Editorial: “In These Uncertain Times…”

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This issue of School Libraries Worldwide is based on “the basics.” At the time that the call for papers was released, I never could have envisioned the Covid-19 pandemic and the extreme circumstances school librarians and their communities are experiencing. True to form, school librarians throughout the world responded as they always do: center on the basics of meeting our users’ needs.

School Librarians as Essential Workers

I live in the U.S. state of Florida, the #1 location of mainland hurricane strikes. Here, school libraries are regulatorily deemed priority disaster shelters* and are often staffed by school librarians and teachers. Many other U.S. states have similar statutes. In this first responder role, school librarians provide information and reading resources, coordinate food and aid distribution, and ensure that displaced community members receive comfort and support. This empathetic work is core to school librarianship and the response to Covid-19 has been no different.

In many areas, the pandemic led to online schooling and an abrupt school year curtailment. In response, school librarians across the world jumped on IASL-Link and began compiling lists of high quality open and free educational resources. In the U.S., the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) began conducting “snapshot” surveys of school librarians’ practices and perceptions during the pandemic (http://www.ala.org/aasl/about/pandemic). Nearly a thousand school librarians from all levels and in all types of U.S. primary and secondary schools participated. Each survey is a fascinating glimpse into the ways school librarians refashion the basics of their service to meet the socially distant demands of pandemic information needs.

The first snapshot (30 March-6 April, 2020) featured data relating to learners’ home Internet and technology access as well as school librarians’ practices. Surveyed school librarians reported expanding online resources available to students; extending check-out periods; and providing virtual assistance and classes. A few school librarians reported offering alternative check-out procedures (e.g., via photos or online forms), delivering resources “on foot” with a bookmobile or meal delivery; and making curbside pick-up available.

The second snapshot (15 -21 April, 2020) included school librarians’ services to educators including offering resource curation and technology tools for “virtual classroom” instruction; expanding online resources on school websites; facilitating virtual meetings, events, and professional development; providing technology support; answering intellectual freedom/fair-use questions; and co-teaching with classroom or subject expert educators. School librarians also reported supporting parents by providing curated resources for at-home non-homework activities; sharing community resources from the public library or on health and well-being; offering technology support; and expanding engagement through virtual channels. The third snapshot closes mid-May 2020.
In this Issue

Verity Attwell takes on perceptions of “controversial” materials in “In all areas, I cater to the majority”: An Investigation of LGBT+ Provision in School Libraries from the Librarian’s Perspective.” Keeping with topics relating to the collection, Jenna Spiering and Kate Lechtenberg are “Rethinking Curation in School Libraries and School Library Education: Critical, Conceptual, Collaborative” and Krystal Gagen-Spriggs wonders “Why Do Students Choose to Read for Pleasure?” Kim Becnel and Robin Moeller round out the collections-focused studies with “I’m Conflicted about My Shelf of Censorship’: High School Library Graphic Novel Collection Development in North Carolina, USA.”

Jenifer Spisak explores “School Librarian Perceptions of the Importance of Information Literacy,” while in a pair of collaboration-focused studies, Marisa McPherson plumbs “The Influence of Teacher Librarians’ Personal Attributes and Relationship with the School Community in Developing a School Library Programme” and Paulette Stewart and Mark-Jeffery Oniel Deans examine “Enablers and Barriers of Inter-Professional Collaboration with Teacher-librarians and Teachers: A Content Analysis.”

Goodluck Ifijeh, Margaret Nwakaego Ngwuchukwu, Virginia W Dike, and Promise Ifeoma Ilo share school library development history in “Involvement of Nigerian school library Associations in the Development of Primary School Libraries in South East Nigeria from 1980-2010.”

Conclusion
School librarians, dedicated to serving their communities, are optimists. For example, you may have noticed that we optimistically call SLW’s issues “January,” and “June,” though they are rarely complete during those months! This issue is no different; the intellectual generosity of school library scholars allowed us to have many more papers than usual do in a single issue. In the midst of shepherding these papers through the editorial process, I was seconded in my university faculty role to help an entire campus transition to online learning in the middle of a semester! IASL, staffed with big-heartedened and understanding people, worked with me to post completed papers one-by-one, instead of waiting for the whole issue. The organization offered me this kindness and its members this convenience while working to reschedule the annual conference and communicate high spirit and support to IASL members. In these uncertain times, count on all types of school librarians to focus on the basics of resilience, access, and information—always with the user at the center.

Author Notes
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