better school performance. Across the United States, research shows that students in schools with well-equipped and well-staffed school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without libraries. More than sixty studies show clear evidence of this connection between student achievement and the presence of school libraries with a qualified school librarian (Sorestad 2014, 4). Logically, then, creating a collaborative relationship between the school library and the public library's summer programming would potentially lead to greater academic success.

With this knowledge in mind, Denton Public Library (DPL), Texas Woman's University, and four elementary schools in DPL's service area collaborated on a research-based summer reading program. The highly coordinated program included participating students' names being published in the news-

paper, a public librarian making visits to schools and youth organizations, school librarians participating in public library story times during the summer, author events, and year-end evaluation of the collaborative programming. Outcomes were largely positive, showing a 27 percent increase in summer reading participation and a 23 percent increase in youth programming participation (Tucker et al. 2015). Coordinated summer reading programs not only increased student participation, but also promoted the roles of the school library and public library in the community.

Preschool-Aged Kids

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) is a joint initiative of the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children. With the aid of resources available at the ECRR website <http://everychildreadytoread. org>, four thousand libraries across the country act under the assumption that parents are a child's first and best teacher. Getting children ready for school is vital. Parents can engage in five reading practices to get kids ready for school. These practices are talking, singing, reading,

writing, and playing. ECRR encourages public libraries to augment the efforts of parents: "Much of ECRR involves librarians modeling the five practices for parents during story times or other adult–child programs, as well as at parent workshops in day care centers, teen parent programs, or large community events" (Celano and Neuman 2016, 75).

Public libraries can serve those children who are not old enough for school, and are, therefore, beyond the reach of school library services. Singing during library programs, in particular, has been proven to have benefits for kids. Peter Andrew de Vries pointed out the many benefits of singing: "(1) music in storytelling sessions enhanced social interaction for children; (2) music focuses the children in storytelling sessions; (3) music is embedded in storytelling; and (4) sessions provided new ideas for music in the home and beyond" (2008, 473). The obvious benefits of music for kids means that it should be a tool in education. ECRR and similar public library programs share a goal with school library programs: helping children be successful in school and life. School librarians can help make parents of school-age children aware of public library services for all kids, including students' siblings too young for school.

Public Library Summer Programming Beneficial to Students

In a 2016 interview, Angie Petrie, director of youth services at Stillwater (MN) Public Library (SPL), described the process of programming. She pointed out that SPL offers year-round programs for kids of all ages, and those programs are described on the library website <http://stillwaterlibrary.org>. A huge benefit of these programs, especially during the summer, is prevent-

ing or reducing academic recession (aka "summer slide"), which often results when kids are out of school. Petrie also pointed out that these programs have other important qualities: they are fun, and attendees don't feel the pressure associated with school progress. She described summer programs offered at SPL and pointed out that SPL programs offered over the summer currently attract anywhere from nine to eighty kids. Seventy to eighty participants will show up for programs where stories are read to kids ages three to five, and approximately fifty kids will show up for crafts.

Reading to a dog. Groups that would especially benefit: ELL students, prolific readers, students of low academic ability, dog lovers, dogs. Certified therapy dogs come to SPL during the summer. Kids ages seven through twelve are invited to come and read to the dogs. Each student is given a fifteen-minute timeslot. ELL students and struggling readers need to practice reading fluency, and this program gives them a low-stress opportunity to do so.

Weird science. Groups that would especially benefit: struggling readers, preschool-aged kids. Trained teen mentors lead a STEM-based activity for kids, including kids who haven't yet been enrolled in school. This program, which is for kids from six to nine, works, in part, because older students teach younger students, and so the atmosphere is often a bit more relaxed than when adults present programs. The intended outcome is to get kids interested in math and science in a hands-on and fun manner.

Preschool lab-STEM story time. Groups that would especially benefit: preschool-aged kids. This activity is geared for kids from three to five. Stories based on math and science are read to kids, and then these "young scientists" explore a science
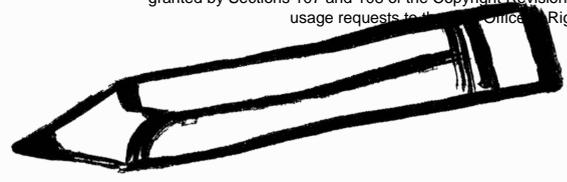
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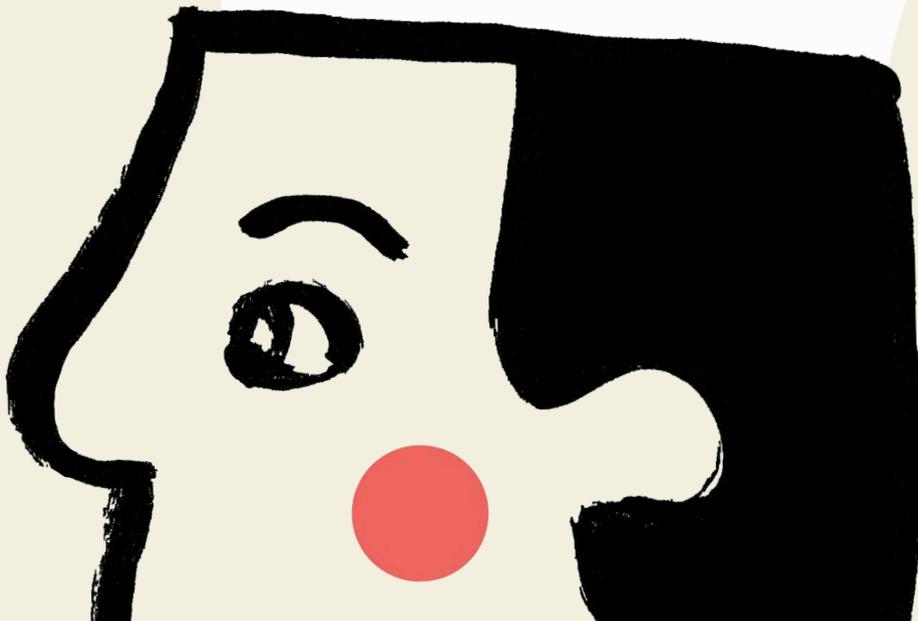
or math-based theme in a lab setting. In summer 2016 SPL focused on these themes: rainbows, my body, muscles, ocean animals, magnetism, nature walk, dinosaurs, birds, and gardens.

Crafternoons. Groups that would especially benefit: students of low academic ability, preschool-aged kids. SPL has opportunities for kids from ages six through ten to be creative. The premise is that students who are allowed to exercise their curiosity become stronger students. Summer 2016 weekly themes included treasure holders, robots, bookmarks, castles, rock creatures, painted tiles, envelopes, T-shirts, and buttons.

While it is difficult for the school librarian to promote these programs during the summer months, nothing stops a school librarian from promoting these programs while school is still in session and handing out the public library's summer schedule of events. Discussing public library programs while kids are in school—and including reciprocal links at both libraries' websites—could potentially increase participation in both school library and public library events. Petrie expressed the importance of good relationships between public and school libraries.

One area of cooperation could be communication. If the public library staff is made aware of school assignments, they can prepare for those students who may have questions when they arrive in the public library. Databases that address assigned topics can be shown to these students, even if the library's physical collection is limited (Petrie 2016). Not only can this relationship between school and public libraries increase participation in public library programs year-round, but it can also increase student achievement during the school year.

Reciprocal Support

Kari Phillips is the school librarian at Lake Elmo Elementary School in the Stillwater (MN) School District. In a 2016 interview she mentioned that she has already established a strong relationship with the Lake Elmo Public Library (LEPL), a library located near the Stillwater Public Library, but a separate entity (see <www.lakeelmo-publiclibrary.org>). In the fall, the LEPL director visits the students at Lake Elmo Elementary to gear kids up for reading and remind them of LEPL programming; he returns at the end of the school year to talk up the public library's summer reading program (Phillips 2016). Part of the reason for the visits? In a word: money. Phillips said, "Due to budget reasons at Lake Elmo Elementary I was not able to purchase the Maud Hart Lovelace books and do a program, so I had [the LEPL director] come in to talk about the books and do a public library program." The Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award is a Minnesota student-choice award; nominees are actively promoted by school librarians throughout many school districts, including the Stillwater Area Public Schools, Phillips's district. Obviously, not having the funds to purchase the nominated books hindered Phillips's ability to get her students to read them. Public library to the rescue! Having those books supplied by the public library obviously saved the school district money and introduced some families to the public library—a win-win situation for both the school district and the public library.

SPL's Petrie expressed an interest in also creating a partnership with regard to the Maud Hart Lovelace award books. "In the past, I've ordered two copies of each title.

This year I will order three and definitely have voting boxes out" (Petrie 2016). She suggested that, in the coming school year, the local school libraries inform students that they could vote for their favorite books not only in the school libraries but in the public library as well. She also shared that the public library enjoys a deep discount on certain products. It would be relatively simple, in the case of Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award nominees, for the public library to order the books and encourage student patrons to check them out. This approach would save the school libraries money and would potentially increase the number of students using the public library (Petrie 2016).

Conclusion

Multiple public institutions provide services for communities. If one created a Venn diagram of the people school and public libraries serve, the circles would intersect in the case of school-aged students. This reality makes a relationship between public libraries and school libraries seem obvious.

With continued budgetary restraints limiting school and public libraries, collaborative ventures can create a much-needed support system for students and help meet students' varied needs. Programs can take on a variety of forms, and the investment of librarians' time and effort may range from minimal to very involved. Reciprocal programs not only have the potential to improve patrons' access to resources but may also invigorate library programming and boost student achievement in school. Future programs that are built on research-based methods may help create useful frameworks that expand the collaborative efforts between school and public libraries.

In many communities, there are already attempts to build upon

this reciprocal dynamic. It takes buy-in from people in both buildings. Promoting programs that each offers, sharing costs, and being visible in the wider community are three ways to improve the relationship. Small initial steps can lead to bigger, bolder collaborative programs in the future. But each journey starts with that initial step. Once the initial collaborative gesture has been extended, all stakeholders have an opportunity to make gains and improve student success.

Tonya Potter *is a library media specialist for Stonebridge Elementary and Lily Lake Elementary Schools in Stillwater, MN. She is currently working on her Masters degree through Minnesota State University in Mankato, MN.*

Kara Johnson *is a library media specialist at Franklin Elementary School, Anoka–Hennepin School District, in Anoka, Minnesota.*

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E-BOOKS IN PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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Allison Rothman
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All Aboard?

Demands for school technology innovations, implementation of 1:1 device models, and increased interest in digital media highlight complicated issues such as funding, equity, and decision making for e-book collection development and programming in school libraries. School librarians considering purchase of e-books for school libraries still cannot follow a clear or consistent track through this uncertain e-book terrain. With multiple purchasing, delivery, and device options, school libraries can choose to partner with public libraries, purchase e-books from varied providers, or intentionally select the option of waiting until e-book use becomes more straightforward.

At the Station

As I contemplated e-book options for my school library I investigated current trends and literature but determined that existing solutions did not comfortably fit our learning community. Our school and district had no distinct plan for e-book adoption, and many students had no personal electronic devices. To ensure e-book platforms would remain relevant and practical in our environment, I chose to explore how e-books and e-readers work in our community.

This article addresses my experience with an e-book action research study designed to illuminate my school library e-book decisions within a manageable and affordable pilot program. Over the course of one school year, this study explored public middle school book club students' use of public library and open source e-books for pleasure reading on Kindle e-readers.

Although this study was initiated to inform decisions for a school library environment without 1:1 technology, our school has since moved to a 1:1 tablet model made possible by a generous grant. However, the results of the study are still useful to me for the insights I got into students' preferences for resource delivery and to other librarians in schools not able to afford to implement 1:1 device models. In addition, use of e-books in school libraries is still relatively new, and the evolutionary nature of their application brings tremendous challenges requiring flexibility on the part of all stakeholders. Based on my study findings I offer suggestions here for e-book implementation in non-1:1 environments while at the same time reflecting on our newly realized iPads-for-all world.

Riding the Local

In planning for action research that investigates middle school e-book use I considered the consumer e-reader landscape and worked with school administration to determine practical methods of gathering data. I opted to use Kindle e-readers for several reasons. With the Kindle students can download public library content wirelessly and without cost. To prevent students' being distracted by the variety of features supported on tablets and by the backlit brightness of the screen, and to allow students to read in bright sunlight I selected a dedicated e-reader with an e-ink screen. Working within the existing weekly structure of our book club provided an established cohort of dedicated student participants willing to explore technology for pleasure reading. Students were assigned Kindles for personal home and school use throughout the school year.

Making the Grade

After I had drafted, distributed, and collected permission and assent forms, students were assigned e-readers and protective cases.

Genuine enthusiasm was evident as students registered, explored, and personalized their e-readers. Students met weekly for lunch in the school library/learning commons where they had access to computers to set up and filter their San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) OverDrive and Amazon accounts. (OverDrive was the only SFPL aggregator that supported the Kindle format.) Students controlled their own checkout and reading choices, and together they worked through the protocols and strategies for e-borrowing.

I communicated directions for set up of devices and accounts through familiar learning platforms like School Loop, the learning commons homepage, and Google Classroom. Monthly surveys to track progress and concerns of participants were posted to the same forums and were often completed during club meetings. I interviewed all participants at the beginning of the experience to ask about digital reading experiences, public library use, and book preferences.

Speed Limits

Attendance at a voluntary lunchtime book club for middle school students varies considerably throughout the school year. Thirty-three students submitted the September intake survey and by February only thirteen students responded. With a consistent core of participants, generally twelve to eighteen students attended book club weekly. To entice greater participation I began cooking and providing lunch for the club on the last meeting of each month. Fortunately, my kitchen skills helped boost attendance for these meetings and created opportunities for students to complete surveys. As attendance fluctuated, individual participant interviews became challenging; I had intended to interview every student every

month, but, instead, interviewed each student three times during the school year. Eventually, I moved toward a roundtable setting where I asked my interview questions to the group. In each of these interviews (after the one at the beginning of the year) and roundtable discussions I asked the same six questions about comfort level and enjoyment with the e-reader and the process of e-lending as well as about use of print versus digital materials.

Passengers

This cohort generally enjoyed reading and entered this study having some degree of familiarity with public library borrowing and electronics use. Book club members who participated in this study reported reading at least one book for independent pleasure reading each month; 52 percent of these students reported reading five or more books monthly. All but one student used the local public library to get reading materials at least "sometimes." Every participant reported having daily access to at least one type of electronic device such as

a smartphone, computer, or tablet. Sixty-five percent of participants had some e-reading experience prior to the study; these experiences included reading e-books on family tablets, using a smartphone app to access Wattpad, trying a friend's device, and accessing e-books on a computer. The remaining 35 percent of the students had no previous e-reading experience. Only one student in the group reported having access to her own personal non-tablet dedicated e-reader.

Although these book club students had experiences, skills, and access to aid their journey into e-reading, several areas needed early attention. All but two students had public library cards, but 58 percent did not have a personal identification number (PIN) or didn't know their PIN to access their SFPL online account. Only one participant had previously checked out an e-book from the public library. Fortunately, no students ranked themselves as "nervous" or "uncomfortable" with the prospect of using Kindles for this project, and more than 66 percent considered themselves "super excited."

Chugging Along

Student participants enthusiastically explored their new e-readers, the San Francisco Public Library's OverDrive portal, and Kindle content controls through their Amazon accounts. At weekly meetings students collaborated to share knowledge and experiences navigating these components of the project. After the first month with Kindles, 66 percent of the participants reported receiving assistance while navigating the various websites and mechanics of downloading e-books. Students sought help from other book club students, the school librarian, friends, and the public library online chat system.

Although nearly all participants reported high levels of comfort with the process of using e-readers,
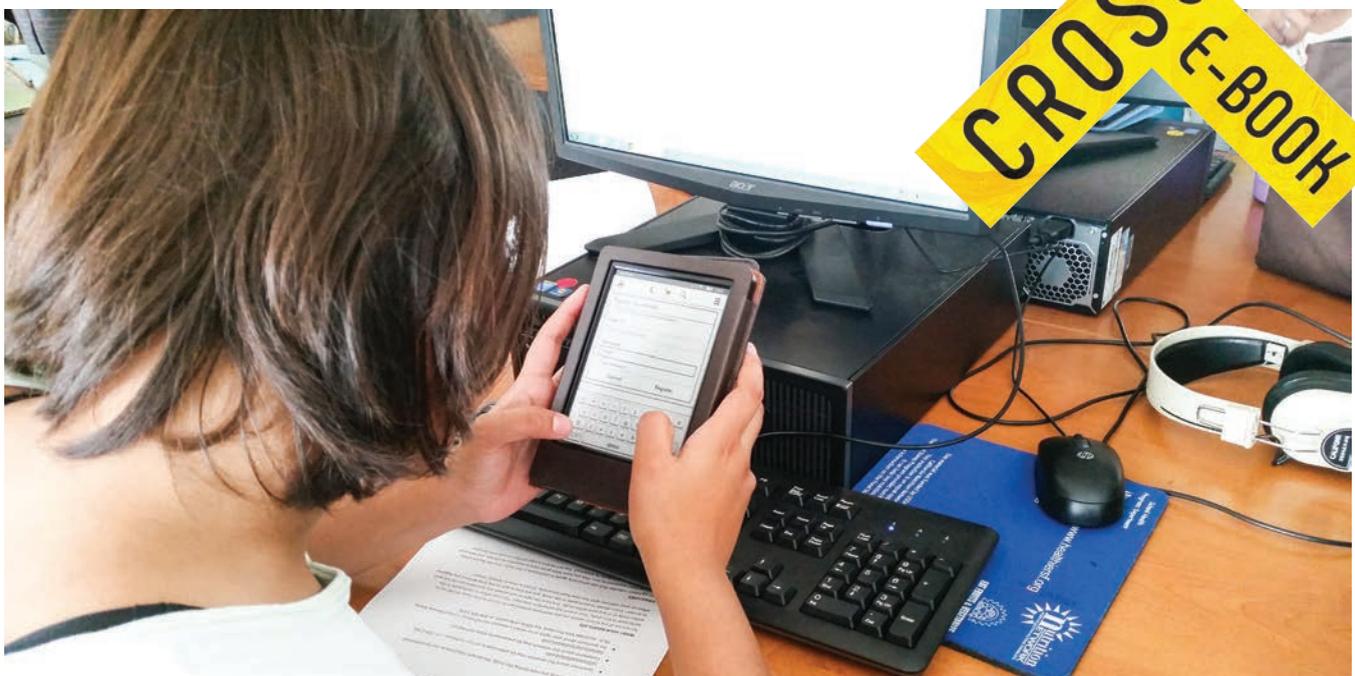

Figure 1. E-reader set up.

Until a school librarian has determined how—and whether—students will use e-books, and how students will access them, I recommend practicing restraint.

students also noted complaints about the process of e-book borrowing:

> I got frustrated when I had to put an e-book on hold and had to wait forever! R.J.

> I think that there should be an easier way to download e-books. L.L.

> It takes a looooong time for e-books to get returned to the library. R.Y.

Often the popular books students wanted to read were unavailable, and I began training students to create wish lists and place holds for e-books. I also demonstrated how students could speed the hold process for other borrowers by returning e-books through their Amazon accounts prior to the automatic return date.

Junction

The book club students considered their new reading medium from numerous perspectives, including convenience, aesthetics, and familiarity. After the first month with the Kindles more than 90 percent of respondents reported reading e-books *and* print books. This pattern continued throughout the study with at least 65 percent of participants reading print books in addition to e-books each month. During roundtable discussions student opinions were mixed when comparing e-books to print books. Amongst the numerous "thumbs up" and "love it" reactions to e-reading, there were a fair number of "eh" and "just ok" comments, too. While 100 percent of the group plans to continue reading e-books for pleasure at least "sometimes," 50 percent prefer the print experience or didn't have a preference. Participants appreciated these benefits of e-readers:

> *Ease of check-out and download.* A.L.

> *Lightweight.* E.J.

> *No need to go to library or bookstore.* A.T.

> *They don't waste paper.* L.L.

> *Portable.* C.A.P.

> *Fast access.* I.L.

> *Ability to get books for free.* K.C.

> *E-ink more pleasant than backlit tablet screens.* A.T.

And the fans of print materials appreciated:

> *Flipping paper pages.* K.C.

> *The solid form.* V.T.

> *Seeing their progress through the book.* Z.P.

> *The tactile nature of print.* L.S.

> *The ability to collect the physical item.* E.Z.

During this study, book club students overwhelmingly preferred obtaining e-content through the SFPL OverDrive portal versus Project Gutenberg's open source collection. Students found the wireless download system more manageable than downloading books to PCs and transferring e-books to the Kindle via USB cables. The only student who preferred Project Gutenberg is a self-described book collector who enjoyed building a collection on her Kindle, even though she had to return the Kindle at the end of the school year.

Putting on the Brakes

This study investigated e-reading for pleasure, which differs significantly from whole-class fiction assignments and other curricular e-content. Book club students chose popular genres and the newest fiction available when reading for pleasure. They experienced frustration when forced to wait for titles they wanted because of a limited number of available copies.

Book club participants preferred to read the print version of a title rather than to wait for the e-book. Creating an e-book collection with the depth and size needed to provide value to a school library program is expensive. E-material for pleasure reading can be more expensive than print books. One large popular e-book aggregator provided an estimate of $30,000 for a collection of approximately two thousand e-books, averaging fifteen dollars per e-book.

E-book availability and pricing systems reflect the demands of different publishers. Popular e-book titles might be priced similarly to the corresponding hardback, or they could run upwards of forty dollars a copy. These e-books might be available for purchase, meaning they will remain in the library collection year after year, or titles might need to be repurchased after twenty-four checkouts. With kids new to e-checkout procedures clicking away in the catalog, a potentially large number of unintentional checkouts could increase the required investment. Some titles may need to be repurchased annually. Fiction titles are almost never licensed for multiple simultaneous users, and the license is not perpetual.

Until a school librarian has determined how—and whether—students will use e-books, and how students will access them, I recommend practicing restraint. Investments with specific e-book vendors must be carefully considered; the librarian should also measure the level of commitment to the associated products and apps the library can afford to make. Money spent on e-books linked to a vendor and platform that the library abandons in two years is money poorly spent.

Providing unloaded e-readers allows
idea of checking out preloaded e-rea
E-readers are not static. Students
that interest them. You know...teach

Light at the End of the Tunnel

For schools where few students have access to personal electronics and must use shared e-readers, tablets, or computers, the e-book route is not streamlined. Device and account set-up is challenging for products that presume a 1:1 consumer model. Without individually assigned devices, students must sign in and out of apps and interfaces with every use. Yet even without a take-home device for every student, school libraries can provide e-reading opportunities for their communities. Working with existing systems, technology, and resources school librarians can develop face-to-face and online informational forums for students, teachers, and families to access e-books for pleasure reading.

Purchase e-readers and train students and teachers to access public library collections and public-domain e-books. A small investment in e-readers could launch a school library e-book program that offers the added benefit of bolstering the relationship between the public library and the school library.

Middle school library users often keep books for months; so **check out e-readers for extended periods of time.** Students need time to grow comfortable with the device and the process—and these kids are busy! The most frequent complaint in this study: "I don't have enough time to read." Providing unloaded e-readers allows students to gain essential skills. I don't support the idea of checking out preloaded e-readers just to offer an alternative medium for reading. E-readers are not static. Students should learn to find and access sources for e-books that interest them. You know...teach them how to fish.

In this study several students returned their Kindles and, instead, opted to read through the Kindle app on their smartphones. Numerous students also reported reading fan fiction on their handhelds. In environments with limited access to dedicated e-reading devices and tablets **teach students how to download e-reading and fanfiction apps on their smartphones**. Introduce public library and open source e-collections through tutorials and online instructions. Students are attached to their handhelds. Give them the power to get their favorite books in their pockets right next to their Instagram/Snapchat/next coolest thing.

Bells and Whistles

Schools eligible for Title I, Part A programs can initiate access to a large collection of popular Baker & Taylor/Axis 360 content through a collaboration with New York Public Library, Digital Public Library of America, First Book, and Clever. Only for use with Apple and Android apps, this Open eBooks program does not provide circulation statistics and may require labor-intensive distribution of overly cumbersome log-in codes. For students with a device and motivation this solution opens a door to a wealth of resources. For more information, go to <http://openebooks.net>.

Vendors that provide online public access catalogs (OPACs) to schools hope librarians will develop e-book collections through them because of streamlined cataloging and established purchasing chains. E-books obtained through OPAC vendors are accessible through vendor apps or in-browser reading. Circulation statistics for OPAC-acquired e-content might prove an unfriendly reminder of unfruitful purchases if students do not use these less familiar and less popular apps. In shared device environments students must sign in and out of accounts, resulting in additional effort to access e-content.

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E-Equity Line

Any potential e-book solution must consider student equity. Will all students have access to library e-book programs? Since students' access to e-books depends on Internet connections, librarians and schools need creative strategies to help students locate practical local Internet access points. Students currently without home Internet access will probably continue to need external Internet access in the future. Knowing where and how to gain access is a necessary skill for many of our students to develop.

School librarians depend on data to inform, guide, and defend collection-development and programming decisions. Unfortunately, many practical e-reading options for school libraries without 1:1 environments do not provide methods to collect circulation statistics. School librarians should document employed e-book strategies and solutions that help students and teachers locate and access e-materials beyond school collections and survey their communities about external reading sources. If school library circulation statistics drop in parallel with increased library e-book

programs the change might indicate that students are reading differently because school librarians are laying down the track across the evolving e-book terrain.

Little-Read Caboose

Unfortunately 1:1 environments do not eliminate all e-book borrowing challenges for school libraries. E-books for school library collections remain costly; students may not have public library cards; public library e-collections may not serve student needs sufficiently; Internet access may be unavailable to students outside of school; and school or district device management may impede e-book app access.

In our present 1:1 environment, students' iPads and available apps are managed by our district department of technology in partnership with the organization providing the grant. Nearly all students and staff have tablets with monthly data plans for two school years. Students may install apps that are assigned to the tablets by the district and the grant provider. However, so far, no efficient and transparent method for teachers and schools to request apps for student use exists.

As I write this during winter break during the first year of our 1:1 grant our students now have access to three different e-book apps. Highlighting the third rail of student e-equity, two of these apps (OverDrive and Axis 360) require students to have active public library cards and PINs, and the third app (Open eBooks) requires inventive communication of cumbersome log-in codes. One quarter of the way into this initiative I can begin to inform students and teachers about e-book availability on their tablets.

School librarians often initiate and innovate with technology in school settings. Considering the expense and potential commitment to e-book programming, districts and schools without thoughtful plans for e-book programming may spend time and funds unwisely. Librarians, administrators, curriculum teams, and district technology leaders must collaborate to engineer smart, relevant policies for school library routes through e-book landscapes.
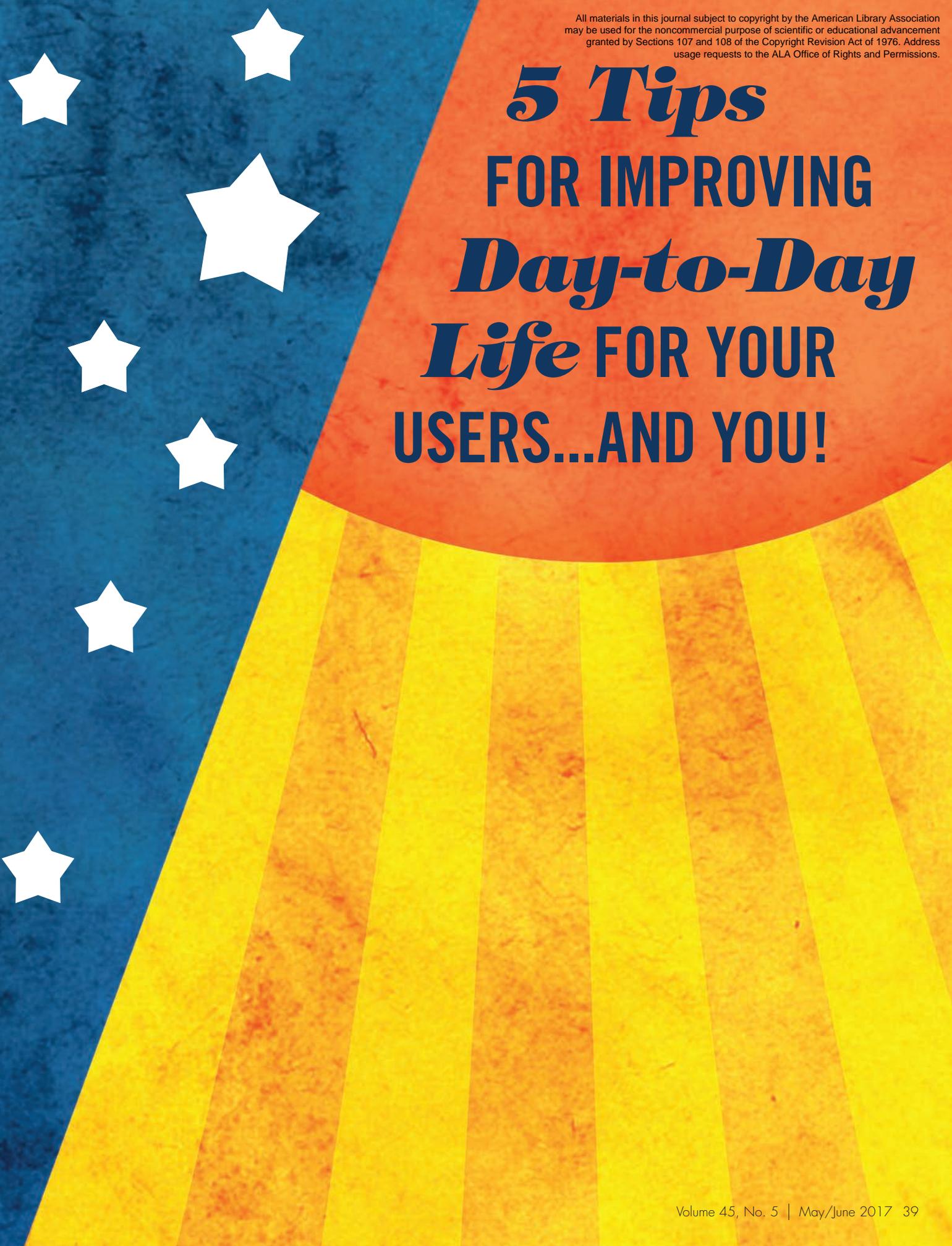
Allison Rothman *is a teacher librarian at Hoover Middle School in San Francisco, California.*

PRACTICAL *User* *Experience* *Design* FOR *School* *Libraries*

Suzanne Sannwald
suzannesannwald@gmail.com

5 Tips

FOR IMPROVING

Day-to-Day

Life FOR YOUR

USERS...AND YOU!

Recently, while spending time in the school library, a student asked, "Please don't judge me, but is Alaska part of the United States or Canada?" Another student then chimed in, "Yeah, I've always found it confusing, because isn't Alaska an island?" An island? I could understand how a student might think that Alaska is part of Canada, but the island comment caught me completely off guard.

After taking some time to process the situation, it finally struck me. While I automatically visualize Alaska within the context of a world map or globe, I realized that the Alaska-is-an-island student was picturing one of those maps of the United States that inserts Alaska and Hawaii just "off-shore" for the sake of space and simplicity (see figure 1). I thumbed through a nearby atlas, finding an example of such a map, and the student exclaimed in recognition: "Exactly!"

As another example, when getting organized this fall, I created a guide to keep near my work phone for students who help in the library. It includes a script for answering the phone, as well as emergency contact information for various key staff members on campus. When using it one day, though, a student asked me how to dial "x."

Dial "x"? It took me a minute to register that the student did not know how to interpret the way I had listed extension numbers (e.g., Front Receptionist, x60400). Thinking that this student was an outlier, I asked others, and they were similarly befuddled. In retrospect, it makes sense that students may have little to no experience dialing extensions. With stored contacts and phone numbers now hyperlinked on their smartphones, they hardly need to dial any numbers at all.

The Alaska and extension incidents reminded me of how easy it is to make assumptions about what students do and should understand. I am forced to question what I consider to be common knowledge and to recognize that what makes sense to me may not make sense to others. How often do I unknowingly fail when attempting to communicate information to students in the school library? More than I probably even realize!

This is where User Experience (UX) design comes into play. In my previous work life—after I was pink-slipped from my job in public K–12 education back in 2012—I worked for a couple of years in a corporate setting. This is where I learned about everything from organizational development and leadership to marketing and customer satisfaction. I now consider those years to have been a sabbatical of sorts for me, and UX design is one area of interest that I have carried forward into my current work as a school librarian.

What Exactly Is UX Design?

Explained succinctly in *Useful, Usable, Desirable: Applying User Experience Design to Your Library*, "The user experience is how someone feels when using a product or service" (Schmidt and Etches 2014, 1). Defined another way, " 'User experience' encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products" (Norman and Nielsen n.d.).

Combining these definitions in the context of the school library, user experience is how someone feels based on all of his or her interactions with the library program. For instance, how do people feel when:

· In your library's physical space?

· Receiving assistance or instruction from staff members?

· Looking for books and other materials?

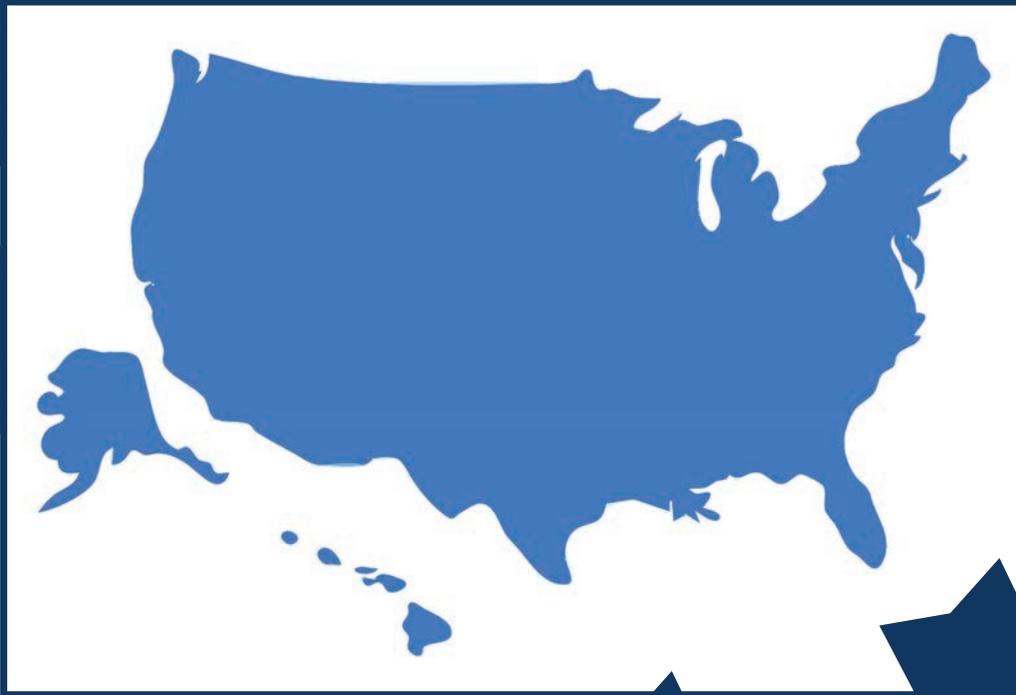· Navigating your library's website and other online resources?

Figure 1. Map requiring knowledge of mapmakers' conventions.

What becomes clear after thinking about UX for a few minutes is that, ultimately, every decision you make about your library affects the user experience. UX design is all about making decisions that contribute to an improved experience. One popular model that I have found helpful when making and evaluating decisions is the User Experience Honeycomb (see figure 2) shared by Peter Morville (2004). When looking at a given aspect of my school library program, I frame each hexagonal quality as a question. Is [fill in the blank] useful, usable, and desirable? Is it findable, accessible, and credible? Is it valuable? How can I make it more so?

Imperative and Practicalities for School Libraries

An argument I sometimes hear is that, rather than making changes to accommodate students, we should view gaps in understanding as teachable moments, helping them learn how to decipher, navigate,

What becomes clear after thinking about UX for a few minutes is that, ultimately, every decision you make about your library affects the user experience.

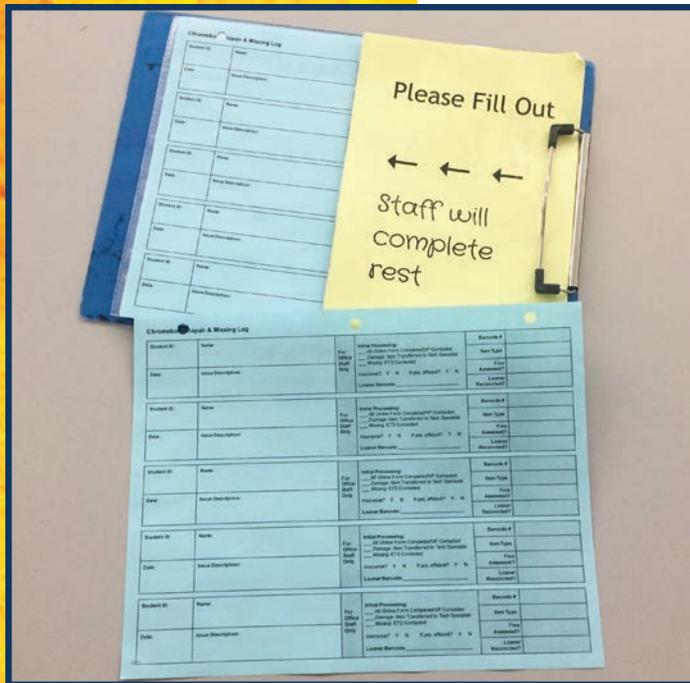*Figure 2. Morville's User Experience Honeycomb.*

Figure 3. Easy fix for a recurring problem.

and use various systems. To be clear, I never pass up an opportunity to teach my students, such as explaining the shorthand of mapmakers in their depiction of Alaska. At the same time, I did remake my phone extension list, removing the "x" before each extension number. Why? Because even though I explained why I had preceded each number on the list with an "x," when there is an emergency, I do not want a student to have trouble dialing for help.

Emergencies aside, the idea of having students learn *our* way is problematic for libraries. I personally do not have the same luxury as classroom teachers in terms of regular and required student attendance. Within traditional classrooms, students are required to show up, and to be successful they may be expected to learn and adapt to the different styles and methods of teachers.

In the case of school libraries, much more choice is involved. Therefore, my goal is to make sure that the library is as user-friendly to students walking in for the first time as it is for those who use it daily. I cannot rely on others learning my way; I aim to make my library work for them so that they have a positive experience and choose to stay and return.

My goal is to make sure

that the library is as user-friendly to students walking in for the first time as it is for those who use it daily. I cannot rely on others learning my way; I aim to make my library work for them so that they have a positive experience and choose to stay and return.

The main trick when listening

to your inner irritations is to not fall into the trap of assigning blame to others when you note your feelings. Shift your thinking from "These darn students never listen to my instructions!" to "Hmm. There is a common issue with students not following my instructions. How can I deliver them more effectively?"

Of course, as much as I see the imperative of providing a good user experience in school libraries, I know firsthand the unique challenges that school library programs face in terms of limited staffing. Unlike larger public or university libraries—which may be able to hire a "User Experience Librarian" or share responsibilities across a team—I know what it is like to wear many hats, trying to do it all, and often all alone. Given this perspective and based on my own experiences, I offer the following five practical tips for improving the user experience within your school library.

Tip #1: Listen to Yourself

Even though improving user experience involves thinking about how others feel, my first piece of advice is to listen to your own feelings. Give yourself permission to pay attention to your pet peeves. What irritates you during your daily work? It may seem counter-intuitive to focus on yourself, but view this action as serving as your own barometer. When identifying your feelings, use them to detect areas that may be in need of improvement. When an annoyance comes up, consider how you might change conditions to prevent it from occurring as often or at all.

In my school library, for instance, students must fill out the left-side boxes of a form when getting their computers repaired. I get irked when, even though they have been provided with instructions, students would often proceed to fill out the "For Staff Use Only" side of the form. Frustrated when students did not listen to my directions, I alleviated the problem simply by covering the right half of the form with a card reminding students that "staff will complete rest" (see figure 3). I still give oral instructions, but these are reinforced by the physical and visual cue. The annoyance has generally gone away.

The main trick when listening to your inner irritations is to not fall into the trap of assigning blame to others when you note your feelings. Shift your thinking from "These darn students never listen to my instructions!" to "Hmm. There is a common issue with students not following my instructions. How can I deliver them more effectively?"

By noticing my own frustrations and thinking of ways to solve the problems, I have improved my sign-in procedures for library visitors, shifting from a paper-based sign-in method, which students regularly avoided, to faster computer-based sign-in kiosks, which students use willingly. I have rearranged the library front counter so that students can reach their printouts rather than waiting for me to hand deliver them—or more frustratingly—inviting themselves

into the staff office area to retrieve printouts. As I learn through each example, the beauty of listening to yourself is that improving the user experience is clearly a win-win endeavor. Chances are that your annoyances are also irritating to your users; making improvements not only rewards you but also your users at the same time.

Tip #2: Listen to Your Users

While listening to yourself is important, listening to your users is, of course, critical when trying to improve their experience. The opening anecdotes about Alaska and phone extensions demonstrate how listening to my students made me aware of gaps in their understanding of conventions familiar to me.

Here is another example. The school library that I inherited uses traditional book pockets with paper due-date cards to remind students when books are due. Continuing with the practices of my predecessors, I reuse due-date cards, stamping new due dates on subsequent blank lines each time the cards are used. One day, though, a student asked, "Which date is the due date?" To me, it was obvious that the due date would be the most recent date stamped. But, after reflecting on this question, I started having student helpers cross out old due dates before reusing cards. This way, only one date would be visible on each card.
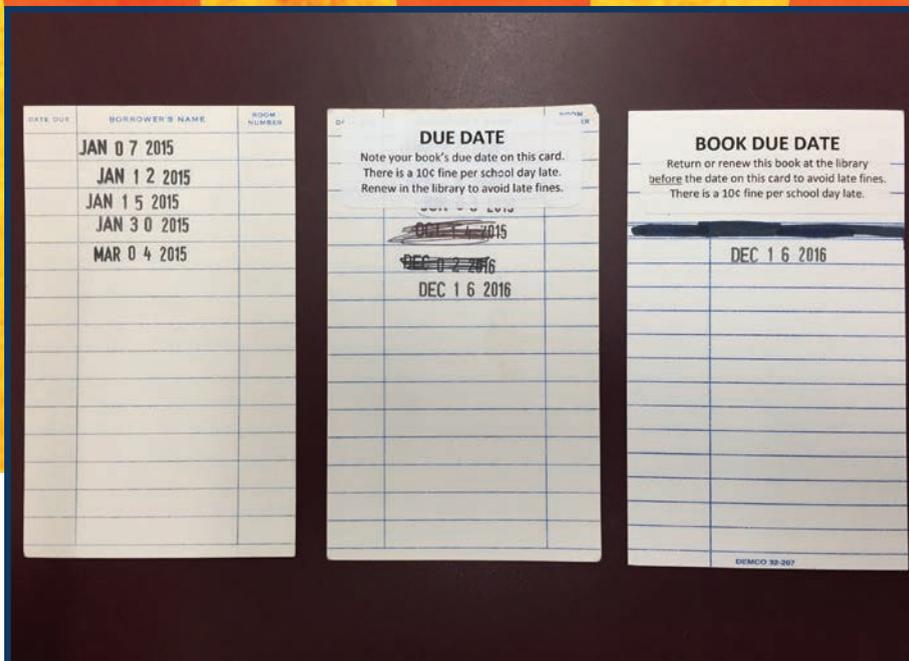
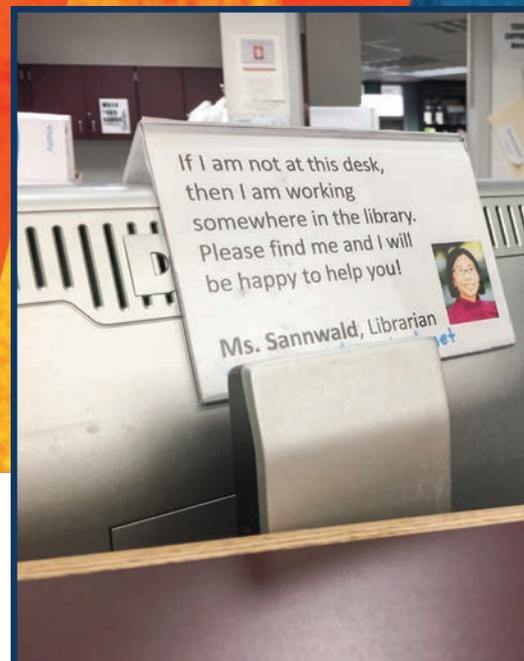Figure 4. Evolution of due-date cards in author's library.

Figure 5. Sign encouraging students to find the librarian.

The next improvement occurred after I had borrowed a book via interlibrary loan from another school in my district. I noticed that the school librarian had added labels to the top of her due-date cards with a heading and brief explanatory message. I immediately borrowed my colleague's idea, adding address-size labels with the message: "DUE DATE. Note your book's due date on this card. There is a 10¢ fine per school day late. Renew in the library to avoid late fines."

I was pleased with this version until one day another student asked me,

"Can I return my book *before* the due date?" My immediate thought was, "Does this student really think I require him to return it on the exact date?" Still, reflecting on this question made me wonder how often students may not fully understand how due dates work. As a result, I made a nuanced change in the label text: "Return or renew this book at the library *before* the date on this card" (see figure 4). Lesson of this story: Our students are always giving us clues for detecting areas for improvement, as long as we remain open to hearing them.

Lesson of this story:
Our students are always giving us clues for detecting areas for improvement, as long as we remain open to hearing them. ⭐

Tip #3: Be Explicit

As much as I try to listen to my users, I also realize that the absence of questions or complaints does not mean that everything is working fine. How many users come in to use the library and never talk to you? How many never come back? Students might be shy, scared, or simply may not make the effort to ask about what they do not know.

By being explicit, I aim to answer unasked questions and preemptively provide permission. At my desk, for instance, I have a sign: "If I am not at this desk, then I am working somewhere in the library. Please find me, and I will be happy to help you!" This both answers the potential question of "Where is the librarian?" and empowers the student to find me, aided by my name and picture on the sign (see figure 5).

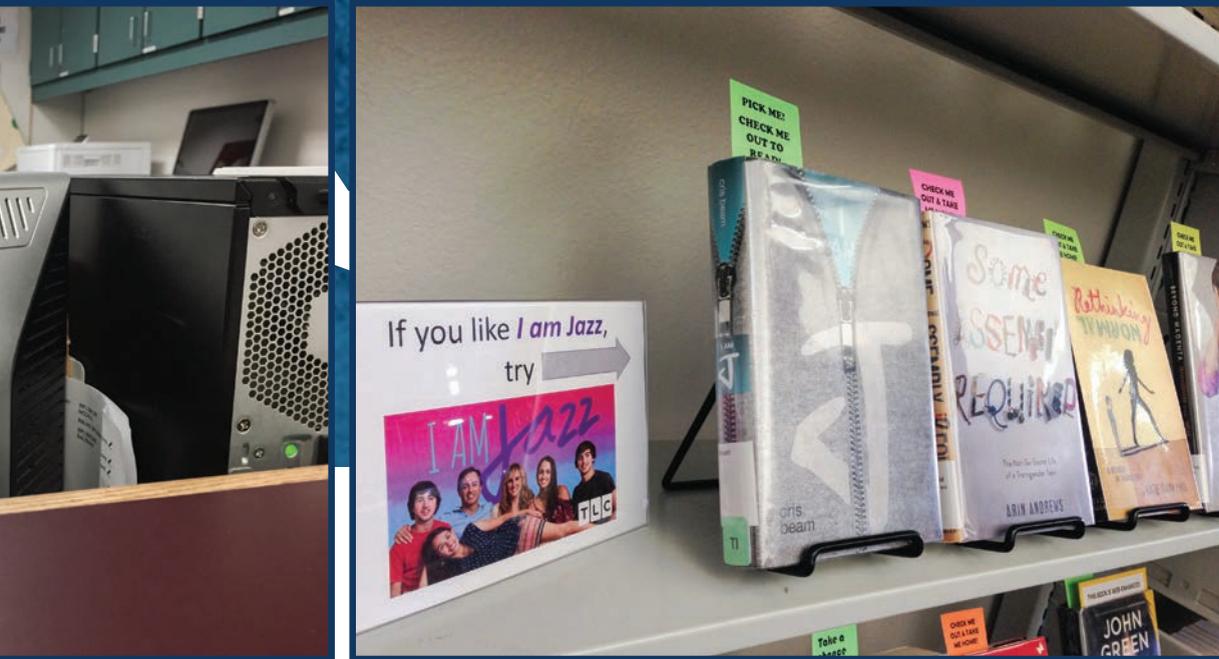As another example, I recognize that students may not realize that

Figure 6. Using bookmarks to make sure students know they can borrow displayed books.

books are displayed expressly so that they may be noticed and checked out. Because students may instead assume that the books are merely decorative, I insert bookmarks into each displayed copy with some version of: "Check me out!" (see figure 6). Whenever possible, I try to remove doubt and guesswork so that users have agency to act independently. (You can view and download bookmarks at <bit.ly/displaybookmarks>.)

Whenever possible,

I try to remove doubt and guesswork so that users have agency to act independently.

Tip #4: Avoid Being Overly Explicit

I am self-admittedly guilty of being verbose and providing more detail than necessary. I like to do thorough and accurate work, and I appreciate comprehensive and polished products. The thing is, when it comes to user experience, less is usually more. Thus, while the previous tip addressed being explicit, this one balances it out: Do not be *overly* explicit.

Printing instructions are one example illustrating the iterative attempts (see figure 7) I have made in my library to Keep It Simple Stupid (KISS). Last year, my school introduced cloud printing so that students are able to print directly from their 1:1 devices. The catch is, this functionality requires that every student individually add the cloud printer to his or her account.

First Iteration. I started off by displaying plastic signs around the library with what I thought were baseline instructions. The key information was there, but it was all text-based. Some students would read the instructions and print successfully, but I noticed many still asked for help. As brief as the text was, it was still "TL-DR" (too long; didn't read).

Second Iteration. I created a more-visual set of instructions that reduced the steps to A, B, and C. I printed them on legal paper and laminated them onto colorful construction paper. Students knew to look for the "orange cards" and experienced greater success.
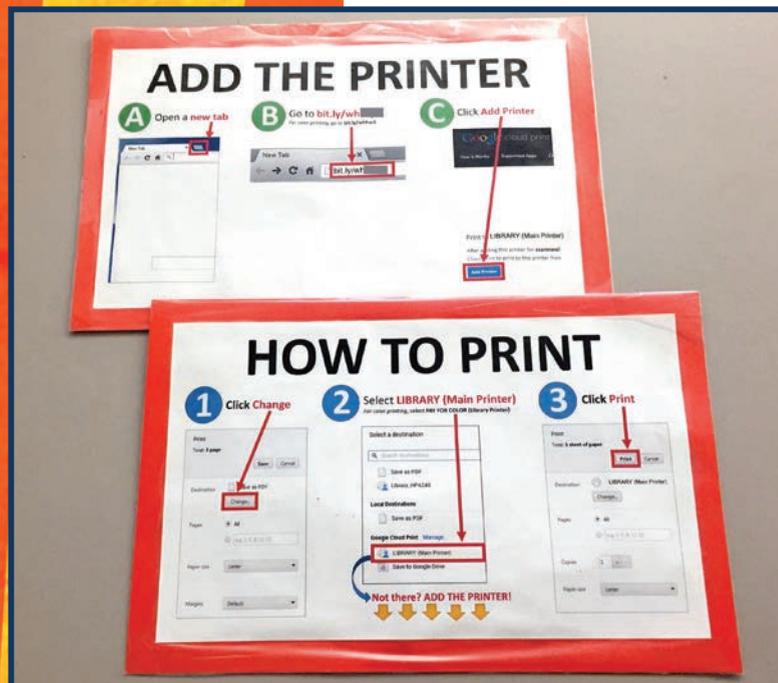
Figure 7. Three versions of printing instructions.

Third Iteration. While the orange cards were a marked improvement, and I still keep some floating around, I noticed I often resort to providing basic oral instructions when helping students. Realizing that all they really need to look at is the URL for adding the printer, I posted the Web address—using a large font—in a location that is easy to see. Students no longer need to read a sign or look for an orange card. Now I simply say, "Open a new tab and go to the address above the front door," and they are on their way.

Tip #5: Start Your Perpetual Beta Now

In school libraries, minimal staffing may impose some limitations, but a small staff also affords freedom to be more nimble when it comes to making changes. When even small decisions may improve the user experience in your library, why wait before trying them out? Inspired by the technology industry, I frame my work as being in a perpetual beta state. In other words, I aim to "RERO" (Release Early, Release Often). Translation: Start now and do not expect perfection!

When I decided to create computer-based sign-in kiosks, I "released early," creating the workstations and hosted Web form in a single day. At the start, I based the form on a colleague's model, and then I just observed students' use. Noting what parts slowed them down or invited mischief, I edited the form, re-releasing it at least two more times. Each time, I considered potential ramifications, such as data inconsistencies caused by midstream changes, but witnessing students sign in more quickly and with greater compliance reinforced my belief that the gains in terms of user experience were worthwhile.

When producing something that will be paper-based, I swear by small runs when creating informational handouts or forms and print only a small number at a time. If I were to have a large stack of copies, I might be less motivated to make improvements because of the convenience of having copies readily available and not wanting to waste paper. When I am forced to run new batches, I use the task as an opportunity to make edits at the same time.

Design with Humility

Whether I'm changing a Web form, a handout, signage, instructions, or due-date cards, I am reminded that user testing is paramount. The effort is not about what I know or how I think; it is about validating my users and what will work best for them. UX professional Austin Knight echoes the realization I had upon discovering my students' lack of understanding about Alaska's geography: "If there's anything that design has taught me, it's that my assumptions, while generally well-founded, are almost always wrong. No matter how much of an expert I become, I will never be able to represent the collective mass that is a user base" (2016). He reminds us that good design is humble, and I agree. No matter how much training and experience we may have, we must design our school libraries with our users at the center. It is not about us being wrong, but about making our libraries work right for users.

Suzanne Sannwald *is in her third year of serving as the school librarian at West Hills High School in the* Grossmont Union High School District, in San Diego's East County region. Hired under an Emergency Teacher Librarian credential, she enrolled in San Jose State University's School of Information online program, completing the credential requirements in summer 2016; she expects to earn an MLIS in spring 2017. Suzanne is an ALA Spectrum Scholar who copresented at the California School Library Association (CSLA) 2016 Annual Conference and San Diego Computer Using Educators 2016 Tech Fair. Recently, her article on virtual makerspaces was published in the *CSLA Newsletter, and her approach to library orientations was featured in Joyce Valenza's* NeverEnding Search *<blogs. slj.com/neverendingsearch/2016/08/25/on-orientation-attitude>.*

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THE CLOCK IS TICKING
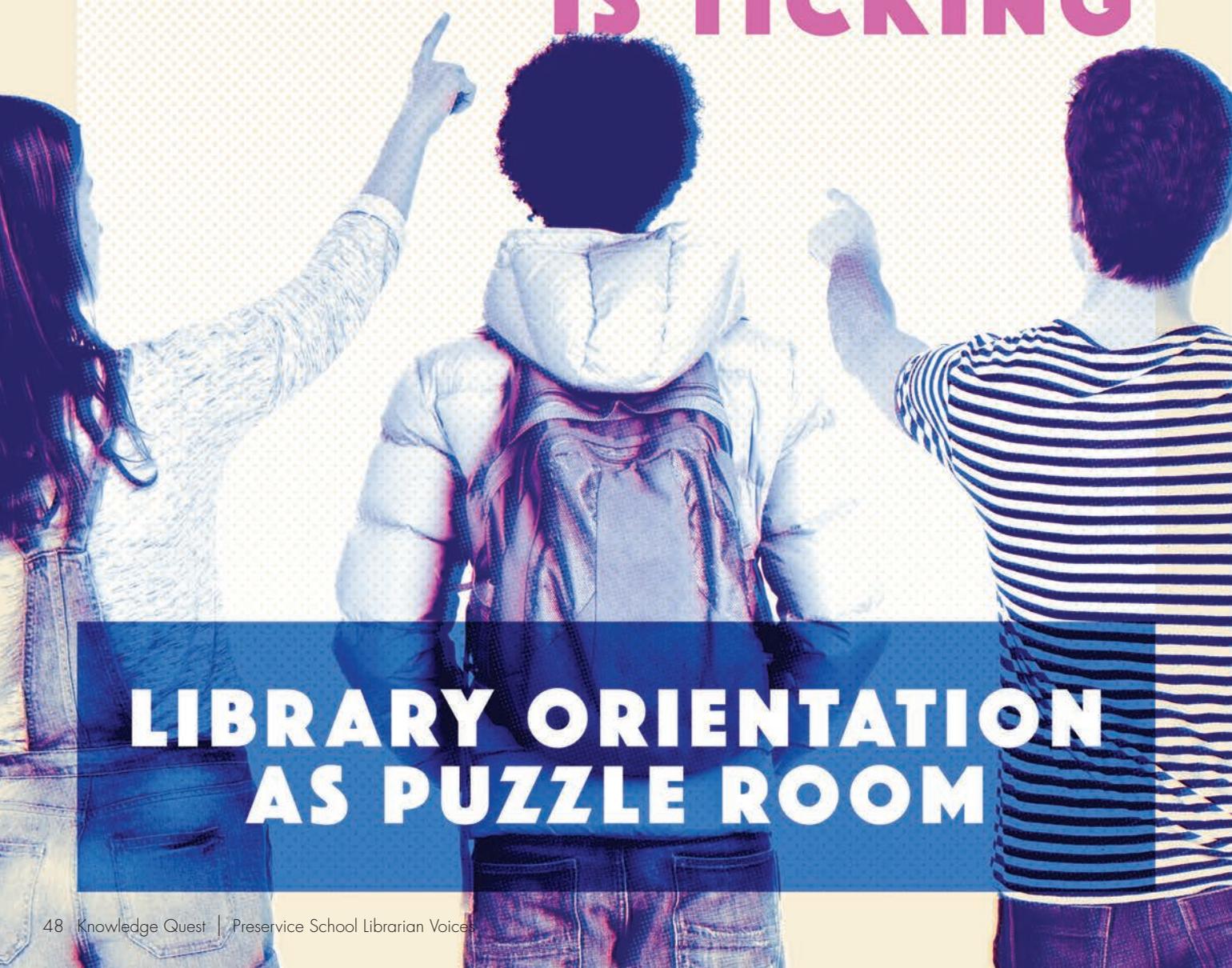
LIBRARY ORIENTATION AS PUZZLE ROOM

Tripp Reade

treade@cghsnc.org

Pretend for a moment you're in ninth grade, two weeks into high school and visiting the library with your classmates for orientation. The library staff tells you and your team of detectives—yes, they call you detectives—that a priceless statuette (i.e., action figure) from the library's art collection has been stolen, but fortunately the thief's M.O. is to hide the pilfered item in the very place from which it was taken. You have forty-five minutes to follow the thief's trail of riddles and puzzles and recover the statuette. After that, the thief—a stylish cat burglar known as Rayna Trix—has promised to return and steal it for good. A stopwatch projected against a screen in the library begins ticking.

"The thief left this," one of the librarians says. You open the proffered copy of William Messner-Loeb's graphic novel *Journey: The Adventures of Wolverine MacAlistaire* and find tucked in its pages a small square of blue paper on which "Hg" is printed.

What do you do?

From the description above, aficionados of live-action, team-based games might recognize identify-

ing characteristics of the escape room variant known as a puzzle room: the clock, the clue, the narrative. (Film buffs might additionally recognize in the thief's M.O. a reference to one of the plot twists in *The Thomas Crown Affair*.) Though the first escape room is often traced to Japan in 2007 (Nicholson 2015, 3), my introduction to the concept came via a June 2014 *New York Times* article that described the phenomenon as a cross between video games and theater (Suellen-trop 2014). After reading several other articles about escape rooms and hearing of them on NPR, I started considering puzzle rooms in the context of our library orientation program, which I wanted to remake. In December 2015 I began gathering ideas for puzzles and riddles, intending to test a design during the spring 2016 semester with a single team of students and to fully implement a puzzle room-style library orientation in fall of the same year.

Puzzle rooms, for those unfamiliar with them, present players with a set of challenges to solve; they require "teamwork, communication, and delegation as well as critical thinking, attention to detail, and lateral thinking" (Nicholson 2015, 2). At their most elaborate, puzzle rooms offer a themed narrative that organizes a variety of clues—ciphers, symbol substitution, invisible

ink—each of which contributes to the story. They differ from escape rooms in objective: not literal escape but some other victory condition, stipulated within the narrative. The objective might be solving a murder, committing espionage, or carrying out a heist (Nicholson 2015, 2, 13, 15).

To the qualities mentioned by Scott Nicholson (see above), add the notion that taking ownership of and responsibility for one's education, rather than passively waiting for others to provide direction and help, is greatly to be desired. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine a better set of attributes for students to develop.

Starting the Redesign Process

I began the redesign by identifying topics and areas to cover during the orientation, and cognitive processes to challenge. Topics to cover included knowledge of the library's catalog (Follett's Destiny) and of our OverDrive collection, the library's virtual and physical spaces, and some of its social media presence. The list of cognitive processes to challenge included attention to detail and close reading, especially of instructions and directions, and critical and lateral thinking.

The next task in the redesign process involved a peripatetic brainstorm

session, a stroll around the school library to note anything that might furnish a puzzle, clue, or riddle. Whereas commercial puzzle rooms might use invisible ink, mirrors, and tests requiring hand-eye coordination—all enjoyable, of course—I wanted something more directly relevant to library and academic practices. Anything that could draw students' attention to call numbers, indexes, and the differences among fiction, nonfiction, and reference items would be useful.

For example, I adapted a puzzle room staple, the stopped clock, to my nefarious library orientation purpose: a team finds a riddle that reads, "The clock is stopped on a book, and in that book is your next clue." This riddle works on at least two levels. First, close reading: "*the* clock" rather than "*a* clock," and "stopped *on* a book." The former should cause the students to look for a specific clock in the library, while the latter's pivotal word, *on*, is designed to spark lateral thinking,

a deeper level of cognition. In the game, I remove the batteries from the library clock so that it perpetually gives a time of 7:01, clearly wrong. The team is left with a cryptic set of numbers. Only when they think of their context—of the fact that they're in a library and that some books have numbers on their spines and that "7:01" might in fact be "701"—will they solve the riddle and move on along their specific puzzle path to find 701 SHL, Leonard Shlain's *Art & Physics*.

Another skill worth developing is that of reading and interpreting the visual display of data. During my stroll, I stopped at the many infographic posters hanging on our school library's walls, artful organizations of data in subjects as varied as coffee, magical objects in the Harry Potter series, Avengers comic books, B-movie monsters, musical notation, college sports team names, and more. It was a happy moment when I realized these infographics offer a near-infinite array of numbers

that could either point to nonfiction books or reveal padlock combinations. How many ornaments are there in musical notation? Seven. How many types of espresso shots are there? Four. Which volume of the Avengers had the briefest run? Two. And there you have either a combination or a call number: 7-4-2.

Rationale behind Using Puzzles in the Library

The aim here is to employ constructivism, a theory built on the idea that people learn best when they construct knowledge based on experience, when they apply what they've learned, and when they have the chance to test and revise personally generated hypotheses, a theory that demands active learning. A 2011 study of physics teachers showed that students' understanding improved 38 percent after a switch to active learning from a more-traditional model (Stone 2016).

Therefore, rather than have students watch me and my colleagues, Shelley Horman and Terri Ingraham, demonstrate aspects of the catalog, with a few of the more ambitious among them perhaps following along on their laptops, we would rather hand students a locket with a note inside that reads, "This object is the clue. Good luck" (as, in fact, we did with one team) and see what they make of it. To figure out the meaning of this clue students need the Internet and some trial and error with search terms. For example, "The Locket" combined with "fiction," takes students to the correct answer, while searching only on "The Locket" sends them on a wild goose chase. With the former search, they find that Kate Chopin wrote a short story titled "The Locket." When searchers plug that information into Destiny, they discover we own a copy of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Necessary to the process of solving a single clue are complexities of thought sufficient to challenge the most-precocious ninth-grader.
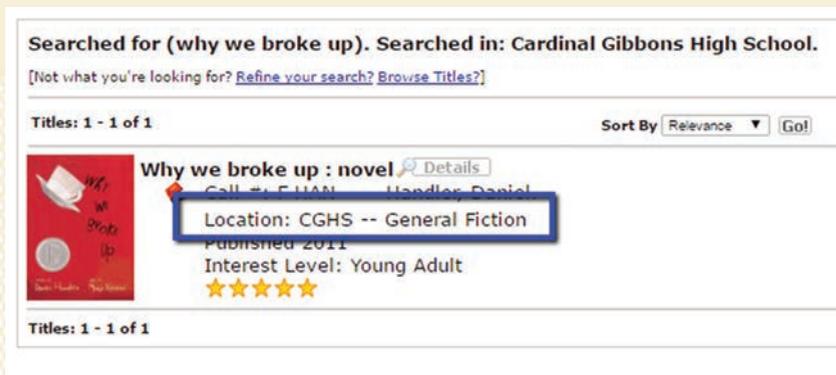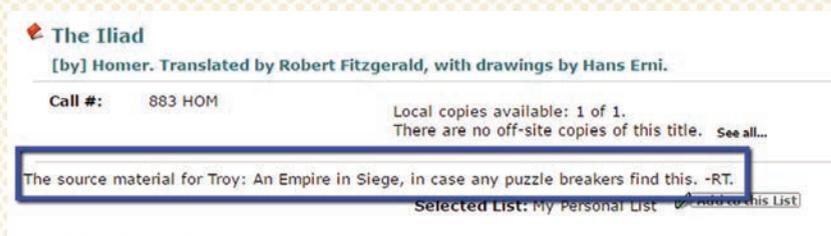

Figure 1. Location note in catalog as clue.

Figure 2. Message left in our catalog for attentive students.

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Most of the clues demand attention to detail. For example, books in a series are arranged out of order so that the volume numbers point to a particular page or a call number. Woe to the team that heedlessly pulls books off the shelf and jumbles them up! Other examples of clues that require close attention to detail are those that direct students to catalog records. A fiction genre may be significant (see figure 1). The international art thief herself may leave taunting hints (see figure 2). Clues require scrutiny to successfully complete a task or solve a riddle, activities paralleling teachers' expectations that students will carefully read and understand their assignments, which will become more complicated as they move through high school and into college.

To test students' teamwork and delegation skills, some clues have several parts, three or four clues rolled into one. We planned to watch to see if these teams assigned individual members, or groups of two, to work on different parts of the clue, making efficient use of time and resources. Do they have one person ready with a QR code reader on his phone, another with her laptop poised at the catalog search screen, and a third charged with taking photos of anything that might be important later? Will the team designate one person to write down information gathered? The answers to some riddles to be solved in the early moments of the game don't come into play until later, and the most-successful teams will be those that keep track of what they've learned.

Testing and Revising the Prototype

I finished the prototype in May 2016 and ran a test with four volunteers, freshmen at the time, though with almost a full year of high school behind them. (Thank you, Brendon, Ashlyn, Rom, and Julianna!) They asked for many hints along the way and in the debriefing afterward said solving the puzzle was difficult but fun. Based on observing them during the challenge and on their feedback, I modified the wording of several clues that caused confusion or were simply too hard: a scrambled Virginia Woolf sentence whose intricate syntax foiled their every attempt to untangle it, the afore-mentioned clock clue, and a type of clue that has its answer hidden in plain sight. An example of this latter type is a message that reads, "Look for my mark in the white city. If you can't solve my riddles, I'll add your wonderful object to my index of treasures." The first sentence requires a literal reading to find the book that contains the next clue, and the second tells where in that book to find the clue itself: look in the index of Erik Larson's *Devil in the White City*. Revised, this became, "Look for my mark in the white city. If you can't solve my riddles, I'll add your wonderful object to my Index of treasures," with the italicized and incorrectly capitalized letters offering the sharp-eyed student a chance to solve the riddle without asking for help.

The Introduction of the New Orientation

After revising the prototype puzzle path, I created eight more paths to accommodate teams of three or four students in classes of up to thirty-six. Each clue was used in only one path. Therefore, creating the clues kept me busy all summer and right up to the first day of orientation in mid-August 2016. Along the way, I refined my technique, using a spreadsheet to deploy the various clue types among the nine teams to minimize traffic jams that might occur if too many students clustered in the same area of the library at the same time.

Students had two library visits (on consecutive days) to complete their team's puzzle path.

Before deploying the new paths, though, I had changed one type of clue, a twenty-four-piece jigsaw puzzle of a book cover. Why? I realized that if the jigsaw puzzle gave only a partial rather than a full image of the cover (see figure 3), along with part of a title or of the author's name, the students would have to use the asterisk wildcard to find the book in the catalog, possibly also having to notice that Destiny provides a thumbnail image of book covers and, thus, offers the students another point of reference against which to compare the partial image in the jigsaw puzzle. In the example given in figure 3, "Gross*" produces a manageable list of thirteen titles (see figure 4). Searching "Aus* Gross*" yields the specific title they need: Austin Grossman's *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. We'd never before had much luck getting students to use wildcards,
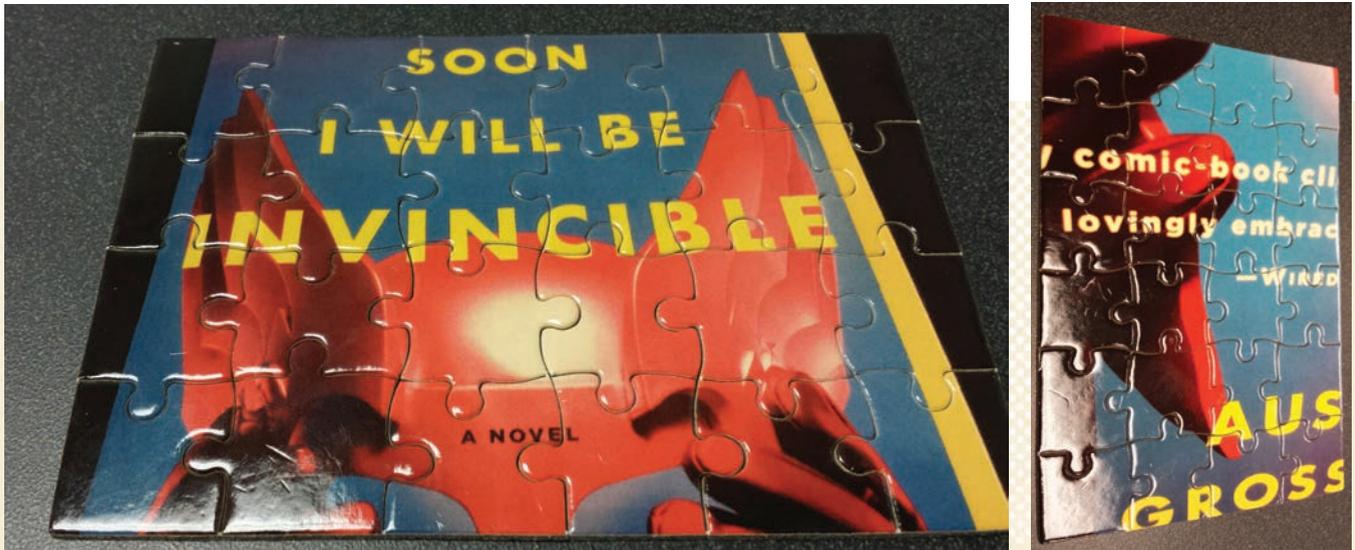
Figure 3. At left, cover image with the complete title; at right, partial cover showing only part of the author's name.

and now here they were learning by doing—every constructivist's dream.

Because they're freshmen and not expert detectives, the instructions include not only the narrative but also a list of the "expert knowledge" they must possess to use the clues. This list, containing tidbits such as how to use the asterisk wildcard, how to search on a phrase, and how to log into Destiny, provides everything the

teams need, combined with their own problem-solving skills, to crack the case and recover the stolen treasure. We leave it up to them to make use of the information.

If stuck, teams can ask for help from the library staff. I generated a number of hints for each riddle and puzzle, starting with the most heuristic-friendly, encouraging students to use their own problem-

solving and initiative, qualities highlighted as 21st-century skills in AASL's *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (2009). For students not yet ready for the most-challenging puzzles, less-subtle "hints" (akin to giving students the answers) are provided when necessary. The downside for teams who ask for assistance? Asking for hints amounts to stepping outside the narrative and their role as experts brought in to find the missing artifact, and so comes with escalating penalties that get added to a team's final time. The time element provided a competitive layer, allowing teams to compete with all other freshmen, four hundred in all.

The most-successful teams shared a number of characteristics. Each paid close attention to the expert-knowledge document, asked for hints early, and in so doing learned how to think about the various riddles and clues. As a result, these teams were less likely than other groups to get stuck in a single unproductive line of thought rather than explore alternative approaches. The most-successful teams were also the most curious, and the ones that embraced the narrative, consider-ing it a personal challenge to keep the library's art collection intact and out

Figure 4. Thumbnail image and location note that help alert students find the book pictured in the clue.

of burgling hands. In a debriefing session with the students after each game, we discussed the various strategies, successful and otherwise, they had used, and explicitly connected the skills required by the puzzle room with those demanded by high school research.

We made changes on the fly as we learned how the students thought. Among the changes that proved to be successful were:

- holding a meeting with each class the day before the challenge to go over the narrative, the expert knowledge required, the rules, and the objective;

- demonstrating the sort of problem-solving these puzzles required;

- color-coding the clue slips, so that a team that found another team's clue would not get hopelessly off track (see figure 5);

- eliminating from the narrative and the clues every mention of the specific action figures "stolen" (e.g., Iron Man, Thor) because

if the "stolen statue" was named, some teams immediately headed for the graphic novels involving the character, but instead of getting an easy win, they wasted time.

Looking Ahead

We considered the puzzle-based orientation to be a success based on students' enthusiasm, engagement, and subsequent ability to use the catalog and find books in the collection. We plan to use puzzles again to introduce ninth-graders to the school library. We intend to meet with students again to introduce the challenge and familiarize them with how to approach the puzzles. However, next year's version of the puzzle paths will fit completely inside a single class period instead of being broken into two consecutive days. We found that when the puzzle-based orientation was spread over two days, the students had difficulty remembering where they were in the puzzle path and what information they'd already gained (in spite of our reminders for them to take photos and notes). We are considering our options. Other

narratives are possible, as is the idea that all teams work on various parts of one overarching mystery.

Overall, we are happy with this inaugural effort. Students got repeated, hands-on exposure to the library website, Destiny, OverDrive, and physical collection and space, and that's exactly what we wanted.

Oh, and that "Hg" found in *Journey*? That's the chemical symbol for the element mercury, and *Mercury* is also the name of a graphic novel by Hope Larson. Congratulations, you solved your first puzzle!

Tripp Reade *is the school librarian at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, North Carolina. A member of AASL, he is the author of two recent articles published in* The Review Review: *"Esteemed Lit Mag Charts Wide Experience of Human Nature," in the April 4, 2016, issue and "Lit Mag Focuses on Justice, Broadly Defined," in the January 25, 2016, issue.*

Not bad! Maybe it's your Destiny to figure this out, maybe not, but the next clue can be found here on earth--hope that's specific enough! Carefully Review your approach! -RT

The International Encyclopedia of Dance has be number. Pay attention to what's forward and wh

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Figure 5. Color-coded clues to help teams stay on track.

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This is what my childhood taught me, that learning has to be a part of the real world and that we have to engage in numerous ways.

Reading Can Save Lives

Peter Brown Hoffmeister

Hoffmeister@4j.lane.edu

When I was a kid, my mom used to drive 85 miles per hour across the desert, swigging from a Pepsi can while reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* aloud to the family. Or a book from the The Great Brain series. Or a Mrs. Piggle Wiggle book. It didn't matter what the book was, just that we were flying along in our old cream-colored Volvo, listening to a good story.

Because of my mom, my life has always been about good stories. It began with her reading aloud to us, then all of us reading at her feet, then—one by one—sneaking off to read books on our own.

As a small child I loved books like *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* but quickly moved on to two straight years of Hardy Boys mysteries that I could buy for a quarter each from the used book store. Later, I poured through Tolkien's collected works

and *A Child's History of the World*. After that, the autobiography of Hank Aaron, Tolstoy's *Peter the Great*, and—eventually—all of Jane Austen. An eclectic mix.

When my mom set a book down, I picked it up. Jean Kerr's *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, novels by the British mystery writers Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie, anything by novelist Kathleen Thompson Norris. Or my dad's Hemingway collection.

I attended one day of first grade before my mom unenrolled me from the Tucson Unified School District. She said, "These schools are horrible. You're going to be homeschooled from now on." Then she said the same thing to my three siblings, and that was the beginning of Hoffmeister Country Day (or HCD), the start of seven years of homeschooling for me.

We lived on seven acres, and we spent a lot of time catching snakes, trapping tarantulas, finding bones that my mother would bleach and turn into copper-and-bone mobiles. We filled our days with adventures, but we also spent a lot of time reading. Some days we would hike up a trail into the Santa Catalina Mountains to read by a spring. Others, we would read out along the fence line. In our house, books were everywhere. Our family didn't own a TV. My mother taught us that video games were "evil," that they would "turn our brains into a vacuous mush." Our entertainment consisted of exploring, swimming, and—of course—reading.

Homeschooling changed over the next seven years. HCD went from teacher-directed learning to what my mother called "the glory and autonomy of being an autodidact." She would take us to bookstores in

the fall, and we were allowed to pick our own textbooks for the year. She taught us Latin and Greek roots and taught us to write, but then expected us to teach ourselves. She believed that learning meant something only when it was personal, when it was self-directed, guided by personal wonder.

Because of my mother, I know that my students care about their educations only when they're engaged in the material, when they're curious, when they're challenged and intrigued. So I try to integrate. For example, in the outdoor program, I have students read Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, but learning doesn't stop there. We take small groups out into the desert, challenge them on navigation courses, go rock climbing, spelunk in caves, and study water acquisition and survival structures. Then we bring the book back and read the best selections aloud. This is what my childhood taught me, that learning has to be a part of the real world and that we have to engage in numerous ways.

When my family fell apart, when my parents struggled and my brother and I made bad choices as teenagers, somehow we were all still learners, we still possessed books and the power of stories. Even when I was expelled from three high schools and arrested, the lessons of autonomy, the learned models of an autodidact stayed with me.
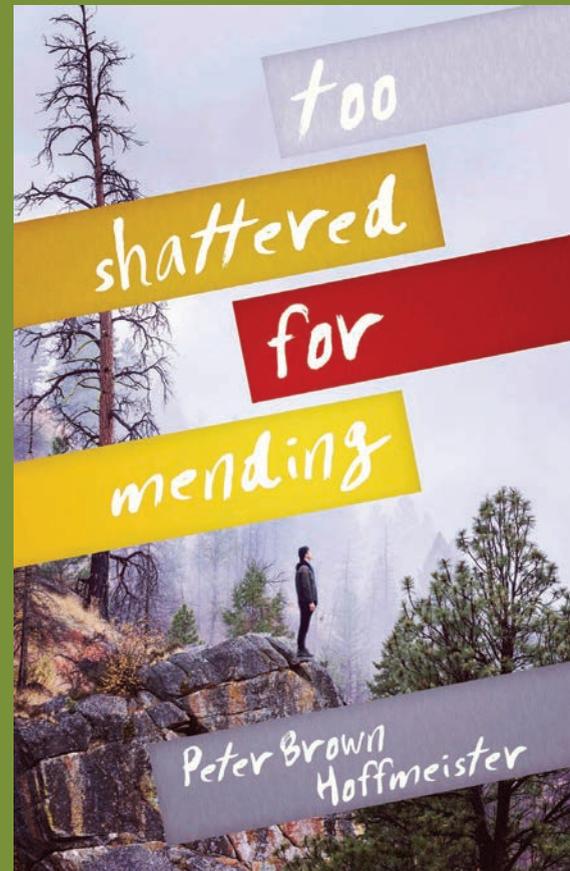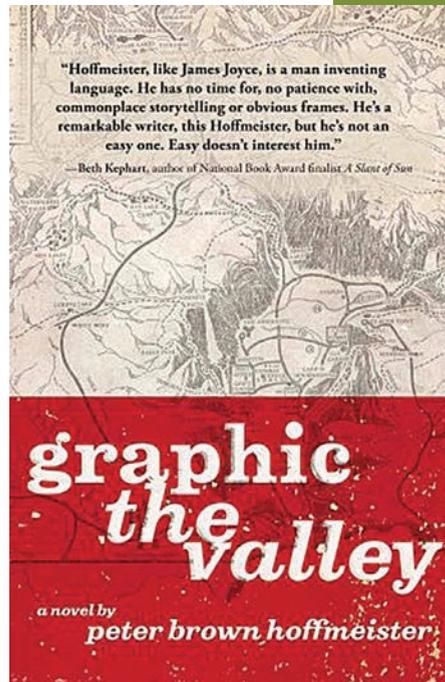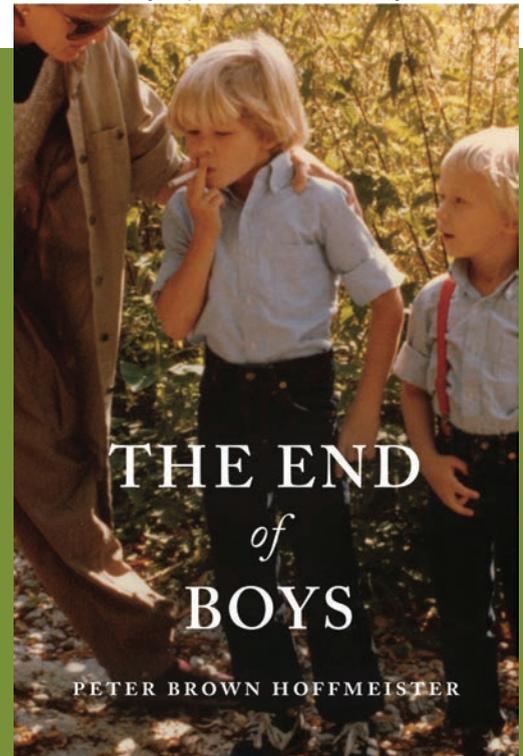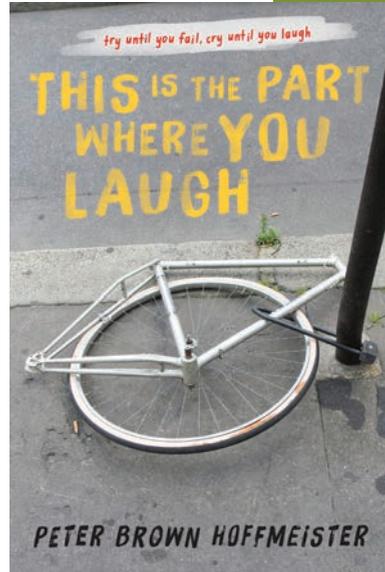
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Stories were with me when at fifteen I snuck back into the house with a face bloody from a midnight fight in an Albertson's parking lot. I packed books in my suitcase when I went to the East Texas rehab and parole chapter of Life Challenge, and I kept those books with me when I ran from the program, hitchhiking across Texas. Books were with me when I slept for a while under a counter in a Greyhound Bus station in Dallas, Texas, and when I was sleeping on the street in a hedge. Books were with me when I backpacked during the Outback Program for Troubled Teens in Colorado, when I moved out of my parents' house the first time at sixteen, and when I moved out for the final time at seventeen.

Now I take books with me when I paddle rivers, backpack, or rock climb. And I put books in the hands of my students, books by Pam Houston, Pete Fromm, Jon Krakauer, Cheryl Strayed, Arlene Blum, and David James Duncan. I give young people poetry by Dorianne Laux, Robinson Jeffers, and Patricia Smith.

I love and share short stories too, the authors and collections all running together: Jhumpa Lahiri, Junot Diaz, Edwidge Danticat, and Sherman Alexie. Or telling stories aloud: Ken Kesey's "Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear" retold to my daughters over a juniper fire in the high desert of the American West.

Even my fictional characters read. In my first novel, *Graphic the Valley*, young Tenaya reads books he gets from his father. And in my most recent novel *This Is the Part Where You Laugh* both Creature and Travis's grandmother are always pressing books into his hands.

It's all tied together. As my mom preached when I was little, "Readers are leaders."

No one could've predicted that I would be a successful adult after I committed an assault in New York, or was caught in possession of a loaded handgun on school property in Tennessee, or when I was arrested for felony distribution in Oregon. I'm sure most people wrote me off. So now, as a teacher, I try to see past my students' current crimes, past their clothing choices or music, past their partying or addictions. I try to see a positive through-line, ten years into the future.

Also, I think about the power of reading. For my entire life, I've held books in my hands and read the reality of other stories. As a teenager, books showed me the reality of other possibilities, and at eighteen I decided to get off the street and make different choices going forward. In a sense, I wrote a new plotline for my life.

To say it simply: The world I want to live in involves books. But also, my life has been saved by books. Now I have the opportunity to help other people save their own lives.

Peter Brown Hoffmeister *is the author of the critically acclaimed adult novel* Graphic the Valley *(Tyrus Books 2013), the memoir* The End of Boys *(Soft Skull 2010),* This Is the Part Where You Laugh *(Knopf Books for Young Readers 2016), and* Too Shattered for Mending *(Knopf Books for Young Readers) out this fall. A former troubled teen, Hoffmeister now runs the Integrated Outdoor Program, serving teens of all backgrounds, taking them into wilderness areas to backpack, climb, spelunk, orienteer, and whitewater raft. He lives with his wife and daughters in Eugene, Oregon. Visit him online at <peterbrownhoffmeister.wordpress.com> and follow him on Twitter @peterbrownhoff.*

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