Developing a real sense of community

by Ashley Cummins

Director, Russellville Public Library

When discussing libraries in the community, many thoughts come to mind. How many times have you heard that “libraries are the pillars of the community”? How about “Libraries are melting pots of society and culture,” or “Libraries are by the people, for the people?” They are beautiful concepts and I’ll admit that I have heard several of these and gushed with pride at my chosen occupation.

To be quite honest, I believe it is a good representation of libraries as a whole, even considering their systemic failings. Libraries are the physical representation of your community – this much is true. However, libraries are not fail safe. At the end of the day, libraries — by and large — are managed, staffed, and run by white women. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with that; however, in terms of diversity, inclusion, equality, and equity of library resources, this statistic comes with a few caveats.

Marginalized and underserved groups in our communities deserve to feel seen, heard, and above all, safe in our libraries. Yet, how do we do our part to include and encourage our patrons/members of the community in a respectful, inclusive manner without trivializing their plight? My suggestion: Start a conversation.

These conversations are not easy, but absolutely necessary when it comes to library service. It can be intimidating, even a little scary, when attempting to find the right approach to things like policy, planning, staffing, collections, etc. What about library programs and outreach? Try posting a Google form survey on your webpage or social media to see how you can better serve your population and their needs/interests. Ask the hard questions as well. Have you felt "othered" during a library experience? Have you ever felt alienated or discriminated against during a library experience? Sadly, you may be surprised to see some of the answers.

Libraries must have adequate representation of the population that they serve. I heard a phrase recently from the disability rights movement that went something to the effect of "nothing about us without us." It’s such a simple and memorable piece of valuable information. In essence, policy should not be decided about a group of people without the participation from the group of persons that a policy will affect.
I believe the same can be said for library programming.

Sometimes in an effort to encourage others, we are blinded by our own privilege and biases (sometimes referred to as implicit bias). This can result in marginalization and micro-aggressions that we don’t truly intend or understand. We don’t want to alienate or “other” the people we are here to serve and celebrate.

Over the past two years, I found our library in a bit of a tricky situation. We knew that our Hispanic population had been steadily growing year to year. However, we were under the impression that we were meeting the needs of our community. That was far from the case… it wasn’t until the hiring of our most recent staff member that we realized just how out of touch we truly were.

She was hired and almost immediately we gained a world’s worth of information. We began to realize that people were coming in to the library and, if it was her off day, they would leave and come back the next day.

She began to offer translation services both in person (increasing reference) and in print (program flyers, social media posts, emails) resulting in a massive increase in library circulation and program participation. We also started receiving new requests for books and DVDs in Spanish. It didn’t take much to realize this was an area in which we were seriously lacking.

We decided to take what we had learned and attempt to apply it to other areas of the library. However, we struggled to find a way to do this. We were very fortunate to have several regular, enthusiastic library patrons, volunteers, and a couple of partnering organizations that felt inclined to help us better ourselves and to work toward enriched service to our community. As a result, our library formed its first multicultural planning committee. This group of eight persons has proven to be an invaluable resource in all areas of library planning.

Whether we are planning programs, implementing new policy, updating a collection, or just need a quick opinion on a potential advertising slogan - our group has been amazing and enthusiastic about the direction of the library since its implementation.

We have learned, and are still learning, to celebrate different cultures with respect. It may seem easy, but you would honestly be surprised by what you learn when you ask the tough questions. The last thing you want is to offer a library program that accidentally insults the group of people you wish to celebrate. A multicultural planning committee can help you to plan genuine displays, programs, and interactions without “tokenizing” your patrons, or just plain making it weird. They can also help you to learn to provide services, programming, and encouragement in an authentic way without appropriating their culture.

The results of a committee like this can be just as impactful on children and teens. Being respectful of their culture and not trying to “Americanize” them, allows them to respect their own heritage while trying to fit into our culture.

How can you make this happen? I’ll tell you. Don’t be afraid to reach out. Don’t be afraid to ask the hard questions. Don’t be afraid to put yourself out there. Don’t be afraid to mess up. Don’t be afraid to correct your mistakes. It may come with a learning curve, but the benefits will be exponential. I’m not recommending that you corner every multicultural patron that comes in to your library and ask them to be the “voice” of their culture. That, simply put, is just too much pressure and flat out WRONG. Why not try a simple sign up sheet on the circulation desk or on your social media pages? Many people are excited to feel included and happy to discuss their heritage. If it comes with the added benefit of better library service, you’d be surprised how enthusiastic people can be!

Libraries should strive to accurately and inclusively represent the communities they serve.

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"Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities."

—R. David Lankes

"The truth is that libraries are raucous clubhouses for free speech, controversy, and community."

—Paula Poundstone

"Libraries are our friends."

—Neil Gaiman

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January 2019
The start of the new year always brings a sense of opportunity, and this year WebJunction has a big opportunity for small libraries. An expansion to their Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces project means 15 additional libraries will collaborate with their communities to transform a space in their library to encourage more hands-on, participatory active learning.

Thanks to a generous supplemental grant from IMLS, 15 selected libraries will receive $5,000 for project materials and engage in online learning with the WebJunction team. It’s free to apply and participate. Transform cramped and underutilized spaces into vibrant, dynamic, active learning places.

Take a look at the incredible transformations from the first round of participants and how they created smart spaces in their libraries, and then learn more this new opportunity and apply soon! Applications will be accepted now through Jan. 18.
Foaming Snowman

courtesy of funathomewithkids.com

01 Gather Supplies
- Baking soda
- Salt
- Glitter (silver, white, and blue)
- Liquid dish soap
- Vinegar
- Squeeze bottle
- Black and orange foam sheets (scraps will work)
- Waterproof tray with sides

02 Build a Snowman
In a bowl, measure out two cups of baking soda, and add two tablespoons of salt. Mix thoroughly. Add one teaspoon of dish soap and mix into the dough. The dough should look crumbly. Next, add eight tablespoons of water. If dough will form a ball, you’re set, but if the dough is still dry and crumbly, add one tablespoon of water at a time until you have a dough that will form a ball. Note, the proper mixture will not feel like playdough. Its consistency is much more smooshy and crumbly. Next, cut pieces of black foam for the eyes, and a piece of orange foam for the nose. If there is enough foam, you may also make a snowman hat. Find small twigs from outside to use as arms if you wish. Finally, make and decorate your snowman.

03 Destroy the Snowman
When you are ready to send your snowman to his icy cold foam grave, just add vinegar. It creates the most foam if you add a lot of vinegar all at once, and a squeeze bottle works well at foaming the snowman. If you don’t have a squeeze bottle, you can also pour a cup of vinegar onto the snowman to make a messy, foamy snowman explosion.

Melting Snowman

courtesy of theresjustonemommy.com

01 Gather Supplies
- Biodegradable packing peanuts
- Permanent markers (black and orange)
- Small bowl and water

02 Make Them Melt
Use permanent markers to draw a snowman face on each biodegradable packing peanut. Non-biodegradable packing peanuts will not melt. Next, fill a bowl with room temperature water and place a snowman into the bowl. This is quite fun to watch, so have plenty of snowmen ready to go.

Steam Books

Change It!: Solids, Liquids, Gases and You (Primary Physical Science)
- Mason, Adrienne; 978-1553378389

Kaboom!: Wile E. Coyote Experiments with Chemical Reactions (Wile E. Coyote, Physical Science Genius)
- Weakland, Mark; 978-1515737339

Matter: Physical Science for Kids (Picture Book Science)
- Diehn, Andi; 978-1619306424

What is the World Made Of? All About Solids, Liquids, and Gases
- Zoefield, Kathleen Wadner; 978-0062381958
This DIY puff paint recipe gives a wonderful, fluffy texture. Unlike other recipes, this will actually dry puffy, so you can hang your pictures. It’s fun to paint and admire hanging on your walls.

**Gather Supplies**
- One cup white glue
- Two cups shaving cream (not gel)
- One-half cup flour
- Glitter (optional)
- Heavy construction paper
- Assorted décor as needed

**Mix**
In a bowl, mix together glue, shaving cream, and flour. Add glitter to the mixture for more sparkle.

**Paint and Decorate**
Paint mixture onto heavyweight colored construction paper. This particular snow paint recipe is perfect because it allows enough time for kids (or adults) to decorate their snowman and actually have the accessories stick. The snow paint will be dry to the touch in about 30 minutes. You can still stick additional accessories for another 30 minutes if you give the artwork a little press.

**Steamfactor**

- The foaming snowman activity is a clever and fun take on mixing baking soda and vinegar. Baking soda and vinegar react chemically because one is a base and the other is an acid. Baking soda is a basic compound called sodium bicarbonate. Vinegar is a diluted solution that contains acetic acid.
- By mixing vinegar and baking soda, hydrogen atoms in the vinegar react with sodium and bicarbonate ions in the baking soda. The result of the reaction forms carbonic acid and sodium acetate. The carbonic acid then immediately begins to decompose into water and carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide is what rises to the top and creates the bubbles and foam you see.
- Biodegradable packing peanuts (from melting snowman) are made using starch from plant material, and dissolve completely in water. You might already be somewhat familiar with the texture of these packing peanuts because many breakfast puff cereals are made in the same way. Like cereal, biodegradable packing peanuts are also edible, although you might not want to munch on them due to how they have been stored.
The Similars
written by Rebecca Hanover
Release date: Jan. 1, 2019

Darkwood Academy is a prestigious boarding school with a long history of only accepting the best of the best. Not only that, it is a shining example of progressive, forward-thinking values in which equality is treasured. But when six clones emerge into the public eye, the results of a lab technician creating clones without parental consent, and are invited to attend Darkwood, it causes a national uproar. Clones are already a hot topic issue because where do you draw the line at messing with genetics? Will parents design the children they want? What happens to genetic diversity? And if a person can be cloned...what makes anyone special?

Emma believes that clones should have rights just like everyone else—it isn’t their fault they were created. Still, it’s a shock to look up, and see her dead friend Oliver’s face on one of the new clones, Levi. How can she be ok with that? Oliver committed suicide over the summer and just living in a world without him in it has been hard enough. Now she’s tested into the 10, the elite of the elite of the school, and surviving that headache quickly becomes the least of her priorities. Her remaining best friend is attacked and taken away, the clones are hiding secrets, the administrators of Darkwood Academy have a hidden agenda, and the repercussions of what happened when her own father was attending school might end up dooming those she loves.

Upfront, I need to say that this book is a combination of my least favorite genres: high school drama paired with dark thriller. This...wasn’t the book to change my mind. Emma as a main character is all over the place and I never really learned who she was as a person. What were her interests? Life goals? Anything in depth, really? One of the downfalls of thrillers (in my opinion) is that so much attention is given to an exciting suspenseful plot that character development falls by the wayside, something The Similars definitely falls victim to. The romance? Emma is paired with her dead friend’s clone. Because why not? I would say a good reason why not would be the fact she wasn’t attracted to Oliver when he was alive, something repeatedly enforced in the book (likely so it would be ok if she ended up with his clone). Then pair that with the fact that their interactions in the book are nothing that would lead me to believe they’re heading anywhere towards a star-crossed romance. No physical, no emotional, just...blah.

But oh, surely the suspenseful plot makes up for everything else? No...no, not really. Not just because the main character did nothing to particularly make me care about her, but because everything seemed rather predictable. Ultra exclusive school has secrets, oh my! The clones who were raised on an engineered island away from humanity by a super-rich benefactor have ulterior motives! Really?!

I could keep going, but honestly there was nothing redeemable about this book to me. It was shallow, predictable, and boring. Maybe someone who actually likes the genre would be more forgiving, it wasn’t so bad I just threw it across the room and went on strike, but... there has to be better books out there in these genres? Right? Please?

Recommended for: I just can’t.
Things to watch out for: Weak characters. Predictable plots. Forced romance. (OK, OK, there was kissing, characters getting injured, the ethics of genetic engineering/ cloning, discussion of suicide, serious hazing, teens administering drugs, violence...don’t remember any swearing though. There’s that. Unless my mind’s failed me.)
January 8
Become a PowerPoint Jedi with the Force of Templates & Masters

Getting your presentation design off to the right start is essential. PowerPoint templates and masters are the underlying force that ties all your slides together, but so often they are ignored and forgotten. Having a consistent, branded PowerPoint template will ensure that all your presentations look the part from the beginning. But templates within PowerPoint can be an easy stumbling block for the uninstructed. In this masterclass, we look at how to create a PowerPoint template from scratch, teaching you how to set the template masters, the color scheme, layout options, fonts, and animation effects. Moving through the session, we’ll show you exactly how to work in PowerPoint to achieve a consistent, professional presentation template, so that you can become a true PowerPoint Jedi with unmatched skill and speed. (Training Magazine Network)

https://www.trainingmagnetwork.com/calendar

January 9
NCompass Live: Graphic Novel Collection and Programming

Learn new resources to find widely-appealing graphic novel selections for all age groups, toddler through teen. Join Russ Harper, Youth Services Specialist at Omaha Public Library, as he makes core collection recommendations, discusses top sellers, and how to find the hot new thing. Includes programming tips for both American comics and manga fans! (Nebraska Library Commission)

http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/scripts/calendar/eventlist.asp?Mode=ALL

Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries New Applicant Webinar

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has launched a new special initiative, Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries (APP), and is accepting grant applications now through Feb. 25. This pre-application webinar will be held with program staff to answer questions from potential grant applicants. (Institute of Museum and Library Services)

https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/accelerating-promising-practices-small-libraries

January 10
Design Squad Global Inventing Green: Engage Kids in Hands-on Engineering around Sustainability

This one-hour webinar will detail how to bring Design Squad Global (DSG) Clubs to your community, including the support and resources available to make it successful. Participants will learn about the new DSG club guide “Inventing Green” that gets kids thinking about engineering and environmental sustainability. The guide challenges DSG Clubs to think about how to solve environmental problems with engineering, as well as how to create new inventions using a sustainability mindset. (National Girls Collaborative Project)

https://ngcproject.org/events

Out of this World Programming

In early 2017, Estherville Public Library (Iowa) and Ericson Public Library (Iowa) were two out of 75 libraries in the nation to be awarded the NASA® My Library program grant. Through this opportunity both libraries have spent a year developing and offering exciting space programming for children, teen, and adults. Journey with Paula Spoo, Children’s Librarian at Estherville and Zachary Stier, Children’s Librarian in Boone as they highlight their programs from creation to implementation to inspire you to offer these or other space programs in your community. This webinar is a wonderful opportunity to help launch your library’s 2019 Summer Reading program. (State Library of Iowa)

https://zoom.us/j/231867085

January 12
STEAM Activities for your Classroom

Session 1: Engage Students and Enhance Learning with Innovative STEAM Activities from Google.

Session 2: Connect, Create, and Collaborate with STEAM Websites, Web Tools, and Apps.

Session 3: Integrate Coding Across All Subjects: It’s Easier than You Think. (SimpleK12)

https://www.simplek12.com/webinar/

January 15
Presenting the 2019 Morris Award Finalists

Join Booklist for this exciting Q&A with all five authors nominated for YALSA’s 2019 William C. Morris Debut Award, an honor presented annually to first-time authors writing for teens. (Booklist)


Implicit Bias in the Library Workplace

In this webinar, presenter Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran will share examples of implicit bias within the library workplace and discuss best practices for addressing and minimizing implicit bias in recruitment, hiring and retention. Attendees will have access to a reference list of articles and videos on implicit bias including ones the presenter has authored and instructions for taking a free implicit bias test. (Infopeople)

https://infopeople.org/training/view/webinar

January 17
Making the Move from Summer Reading to Summer Learning

Participants will gain an awareness of best practices in making the shift from summer reading to summer learning and examine outcomes based evaluation as a way to measure program success and communicate their programs’ impact. (Association for Library Services to Children)

http://www.ala.org/alsc/elearning/live-webinars

TWO RESOURCES, ONE GOAL: HELPING ALABAMA SUCCEED

LearningExpress Library & HomeworkAlabama

- Online tutoring for grades K-12
- College placement resources
- Help for all ages and skill levels
- Certification testing & GED preparation
- Career resources

Find both on our Resources & Research Links Page
January 23

Size Doesn’t Matter: Transforming Big Ideas into Small Library Environments

If you’ve ever heard about a fantastic library idea from a super-big library and thought, “There’s no way I can make that idea work in my understaffed, underfunded small library,” think again! This presentation celebrates all things small and shares big ideas that work in small libraries. (Programming Librarian) http://programminglibrarian.org/learn

Leadership in Youth Services, Part III: Moving Beyond Youth Services

Thinking of the next step in your career? Learn how to translate the things you do every day in your role as a Youth Services Librarian into desirable supervisory skills on your resume. Get advice from professionals in the field who have made the leap to management and hear what you should be doing right now to make yourself more marketable. (Association for Library Services to Children) http://www.ala.org/aslc/elearning/live-webinars

The Future Is Now: Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed Reality in Public Libraries

Libraries have long been at the forefront of providing community access to new technologies. Virtual, augmented, and mixed reality (VR/AR/MR) are now finding a place in library programming and services, engaging with communities in truly innovative ways. Two Maryland libraries are building their programming with straightforward approaches to community discovery and local partnerships. Join us to hear creative ideas for how to get started using VR/AR/MR at your library, as well as practical tips about applications, equipment and potential uses to meet your community’s needs. (WebJunction) https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction.html

January 24

Leading Transformational Learning Through Making

The library makerspace is emerging as a powerful vehicle for increasing library visibility and value to the student community. In this session, Michelle Luhtala, Library Department Chair, and Donna Burns, Technology Integrator, of New Canaan High School in Connecticut, will feature how reorganization and materials selection helped one learning community fully embrace “making” across disciplines and grade levels. (edWeb) https://www.edweb.net/emergingtech

National Mentoring Month: Strategies for Mentoring Girls in STEM

The National Girls Collaborative Project is celebrating National Mentoring Month by highlighting the importance of role models and mentors in empowering girls and young women to actively pursue STEM education and careers. Join us as we cover tangible takeaways for educators seeking to utilize mentors in their programming, in addition to concrete strategies mentors can use to engage girls. We will also take time to hear from participants and discuss methods for promoting the mentoring work that inspires girls to pursue STEM. (National Girls Collaborative Project) https://ngcproject.org/events

I Inherited a Mess! What Do I Do Now?

You’ve landed your dream job. Every position has its challenges, but from day one, week one, or month one, you figure out that the library has problems: collection, human resources, public relations, technology, finance, policies, circulation, programming, or that the 100-year-old building is held together with duct tape. And maybe all of the above. This session is part case study, part plan, and part cheering session. Gwin Grimes, director of the Jeff Davis County Library in Fort Davis, Texas will share her decision-making matrix and outline of how to prioritize and plan for a library makeover, large or small. (Texas State Library & Archives Commission) https://www.tsl.texas.gov/lr/workshops/webinars/index.html

January 29

Building and Maintaining a Graphic Novel and Comics Collection

Graphic Novels can be one of the most popular and highest circulating formats in your library collection, but often, staff are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the format. In this webinar, graphic novel enthusiasts and longtime collection developer, Amanda Jacobs Foust, will share the secrets of purchasing, organizing and preserving graphic novels and comics in the library for all ages. (Utah State Library) https://www.eventbrite.com/o/utsl-training-208844751

Footprint Foothold: Helping Students Manage Their Online Reputations

Sean Coffron, Ph.D. will present strategies and tools for introducing the topic of digital footprints to students and for preparing them to be thoughtful keepers of their online presences. (edWeb) https://home.edweb.net/webinars/2019-01/

January 30

Moving Diversity Forward: Using Embedded Diversity Practices to Enhance Learning Opportunities for Youth

This session will introduce participants to best practices for implementing multicultural literature into curriculums. The goal of the session is to engage participants in a meaningful, reflective discussion about the importance of diversity and inclusion as a strategic imperative for creating a sense of equality for all students. (American Association of School Librarians) http://www.ala.org/aasl/ecollab/upcoming