Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of RELIGION, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of SPEECH, or of the PRESS; or the right of the people peaceably to ASSEMBLE, and to PETITION the government for a redress of grievances.
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In California, teacher librarians have struggled to maintain their positions. Districts will admit that credentialed teacher librarians are vital to education but, have had a hard time “finding” the funds to pay for this person and the clerical staff to support this teacher. Many teacher librarians will testify that their career has been like a roller coaster as funding is available, then is not.

Due to the recent political campaigns of 2016 and heavy use of social media, fake news proliferated at an alarming rate. To highlight this topic in relation to the education of children K-12, the executive summary of “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning” (http://stanford.io/2gkkfXe), a study from the Stanford History Education Group, including 7,804 students from 12 states across a variety of socio-economic backgrounds was released on November 22, 2016. The researchers examined students’ abilities to analyze home pages, evaluate evidence, and claims on social media. The results of the study showed that 80 percent of students are unable to distinguish between fake and truth in the news (Stanford, 2016). They cannot judge the credibility of information that floods their smartphones, tablets, and computers.

In the article “A search for truth: Real-life lessons about fake news” from the CTA magazine California Educator March 2017, fake news is defined as misinformation found in publications and on websites that look deceptively newsy (Posnick-Goodwin).

There are currently two bills related to this issue in the State Legislature. AB155 by Assembly member Jimmy Gomez (D-Los Angeles) would incorporate analytical skills for online information into English and other subjects grades 6-12. Another bill, SB135, by State Senator Bill Dodd (D-Napa) would add media literacy training to social science standards for grades 1-12.

Jeff Frost, CSLA’s legislative advocate in Sacramento, is working on amending these bills to have teacher librarians, who are already credentialed to teach analytical skills for online information and media literacy, be identified as the staff person to take the lead in this curriculum. Collaborating with classroom teachers, the teacher librarian would be able to nurture analytically astute and media literate students.

In the San Francisco Unified School District, secondary librarians have been teaching credibility, fact-checking, evaluating source credibility, and the credibility spectrum using lessons and guides developed by various teacher librarians in the district. Using LibGuides platform, some of the topics include:

- “Is this for real?” Evaluating Sources of Information
- Fake News

The ELA teachers at my school have students write pro/con issue essays. They use the SIRS database, books, and vetted and reliable magazine articles. All essays have a bibliography/citations page. “I stress the importance of reading opposing views on any topic to foster more profound engagement with the issue and to reach a sound conclusion through evaluation.” (Posnick-Goodwin, 2017).

Here are some other Resources from “A search for truth: Real-life lessons about fake news” California Educator March 2017 concerning detecting fake news:

- PBS Newshour’s lesson plan to.pbs.org/2mifzl
- KQED’s lesson plan bit.ly/2kqYutO
- Questions from the News Literacy Project and Checkology bit.ly/2hWjpC2


With the heightened awareness of the educational implications for students in California concerning fake new and the legislative interest in more focused education around analytical skills and media literacy, the teacher librarian will finally be recognized as a necessity for every school at all levels. No more roller coaster.

References continued on page 11
In 2014 schools in Ferguson, MO closed for the day. The public library however remained open to provide services for the community, reeling from the death of Michael Brown and ensuing protests. Libraries, as the Ferguson Public Library demonstrated, have a role in the community, providing resources and spaces for healing. While school libraries were closed that day due to a decision at the District level we do not have to wait for extraordinary circumstances to engage in civic action for our school community. We do this through education every day. Teaching can be a civic action. In this issue, we examine the role of school libraries in civic education and democratic citizenship. It is a timely issue as civic engagement is increasing since the 2016 election, as questions about democracy are in our news daily, and we are still trying to understand the most effective ways to cope with fake news, clickbait headlines, partisan echo chambers, and an invisible filter bubble controlled by misunderstood algorithms.

Teacher librarians are uniquely positioned to help their communities understand the role of information and information literacy in democracies.

In this issue Anthony Doyle shares how his district is approaching educating teachers regarding media literacy, with a focus on understanding how bias impacts media and our engagement with media. Christopher Fluetsch introduces a novel approach to teaching critical thinking, a necessary skill in our information age. Dr. Lesley Farmer discusses fake news and the role of teacher librarians in educating our youth to cope with a fractured media environment. In her article, Sara Zoroufy examines source literacy from the point of view of a student. Jill Sonnenberg addresses issues related to social justice, and trauma informed teaching in school libraries. Jackie Siminitus suggests a role for school librarians in working with foster youth. And finally, Connie Williams offers specific strategies for collaborating for civic education.

While I applaud, and am deeply grateful, to all of our authors that took time to write and share their insights and experiences with you I particularly want to highlight Sara Zoroufy. I had the opportunity to listen to this amazing young woman at the CSLA conference where she presented with her teacher librarian, Tasha Bergson-Michelson, and was excited to have her agree to write an article on her topic. As a junior in high school she brings a unique perspective to our pages.

I hope that you find useful information in the pages, and consider your own role in your school community to address civic education and democratic citizenship.

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**DR. MARY ANN HARLAN**

Dr. Mary Ann Harlan is the Program Coordinator of the Teacher Library program at the School of Information at San Jose State University. She is a long time CSLA member and has been Chair of the Governmental Relations committee and the Northern Section President.
In November 2016 a Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) report alerted the world to the fact that students are really bad at distinguishing fake information from real. Librarians everywhere put on their shocked faces. As a profession we have been sounding that alarm for decades. Information literacy is not a library skill it is a life skill. Professor Sam Wineburg, director of SHEG says, “Online civic literacy is a core skill that should be insinuated into the warp and woof of education as much as possible” (2016). If we are to heed Wineburg’s call, librarians cannot be the sole instructors of information literacy. We need to partner with teachers across the curriculum to integrate skills into all classes. Which brings us to an equally vexing problem: adults are not much better than students at discerning fake or misleading information. A few minutes on your Facebook feed will likely provide plenty of evidence of this.

Teaching the Teachers

This year the Merced Union High School District introduced online, on-demand, paid professional development. Technology Integration Specialists (TISs) were tasked with creating online courses for teachers using the Canvas platform, an online learning management platform. The website is called MUHSD InnovatED. Recently, as part of an effort to expand course offerings and increase the pool of course developers, the district’s six teacher librarians (TLs) were tasked with creating a course on media literacy. In collaboration with two TISs we began mapping out a course. Based on feedback from teachers, we decided to create a series of three mini courses. Throughout the courses we adhere to the district’s guideline to provide learners with “choice and voice.” Where possible, learners select their own materials and are asked to reflect and contribute to group discussions. Each course also asks them to think about and/or give examples of how the information could be integrated into their classes. Here is a summary of each course.

Media Literacy 1: Biases

Teachers look at the socio-cultural factors that form our personal biases. They are then asked to analyze media messages through different lenses or positions. Participants then read and discuss the Center for Media Literacy’s Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions (n.d.) for media literacy. They apply what they have learned to paired articles from our Gale Opposing Viewpoints database. The final course module asks teachers to learn about and discuss the intertwined concepts of confirmation bias, defined as tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one’s existing beliefs or theories, and social media-enabled echo chambers in which people engage only with like minded people.

Media Literacy 2: Deception in Media

This course explores four types of false or misleading media: satire, clickbait, outright hoaxes, and highly-partisan bias. Teachers examine examples of each and discuss the consequences of not being able to distinguish them from reliable information. Fact-checking tools (Politifact, Snopes, for instance) are introduced and participants discuss ways to use their learning in their classrooms.

Media Literacy 3: Social Media for Teachers

This course discusses different social media platforms, how they are used by students, how they can be leveraged to improve classroom instruction, how to create virtual Personal Learning Networks (PLNs), and how to use the platforms safely and wisely.

The three courses are still in the beta stage but will be made available to teachers this summer. Creating self-paced, online Professional Development for teachers is a little more involved than preparing for face-to-face instruction. In a district with over 500 certificated Full Time Equivalent teachers there are a host of potential “triggers” that might upset various groups and individuals. For example, in our first course we do not actually use the word bias. We were told that some teachers would be offended if we said they were biased. We had to use terms like lenses, points of view, and frames of reference. Picking examples of partisan bias was also interesting since one person’s bias is another person’s unassailable truth. The process of creating the courses also reinforced the power of collaboration. I was continually surprised at how much better our work was when we were in the room together discussing ideas rather than dividing tasks and having individuals work on them. Almost all TLs are singletons on their campuses. Email, text, video conferences, and other technology can help overcome our isolation, but there is no substitute for meeting in person and working toward a common goal.
References


ANTHONY DOYLE
Anthony Doyle has been in education since 1988, first as a math teacher, then a Spanish teacher, and, since 1997, as a teacher librarian
Introduction

During the past year we have seen a surge in public attention related to critical thinking. Whether concerns about fake news, imaginary statistics, or illogical arguments, the need for educated citizens who understand how to evaluate information and debate has come front and center. Educational professionals have joined the general public in calling for an integration of critical thinking skills into all aspects of school curriculum.

This is terrific news for teacher librarians. What is logical and rational thinking but the accurate discovery, access, and evaluation of information. These increasingly valued skills sit at the heart of our profession. The Model School Library Standards for California make this explicit (California Department of Education, 2011). Many of the standards specifically call out these skills. For instance:

- 1.3 Identify and locate a variety of resources online and in other formats by using effective search strategies;
- 2.1 Determine the relevance of the information;
- 2.2 Assess the comprehensiveness, currency, credibility, authority, and accuracy of resources;
- 3.2 Draw conclusions and make informed decisions; and
- 4.1 Read widely and use various media for information, personal interest, and lifelong learning (California Department of Education, 2011).

Common Core standards also emphasize critical thinking and reasoning skills (Clemmitt, 2015). California’s Common Core English/Language Arts curriculum has numerous examples. Fourth grade reading standard for informational text 8 states “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text” (California Department of Education, 2013. p. 16). In high school they are asked to “Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information” (p. 82). These sorts of standards can be found at every grade level.

As teacher librarians we are called upon to teach our students these skills. However, such lessons can be difficult to construct and deliver. Too often critical thinking seems amorphous and theoretical. We ought to be asking hard questions about teaching concrete reasoning skills. How can we help students better understand the ways in which critical thinking skills impact everyday life? How can we help students understand their own reasoning errors and better forgive and correct the errors of others? What can we do to ensure that our students have the skills for 21st century thinking?

This article provides suggestions for library lessons that help students understand critical thinking from the point of view of common activities that hold their interest. These are all lessons that I regularly use in my elementary school library, but they can be easily adapted for older students as well. These lessons are meant to be “quick hit” lessons taught in five or ten minute bursts throughout the year. I generally use these lessons at the start of a library class session, as an introductory exercise before moving on to the main topic of the day’s lesson.

In teaching these lessons we want students not only to identify critical reasoning mistakes in others, but to understand that they too make such mistakes. It is vital that the TL continually directs the students towards self-reflection. These lessons are meant to make students wary, not smug.

This article offers lessons on three main topics: logical fallacies, optical illusions, and magic tricks. Logical fallacies are basic mistakes people make in their reasoning skills. Optical illusions represent mistakes in perception and illustrate to students the importance of not accepting immediate evidence, but instead reflecting on the evidence and looking for possible flaws in the evidence. Finally, magic tricks illustrate many of the techniques others use to exploit our perceptive and reasoning biases to create elaborate untruths that nevertheless seem real.

It is my hope that you will find a use for some of these ideas in your library and in using them, engage students to better understand reality.

Logical Fallacies

“Logical Fallacy” is the name given to any one of a number of mistakes and errors people make when they reason. Different sources define and number fallacies differently, but there is a great deal of overlap. Purdue University offers 12 basic fallacies (Weber & Brizee, 2013). The website Your Logical Fallacies Is describes 24 different fallacies (Richardson, Smith, & Meadon, 2017).
Regardless of the exact number of fallacies, the concept is extremely important for students to learn. Because fallacies are often weaponized in the world of propaganda and alternative facts identifying them and knowing why they are being used are vital for helping students parse reality in a world of “fake news”.

Fortunately, there are many resources available for teaching about fallacies. YouTube videos and websites provide a wealth of information about fallacies. News media sources and social media provide many examples of such fallacies. Often, the best way to teach a fallacy is to find an example from current popular culture and have the students examine it critically.

The Strawman Fallacy is a particular favorite of my students. It occurs when “You misrepresented someone’s argument to make it easier to attack. By exaggerating, misrepresenting, or just completely fabricating someone’s argument, it is much easier to present your own position as being reasonable, but this kind of dishonesty serves to undermine honest rational debate” (Richardson, et al., 2017). In other words, rather than engage with your point honestly I pretend you said something else - something absurd - and argue against that point.

I prefer to teach by demonstration. In this lesson I introduce Strawman by asking for a student volunteer to engage in a short discussion. I warn the students that I might be “pretend mean” to the volunteer, but that I do not really mean it. I would then ask the student a simple question, like, “Do you think all students should have to say the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of each school day?” If the student responds, “Yes,” I intentionally commit the Strawman by saying, “So, you think schools should just make all students say and do exactly the same thing, like little robots.” If they say, “No,” I ask, “Why do you hate America?”

In either case, I immediately follow up by explaining what I was doing and how my response represents a Strawman argument. Because my students know and trust me, the initial confrontational appearance of the lesson startles them while my immediate explanation calms any anxiety from my response and helps the students understand the nature of the Strawman.

After explaining the concept, I ask for examples. Most of the students are able to come up with a relevant example. Usually, these are examples from their personal lives. Sometimes, more politically aware students will come up with an example from current events.

Whenever logical fallacies are taught, it is important to include examples from the students’ own lives. Videos or readings can also be incorporated. In my library, a typical logical fallacy lesson takes no more than 10 minutes, leaving the balance of the library class for my main lesson.

Optical Illusions

Illusions are exciting and engrossing representations of the ways in which our perceptions can fool us. Students who understand the nature of such illusions are better equipped to be self-reflective about the information they take in. Self-reflective processing of information is key to information evaluation.

Illusions occur because our brains are imperfect at processing information. This section concentrates on optical illusions, which are the most common and well known, but there are other forms of illusions as well.

In my lessons, I focus on two basic types of optical illusions. The first is the focus illusion. These types of illusions occur when the brain is so focused on one aspect of a scene, that it ignores other things that are going on. A classic version of this illusion is Simons (2010) “Monkey Business Illusion.” This illusion, created by focusing a viewer’s perceptive effort on one aspect of a scene that causes the viewer to miss other important aspects, has many variations. By watching an illusion like this one, students can better understand the importance of paying attention to an entire scene, news report, or piece of literature, instead of focusing on only one aspect.

Focus illusions are not the only form of optical illusion. Another form relies on the brain’s occasional inability to correctly understand the visual information it is being asked to process. This is particularly true with illusions based on the depth perception. “Super Clever Sunglasses Illusion” by Ray-Ban Films (2013) is a perfect example of this sort of illusion. Using shading, force perspective, and clever storytelling techniques this illusion tricks the mind in three different ways. By understanding the specific tricks that fooled them, students will be better able to see in themselves and others the tendency to be fooled.

My optical illusion lessons always begin with a little introduction. I do not inform the students that they will be watching an optical illusion. Instead, I just ask them to “watch this video and be prepared to discuss it.” Illusions rely on surprise. In real life, we are seldom informed when discernment is necessary. I want my students to be in the habit of approaching all information with a healthy amount of skepticism.

After watching the illusion, I facilitate discussion about what we saw, always focused on the issue of how the illusion was created and what about it was so deceptive. I will often ask students to discuss in
small groups before reporting to the larger class. I will also ask them to identify how the narrative of the
illusion added to the overall effect.

Magic Tricks

Magic and conjuring tricks are a performance art that exists by confusing the interaction between
an individual’s perception, memory, and understanding. A magic trick tells a story employing deceptive
practices that intentionally fool the observer, leading to an unexpected and seemingly impossible
outcome. Magic tricks provide another excellent means for teaching students to be wary and skeptical
about what they have seen. After all, just because the woman seems to have disappeared from the box
does not mean that she actually has.

By understanding how a particular magic trick has confused them, students can begin to see false
thinking in action. An excellent trick combining multiple methods of confusion is Penn and Teller’s
“Cups and Balls” (MagicLife, 2013). In the course of performing their version of the classic trick, Penn
and Teller use misdirection, sleight of hand, palming, loading, verbal patter, and other classic magician
techniques. They also blatantly lie to the viewer, explaining that they are taking one set of actions while
subtly doing something completely different. This particular performance shows how someone intending
to fool the viewer can combine various techniques to create a seamless illusion.

Understanding these techniques can greatly aid our students in identifying “fake news”, propaganda,
and other trickery, because the techniques are the same. Fake journalism depends on creating a
believable story that leads to a quite impossible conclusion. To do this, its practitioners use distraction,
logical sleight of hand, and even outright lies told with absolute sincerity to create an environment in
which the liar is believable and the lie will be believed.

Student reflection and discussion about magic tricks revolves around answering three basic
questions. The first is “What did you actually see?” The TL should continually remind the students to
only describe what they saw, not to add any interpretation or explanation. Through this technique, they
can begin to overcome the power of the magician’s narrative to cloud reality.

The second question is “What do you think actually happened?” This is the place for interpretation.
After students offer their explanations, it is often useful to revisit the trick and have students watch it
again, comparing their “What did you see?” and “What happened?” answers to the actual trick. Often
students will discover that their memories of, and thus answers to, both questions contained obvious
flaws and falsities.

The third question, the key one for reflection, is “How did your brain fool you?” Once students
have answered the first questions and watch the trick a few more times, they can begin to reflect on the
flaws in their thinking and perception that the magician exploited. As always, these discussions might be
small group, whole class, or some combination.

Assessment

Proper assessment is a vital part of any lesson plan. Assessment offers a chance for the teacher to
understand what information students have retained and internalized. However, when done properly
assessment also acts as a review and reinforcement of student learning. These lessons are quite effective
when paired with simple informal assessments.

As should be obvious, my favorite assessment is group discussion, either in small groups or whole
class. Discussions, particularly in small groups, engage students on a deeper level than many other
assessment techniques. I will often start a logical fallacy lesson by asking students what they remember
about the previously-taught fallacy. I might split the class up into table groups, assign each group a
previously-taught fallacy, and have the group discuss the fallacy and come up with additional examples.
Alternately, I may offer a number of examples, then ask the class to determine what fallacy each example
illustrates. These assessments take only a few minutes, and are excellent “time fillers” when a lesson does
not take as much time as planned.

A more in-depth version of this involves asking students to create skits that demonstrate particular
fallacies. Groups of three or four students are given a short period of time (usually five minutes or so)
to come up with a quick skit. They then perform the skit for the whole class, and students have to guess
which fallacy is being illustrated. If there is some disagreement between the members of the class, an
additional discussion of either the fallacy or the construction of the skit itself often leads to a better
understanding of the various fallacies.

A related assessment requires students to find additional real life examples of the three phenomena.
A student might research and share a new optical illusion. A group of students might search the news
or social media to find a news report, quote, or meme that illustrates a particular logical fallacy. A
particularly talented or driven student might even learn to perform a magic trick and share it with the
class. Just think – it is a great chance to feature those 793.8 books!
Finally, consider having your more enthusiastic students prepare and lead the lesson on the next logical fallacy! As mentioned earlier, there are many places to find information and examples of fallacies. Students can enhance their own learning by teaching their fellows.

**Conclusion**

Critical thinking skills are vital in the 21st century. As teacher librarians, we are uniquely placed within the school environment to teach these skills in new and memorable ways. By thinking outside typical curriculum structures and topics, we can provide real life examples to help our students recognize and avoid flaws in their critical thinking processes. Using various real life examples from related fields provides students with an engaging curriculum that aids their long-term understanding of these issues.

**References**


**Christopher Fluetsch**

Christopher Fluetsch is the Teacher Librarian at Robert E. Willett Elementary in Davis, CA. He has a decade’s experience teaching alternative education in the court school system. He always tears up when he reads the last paragraph of "A River Runs Through It," but he'll deny it if you ask him.
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As the recent American Presidential race made abundantly clear, news might not be as true as it appears. The term “fake news” is being bandied about daily. At the same time, mass media play an increasingly significant role in today’s society, influencing millions of students daily. Particularly as news media outlets increasingly communicate their messages to narrow target audiences, people can stay in their information “comfort zones” and not consider different points of view.

Even when one is not searching for information, mass media permeate everyone’s environment. Students need to consciously and critically analyze and evaluate mass media messages and then decide on their own response step. This reflective process also helps students follow the stimulus-impulse cycle so they can think before they act. Now more than ever, students need to be media literate. Otherwise, they will not make reasoned decisions, and they will suffer the consequences of their assumptions or ignorance. Indeed, California’s bill AB155 intends to mandate civic online reasoning.

What then is media literacy? It should not be confused with multimedia. In the United States, media literacy focuses on the idea of mass media: its agenda and how it uses media to influence audiences. The Center for Media Literacy (2015) developed core concepts related to media messages; students need to consider the process by which the message is made, the message’s content and framework, and the intent of the message. The Center further asserts that media have embedded values and perspectives, and are experienced uniquely by each person. Within that framework, news is particularly salient because there is often a perception that news is accurate and trustworthy, an assumption that has been challenged. In that context, “fake news” is deliberate, published disinformation/hoax/lie purported to be real news.

In sum, media literacy fits well under the umbrella of information literacy, and news provides a concrete basis for discernment (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012).

How news media literate are today’s students? A 2016 research study by Stanford faculty focused on students’ news-literacy tasks, and found that middle and high school students, and even some in college, have trouble distinguishing which online resources are credible. The researchers stated a strong need for curriculum focused on developing students’ civic online reasoning. Furthermore, Leu et al’s 2015 study on students’ online literacy skills revealed a significant achievement gap: students who had more access to the Internet performed better than students with less Internet access. This study is important in light of the Pew Research 2015 report that millennials tend to get their news from social media.

Teacher librarians have unique skills to help students in this process because they evaluate and work with all kinds of information in various formats (Rheingold, 2012). While the study of news media has not been integrated well into traditional curricula, its impact on political and daily decision-making highlights its need to be part of formal education. Therefore, teacher librarians should seek out opportunities across the school community to provide news media literacy tools to empower students. Furthermore, as a welcoming and neutral affinity space for both the consumption and production of media, the library also serves as a prime informal educational haven for media literacy.

Several curricular areas lend themselves to the examination of fake news. Social studies is one obvious choice. Students can locate primary documents throughout history that exemplify fake news from repositories such as the Library of Congress (https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/) and the Museum of Hoaxes (http://hoaxes.org/). Students can also examine current contradictory treatments of events and speeches, as exemplified in News Literacy Project (http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/) and Center for News Literacy (https://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/).

Another discipline with rich opportunities for incorporating fake news study is science. Issues of evolution and climate change continue to be debated, for instance. Here are some good starting points for examining fake news in science:

- https://ww2.kqed.org/learning/2017/03/01/can-you-spot-bad-science-reporting/

Scientists can also help people build an “immunity” to fake news, as explained in this article from the Science Friday website (http://www.sciencefriday.com/segments/building-an-immunity-to-fake-news/).
Fake news also encompasses visual messages. Digital images are particularly easy to distort or edit, misleading the viewer. The more that students learn about image editing and the context of those images, including physics principles, the less likely students will be fooled. The following websites provide some guidance in this area:

- https://www.salemstatelog.com/picture-editing-new-era/
- http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/

To start, teacher librarians can conduct professional development sessions with their school communities - both teachers and parents - to show examples of fake news and its consequences. Articles such as this one from *Vanity Fair* (http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/01/fake-news-technology) can be shared ahead of time to spark faculty meeting discussion. Videos from news organizations (http://www.msnbc.com/hardball/watch/the-real-world-impact-of-fake-news-828599363932) can be shown to stimulate interest in helping students to become aware of fake news and how to deal with it.

Fake news is a wake-up call to educators and the community at large to gain competency in critically analyzing media in particular, and information in general. Librarians can leverage this hot topic to highlight the importance of information and digital literacy, and incorporate it systematically into the school’s curriculum so that students will be better prepared as informed citizens.

References


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LESLEY S. J. FARMER

Dr. Lesley Farmer, Professor at California State University (CSU) Long Beach, coordinates the Librarianship program. She also manages the CSU ICT Literacy Project. Dr. Farmer chairs CSLA’s Committee on Standards Integration and the Research TF. She also chairs the School Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations, and is a Fulbright scholar. A frequent presenter and writer for the profession, she recently received the AASL Distinguished Services Award. Dr. Farmer’s research interests include digital citizenship, information literacy, and data analysis. Her most recent books are *Library Improvement through Data Analytics* (ALA, 2016) and *Managing the Successful School Library* (ALA, 2017).
This year, our teacher librarians challenged us to stop using the term “bias” and start thinking in terms of “perspective,” instead. Why did they do this? Because the word bias has such a strong connotation to student readers that it changes the way we view a source. Students are tied to the notion of bias and often see it as a determining factor as we qualify sources as reliable or useful. Unfortunately, many students have mistakenly come to see bias as a warning label on a source--if we notice a strong point of view in a piece, we reject the source entirely. It is much more difficult for students to consider that every source has a perspective that contributes to our understanding of the information it presents. In research in general, and in working with news and political sources today in particular, we need to think carefully about how we identify and engage with a source's perspective and how it impacts our thinking about source quality. Source literacy can help us do just that.

My interest in source literacy began in eighth grade when our history class participated in the National History Day competition. This project was transformative for me because it was the first time I had ever done a major research project that required me to draw on various types of sources to create my own argument. The process was difficult, but incredibly exciting. I got a glimpse of the scope of information available--both online and in print--and its abundance amazed me. I wanted to access and understand every bit of it, but I knew I didn't yet have the tools to do so. Thankfully, I had wonderful teacher librarians to help me learn the source literacy skills I so desperately wanted to develop.

This year, as Castilleja School Library's research teaching assistant, I am tasked with supporting the teacher librarians' instructional needs around source literacy. The more I learn about it, the more I realize just how many concepts fall under the source literacy umbrella and how perspective ties into each of them. I have found, though, that many of these ideas can be sorted into three major categories.

Identifying the Type of Source

The first of these is the ability to identify the type of source we are looking at, be it a government press release, a blog post, or a peer-reviewed journal article. Students need to have enough practice recognizing characteristics of individual types of sources that we can classify new sources when we encounter them. In Nora Murphy's groundbreaking work on source literacy, she has started teaching her students to develop "source banks" in which they categorize their sources by type (2016). Over time, students are able to recognize features that consistently identify a particular type of source. Not only would this practice allow us to classify new sources we encounter, but we could also anticipate what types of sources might exist that would address our information need.

Once students can classify a source, we are able to consider the perspective the source provides by virtue of its format. A live Twitter feed, for example, approaches an event from a very different angle than would a piece of investigative journalism published weeks later. Both sources provide valuable information about the same issue, but the type of information each presents has different uses. Twitter captures personal responses to an event in real time, whereas the journalistic piece provides analysis after the fact. In other words, each type of source offers a different perspective on a research topic. Understanding the differences among various types of sources reminds students to consider the circumstances that shape the source's perspective.

Understanding the Publication

Next, we can begin to consider the publication in which a particular source appears. This is a crucial step that is often overlooked; when students do research online, we encounter individual articles but often do not bother to identify their origins. Because recognizing a publication can help students interpret the choice of evidence in a particular article, we need the opportunity to practice identifying common publications and evaluating their perspectives and agendas.

When students critically evaluate a publication, we often find the relationship between its perspective and quality particularly nuanced and difficult to categorize. In one history class, students researching Kazakhstan found an article in a publication called Sputnik News, Russia's government-sponsored international propaganda agency. When the article was presented to the whole class, we naturally wanted to discredit any information this source provided. Its bias seemed so significant that we believed it would...
compromise the veracity of the information it contained. It can be difficult to tell where to draw the line. When students encounter a publication for the first time, we may not be able to immediately tell if it is a reliable source of information, but we can pinpoint its bias, especially its political slant. This bias becomes the foundation upon which students judge the quality of the source, which is, of course, highly problematic.

Judging a publication by its perspective perpetuates a distrust of opinionated sources. We are often quick to dismiss high-quality sources that present a strong perspective, especially one that differs from our own. It can be difficult to wrap our heads around the fact that bias does not render a source useless. Certainly, too much of it can compromise the veracity of the information the source presents, and making that distinction is critical, but bias in general is not negative. Identifying perspective informs us of the particular stance the source is taking on the issue at hand, which is helpful in making sure we are exposed to different viewpoints. In the case of Sputnik News, students may not necessarily realize that the source is in fact useful: it is valuable in understanding the Russian government's stance on international issues. Additionally, understanding perspective helps the reader uncover the philosophy guiding the selection of evidence. Therefore, while the information the source provides should be approached with a critical stance, it may still provide an important insight.

Separating Evidence from Argument

Elsewhere, I have discussed students’ challenges in discerning the difference between evidence and argument within a single text (Zoroufy, 2017). Students tend to read a source as if it is monolithic. Depending on the information need, we essentially see only the evidence or the argument in the source. When students read a source for its opinion on a topic, we are primarily concerned with the argument it is making. The evidence the source presents is regarded solely as contribution to the ethos of that argument. Conversely, students may read a source with an eye towards gleaning the evidence it has to offer, in which case the argument often seems to just be one more piece of evidence we can use.

This disposition towards believing in fact-only and opinion-only texts explains why we students perpetually return to the idea of unbiased sources. While we often associate a strong bias with incorrect information, the opposite misconception also exists: that sources that present accurate information are entirely objective. For a 9th grade history project, we were asked to peer review our classmates’ annotated bibliographies. We were told that our annotations should include an explanation of the source’s bias and why we thought the source was credible. Almost everyone’s bibliography included some variation on this statement: “This source presented factually accurate information so it is not biased.” Novice readers can only take on one task at a time, and extracting facts blinds them to the existence of argument.

Expert readers, on the other hand, are able to alternate between focusing on a source’s evidence and its analysis as they interact with the text as a whole. Furthermore, they understand that perspective impacts each of these elements, but in different ways. Teacher librarians can give students explicit opportunities to learn to deal with each appropriately. As students develop the capacity to read for opinion, they should practice determining whether the proffered evidence convincingly supports the author’s argument. When reading for evidence, students need practice analyzing how the author’s argument might impact the range of evidence presented. Only through guided instruction can students develop both skills and combine them effectively.

The relationship between source literacy and perspective is full of nuance and complexity that can be hard for students to navigate, but it is so critical that we work towards mastering our source literacy skills. Once we leave high school, we have to be able to analyze sources that haven’t been curated or approved by our teachers. It is paramount that our education prepares us to critically evaluate the information we are presented. Our democracy relies on a well-informed citizenry, but being well-informed involves more than just glancing at headlines from our Facebook feeds. With the internet and the 24-hour news cycle, there is an abundance of information available to the general public; however, the availability of so much information is of no use if students are unable to evaluate it (Information Literacy, 2000). That is why I am so grateful to know that librarians have taken on the challenge of teaching source literacy: we are strengthening the cornerstone of our democracy.
Sample Source Literacy Lessons and Teaching Materials

- The Information Cycle (Connie Williams) (http://bit.ly/2pHd1o0)
- Nora Murphy’s source literacy work
  - How To Develop Strong Source Literacy: Practice! (http://blog.fsha.org/develop-source-literacy/)
  - Barriers to Access (http://aislnews.org/?p=4034)
- ACRL draft Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (http://bit.ly/2rcDSbq)

Understanding the publication

- Developing Criterion to Understand a Publication (Tasha Bergson-Michelson) (http://bit.ly/2rnkp57)
- On teaching teachers to be wolves in a “fake news” world… (David Wee) (http://aislnews.org/?p=5147)

Separating evidence from argument

- Literary Analysis/Close Reading of Nonfiction (Tasha Bergson-Michelson) (http://bit.ly/2rcEUeh)
- Distinguishing evidence from analysis: A student’s perspective on the first step in source evaluation (Sara Zoroufy) (http://aislnews.org/?p=5257)

A range of source literacy lesson summaries from Castilleja School (http://bit.ly/2qoHqGw)

References


SARA ZOROUFY

Sara Zoroufy is a high school junior and the Research Teaching Assistant for the Castilleja School library. In this role, Sara observes research lessons and unpacks how she and other students think about sources. Sara chose to spend the last academic year studying source literacy; next year, her focus will be on teaching how to distinguish evidence from argument. Her work helps inform lesson planning.
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School libraries are no longer in a position to maintain any semblance of neutrality, on or off campus. Many suggest that libraries were never really neutral in the first place. We have always had a dogged interest in fairness and facts. Our existence is based on creating opportunity (read: equity) for all of our patrons. As the world struggles to maintain its humanity, we carefully store on our shelves volumes of the history that must never be repeated. In a very real sense, people look to us for help with what matters most to them: truth, beauty, justice, health, love. All are free to study what they wish, not only what they must, in a library. In addition, in the modern school environment, school libraries are often the perfect location for students who are having social difficulties to land. Teacher librarians are in a unique, beautiful, and necessary position to engender social action on campus. While we continue to present all sides of every story, promote critical thinking, and identify biases, the reality is that there are still some ideals—and, in fact, laws—that are in real need of defense in the school environment.

School libraries are uniquely equipped to provide students with the safe space(s) that they need in order to nurture their beliefs, identities, and selves. From displays to clubs to resource referral, libraries can actively represent all students, every day. All public educators—especially teacher librarians—must necessarily become comfortable with providing more resources—especially mental health resources—to their students. There are so many avenues for teacher librarians to help students that are not commonly available to classroom teachers, whether due to the nature of the classroom environment, or simple time or class-size restrictions. Many of us do not directly deliver assessments to students (and most likely not the standardized variety) which opens up the potential for a more personalized teaching and learning relationship with our students. Promoting autodidacticism is always at the root of what we do, and now we must turn our attention to protect this right to learn. Teacher librarians need to defend all students, especially those who are disenfranchised, from any and all attempts at further marginalization. It’s definitely time for school libraries, schools, and communities to stand up and create more welcoming, inclusive environments for all students, every day.

Readers’ Advisory as Social Action

Every time we talk with students about books and reading it is an opportunity to engage them with thinking. This, in itself, could be considered a revolutionary act. For example, the study of World War II is incredibly difficult, both intellectually and emotionally. I often laud those students who independently choose to learn more about World War II because it indicates to me a sense of moral responsibility for taking on this difficult knowledge. In some way, I see these students as being willing to share the burden of our collective shame. As humans, it is critical that we study these difficult but critical subjects such as slavery, the Civil Rights movement, and the slaughter of Native Americans. As teacher librarians, we hold quite a lot of power when we make reading and research recommendations related to these topics. We are also able to encourage students to consider social issues by what we suggest for pleasure reading. My belief is that students of all ages possess a social conscience, and there is no better place to capitalize on this than in the library setting. Paying attention to works that have emerged from the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign can introduce us to titles that consider social issues. For instance, the website (http://weneeddiversebooks.org/) has a variety of resources. Authors for teens include Susan Vaught, Rodman Philbrick, and Gail Giles.

Club Advisement

One of the most powerful things that we can do for our students is to empower them through the formation of relevant and intellectually stimulating clubs where they can both socialize and perform meaningful work together as a group. At my site, the Associated Student Body’s policy dictates that the students must necessarily be the driving force behind creating and running clubs, with the assistance of a faculty adviser. This is a great model, for several reasons. Students who run their own clubs necessarily create a greater sense of autonomy and efficacy when they manage their own time and create their own direction. The work that they accomplish is their own.

The Social Justice Club that I advise has experienced several iterations over the past several years, but has just enjoyed a banner year for productivity. Last night, I watched with delight as the president of this club was sworn in as the first student board representative for our school district. Our superintendent, Louise Johnson, was instrumental in getting the process underway, but the President and the other club members
performed the necessary legwork to get a student elected. She will provide our district with a real service as she proceeds as a knowledgeable and involved board member for our district, but more importantly, there will always be a student on the board moving forward.

**Student and Teacher Voice**

Installing a student board member is only one powerful way to present a student voice to our district policymakers. Promoting student and teacher voice on campus is a wholly worthwhile function of the school library, and a great place to begin discussions about social justice. An excellent source for learning more about student/teacher voice is Russell Quaglia’s work (http://quagliainstitute.org/). Quaglia acknowledges that the work around voice is not simple, but it is well worth the effort. His institute has done several studies that suggest that neither teachers nor students have enough of a voice in their schools. Teacher librarians are in a perfect position to gather student voice on a daily, informal basis, as well to spearhead larger efforts to collect information to help guide school policy.

Part of our role is to advocate for the quieter voices on campus, by helping them communicate when they are either unwilling or unable to do so, for themselves. There are many ways to accomplish this, whether by survey, or by simply opening a Google Doc in a classroom and transcribing student input.

It is absolutely imperative that we listen to and appreciate those who dissent, regardless of their social position on campus. By asking everyone’s opinion on new initiatives, smart administrators will be able to smooth out some of the bugs that they had not foreseen on their own. More voices are better, if the goal is truly to progress and to innovate.

**Community-Level Organizing**

Develop relationships with your local service organizations, yes, but also with your local non-profits and service agencies. They are more pressed for time, to be sure (and some need our checks), but many of them need a direct connection to students to fulfill their missions. One piece of cognitive dissonance that I have experienced while working in public schools is that there are lots of helping organizations in every community, but it is often difficult for schools to provide the organizations with students, whether for legal or logistical reasons.

One excellent example of a successful community partnership is our relationship with our local PFLAG, formally Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. They have assisted with our Gay Student Alliance (GSA), throughout the years, but felt that they could do more to support us and approached us with some new books for our library. Many of these included titles I suggested we needed, including the *Queer Encyclopedia*. Although we’ve only asked for their help on a small number of occasions, they are now actively contacting us with a desire to buy us more books.

Collaborating with the public library is another natural relationship, and one well worth developing. We partner with our public library on our county book-in-common program, and the selection of this title can drive social justice instruction. Two such books that we’ve selected in the past few years were *Trash* and *Just Mercy*. I highly recommend both of these books for this type of program. Teachers use them gladly, and the students welcome the chance to have conversations about the challenging and relevant subject matter.

**Professional Development as Activism**

All teachers have a personal and professional responsibility to learn, grow, and represent. There is even more of an onus on teacher librarians to examine pedagogy with a 360-degree view. From culturally-relevant teaching strategies and materials to student voice to critical pedagogy, it is our responsibility to understand and disseminate the ideas of those educational experts who have turned their collective attention to the growing field of student advocacy through teacher leadership: Eric Jensen, Stephen Krashen, and Michael Fullan are just a few of the experts who strongly advocate for students and teachers through their work. Help create a professional learning network on your campus that examines the critical ideas of poverty, equity, and access in education.

**Bullying versus Discriminatory Harassment**

The U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights does a perfect job in describing the relationship between popular bullying programs and discriminatory harassment in one of its “Dear Colleague” letters (Ali, 2010). Simply put, no bullying program will ever be enough to protect a school or district from a discriminatory harassment lawsuit. School libraries need to explicitly state through words and actions that their spaces are safe and free of hate. We hang a rainbow flag near our entrance and place signs on our bulletin board that leave no question about our dedication to providing all of our students with a safe space.
Using Fake News to Teach Civics and Civil Discourse

It’s not possible to discuss the current news media without talking about the role of political institutions and their relationship with human rights. Students welcome--crave--the chance to participate in discourse about social issues and policy. Teaching civics and civil discourse was at one time the backbone of a democratic education, but has been subsumed in the focus on accountability through standardized tests. Teacher librarians can interact with classes on different levels, by incorporating media literacy lessons and even civics education. Civic Action Projects are a great option for student engagement. The Civic Action Projects website (Constitutional Rights, 2017) has a wealth of ideas and curricula with which to work. Students can seamlessly incorporate service learning into these projects.

Promoting Culturally-Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning (Education Alliance, 2017). There is truly a plethora of free high-quality resources available online to help English and social science teachers teach required material through a social justice lens. For instance, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has developed a framework which teacher librarians should know. Further resources can be found at the end of this article.

Restorative Practices and Trauma-Informed Teaching

Neither students nor teachers arrive on campus with a clean slate. Entire school communities carry various forms of trauma. Both restorative practices and trauma-informed teaching are vast and complex fields in and of themselves, and certainly neither can be neatly encapsulated in a brief article such as this one. Students and teachers are regularly dealing with direct and indirect trauma, such as death, divorce, moving, substance abuse, mental illness, or isolation. There are three main tenets that we now know about trauma: 1) trauma is real 2) trauma is prevalent and 3) trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development. Still, the power behind the basic premise of approaching students and teaching through a restorative, trauma-sensitive lens cannot be underestimated in the school and school library setting. Childhood trauma can show up in behavioral, emotional, psychological, or physical symptoms.

If we are being honest with ourselves, we need to acknowledge that schools can be traumatic, and even traumatizing for many of the students and adults on campus. Libraries have always served a resource and referral function, but it’s time to “up our game.” Some of the most important work that I’ve performed in my environment involved many real-world “assists”: for example filling out Medi-Cal paperwork, helping to schedule appointments, or linking students over 18 to county services. Small things like working with students on practicing their driving test online mean you get to hear about their passing mark!

But still, in our environment, much deeper situations often float our direction and while we can and do connect students to more qualified helpers like counselors, it’s important to allow them to see us as meaningful, helping adults, as well. It is true and evident that we don’t have the same credentials as the counselors or the psychologists, but when kids come to us for help, it is important for us to be the active listener in the room.

It is also up to us to analyze what is behind the behavior in the classroom. Poor behavior is often a screen for difficulties at home, or possibly difficulty with processing high-level information. I recently had a great discussion with a colleague from my former district. He delivers professional development about trauma-informed teaching, district-wide. He has some incredibly useful and pithy comments on the subject. He acknowledged that many excellent, veteran teachers are having new difficulties with kids. He went on to say that some of the “older methods” such as shame and sarcasm are simply no longer effective (not sure they ever were, it could be that kids are just more vocal, now). One main thing to remember, he said, is that as educators, we need to realize and acknowledge that the responsibility for poor interactions with students lies with the adults in the room. We are the ones who are modeling behavior, especially when life is difficult. Never does bickering with a student end with a “win” of any kind.

Ross Greene states it well when he says that kids are doing the best they can with what they know (Greene, 2008). He describes two schools of thought: the first suggests that kids do well when they can and the second (more common) philosophy is that kids do well when they want to. Teachers who gravitate toward the second philosophy find themselves at odds with kids far more often than those that adhere to the first. In other words, brain development issues may be at play with students who are having a hard time sitting still, not a desire to misbehave.
There is some good news: we all possess some measure of neuroplasticity, meaning that the brain is always capable of change. There are treatments and techniques to help heal both students and adults. The sense of trauma does not have to last forever.

We were taught in our teaching credential classes to teach to kids who are ready to sit and get. This model is no longer in play for kids in trauma. Part of this is because relationships are really difficult for these kids. They don't often behave in a way that makes it easy to have a relationship with them.

One concrete way to understand trauma is through the study of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) (Centers, 2016). The original ACEs study was performed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser from 1995 to 1997. What the CDC and Kaiser found is that if a person has four or more ACEs they are more prone to have chronic health problems as an adult, even when controlled for unhealthy behavior. Even those who deliberately made healthy life choices were still affected by their ACEs. In other words, ACEs are not simply an educational issue, but a health issue.

And while ACEs are universal, access to healing is not. Students cannot effectively learn if they don't feel safe or loved. If the amygdala (flight or fight part of the brain) is always switched on, then it has a hard time distinguishing real danger from false danger. It's extremely hard for kids to re-regulate once their amygdala is “firing.”

Students may experience anxiety when dealing with high-level information, and may create a behavioral distraction to avoid acknowledging this.

**Trauma-Informed School Libraries**

Libraries have often been considered places where responsibility can be taught through fines, bills, and even scolding. Even though we do not have fines at our particular site, we often need to mitigate some kind of damage associated with a previous library experience. I suggest that the use of fines and other traumatizing library practices are not only outdated, but not advised.

Reading aloud from overdue lists, for example, simply needs to stop. It is a breach of privacy, regardless of the student’s age. Public shaming of students who have overdue or damaged books is not acceptable in our setting. It frankly does not model good manners. Speak to each student, quietly and independently, as they approach the desk, if you must, but I am an advocate for continuing to check out books even if they have lost one or more books in the past. Students in poverty need to be given additional books, even if one or more is lost. Many students spend considerable time at mom’s, dad’s or grandma’s. It’s really not in our best interest to chase kids or shame kids. The best move is to replace the book without fanfare and repair the relationship with the student. This teaches them that libraries are benevolent places where the adults help them fix situations, rather than exacerbate them.

Our environments are often places of conflict, when we should be focused on creating safe havens for students. Always, always the students are more important than the books. It’s especially critical to consider that students of poverty may not be able to pay for anything, ever. Make arrangements with the student to work off the fine if you feel you must.

I love that libraries have very little to do in the way of assessment, because it shifts our relationship with students away from compliance and accountability. Finally, the pendulum seems to be swinging back to relationship-building, where the focus always belonged. And libraries generally lean one of two ways: expansionism, in which we encourage kids to take all of the books that they can carry with them, or preservationist (which, simply put, can be summed up as: “Don’t touch my books!”). Let’s make our libraries expansionist!

**Summary**

In sum, libraries are in an unusually powerful position to effect social change. We have at our disposal multiple tools to help make our libraries, our schools, and our communities more pleasant, productive, and just places to live, work, and thrive as learners and as people.

**Resource List (on next page)**
## Resource List:

### Trauma-Informed Schools and Restorative Practices

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>General information about trauma-informed practices in the school environment:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ACEs Study</td>
<td><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/">https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/</a></td>
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<td>Dr. Nadine Harris’ TED talk on ACEs</td>
<td><a href="https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime#t-515196">https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime#t-515196</a></td>
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<td>Trauma Sensitive Schools</td>
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<td>Wisconsin’s Department of Education Trauma-Sensitive Schools Professional Development Modules</td>
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<td>Ross Greene’s “Kids Do Well If They Can”</td>
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### Student Voice

- The Blend Space site is full of excellent resources on the subject of student voice
- Russ Quaglia and the Quaglia Institute                                     | http://quagliainstitute.org/qisva/                                    |
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights “Dear Colleague” Letter about Bullying and Discriminatory Harassment | https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.pdf |

### Social Justice Curriculum

- Teachers 4 Social Justice                                                   | https://t4sj.org/                                                     |
- Rethinking Schools                                                          | http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml                          |
- Facing History and Ourselves                                                | http://www.tolerance.org/school_climate_resources                     |
- Teaching Tolerance: Responding to Hate and Bias at School                  | http://www.tolerance.org/school_climate_resources                     |
- The Civic Action project is a thorough way to incorporate civic lessons into any discipline. | http://www.crfcap.org/                                                |
- Kevin Williams’ Public Wiki                                                 | https://mrwilliamshistorypublic.wikispaces.com/                      |

References continued on page 11

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**JILL SONNENBERG**

Jill Sonnenberg has worked in all levels of public school libraries since 2003, but is officially settled in at the high school level (for now). She earned a master’s in education in 2004, which means it’s way past time to go back to school. Her professional interests include running a school from the library, learning as much as possible about professional development, student voice, trauma, and social justice as she can. She is currently catching glimpses of the news through cracks in her hands. But in all seriousness, she is humbled by her position to be of some help to students during what is for many a difficult time of life.
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Safe and Strong Student Relationships: School Libraries

Jackie Siminitus

“When trouble strikes, head to the library. You will either be able to solve the problem, or simply have something to read as the world crashes around you.” – Lemony Snicket

This article introduces educators, especially school librarians and staff, to CASA – Court-Appointed Special Advocate for children. This also introduces CASA volunteers to the role and importance of school libraries for children in their care.

CASAs

First, let’s learn about CASA and its role in supporting foster care children. Students in foster care have great needs. According to Dr. Bruce Perry, an internationally-recognized authority on children in crisis, “the more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be able to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love... People, not programs, change people” (Perry, 2007).

Last year, I joined a class of about twenty caring adults from all sorts of backgrounds and became trained as a CASA volunteer. CASA’s mission is to ensure that all abused and neglected children under the protection of the court have a consistent and caring adult who speaks on their behalf and helps them reach their full potential. Training covered the Child Welfare System, the Juvenile Dependency Court process, and the numerous players and their roles. We were given a complex fictional family case scenario in order to experience the child welfare system and foster care. As you might imagine, we had lots of group discussions about a wide range of situations and issues. One class covered the needs and development of children and youth. Another evening focused on understanding families. Class eight was devoted to Educational Advocacy.

The more I learn about foster care children and the importance of them having safe and stable adult relationships, the more strongly I see connections with school librarians. For example:

• CASA volunteers are charged by the Juvenile Dependency Court to learn all they can about important adults in a child’s life and to introduce the child to good experiences, including educational experiences.

• CASAs, as CASA volunteers are affectionately called, are asked to record and report basic education information to their superiors. The list includes: attendance and discipline, school changes, special education status, standardized test results, high school credits, teacher assessment, IEP – Independent Education Plan, and 509-Recognition of Learning Difference. I suggest adding “library usage.”

• We are required to write a monthly report to our supervising counselor that includes a section on education. We visit a child’s school and meet counselors and sometimes a student’s teacher. It seems reasonable to also visit the school library. When I have suggested this to fellow CASAs, they say they would never have thought of that! I then explain how a school librarian is in the library all the years a child is in school, unlike the many teachers a child has. Foster care kids need a sense of permanence!

• CASAs are also required to submit 6-month reports to the Court so the judge can get a good sense of the child’s situation and our observations. From my perspective, judges would see visits to the library, participation in library activities, number of books read or listened to, and conversations with the teacher librarian as positive experiences in a child’s life. AB490 California Foster Youth Education Task Force states that educational matters must be considered at every court hearing (2007).

Here are the basic demographics of California Foster Care Youth as provided in the CASA Training Manual:

• 25%-52% placed in special ed (vs 10-12% general population)

• 33% change schools 5+ times

• 69% suspended from school (vs 28% general population)

• 3% get a Bachelor’s degree (vs 23.5% general population)

The CASA Training manual highlights the following barriers to school success:

• instability of home and family

• lack of a consistent adult supporting education

• multiple school changes

• missed basic skills acquisition
School Libraries

Now, let me describe school libraries. As a long-time member of the California School Library Association (CSLA) and school library advocate, it is a pleasure to explore the potential role of school library staff as a strong adult presence in a foster child’s life. Given the unfortunate reality of multiple moves by children in foster care, it would be useful if there were a way to easily or routinely introduce the school library team in the next school or series of schools.

Some school library facts:

- School libraries are often open during recess, lunch, and after school, thus providing a safe, quiet setting for students. “A library should be like a pair of open arms.” – Roger Rosenblatt
- Teacher Librarians develop book collections especially for the students they serve. They review and recommend books.
- A student has a revolving number of teachers over the years. Some of the more consistent or longer-term teachers that a student gets to know are the school counselors and librarians.
- Teacher librarians are responsible for library instruction, including both print and online tools, and programs and administration. They teach digital citizenship and cyber-safety. (see brochure and state curriculum standards). (California Department of Education, 2010).
- The Library is often the destination for school study halls, homework help centers, and make-up test times.

CASA-CSLA Collaboration and Conclusion

CASA and CSLA are nonprofit and non-government organizations. CASA of California (http://www.californiacasa.org/) is the state-level organization; I am trained and supported by the CASA of San Mateo (http://www.casaofsanmateo.org/). What would a strategic relationship between the two organizations look like?

1. Teachers and school staff often see a child for more time daily than a parent or guardian. Given the unfortunate reality of the lack of positive family relationships and multiple moves by children in foster care, it would be beneficial to ask the CASA to routinely introduce the child to the school library team in the next school or series of schools.

2. Once a year, CSLA and CASA could use social media to promote the value of safe and strong student relationships with adults in their life, reminding readers that school libraries provide safe and special places for children.

3. Given the importance of educational advocacy by the Courts, CASA has developed a number of resources and best practices to counter many of the challenges children, who are dependents of the court, experience in their educational settings. CASA could add school libraries to their training manual.

4. Given how difficult it can be to identify foster care youth if not introduced to them, CSLA may want to consider promoting CASA volunteers from amongst CSLA members.

5. Jointly publish a recommended reading list for foster care and other special needs children, sorted by elementary, middle, and high school levels.

There are a number of ways CSLA could join with CASA in order to advocate for school library as safe havens for children in the foster care system. After all, people, not programs, change people.

References continued on page 11
Civics in the Library: Everyday Democracy

Connie Williams

The library is an excellent place to celebrate the critical thinking that civics requires: decision-making, questioning, and active participation; all of which are elements of information literacy instruction.

Walk around any town or city today, and you can see the fruits of democracy:

- Civic buildings where decisions are made and discussions are held on the future of the surrounding areas;
- social arenas where people can get together to celebrate their shared location and heritages as a united community;
- historical monuments and museums where we can celebrate the past and remember the sacrifices it took to get to today.

All of these are reminders that it is only with an engaged citizenry that democracy can work.

There is no doubt that this election cycle has brought a sense of citizen engagement to the forefront. It also reminds us as teachers that our job is to give students the tools and the confidence to create a future that embraces the rights for all guaranteed through the living document of our Constitution and the laws that support it... and then to go out and do something about it.

Since the election and the polarized energy that it has ignited, our schools are not immune to public scrutiny of how we teach civics. The Google quick definition of civics – “the study of the rights and duties of citizenship” gives us the big picture without any of the nuances of a deeper definition. To truly be “civic minded” includes accepting the roles and responsibilities that all citizens have in contributing to the government by being active, involved, and engaged citizens. Students in schools today don’t usually take a course titled: “Civics,” but many of the expressions of civics are included in subject matter lessons. The library is an excellent place to celebrate the critical thinking that civics requires: decision-making, questioning, and active participation; all of which are elements of information literacy instruction.

Education has a propensity to silo “subjects” into classes where students are not always able to make the connections between what they learn in class and how it can apply in life. We have often heard students remark that they don’t like a subject [“I hate history!” or “I can’t stand to read”] only to discover that they watch historical dramas, or they voraciously read comic books. These students haven’t made that connection between historical events and current events through their classroom experiences.

...And here’s where librarians and their libraries can show them that connection.

There is much activity in libraries today with the “maker” movement. It is an innovative program, but libraries really have been on the cutting edge of “makering” and helping students learn how to “do work” for a long time. The emergence of Maker Camps notwithstanding, libraries have been offering students the place, the resources, and the instruction to create for many years.

The maker movement allows us to experiment, to think out loud as we move things around and build, re-build, and re-design. While most of the Maker Camps and much of the maker talk has centered around 3-D printers, robots, and circuit boards – what if we took the same maker mentality and turned it towards social innovation and community engagement, especially focusing on social justice?

Here are some ideas to consider:

Start with geography.

Having a large sense of ‘place’ allows students to understand how big (or little) their community is – thus making them aware of the many issues that affect them as well as community members who live miles away.

Using a physical map in hand - virtually or physically - take students on a walking tour of your town/city noting city landmarks: city hall, police stations, hospitals, parks, museums, libraries, local monuments, civic organizations buildings, school district offices, public art, and so on. Let students...
take photos, draw in a journal or take notes at each stop. If using a virtual field trip: use Google Maps to create screen shots of the buildings and neighborhoods. Return to the library and create a model map with 3-D buildings (maybe a use for your 3-D printer or other maker tools?) and display it in the library. Library Teaching Assistants - or school club members - can be put in charge of monitoring local activity and can add important events in town to the model. The C3 HSS Framework Dimension 2 (https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/c3/C3-Framework-for-Social-Studies.pdf) (The College 67) states that Civics instruction should include the “observations of local conditions.” Keeping students abreast of events in town fosters open connections.

If you don’t want to build a city model, hang maps of your city in several places around the library. Use push-pin flags with explanations written on them to explain the events, and/or the names of the building of importance including libraries, shelters, food banks, as well as government buildings. One map could identify important places, another map would list current events, and another highlight where community actions are being held.

**Engage your students with local issues that might be meaningful for them.**

Does the local swimming pool close before school is out so no student can use the pool? Do kids want a skate park nearby? Is there so much trash accumulating in the local park that it is not safe to play or hang out there? What about the larger social issues such as police response, profiling, jobs for teens? What issues can students stand up for and even lead? Your city diorama/map can help them to see how issues on one side of town can affect the whole town; and just as readily point out how different “sides” of a town are really much the same. Poll students to see where certain events take place in town. Where do teens/tweens hang out? What does it look like there? What is police presence in this part of town? What time do particular things happen in these places? Look for patterns of locality and events. Is there something that can improve those places? How?

**Encourage students to join in issue-related community discussions.**

Town Hall meetings with local representatives occur regularly. Create a current events club or encourage the MEChA, JSA, debate or other national clubs to attend these meetings and bring back their findings to the school via video, podcast, or posters. If students can’t attend in person, many of these events are videotaped and can be shown in the library during club meetings. This allows those students interested in politics, history, and community involvement to meet regularly and discuss their ideas and concerns in a safe place with others who share similar passions. You can help them hone their ideas in a respectful and caring place and can guide them to define an activity that they can accomplish.

**Invite representatives from Congress, the city council, the school board, and other elected officials to speak in the library.**

Do not just have them speak. Invite them to participate in a discussion group, to judge a debate, or be interviewed by students. Include service organization members in these events also. They can create networks for students in the trades and small businesses.

**Create a questioning environment and give students the tools they need to be active, engaged citizens.**

Many students are not going to go to college. Their high school experience could easily be the last chance we have to help them see their way into the wider world. By giving all students the opportunity in K-12 to become a part of a larger group than their school, we provide a window to the world they are entering as young adults. Some students go on to college or other educational experiences, including the military or vocational training, continuing to be prodded to think critically about their chosen subject areas as well as required classes that include government, literature, and science. Those not going on to further education need to know that their accomplishments in their chosen career have important value to their community and that they need to step up and become community leaders through their professional or community organizations.

Helping students make those links can open a network of professional connections. Teach students to ask questions and identify their usefulness towards understanding a new idea, a compelling thought, or a problem to be solved. Knowing that a question is “just the right question” takes practice to be able to identify the kind of question that is needed and then prioritized in such a way that answering the
question leads to insights, action, and solutions. We can reinforce questioning in the library by always asking questions ourselves, and by using and working with teachers to utilize processes that encourage a questioning classroom. You can learn this process through The Right Question Institute (http://www.rightquestion.org/) and their book: Make Just One Change, and then teach it in class the following day. It's easy, and remarkable.

Reach out to the variety of beliefs and political persuasions in order to develop dialog that invites true communication.

Listening skills are as important as questioning skills – with the two going hand in hand towards developing ways to live together with dignity and compassion for each other. Many bonding group workshops begin with an activity called “walk the line” where students break into groups behind a line. As the group is asked a question about themselves (cross the line if you're a big sister,” “cross the line if you've ever bullied someone”), everyone sees that no matter with what group they've labeled themselves, they're really more alike than different. This is an example of a lunch time library activity that can be included in weekly gatherings. End an activity like this with a shared lunch or treats that invite continued conversation. Follow up the next week with another activity that includes action advocacy that might come from discovering that some students might not be getting enough to eat, or are afraid of immigration policies, or are being bullied.

Celebrate new voters with schoolwide recognition of their new status.

Hold a “new voters” panel with members of the League of Women Voters or another group to give information about where to vote, how to vote online, how to find reputable information on the candidates, etc. Be sure to include parents, teachers, and invited students. Have lunch. Make a big deal out of their registration.

Visit a courtroom.

Watch a trial in action. Locate a local lawyers Association and ask them to help you put on a mock trial. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the trial lawyers group (ABOTA) puts on teacher education workshops and many are willing to come to classes or to arrange visits. Go for it!

Write letters.

Letter writing campaigns to your local, state, or national legislators on issues of interest and importance to your students are valuable. Send pictures of your students collecting trash outside of the school walls, or collecting food for the homeless to your representative along with letters stating their concerns about local pollution, homelessness, or health care. When you get a response, be sure to post it in the library and share it widely.

Social justice and Civics walk hand in hand to make our democracy work for all. Libraries are excellent classrooms to practice Civics, citizenship, and social justice. We have much to offer in helping students connect with their community and government through engaged actions of all kinds; big and small, local, state, and national.

Resources

These resources are to help your students, faculty, and parents engage with their community:

1. icivics.org Founded by Sandra Day O’Connor to foster the teaching of Civics, this website has loads of ideas that librarians can use to encourage civic life from games.

2. Questioning, decision-making and creating advocacy for parents (as well as school staff, and students) is examined in both of these books by the Right Question Institute (http://rightquestion.org/). Learn the QFT process to share with teachers, parents, and staff to make huge changes in how meetings are run, who is responsible for follow-through actions of decisions made in meetings, and how to be an advocate when needed.

4. The American Federation of Teachers offers lessons on immigration rights and ways to create inclusive classrooms.

5. Brought to you by Public Broadcasting, ListenWise has hundreds of lesson ideas. Using the power of story, students listen to a segment from news reports, which create rich fodder for class discussion, great Q-focus for questioning (see above), and jump-in research topics. Search for civics/government to find amazing topics including, debates (Debate: What are the Benefits and Drawbacks of Having a Very Rich Administration?) and current events (How Police Use Social Media). Filter for length, grade level, subject area, and kind of lesson.

6. There are hundreds of sites that give examples of the Citizenship test. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offers study materials for the U.S. Civics Test. https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/study-test/study-materials-civics-test Consider using these materials in the library by offering to give a short version of the test, ask questions from the test on your schoolwide television station, bulletin, or other schoolwide communication method. Give the test on President’s Day or other national holidays and offer prizes for those who pass.


References


CONNIE WILLIAMS
Connie Williams is a National Board Certified Teacher Librarian, formerly with Petaluma City Schools. She writes a monthly blog for Knowledge Quest, presents regularly at Library, History and Social Science conferences on using government information, sourcing, and questioning. She is the author of the forthcoming book: Understanding Government Information: a teaching strategies toolkit for grades 7-12; to be published by Libraries Unlimited.

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The association encourages professional growth, provides avenues for sharing common concerns, represents the interests of school libraries to the Legislature and the California Department of Education, and enables members to serve the educational needs of the multiculturally diverse students of California.

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