

School Libraries in View

Issue 49

October 2025



USING DATA FROM INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Dr Margaret Merga explores the findings of the International School Library Workforce Survey (ISLWS) and how they can inform our daily practices.

Find out what CILIP has been doing recently and what is coming next from CEO Louis Coiffait-Gunn

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A message from the Chair

by Caroline Roche



Another year has passed already, and with the days drawing in, it is time for your annual SLiV to arrive.

Louis Coiffat-Gunn, CILIP CEO, gives an inspiring overview of how CILIP has been changing over this past year, with an overview of the profession and thoughts on how CILIP will be developing in the future.

Dr Margaret Merga writes about her findings from the International School Library Workforce Survey. It is fascinating to see how many of the challenges we face here in the UK are also faced by colleagues in other countries. She says: 'While many school library professionals are doubtless suffering from advocacy fatigue, we must continue to actively and strategically draw attention to the value that school library professionals bring to their role.' Her continued advocacy for us is inspiring and invaluable. Dr Alison Hicks has been working closely with us in the important areas around book banning and censorship. We continue to work with her on other upcoming projects.

Andrew Shenton gives a really interesting perspective on writing collaborations with teachers, and the value and power of amplifying our voices in this way.

And Bryony Hart, who worked closely with SLG Secretary Carol Webb in co-delivering a webinar earlier this year, tells us about how, from a teacher's perspective, working alongside a librarian in teaching information skills works best.

Charlotte Martin-Guruge gives us a new perspective on the library as a coaching space. She tells us: 'The ability to be 'coach-like' in interactions offers people vital moments of calm reflection, awareness raising, and consideration of their lens or outlook, which can move to decisions or directions they would like to take.' Certainly something that we can consider introducing into our own workspaces.

And finally, Committee Member Anais Cayzak went to IFLA on our behalf, and came back full of enthusiasm about being bold and radical in our approach at our workplaces. She shares her insights, and enthusiasm, in her article.

Now for some exciting news – we are currently updating the Guidelines, (last updated 10 years ago) and hope to publish in the middle of next year. These are invaluable when setting up a new library, or as a how-to manual. We are also preparing several webinars, keep an eye on the Newsletter for this, or on our new and developing website. We are putting together a plethora of invaluable materials which will be accessible to CILIP members, on the SLG pages of the CILIP website. Keep an eye on our announcements – follow us on social media here.

I hope you have a successful year, and if I can be of any help, please email me on chair.slg@cilip.org.uk

Caroline Roche, MA HonFCLIP
Chair, CILIPSLG

What CILIP's done recently and will do next

by Louis Coiffait-Gunn CEO of CILIP



After 15 months since joining CILIP, it is timely to share some initial impressions, highlights from what CILIP's done in that time (including for those working in schools and colleges), and to share some plans for the future. It's also an opportunity to say a huge thank you for the warm welcome and all the support, it's such a privilege travelling around and meeting people in this life-changing sector, learning about what drives and frustrates people, and working with CILIP colleagues to keep improving the offer to members. It's still just the beginning and there are many more people to meet and things to learn, but it's exciting to think about all the ways CILIP and the profession can work together to do even more for society.

Some initial observations about the profession

As a sector, the sheer breadth of what different CILIP members do is impressive, including but going far beyond the stereotypical room or building full of books. The public benefit is huge and varied, but often hard to track, given how many different agendas are being served and how intangible the impact can be at times. Even within education I know members help deliver reading for pleasure, a range of literacies and critical thinking skills, the curriculum, saving colleagues time, and ensuring new tech is a success for students. The list could go on. It's also clearly a proud service sector, often quietly providing support to different groups of users, sometimes

without them realising it. That's particularly true of online and audio services, where members' hard work to provide access to trustworthy and engaging content isn't always obvious to users. There's also something interesting about the fact that most of the profession – including all those working in schools and colleges – are embedded within wider institutions. What is clear is that many people really do love libraries and librarians, just look at all the celebrities – especially among the author community – who come out in vocal support. Further evidence includes the generous bequests granted to CILIP by some members in their wills recently, what an amazing way to help support the next generation entering the profession. By one measure, CILIP will be 150 years old in 2027, and it's important to honour that heritage even while modernising to help each and every member thrive through today's challenges.

There is also a powerful network of skilled and ethical professionals, woven in different ways across our communities, but currently appearing to punch below its weight.

Perhaps partly that's about being naturally modest, and partly it's about us not having the evidence we need to make our case as firmly as possible, especially robust quantitative data. Again, these are both areas where CILIP will fight alongside its members and keep providing new tools such as the

CILIP Connect advocacy toolkit.

Some of CILIP HQ's actions for members over the past 15 months.

Casting minds all the way back to May 2024, the snap election was called and CILIP quickly developed the Trust Libraries election campaign to highlight 10 agendas the sector already delivers against, and what would help it to achieve even more. Responding to party manifestos where they mentioned libraries, writing to all 3,903 Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, and then to all 650 elected MPs, helped get the profession on politician's radar. Likewise, so did welcome letters to key appointees – including the Prime Minister, Culture Secretary, Libraries Minister, and Schools Minister. Another round are going out after the latest reshuffle. With thanks to all the member networks that have inputted (including School Libraries Group), every member should consider writing to their political representatives using the template letters in CILIP Connect. That month, CILIP's Copyright Conference focused on AI, with speakers covering the technology's impact on everything from black creators and the heritage sector, to academic research and licensing.

June 2024 began with CILIP Scotland's conference in Dundee, which heard about countering book bans in the USA with solid institutional processes, and the experience of curating the Women's Art Library over the decades. The Carnegie Awards on the Matilda stage in London's West End was an amazing experience and had the audience in tears at points, please do take a look at the 2-minute video. The week of advocacy just ahead of the General Election saw the Libraries Change

Lives campaign showcase **180 case studies across the country** to celebrate the impact of all types of knowledge, data, library, and information services – including many in schools and colleges. In July 2024, new analysis found that public library budgets were almost halved since 2010, explaining why so many face cuts, closures, and reduced services. CILIP wrote to Nottingham City Council and the commissioners at Birmingham City Council, with further letters and a more public campaigning approach to follow. All CILIP members are encouraged to add your own insights about proposed changes to UK public library services into the crowdsourced live Public Libraries At Risk Monitor. CILIP's 2024 annual conference included keynotes on digital improvement and “truth decay”, as well as the launch of CILIP's updated Intellectual Freedom policy. It was a great to meet so many different speakers, exhibitors and attendees from across the sector.

After the shocking incident in Southport, August last year started with violent right-wing riots in some communities, fuelled by false and malicious information. CILIP issued a statement about the fire at Spellow Hub Library in Liverpool, wrote to members in local institutions, shared media literacy resources, and promoted the inspiring community fundraiser. The response from this sector and wider society was reassuring, emphasising these were the actions of a minority. CILIP's pilot public libraries online community also demonstrated its value in helping members respond, and is something to be rolled out to other member networks in summer 2026. CILIP were in the media discussing everything from library closures and school censorship, to what the Labour government could mean for

the sector and “racist buildings” in Wales. CILIP also issued a joint letter to the schools minister.

September saw more stories about censorship, including in schools. CILIP, SLG, SLA and the Society of Authors issued a joint statement in response. A joint letter to the Justice Secretary highlighted the power of prison libraries. After meeting the new Education Select Committee Chair at a joint dinner with The Reading Agency at Labour Party Conference, CILIP followed up to highlight the issues facing school librarians. A visit to Spellow Library in Liverpool showed how the community responded after the riots, and what else CILIP could do to help. This month also saw the launch of CILIP Connect, a practical toolkit of guidance and template letters to help all members send invitations for visits and meetings to elected representatives at all levels of government. Please make use of it and share any feedback.

In October, the Libraries Change Lives By Opening Up Opportunities parliamentary reception united MPs, Lords and library leaders on the House of Commons terrace, with speeches from authors, MPs and Select Committee Chairs. A week later CILIP wrote to 19 local authorities considering changes to their library services, ahead of the Budget. The team were proud to have prompted a debate in the House of Lords about a new public libraries strategy, collaborating with partners to brief politicians and encourage them to take part. It was over-subscribed, with Peers only getting a minute each to sing libraries’ praises. It was also the first Member’s Fest, a day of online and in-person activities across the country to bring CILIP member networks together and celebrate the amazing work

volunteers across the sector do. On Halloween CILIP attended a joint roundtable with the libraries minister and were asked to contribute to a proposed plan for the sector, which was submitted at New Year. There was also a fantastic second Green Libraries Week and Conference.

November saw CILIP write to the Communities Secretary and respond to new data showing fewer children reading for pleasure. November also saw the return of Rewired, CILIP’s conference focused on the latest digital innovations relevant to the sector.

In December, CILIP inputted to two joint responses to the Curriculum & Assessment Review, one highlighting the power and potential of school libraries and librarians, the other focused more on information literacy. The ongoing debate about ethical AI also prompted CILIP to join the CILIP joins Creative Rights in AI Coalition (CRAIC), advocating for greater transparency and respect for UK laws. December also saw the start of a campaign over several months with politicians in both houses, generating key questions for the government, including about school libraries.

January 2025 started the elections for IFLA vacancies, with CILIP nominating many members, including some who were successfully elected to the school libraries section. A joint briefing for libraries was submitted to Sir Chris Bryant MP, highlighting how libraries can support the government’s missions. CILIP and several members also contributed to an article on raising funds for school libraries.

February marked four years of CILIP supporting apprenticeships in the sector, as well as another batch of titles from Facet Publishing – this time all focused

on AI. Actions by the US administration to modify and delete data prompted a statement and survey. CILIP also responded to the government consultation on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence.

March saw another fantastic Facet titled published, this time on EDI. And the questions in Parliament about school libraries continued to be answered by the government.

April launched the consultation to help develop CILIP's new 2026-30 strategy, with lots of 1:1 conversations, and over 20 member and non-member meetings, including with SLG and two public town halls. The public survey also generated lots of valuable feedback and ideas. CILIP also worked with SLG and others to respond to the Ofsted inspection consultation.

May saw another debate in Parliament about libraries, this time in the House of Commons. And another roundtable with the – newly appointed – libraries minister. An updated joint plan for the sector was submitted, though no response has come back yet. CILIP also started a new £1.2m Green Library Hubs project, powering climate action across local communities.

June saw CILIP respond to the Spending Review and contribute to a joint letter to Professor Becky Francis who's leading the Curriculum & Assessment Review. There was also another fantastic Carnegie Awards, please do watch the summary video and consider taking part next year. The second new June Libraries Week again focused on Libraries Change Lives, with a particular focus on economic growth.

Annual Conference in July saw a new poem for the profession launched, and censorship raise its head again, this time

in Kent. It was also the launch of the new Super Searchers programme with Google, delivering information literacy training to school and public librarians. And it marked the launch of the National Year of Reading, which should be an opportunity to amplify and support the vital work of librarians. CILIP also helped shape then signed an open letter on AI literacy.

August saw CILIP launch the results of a new survey on AI use across the profession, with Dr Andrew Cox. Dr David McMenemy was confirmed as inaugural Chair of CILIP's new Intellectual Freedom Committee. A new project on AI in schools was also published this month.

What CILIP plans to do next for members

As the government continues to develop and start to implement its policy proposals, CILIP will be keeping a close eye on opportunities and risks relevant to different groups of members, including those working in education. This includes more welcome letters, meeting requests and speaking invites as more key (re)appointments are made. This sector knows all about delivering across departmental silos, the challenge will be getting recognition and funding for it. CILIP is keen to work with member communities and partners to make a persuasive case for a bigger funding pie, rather than argue over slices.

Given this is such a wonderfully broad and varied profession, CILIP aims to make a positive difference on the key priorities of each group of members. However, the only way it can be effective across such a range of issues is by prioritising and by harnessing the expertise of members. So speak to SLG about the policy priorities and other actions the education sector

wants to see, the Committee there escalate issues regularly to HQ which in turn flags issues for attention. The results of the Curriculum & Assessment Review are expected soon and the National Year of Reading should be an opportunity to grow the visible impact of members working in the education system. CILIP continues to campaign for better support, data and attention for school and college librarians.

There are also some fantastic CILIP and member network events coming up, get involved wherever possible, with the AGM on 14 October, Green Libraries Week later that month, and Members' Fest in Spring particular highlights.

And after all that, well then things get really exciting. After months of consulting members and non-members, CILIP will be launching then implementing its 2026-2030 strategy, focused on empowering impact of members across the sector, providing new more-modern tools and services. The next sixteen months are going to be even busier than the last, there's so much more to do together.

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'Creating a School Library with Impact: A Beginners Guide is an introductory manual for anyone entering or looking to enter the exciting world of school librarianship in primary or secondary school settings. It provides readers with everything they need to know and understand from day one from author visits, social media, reading schemes, information literacy, evaluating your library, the physical layout of your room and much more, providing an invaluable guide to those first few years in the role.'

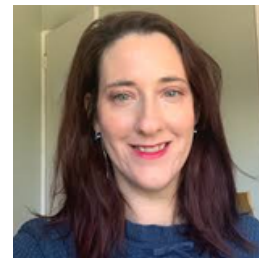
CILIP
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

CILIP members receive 35% discount on all Facet titles



Findings you can use from the International School Library Workforce Survey (ISLWS)

by Dr Margaret K Merga



Why the ISLWS?

Throughout the world, passionate and creative school library professionals dedicate significant time and energy advocating for their profession so that they can get the support and resources that they need to support student learning, engagement and wellbeing. However, there is a lack of large-scale international research conducted with methodological rigour and human research ethics approval that can support these advocacy efforts, uncovering the challenges that school library professionals are facing with a view to mitigating them where possible.

While school library professionals have long featured in my research agenda, in 2018 I began to focus more intensively on their contribution to the school environment on the Copyright Agency funded Teacher Librarians as Australian Literature Advocates in Schools (TLALAS) project. The TLALAS uncovered numerous issues and barriers influencing school library professionals' capacity to support literacy and literature learning¹, also capturing issues impacting on their sense of being professionally valued², using a small local sample for this exploratory research.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. I found myself increasingly contracted to deliver invited speaking,

workshops and consultancies, and working with school library professionals gave me firsthand knowledge of their concerns and research and advocacy needs.

To be responsive to these, I broadened my research focus to pin down the specifics of school library professional roles in Australia³, the UK⁴ and the USA⁵ through job description analysis, as well as many other projects that focussed on:

- school libraries fostering reading cultures⁶, wellbeing⁷ and information literacy skills⁸,
 - the role of the library within school-level literacy policies and plans in Australia and the UK⁹, and
 - how school libraries can effectively advocate for writer visits in schools¹⁰
- . I began to get feedback that the research was starting to be useful at school level (e.g., in workload discussions with school leadership) but also at broader levels where it was being used to lobby politicians and other policymakers.

[1] Merga 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020a; 2020b; Merga & Mason 2019.

[2] Merga 2019d

[3] Merga 2020c

[4] Merga 2021a

[5] Merga & Ferguson 2021

[6] Merga 2023a

[8] E.g., Merga 2022a

[9] E.g., Merga 2023b

[10] E.g., Merga 2022b

Despite this progress, I remained frustrated by the lack of peer and ethics-committee reviewed current and international evidence to enhance understanding of:

- why school library professionals are absolutely crucial in contemporary schools, and
- the challenges faced by these professionals across contexts

While other kinds of evidence can contain rich and compelling insights, we need the highest quality evidence to sway fixed mindsets on school libraries and the experts within them.

What was the ISLWS?

In 2024 I won a competitive internal grant at the University of Notre Dame Australia to conduct the ISLWS, a survey of school library professionals across international contexts which sought to capture both shared and contextually unique challenges to the school library workforce and library-based learning and wellbeing affordances, supporting the real-world advocacy and best-practice needs of school library professionals. I wanted this cross-disciplinary project (education and library/information science) to trigger further in-depth investigation of priority areas identified.

Dr Saiyidi Mat Roni was an absolutely invaluable contributor supporting the survey validation and analysis, and he co-authored most of the research outputs from this study.

Thanks to the generosity of school library professionals worldwide, we achieved a wonderful sample, with data from 971 respondents across 63 countries.

We need to thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey and for sharing the survey; without you this work would not have been possible. I also need to acknowledge the special group of international school library professionals who helped me with the validation and cognitive piloting stages under conditions of anonymity.

What did we find?

ISLWS findings have been published across four articles in international peer reviewed journals, and I have also presented these findings at numerous national and international invited speaking engagements.

All of these journal articles are open access which means that you can read them for free. My summary of findings here is very brief to avoid duplication, and designed as an entry point for further reading if you are so inclined; I encourage you to read the original articles as the detailed and compelling descriptions generously provided by the school library professionals can be found in these original sources. Here I've focussed on key take-away messages most practically useful for the school library community.

From a personal perspective, analysing these data was sometimes really confronting. While I had my researcher hat on, I'm also a human being, and while the data certainly were not uniformly bleak, more than once I cried over accounts of exhaustion and frustration as committed advocates that managed to make gains under one set of school leadership immediately lost them when leadership inevitably changed; as some of you became increasingly fearful about

your profession being targeted in some geographic contexts; and, as some of you were simply worn out through being continually misunderstood and under-resourced. I want all respondents to know that even if their comments were not published in final articles, they were carefully and closely read and interwoven into the overarching qualitative findings. Your words made a difference to the shape of this research.

So what did we find?

Building on my earlier local investigation of school library professionals' sense of being valued¹¹, "respondents were more likely to disagree than agree" that school library professionals "were typically valued in their country"¹², with many respondents feeling that their role was poorly understood by colleagues outside the library. Perhaps the most concerning finding was that over two thirds of respondents agreed that retired school library professionals "were often replaced by less qualified staff in their country, indicating an alarming level of deprofessionalisation"¹². The rich and detailed descriptions of the challenges faced by school library professionals made for sometimes very concerning reading, and I provide many of these accounts in the original source.

We also found that school library professionals often faced serious barriers to fostering student reading engagement within schools, despite the associated literacy benefits. Younger students usually had greater access to the library than older students, with the value of reading aloud and reading for pleasure often poorly understood, and "student choice

may be constrained by low resourcing, censorship and book levelling"¹³.

Many school libraries are being underutilised to foster student digital information literacy even though many school library professionals hold significant expertise in this area¹⁴. Developing digital information literacy was not perceived to be a priority in many schools and countries, with room for improvement in these skills to prepare students to deal with the growing challenges of reliably identifying credible content and expertise online¹⁵.

ISLWS findings indicate that while the library is considered to be a safe space in the vast majority of schools, "in more than a quarter of the schools (28.1%), school libraries were the only designated safe space"¹⁶, bringing into question the impact on students where these spaces are inaccessible, under-resourced or even closed for good.

Where to from here?

While school library professionals are thriving in some contexts, in others they are barely professionally surviving. The ISLWP captured this precarity across contexts, showing sometimes unexpected commonalities that persisted in vastly different sociocultural regions. At the very least, we need to use the ISLWP to motivate a cohesive strategic response to current workforce challenges, perhaps

[11] Merga 2019d

[12] Merga & Mat Roni 2025a, p. 10.

[13] Merga & Mat Roni 2025b, p. 17

[14] Merga & Mat Roni 2025c.

[15] Oddone & Merga, 2025.

[16] Merga 2025b, p. 5

using some of the steps we outline in the first paper published from this study¹² While many school library professionals are doubtlessly suffering from advocacy fatigue, nonetheless perhaps fuelled by recent research in this space, we must continue to actively and strategically draw attention to the value that school library professionals bring to their role, aligning what they offer for the achievement of contextual priorities and goals.

In many contexts that do not currently have mandated requirement for school libraries and school library professionals, this is the goal that we are chasing, and we need a continued research to re-energise and support this. To this end, one of my goals in recent times has been to support school library professionals to enter the research space and conduct high-quality research, ideally through a thesis by publication (TBP). Not to be confused with a thesis by prior publication, a TBP “incorporates research outputs such as journal articles from research conducted during doctoral candidature”¹⁷ (my emphasis). Through TBP, the knowledge and evidence gained through the research goes through the rigour of peer review and ethics approvals, and gets out into the world as fast as possible. If just a few school library professionals could undertake a TBP, this would greatly add to the currency and quality of the available research that can be used for advocacy purposes, and my new book¹⁸ is a practical guide on how this can be achieved based on my extensive research in TBP.

[17] Merga et al., 2020, p. 1245

[18] Merga in press.

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“It’s in my professional conscience all the time”: School library workers, book banning and censorship

By Dr Alison Hicks



ABC Pride (Stowell, 2022), Giraffes Can't Dance (Andreae, 2014), and Billy's Bravery (Percival, 2023): while this list is not yet as long as the American Library Association's record of banned and challenged books, these are all titles that have been disputed in UK school libraries in recent years. Forming the topic of primary school lesson plans and YouTube read alouds, the aforementioned books have received awards from the School Library Association as well as featuring as a World Book Day pick. Yet, these censorship attempts will come as no surprise to anyone who has been tracking recent conversations in the UK, with two recent surveys indicating that between 37% (Turner, 2024) and 53% (Dancey-Downs, 2024) of UK school library workers have faced challenges to library materials in recent years. The magnitude of these statistics, coupled with the viciousness of the accusations that have been levelled at titles that are otherwise celebrated for their inclusive and anti-bullying messages, make for tough reading. At the same time, this data may also obscure the impact of attacks on school library workers, including their professional work and agency. This study centres the voices of these workers to offer insights into how the risks of book banning and censorship are playing out in the UK and to make recommendations for the development of a responsive library and information sector.

Interest in this topic arose from growing concern about the implications of the ongoing 'anti-woke culture war' for cultural heritage workers. As the National Trust was censured for its attempts to reconcile the UK's historical legacy, questions arose about how other sectors, including school and public libraries, were managing the challenges that the growing abnormalisation of anti-racism, anti-sexism and pro-LGBTQ+ rights (Cammaerts, 2022) was bringing, including related to shifts in professional roles and responsibilities. To this end, a call for participants in a study about book banning and censorship within school and public libraries was put out in Summer 2024. As the interviews proceeded, it was surprising to note that challenges to materials seemed to be routine within the public library sector; attempts were often one-off and focused on a broad range of issues. In contrast, interviews with school library workers detailed a spike in incidents in recent years as well as an almost unanimous focus on LGBTQ+ topics. While this is a small study that is not generalisable, these differences underscored the importance of examining what was happening within UK school libraries. The newness of the situation, as well as the corresponding lack of literature from outside the US context meant that this study would also contribute to improving support for future incidents.

Methods

Ten school library workers answered the call for participation that was put out on UK school library worker mailing lists. To be included in the study, participants needed to be working in a school library, regardless of professional status, and to have had experience of challenges to library materials, whether large or small. These ten participants were predominantly located in large urban settings but represented a range of geographic regions in the UK. They worked in primary (age 5-11), secondary (age 11-18) and all through (3-18) schools that were either single sex or co-

educational, in both the independent (private) and state sector (See Table 1).

Participants were interviewed about their experiences of book-ban challenges, including how they responded to any attempts to censor materials and what had helped or had formed a barrier to these efforts. These interviews, which were held online using end-to-end encrypted video conferencing tools, were also audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted for between 34 and 56 minutes for an average of 41 minutes and the study was approved by the UCL Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Committee.

Participant	School Type	Location
S1	Mixed, State	London
S2	Single Sex, Independent	Scotland
S3	Single Sex, State	London
S4	Mixed, Independent	London
S5	Independent	Scotland
S6	Mixed, State	East of England
S7	Mixed, State	London
S8	Mixed, State	South of England
S9	Mixed, State	London
S10	Mixed, Independent	North of England

Table 1: Research participants

A constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014) was used to analyse interview transcripts, in which analysis starts from each individual participant's activities and context rather than from a fixed set of themes. Data were initially coded by hand using an open coding process before moving onto a more focused round of coding and categorisation. The study limitations included difficulties finding participants outside of large urban settings. It was also harder to find male participants although this is perhaps not surprising given that the library sector is 75% female (CILIP, 2023a).

Findings

The study's small number of participants means that it is impossible to make definitive or generalisable claims, which are best served by survey-based research designs (e.g., Dancey-Downs, 2024; Turner, 2024). However, various themes emerged from participant interviews, including related to the nature of challenges, the need for support, negotiating pushback, and workload implications.

Nature of challenges

Almost every participant referenced questions of gender and sexuality as the motivation behind school library book challenge incidents. If the Heartstopper (Oseman, 2016) series hadn't already have been well known, these titles, which were mentioned by most secondary school participants, would have become rapidly very familiar but other challenges felt far less expected, including allegations of coded narratives in popular picture books such as *Giraffes Can't Dance* (Andreae, 2014). At the same time, challenges also often felt illogical, with several

participants mentioning other titles that they thought could have more readily formed the subject of disputes. Beyond the LGBTQ+ focus, most concerns seemed to be raised at educational transition points, including at entry into Reception/P1, with the move into primary school, and in Year 7/S1, when children were moving into secondary or high school. However, while challenges were often unexpected, they were not always completely isolated, with participants highlighting that the student or parent/carer in question was often already known to the school for various reasons. It also became apparent that an otherwise LGBTQ+ friendly atmosphere did not always preclude attacks with one participant expressing shock at receiving a book challenge due to openly gay staff members and the emphasis that their school places on Pride celebrations.

Another surprising finding relates to the role that children or young people play in instigating challenges to library materials and activities. While this was not widespread, a handful of participants referenced how pupils contributed to the creation of a hostile school library atmosphere, including by hiding certain books under bookshelves, throwing them behind sofas and turning over books on display. Others noted more serious incidents of vandalism, including how pages of certain books were ripped or annotated with racial or homophobic slurs. While these incidents were frequently playing out against a recognised culture of homophobia within the school, book challenges are clearly not just limited to parental and organised group involvement. Notwithstanding, it also became apparent how much children and young people need access to the

opportunities and possibilities that libraries and diverse books provide, with participants referencing numerous moments when pupils (often inadvertently) shared tender details of their emerging emotions and feelings with them. The creation of these safe spaces also helped to alert school library workers to other forms of risks as pupils shared how their bypassing of parental and school technology controls pushed their reading activities into unregulated online spaces.

Support is key

Ascertaining and shoring up support formed one of the primary ways in which participants responded to book ban challenges. Within their local context, participants approached senior leadership teams for information and guidance, particularly when the complaint was received at a school level, while others contacted line managers and EDI leads for assistance about how to deal with an issue. Participants also indicated that they often sought emotional support from library and other staff colleagues, too. Participants further contacted professional groups for advice, including trade unions, the School Library Association (SLA) and CILIP's School Library Group (SLG), particularly in hostile situations. While guidance from these groups was often perceived as patchy, this is likely to be linked to the newness of the challenges at the time. At the same time, school library workers also used these interactions as a bellwether to gauge what backing they might have for their professional values and actions. This need to re-establish trust was particularly important given how professionally isolated many participants felt within their

schools, with one participant speaking, chillingly, of finding book banning propaganda that could only have come from a fellow staff member or pupil left on their desk. Mistrust was further exacerbated when schools urged secrecy, which left one participant anxious that they might be suddenly attacked when they walked past parents in the playground.

Negotiating pushback

After the initial drive for support, participants started to pushback against the unfolding situation. Participants who had a collections or formal complaints policy in place at the time of the challenge generally found it a useful way to mediate communication with the complainant. While each policy looked different, one participant found that asking the headteacher and complainant to re-read the book before meeting proved to be particularly effective. For school library workers who worked in less supportive schools, however, concern was raised that the introduction of a collections policy might invite problematic closer scrutiny of the collection by the senior leadership team. Participants additionally addressed challenges by purposefully upping LGBTQ+ activities, including by inviting members of the school leadership team (and pupil leaders) to have their photo taken at events designed to foster inclusion as well as hanging Pride flags and posters in their library. Being alert to other supportive community gestures also proved to be helpful for participants, who spoke of the comfort they received from encouraging letters of support from sixth formers and seeing a Black parent picking up and nodding at a book that was clearly marketed to Black girls. It also helped

school library workers to reflect on the structural problems that lay behind many book ban challenges, such as how school library workers were being targeted because ‘tech giants’ were too big to come after. There were also reflections on how challenges may be linked to questions of gender, given librarianship’s highly feminised workforce (CILIP, 2023).

Workload implications

While these actions provided a useful way of addressing broader concerns, this regenerative work did not come without a toll on school library workers in the shape of the additional physical and emotional labour that they faced. Participants frequently had to expend considerable energy to establish the nature of the challenge, including through being proactive about asking senior leadership teams for details of the challenge, setting up meetings with key stakeholders, and repeatedly pushing for written forms of guidance. It also took considerable labour to keep up to date with national developments, which typically happened through monitoring social media and listservs. To this additional work must be added the emotional labour of managing and preparing for complaints, with threads of fear and anxiety running throughout participant responses. Beyond apprehension about what a complaint might mean for them and their future career, participants further talked of the pressure of being under suspicion, knowing that parents and headteachers were checking up on their actions, as well as the mental energy that it took to think through the consequences of every decision that they took. Concern that the next book that they put out could be the one that precipitated further

consequences illustrates how these school library workers were also being forced to invoke considerable courage on an everyday basis.

Recommendations

Findings from this study illustrate that book ban challenges are complex. The following recommendations aim to support the development of a responsive library and information sector.

Professional Associations

Since the initial book ban challenges, professional associations have strengthened their responses to censorship attempts, including by organising training for school library workers as well as publishing statements on intellectual freedom (e.g. CILIP, 2024). However, given that findings from this study indicate that professional associations often form one of the first contact points for school library workers facing a book ban challenge, it is important to continue exploring how this work can be extended. On a strategic level, findings demonstrate the need to integrate campaigning against attacks on intellectual freedom with broader school library advocacy efforts. While the spike in book bans is new, evidence that school library workers who enjoyed positive working relationships with senior management teams had a far better experience than those who didn’t indicates that anti-censorship work is intricately entwined with the perceived value of school libraries. On a practical level, the amount of time that participants reported searching for guidance and support indicate that a one-stop helpline, similar to the ALA’s (n.d.) tool for reporting attempts at censorship, could

be helpful for future incidents, as could a step-by-step guide to actions that school library workers should take when facing a complaint, similar to CILIP's (2023b) manual to managing safe and inclusive public library services. A reporting tool that tracks numbers and types of censorship attempts, which was also recommended by Leggatt (2024), could also help to combat the silencing and shaming that both Leggatt (2024) and Dancey-Downs (2024) note as characterising many incidents.

Care should also be taken to address the emotional impact that book ban challenges have on school library workers. The workplace hostility that many participants noted indicates that trade unions should be encouraged to be involved within disputes particularly when an attack leads to harassment and other harmful working conditions. When organisations do get involved, they should avoid taking recourse in fear messaging, which can perpetuate anxiety and create unhelpful coping mechanisms rather than changing the behaviour of the "complacent" (Dodsworth et al., 2024). It is also important that professional organisations recognise how censorship incidents create opportunities for trauma. While experiencing a book ban challenge is stressful, research demonstrates that oftentimes, it is the lack of workplace support that is more damaging, including where people are "made to feel forgotten, neglected... or where they were frustrated by the lack of communication and understanding" (Comito & Zabriskie, 2022, p.14). Organised collective care practices, such as those recommended by the 2022 Urban Library Trauma report, could help to break the library trauma cycle, in which stressors can lead to an internalisation of

negative events and experiences and, eventually, burnout (Comito & Zabriskie, 2022, p.29).

School library workers

Beyond professional associations, there are several concrete actions that school library workers could take to both prepare for and protect themselves against book ban challenges. Given that censorship attempts are typically unexpected, one helpful action may be to become familiar with CILIP's (2023) recommendations for managing safe and inclusive public library services. While some of the principles do not immediately translate to a school library setting, public librarians have found Principle 9, which is to "make (and document) evidence-based decisions" (p.16), to be a particularly useful piece of advice. While noting trends in smaller incidents as well as evidencing professional reasoning might seem like a small change, it nonetheless helped them to feel more in control over potential censorship attempts. Another tactic comes from the National Trust, which has adopted what they term as the "broken windows approach" (Prieto et al., 2016) to deal with challenges to their professional expertise (Quinn, 2024). Borrowing from criminological research that advocates addressing small or low-level incidents before they can escalate, this approach has led to a deliberate policy of seeking corrections about fabricated or erroneous media stories, as well as being open and direct about actions that they are taking (Quinn, 2024). While the National Trust's tactics are not scalable to individual school libraries, they illustrate the value that this organisation finds in taking immediate action against purposeful misrepresentation.

There are also several smaller actions that school library workers could take going forward. One possibility relates to the interesting finding that most challenges seem to take place at transitional school entry points when parents and carers are, perhaps, struggling to deal with the greater autonomy afforded to their child. Along these lines, it could be worth exploring the possibility of including the library within any events that the school organises to scaffold parental transitions. Another future-oriented action relates to the need to become aware of and to ask about the privacy affordances of library software, particularly if a library is thinking of changing or updating tools. One participant spoke of how their ILS allows for anonymous checkout, while others were very aware of how their check out systems might become less effective in the face of crackdowns on reading. Another recommendation is to be very careful about giveaways of LGBTQ+ books on social media when using a professional or traceable social media account. While these offers are often genuine, participants spoke of how anti-trans activists would use social media replies to troll school libraries. Instead, social media's private messaging features would be a safer way to access new materials.

Library and Information Studies

LIS also has a vital role to play in supporting school library workers. If any MA curricula do not already include a focus on recent censorship attempts this should be an immediate priority. Management modules could focus on what standards for healthy library work environments might look like, including support for staff trauma (Comito & Zabriskie, 2022, p.51); collections modules

should obviously focus on policies and procedures for collection decisions, while people-focused modules should centre dealing with challenges, including related to communication with stakeholders. Limitations in school responses suggests LIS programmes could also explore opportunities for collaboration with local Faculties or Departments of Education, including through educating future teaching professionals and educational leaders about the needs and values of school library workers. Just as with professional associations, LIS programmes should also consider this work in relation to ongoing efforts to expand and broaden access to MA level education, with several participants indicating that library workers who had not had the opportunity to complete an MA course (or even professional development opportunities) being more likely to advocate for self-censorship. Along these lines, LIS programmes have a duty to continue pushing for educational programming that is both accessible and affordable for all school library workers.

What is next for school libraries and censorship?

This research has presented findings from a recent study into the experiences of UK school library workers who have faced book-ban challenges. While the study is small, it raises important themes related to the implications for school library roles and responsibilities as well as the impact that challenges such as these have on the school library workforce. This work is understandably both alarming and unprecedented. However, CILIP's (2023) advice for public librarians who are in a similar situation is: "don't be scared but do be prepared." By working together,

professional associations, school library workers and LIS can continue to stand up for professional values and the workforce to create the school library service that all young people need and deserve.

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Librarian/Teacher writing collaborations: Some thoughts

by Andrew K Shenton



Introduction

Much is often made of the importance of school librarians operating in concert with others. As Barrett and Douglas point out, the school library “sits at the heart of a network of partnerships”.¹ In many contexts, the benefits of collaboration between the librarian and teachers, especially, are obvious. For example, it may be only through discussion with staff like Heads of Department that a school librarian can be confident that items they are considering for purchase will attract sufficient use to justify their cost. Initiatives to promote World Book Day are best realised if the English staff and library personnel coordinate their efforts. Comparable levels of liaison may be necessary if the potential of other subject-oriented occasions, such as Pi Day and World Science Day, is to be exploited to the full. Work by library staff to develop information literacy is usually most effective when it is framed within the demands of the school curriculum and youngsters understand the contribution it can make in helping them achieve academically but for this to be possible librarians need to work with subject teachers. There is one area, however, where the advantages of collaboration between librarians and teachers frequently go unacknowledged – that of writing for publication in professional periodicals. It is this which forms the subject of my article and an activity that is of crucial importance in creating new information, disseminating good practice,

highlighting personal discoveries that may be more widely useful and stimulating the ideas of fellow librarians.

Attractions

The biggest problem faced by any lone writer is that their work will be limited by the restrictions associated with the knowledge, skills and experience of a solitary individual, even if they have made a determined attempt to read extensively and consult with others, both within their own organisation and further afield. Ultimately, the interpretations formed and conclusions reached are theirs and theirs alone. Librarians who find themselves relatively isolated in their own schools may suffer from a particular insularity in their thinking. Russell notes the separation that results from the hierarchical and siloed nature of law firms² – features that are also characteristic of schools. Here, silos may be departmental collections of resources that are administered autonomously – and perhaps even idiosyncratically – by subject teachers and without any oversight from the librarian, whilst the existence of a range of levels in the organisational structure may impose various status-related barriers. If the librarian works in a unique post within their school, this can lead to a further narrowness in their outlook. Where an article is the work of two or more authors, clearly the writers can draw from a broader

base than if they were operating separately. A teacher will provide a different perspective from a librarian. Not only can they offer another angle on any relevant teaching and learning dimension; they may contribute pertinent material relating to their own subject and interests. When writing alone, it is all too easy to allow one's biases to go unchecked – a co-author can alert the individual to them and challenge their thinking. In this respect, a collaborator may assume a role similar to that of a peer debriefer in a qualitative research project.³ Sometimes, the mere act of articulating the proposed content of a piece to someone else enables a reflective speaker to detect flaws in their material.

In the academic world, there is a tendency to associate co-authored papers with high quality outcomes,⁴ and although the situation with regard to professional periodicals is not entirely comparable, the credibility of an article will be bolstered if the name of an experienced teacher is seen alongside that of the librarian. This is most important if the decision has been made to target an education magazine. The teacher may also be well placed to suggest where the work should be submitted and will draw appropriately on their own experience and knowledge of close colleagues as to what teachers read. In addition, the teacher may be better equipped than the librarian to suggest strategies that can be used to gain – and then retain – the interest of readers, and connect the issues raised in the piece with matters of current concern to educational practitioners, using suitable language, terms and buzz words.

Problems

The success of any writing collaboration is dependent on those involved sharing a

degree of common understanding of certain fundamentals, e.g. the nature of the subject under scrutiny, the aims of the piece, what should be covered and the treatment that will be applied. Whilst some difference in opinion can prove productive and lead to greater open-mindedness on the part of the writers, if their views are diametrically opposed, conflict or stalemate would seem inevitable. It may be helpful if informal ground rules for working are established from the outset. So as to ensure consistency of style, there are benefits in one person taking responsibility for writing the piece and the collaborator largely restricting their involvement to contributing pertinent insight. Where, however, one individual's input is limited to offering, say, source literature, the relationship may be more one of cooperation than genuine collaboration, which – in its purest form – emphasises frequent communication and the sharing of roles, resources and knowledge in order to achieve a common goal, with the participants working together so seamlessly that they effectively form components within a single system.⁵

If the librarian is collaborating with a colleague who outranks them, the superior may implicitly expect the right to censor the subordinate's material. This can give rise to tension if the librarian wants to write a balanced and objective account, and their colleague resists the inclusion of any text that might present their school in less than glowing terms. The superior may also assume that their seniority will automatically endow them with lead author status, even if it is their collaborator who has undertaken much of the writing. Given that divisions between teachers on one hand and support staff

(including school librarians) on the other have long been documented,⁶ such problems can scarcely be unexpected. Questions pertaining to attribution can arise again if one author has devised and delivered a project that forms the subject of the piece but the colleague has done most of the writing work.

Disputes are usually avoided if a sound and longstanding relationship already exists between the collaborators. This may be built on mutual respect, personal affection or shared/similar interests. For example, I myself was recently able to develop an effective collaboration that exploited my own enthusiasm for stimulating student reflection within information literacy and a teaching colleague's commitment to meta-cognition in the classroom.⁷ Where collaborators are chosen with care or the partnership seems to occur naturally, the results can be fruitful and rewarding.

Conclusions

Many benefits result from librarians writing articles for publication with teacher colleagues. Two heads are indeed often better than one, and where each party can bring to the endeavour complementary experience, insights and skills, the final work is likely to be of a higher standard than either author could achieve if operating alone, especially if an equitable working relationship can be established in the early stages of the project and then maintained throughout its duration. These positives also arise in situations far beyond writing, of course. There are pitfalls, however, particularly when the two parties have incompatible expectations, and if an unequal power relationship leads to differences that cannot be amicably resolved the true potential of the collaborative process may

go unrealised.

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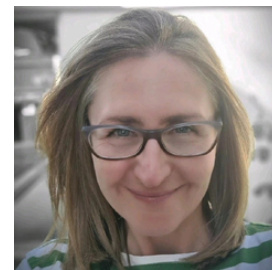
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Teaching Skills for Librarians: A Teacher's View

Librarians Leading Learning: Supporting the Curriculum in your School

by Bryony Hart



Following on from the 'Teaching Skills for Librarians' webinar in January 2025, co-presented with Dr Carol Webb, this article outlines areas that Librarians can follow to help ensure productive learning experiences led by librarians. This approach has been carefully created in collaboration by an experienced English teacher and Head Librarian who have worked closely together for the past 9 years in the same independent school setting.

Liminal Librarians

School librarians hold a unique position. They are the keepers of print, digital media, and information, playing an essential role in supporting pupils with their learning journeys and teachers with the delivery of the curriculum. As Barbara Band MCLIP outlines, 'libraries provide a safe and welcoming environment, fulfilling a pastoral role that supports students' mental health and wellbeing, where they can just "be" without having to worry about grades or exams, and where they can recharge before re-entering the busyness of a school day.'¹ Yet, with the increasing demands within every school in the UK, Margaret Merga argues that librarians also hold a dynamic teaching position, where 'they collaborate with staff to enhance student learning across diverse learning areas.'²

A liminal space therefore emerges when school librarians are requested to identify learning needs across the curriculum,

collaborate in planning educational experiences, facilitate meaningful learning opportunities, assess pupil progress, and evaluate program effectiveness. Librarians might be confident keepers of knowledge and creators of safe spaces, but might not always feel confident or equipped as teachers when requested to lead lessons and deliver specific subject content.

The key to successful learning, whether in the traditional classroom space or a library setting, is to identify the needs of the students ahead of the lesson and be clear about the school's behaviour management policy. Librarians have often already created an environment where students feel safe and secure with a sense of belonging, and may have worked with them 1:1 to build their confidence and self-esteem as readers, learners, and researchers. It is worth remembering that a lot of the groundwork for the librarian to deliver a successful learning experience, which has its foundation in respect and belonging, has often already taken

1 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/how-a-school-library-can-have-impact/>

2 <https://www.nationaleducationsummit.com.au/nas-blog/libraries-the-heart-of-the-school>

place, and this can be beneficial to their position as a successful behaviour manager.

However, stepping into the shoes of a 'teacher' requires thorough planning and preparation, especially if the librarian has been asked to deliver a session outside of the library space. The fact that a teacher has reached out to seek librarian expertise in the first instance suggests that an emerging or established partnership exists, which is exciting on many levels. Librarians should therefore feel confident and entitled to ask for planning and preparation time with the teacher ahead of delivery. In this planning session, librarians should start with the one thing that seems to cause the most anxiety: behaviour management.

Behaviour Management

Behaviour management can and should be planned in advance. Taking time with the teacher to organise a seating plan, especially if the lesson is taking place in the library, will help the librarian to understand the class dynamics. Keep a large copy of the seating plan and pupils' preferred names, next to resources to be used on the day. Use students' names when giving instructions, asking questions, praising, and setting boundaries. One should never feel guilty for glancing at the seating plan (or, indeed, holding it in their hand throughout the session) to check a student's name; teachers do this until each name has been learned, which can take an entire half term! Using correct names fosters a sense of belonging and respect; it is a powerful tool when praising or requesting attention. For example, notice how this use of naming fosters collaboration and

respect: "Sarah's observation about infographics is really thoughtful and developed. Rehan, what might you add to these ideas from your research so far? That's a very perceptive point, Rehan. I like how you have clearly built on Sarah's initial ideas and offered your own unique perspective." Drawing on multiple names, going back to previous points made, helps to establish group identity, and demonstrates to pupils that they are learning together; it also motivates others to be 'named' in this type of feedback, especially those who may struggle to keep focused, because they can see that the librarian is praising positive behaviour.

If the librarian is planning group work within the session, they should ask that the teacher pre-group pupils based on their knowledge of academic, pastoral, and behaviour issues, rather than on the day. Class behaviour can quickly deteriorate in these situations when pupils feel socially vulnerable, and the librarian will want to ensure smooth transitions from one activity to the next, as well as demonstrating that they have authority. This is where cognitive authority comes into play. The librarian has been assigned the position of expert, an authority, by the teacher the very fact that they have been asked to deliver a session on a particular subject or skill. At the start, the teacher should formally introduce the librarian. This can be phrased like this: "We are incredibly lucky today to have a session in the library where Dr Webb, our Head Librarian, will lead you through a session on the age of information. As a respected academic and active researcher, Dr Webb is best placed to lead you today, so I will be handing over to her in just a moment. Please

remember the rules of the classroom which are the same here as they are back in our room, and I will be in the room to assist when necessary. Please be attentive to Dr Webb who is offering us her valuable time today to help with our project.” Notice the phrase “handing over”? This is where the cognitive authority ‘baton’ has been passed over in front of the pupils, who will unconsciously acknowledge the shift in leadership. Rules and boundaries have also been gently reinforced, which should help to establish a positive start to the lesson. Librarians should therefore request a formal introduction, citing the importance of cognitive authority; students do not always see librarians as teachers, so the teacher needs to signal to them that the librarian is stepping into a teaching role.

A thoroughly prepared and well-resourced lesson is often the foundation for successful behaviour management. Pupils react positively to well-structured, pacy, and clearly communicated lessons, and so librarians should ensure that they know the content, lesson plan, which they should keep to hand throughout, and timings, and have all resources ready. If working in a non-library setting, double check the technology in advance, requesting that the teacher has ready any slides or audio to avoid unnecessary disruption at the start of the session. Be ready with a back-up if technology fails on the day. Librarians should be able to leave resources in the teaching space ahead of time, which helps with feeling organised and in control.

Librarians should read the school’s behaviour management policy, which will be readily available to all staff. Creating a

personalised crib sheet on a cue card of the main rules and sanctions is an incredibly helpful method for both teachers and librarians. Librarians should then clarify their understanding of the behaviour policy and sanctions with the teacher in the planning session, and outline what they feel comfortable enforcing and delivering. The teacher has ultimate responsibility for the behaviour of the class and the librarian can make this clear by asking for them to deal with any issues that may arise, so that they can continue to deliver the lesson. It is reasonable to request the teacher to remain with the class throughout the session, only briefly stepping outside of the space if a student needs to be spoken to. Librarians should feel confident applying the basic ‘day-to-day’ behaviour management language during their session, especially regarding warnings. For instance, working through the warning system, which might be “Sonia, I am issuing you with a C1 for interrupting me when I was talking. Let’s see if you can keep on track by being respectful and listening when I am addressing the class, which I saw at the very start.” If a pupil continues to persist with poor behaviour, move to the next warning, which in this instance is a C2 and involves informing the tutor and logging the disruption to learning. At this stage, the teacher should intervene to issue and follow-up on sanctions, which will enable the librarian to continue with the session. After the event, it is worth checking that sanctions have been issued because this will frame the librarian’s interaction with the pupil. If a teacher is not as supportive as they could be, librarians should talk to them about the behaviour and how they would like to be supported in future sessions.

Planning and delivering

In the initial planning session, the librarian should ask the teacher what their desired outcome is for the students' learning and progress. They should ask to see the curriculum map to see where the session fits in the bigger picture of learning. It is likely that the librarian will be kick-starting a unit or offering a skills-based session, and these tend to be one-offs rather than regular sessions, which means time will be limited. Be realistic about what can be achieved in a single lesson. The librarian can ask the teacher the following questions to help with their planning process:

1. What would you like the students to understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson?
2. What will this look like/sound like?
3. How will the students know that they have learned something new and will they know how to apply it to future learning?

Once the aim and content of the session has been established, the following structure works well in any learning environment whether you are librarian or teacher:

1. Activate prior knowledge³ – what do the pupils know already?

This is such a powerful way to engage pupils as they arrive. In the planning stage, the librarian will have discovered the pupils' prior learning, so having a short low-stakes paper-based quiz, cloze exercise, or 'Do Now' task on the desks is a great way to make pupils feel successful and confident, and a bit competitive, even before the session has begun. This establishes high expectations from every student, creates a buffer at the start of the session to allow for any later comers, and

opens opportunity for swift knowledge checking. It also enables the librarian to say things like, "Wow! Well done, Eric! You've great understanding of the term 'referencing' - you're going to make my job really easy today!" After this short activation, misconceptions can be clarified before a new element of learning is introduced.

2. Clear objectives

Make lesson objectives short, clear, and achievable, ideally developing on the activation task. The librarian's objective slide might look like this:

Planning

Example of Learning Objective and Evidence

Aim of course: to develop students' critical reading skills

Big Question: To what extent does the age of information matter?

Objective:

1. To know how to identify the age of a book
2. To examine relevance of age to topic

Evidence:

1. Students will be able to demonstrate/articulate how to find the publication date and identify in relation to a topic, in what way age of the source matters.
2. Students will be able to discuss where they will apply this knowledge.

3. What is a Big Question?

Starting the session with a 'Big Question'⁴ serves to pique pupil interest and set the stage for learning. The question posed is not answered at this stage in the session, but returned to at the end. An effective way to conclude a session is to return to the big question, ask pupils to note down their answers on a Post-It note, and collect their responses. The librarian chooses three to read out and share. This is also a great opportunity to review with the teacher what pupils have learned. Informing students about what

3

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog/ecf-exploring-the-evidence-prior-knowledge-and-pupil-misconceptions>

4

<https://www.aidansevers.com/post/curriculum-what-is-the-best-kind-of-big-question>

they will be learning and what this will look like is a powerful way to set the intention.

Students often ask “what are we doing today?” and this outline preempts the question before it needs to be asked.

4. Modelling the task⁵

Modelling the task and the intended outcome is essential. Students need to actively see what they are being asked to do in order to successfully complete the task. A lack of modelling in teaching is like trying to recreate a recipe in a cookbook without pictures. Ensure that students can see the modelling, which may require them to get out of their seats to come to the demonstration area. Librarians could have the steps of the task outlined on the board with images whilst the modelling takes place, and this can then be left on the board for pupils to refer to (paper copies might also be required for some students, so do check any AEN requirements). At this stage, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the task ahead of them. Once underway with the task, the librarian should circulate around every group, targeting the groups that might need additional support at the start of the task.

5. Managing group work⁶

Once pupils are grouped (groups of 4-5 is optimal), the librarian can help students to establish a good group work charter, which can be a document on a flip chart or board that outlines the working agreements for the groups. This can be established ahead of the group task and is worth allowing 5 minutes to complete (keep the charter for future use with the class!). It will help to outline clear

expectations for collaboration, communication and respect within the group. It should emphasise active listening, shared responsibility, and constructive feedback. The charter should also address potential challenges like conflict resolution and ensuring all members participate, which teaches students that group work and discussion needs to be managed in order to be successful.

6. Questions and ‘Think, Pair, Share’

High-quality questioning is at the heart of all learning,⁷ which can be delivered via the Think, Pair, Share method, to help develop critical thinking skills, collaboration, and low-stakes self-assessment before committing to a final answer. This is a well-used learning strategy where students first individually consider a question, then discuss their ideas with a partner, and finally share their thoughts with the larger group. This process creates opportunities for students to get things wrong, reconsider their answers, and learn from their peers in a supportive and low-stakes environment. After group feedback, offering some time for independent reflection, which could be in the form of a written response, or completing a quiz, will allow for student reflection and consolidation.

5

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/supporting-self-knowledge-through-modelling>

6

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/collaborative-learning-approaches>

7

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-five-teacher-habits-for-a-new-school-year>

Adaptive teaching⁸

Despite sounding like one needs to be ready to change everything on the spot, adaptive teaching can be planned for in advance. In the planning stages, the librarian will have gathered information about the intended aims of the lesson, worked on the lesson format, timings, resources, and outcomes, and discussed potential AEN, EFL, and MAGT. The areas outlined below should be considered to support planning with adaptive teaching. Some of these elements may occur on the day, and librarians should be ready to respond with the support of the teacher who will be more attuned to the individual needs of their students:

- Content – range of complexity available in the task
- Resource – e.g. range of diverse materials/examples at different levels
- Process – individual, group work, interactive, use of a timer

Evaluation

After the librarian has delivered the session, it is important to ask for a feedback session with the teacher to ensure the objectives have been met. Remember that this has been a collaborative session where the teacher has been involved at all stages, so it is an opportunity for shared reflections rather than it being one-sided. It is useful to cover the following points:

1. How did the session meet the intended objectives?
2. How did the students engage with the task?
3. What could be done differently to improve the outcome?
4. How did the adaptive teaching methods support all students?

5. How will this session link to the students' next lesson? Are more resources required to help consolidate their experience today?

6. Would it be possible to see a lesson where the pupils use the knowledge or skills learned from today?

The final point is an important one. Asking to observe teachers in action is the best way to see how the library-led session has informed future learning.

Observation and training

Watching a variety of teachers, from across the curriculum, is a free and easily accessible way to develop teaching skills, as well as understand how the library can best support teaching staff and students. For those interested in developing their teaching skills even further, consider applying for the Teacher Training: Level 3 Award

in Education and Training course⁹. Another way to become a successful teaching librarian is to attend school INSET training, departmental meetings, and/or Heads of Department meetings, to really understand the curriculum and to offer the library and the librarians as an additional tool to support students' learning and development, as well as teachers' teaching.

8

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/moving-from-differentiation-to-adaptive-teaching>

9

<https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/resources/teacher-recruitment/i-want-to-work-in-fe-and-training-sector/fe-teaching-qualifications/>

The Transformative Library Space - Coaching in Schools

by Charlotte Martin-Guruge



A good Library is the lifeline of a school. I have come to view both coaching and the school Library as the beating heart of the organisation, and where these two facets intertwine, it is possible for something rather magical to take shape.

What makes coaching distinctive and powerful?

As a coach's role is to listen and ask questions, or reflect back what they hear or notice, this form of support is highly empowering for the individual. It allows them to gain awareness of their current reality, their values and uniqueness; consider options and perspectives they have on life, work, or any topic; they then have a chance to consider their direction, journey or sometimes a specific goal. The beauty of a coaching approach is that it can take as long or as little time as one likes (or has!), and it can take the form of one really well considered question which encourages awareness and growth for someone as they continue with their day, week, month, or even year.

Day to day in school life, for both staff and students, how often do we receive advice or have to follow directives? On the other hand, how often in a work context are you listened to - without judgement or ulterior motive? How does your organisation develop staff on a professional and personal level in a meaningful way? Coaching is a powerful tool for inclusion, growth and wellbeing. At its best, coaching feels like a natural conversation, which leaves you feeling

brighter and more connected (to a colleague, student, parent, and sometimes, yourself). The coach holds space for someone to find their own path and unlock their potential, rather than leading the conversation or suggesting a direction. After a great coaching conversation, a person will realise that they had all the answers within them and is able to make decisions aligned with their values, which harnesses empowerment. When multiple members of a school community (including teachers, support staff, and pupils) have some training in coaching skills it not only allows for individual development, it also creates a cohesive approach, a common language, and improves communication.

We are into our fifth year of partnership with Graydin who specialise in coaching in education, with a model of training staff in coaching skills, and developing staff as facilitators to run courses in-house. At The Portsmouth Grammar School, we have been running this model of in-house training for several years, enabling staff to become equipped with coaching skills for their personal and professional development.

The training takes the form of a rolling programme each year, which includes Graydin's Foundational and Advanced courses which run over two days each and has been enthusiastically received

by staff opting in, from all walks of school life.

As time has progressed over the four years the rolling programme has been running, training has also taken the form of shorter workshops, which could be as brief as half an hour, and packed full of useful content, or the opportunity to practise skills. A great

additional benefit of the courses is the opportunity the training provides for staff to make strong connections between a range of colleagues. Over the years, the feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive - 'It has been the best CPD I have ever had'. When staff finish the course and start to apply coaching, they have described it as 'transformational' and having 'powerful impact' on those around them.

Who better to be trained in coaching skills than Library staff?

In these calm, embracing, neutral spaces where the school community can seek sanctuary and calm, it is the perfect addition when these key staff can support others using a coaching approach. With Library staff trained in coaching skills, they become an even more powerful asset to the already strong contribution the Library makes to school life and the many members of the school community they come into contact with day to day. The ability to be 'coach-like' in interactions offers people vital moments of calm reflection, awareness raising, and consideration of their lens or outlook, which can move to decisions or directions they would like to take. Our Head Librarian Dr Carol Webb said, 'Being trained as a coach and able to offer support to not only pupils, but colleagues too, has been deeply rewarding. Coaching

is personal and colleagues are deeply appreciative of the support it gives them. When I support one colleague in this way, I feel I am also supporting every pupil and staff member with whom they work.'

One of our greatest successes beyond the delivery of courses and workshops, is the development and embedding of a one-to-one coaching programme. This has been formalised for pupils in Years 7 - 13 who can book a time (usually morning) with a coach and meet in the Library space. Whilst this is very much a student-focused initiative with them driving the agenda and speaking freely about whatever aspect of their life or their goals is critical in that moment, when we tracked the data relating to pupils in exam years, we noticed some conclusive trends. 100% of the pupils who had received coaching demonstrated improved results between mock and final exams. Many pupils came for coaching ahead of external exams as they were performing below their expected grades due to various different factors. However, after engaging with coaching, 77% of the pupils made improvement in line with, or above the cohort average gain, and 64% exceeded the cohort average gain, making notable improvements, above that of their peers. The magic part? They may have not talked to their coach once about exams, revision or studying, but the space to talk, self-actualise, gain awareness and develop their metacognition was the key to discovering their strength, achieving the right mindset, and releasing fear in order to clear the way for focusing on their studies.

Whilst data is extremely helpful, the student voice has been most meaningful to understand the personal impact on

individuals:

'Coaching really helps me relax, as it's a stress free environment, it allows me to reflect on what I've done and things I can do going forward.'

'Coaching has been an essential experience in Year 12 as it has helped me navigate my busy schedule and responsibilities that I have adopted.

It has provided me with a safe space where I can debrief about the week and collect my thoughts because I often find I am thinking of a million things at once.

I have found that after coaching, I am much calm when it comes to scheduling and can think clearly of the week ahead without getting anxious and overwhelmed. It has helped me to find good processes to think things out one at a time.'

As well as pupils, all members of staff are welcome to book one-to-one coaching sessions, and this is explicitly offered to those new to the school who are allocated a coach mentor. Heads of Year are also partnered with a coach, in recognition of the heavy cognitive and emotional load pastoral work can present. These initiatives offer development opportunities and holistic support of these colleagues, outside of appraisal systems or departmental teams, with a coach who can act as an impartial ally.

Reflecting back on our journey as a school over the last few years has been a valuable opportunity to consider how the coaching culture has grown and been implemented in our practices for staff, pupils (and in the future, parents). It has built connections between a range of members of our community, and provided leadership opportunities for pupils. There are still

many paths to tread and further journeys to explore, yet we are very proud to have received recognition from Graydin this year in the form of a Coaching School Award (more information on these can be found [here](https://www.graydin.com/awards):

<https://www.graydin.com/awards>). If you are interested in bringing Coaching to your school, the award criteria could be a useful starting point to consider the possible impact.

What options do you have?

If you are curious to consider how a coaching culture could develop your Library, we would highly recommend taking a step on this journey of discovery. Perhaps you might contact other Librarians in your networks to see who else is making use of coaching in their Library spaces and teams. A number of schools across England, and worldwide, are harnessing the benefits of coaching in a number of different ways to suit their specific circumstances and community.

Another option is to take a look at Graydin's website where you will find information about their work, courses, including a free 60-minute training which could act as a taster: <https://www.graydin.com/>

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From Bold to... Radical?

The Future of Libraries at IFLA WLIC 2025

by Anaïs Cayzac



The IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) 2025, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, had the sub-theme “Stronger and BolderTogether,” building on last year’s “Stronger Together.” The newly elected president Leslie Weir urged us not only to stay united but also to be bold in how we practice librarianship.

What does it mean for libraries to be bold?

During the newly elected presidential session “Be Bold”, several leading voices in our field explored this question. Jonathan Hernández, library professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), when asked how to empower library staff to be bold, gave three words: “education, trust, and wellbeing”.

The session also offered advice: be bold with an innovative mindset, invest in social innovation, embrace technology innovation, and ensure an inclusive approach to innovation.

These ideas resonated. Still, listening to the stories shared across sessions, I felt something else was missing: protection.

Without protection, the rest can’t survive.

-Protection of our role when democracy and institutions are under attack. The recent dismissal of Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress, shook the profession. If the top leadership can be removed so easily, what does that mean for everyone else?

-Protection of library workers who face real threats. An American colleague told me about a librarian who was stabbed by a library user while on duty. An extreme case, but it shows the risks frontline staff face every day.

-Protection in policy. In Scotland, school librarians are being replaced by library assistants: paid less and lacking qualifications, yet expected to shoulder the same responsibilities. This not only devalues the profession but also creates a direct path to burnout and a steady decline in the quality of services offered to students. Meanwhile in Sweden, a new law passed in July 2025 requiring every school to give students access to a staffed library. It’s a bold step that also highlights the shortage ahead, with up to 2,000 trained librarians still needed to meet the demand¹.

These examples show that protection isn’t abstract. It depends on decisions, good or bad, made by governments and institutions.

1

TT. (2025, July 1st). Sweden's New Law Requires Staffed School Libraries This Autumn. Sweden Herald. <https://swedenherald.com/article/swedens-new-law-requires-staffed-school-libraries-this-autumn>

2

Le Guevel, Q., & Prost, J. (n.d.). Deux connards dans un bibliobus. Deux connards dans un bibliobus. Retrieved September 10, 2025, from <https://deux-connards-dans-un-bibliobus.lepodcast.fr/>

The French case: neutrality in question

One conversation in Astana stayed with me. A French colleague reminded me that in France, public libraries are expected to remain strictly neutral. Then she asked: should librarians stay neutral when far-right groups are openly fueling hate?

She also pointed me to the podcast: *Deux connards dans un bibliobus*, hosted by Quentin Le Guevel and Julien Prost^[1]. In their episode “Neutrality, plurality, cowardice”, they argue that neutrality can easily slide into complicity. They draw on thinkers like T.J. Lamanna, the Associate Director of the Steele Memorial Library, NY³ and echo Christian Lauersen’s, the Director of Libraries and Citizen Services in Roskilde Municipality in Denmark, sharp line: “My library will be antifascist or it will be bullshit.”⁴ Their message is clear. Librarianship is never just technical work. Staying silent is also a choice, and sometimes it’s the wrong one.

Bold... or radical?

Maybe bold isn’t enough. Maybe it’s time to be radical.

Radical in saying no to hatred, fascism, and the erosion of our profession.

Radical in defending librarianship as skilled work, not a job pushed onto underpaid assistants who will burn out in months.

Radical in keeping the library a civic space for knowledge, dialogue, and democracy.

This push for radicalism links to the new book *Radical School Librarianship*⁵, published by Facet in September 2025. I can’t wait to read it and draw ideas from the projects it covers. In Astana, I already saw some of those ideas in action:

-Serving immigrant and refugee students through the LiBri European project

(Library Bridges). Launched in 2024 by Libraries Without Borders, LiBri works across 50 cities in five countries to support exiled individuals with language access, integration services, and inclusive programming.⁶

3 Lamanna, T.J. (2018, June). *Dispositif: Or Subjectivity and Neutrality in Libraries*. Washington University. Retrieved September 10th, 2025, from <https://journals.library.wustl.edu/polilib/article/8539/galley/25372/view/>

4 Lauersen, C. (2019, March 1st). *My Library will be Anti-Facist or it will be Bullshit. The Library Lab libraries, learning and lego*. <https://christianlauersen.net/2019/03/01/my-library-will-be-anti-facist-or-it-will-be-bullshit/>

5 Moreillon, J. (2025). *Radical School Librarianship: A Global Response*. Facet Publishing.

6 Dubay, E. (2025, June 17). *LiBri: Libraries in Service of Exiled Communities*. Libraries Without Borders. Retrieved September 10, 2025, from <https://www.librarieswithoutborders.org/2025/06/17/libri-libraries-in-service-of-exiled-communities/>

-Celebrating readers with LGBTQIA+ books and authors through Pride reading lists, drag story hours, and author talks. A powerful example came from the Nélida Piñon Library at the Cervantes Institute in Rio de Janeiro. Speaker Carlos Alberto Della Paschoa showed how their programs promote visibility and cultural citizenship for the LGBTQ+ community.

-Promoting literacy in unequal education systems. Ricardo Crisafulli Rodrigues (IBICT, Brazil) outlined the challenges facing libraries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Brazil, weak public policies, social inequality but also highlighted progress in countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, particularly in science and technology information.

-Supporting diversity and intellectual freedom through social media. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are no longer just for entertainment. They're now powerful tools to counter bans and amplify diverse voices. Librarian-influencer Mychal Threats has shown how. Known for his "library joy," he talks openly about mental health, belonging, and the everyday magic of libraries. His mix of positivity and advocacy proves that social media can turn libraries into spaces of connection as much as information⁷.

-Responding to political change. Jelena Glisovic of the Serbian Library Association shared a striking case. A proposed library tax on copyrighted books threatened closures and undermined trust⁸. Serbian librarians fought back through radio, TV, government lobbying, professional associations, and public outreach, resulting in the tariff cancellation. Jelena's

message at the end of the presentation: "No decision on libraries without librarians".

When librarians stand for themselves, they can win.

-Defending intellectual freedom through the courts. Juliana Pranke from the German Library Association (dbv) described a recent case in Münster, Germany, involving the local public library labeling two books as controversial because they denied historical facts⁹. The library defended its choice as part of its educational mission, rooted in freedom of information and expression. One of the authors objected, but in April 2025 the Münster Administrative Court ruled that

7 Anguiano, D. (2024, March 16). 'So happy you're here': how a librarian became an advocate for mental health. The Guardian. Retrieved September 10, 2025, from [1] [Anguiano, D. \(2024, March 16\). 'So happy you're here': how a librarian became an advocate for mental health. The Guardian. Retrieved September 10, 2025, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/16/california-librarian-mychal-threats-tiktok-mental-health](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/16/california-librarian-mychal-threats-tiktok-mental-health)

8 Ciric, S. (2024, October 31st). Librarians: Authors' copyright according to the principle of equalization. VREME. <https://vreme.com/en/kultura/bibliotekari-autorska-prava-piscima-po-principu-uravnilovke/>

9 Duféal, A. L. (2025, July 10th). German court slaps down library 'warning labels' on 'controversial books'. Brussel Signals. <https://brusselssignal.eu/2025/07/german-court-slaps-down-library-warning-labels-on-controversial-books/>

such labeling is legal, provided it is presented objectively. The case raises broader questions: should libraries only provide access to information, or should they also guide readers with context and curation? The discussion remains open, and the answers are far from simple.

-Protecting against erasure and destruction. At Qatar National Library, Rana Abdulrahman presented “Keys to Palestine”¹⁰: A Digital Platform for Memory, Resistance, and Community. This project preserves voices of displaced Palestinians who arrived in Qatar after October 7th, inviting them to share photos, videos, poems, and oral histories to create a living archive of identity and struggle.

And maybe the clearest calls came from colleagues themselves. Martin Memet Könick, library director in Sweden, in the session Libraries Supporting Democracy, reminded us: “It doesn’t matter if you’re a small or big library. You can make a difference.” And from Edmonton Public Library in Canada came another reminder: “Libraries are key actors of change. They are not passive institutions but catalysts for shaping a better future.”

Being radical means refusing complacency. It means standing up, together, not only to protect our institutions but to keep them alive as spaces of freedom and learning.

Maybe that’s just a bold idea.

10 QNL. (2025). Qatar National Library. Keys to Palestine: A Community Project. Retrieved September 11, 2025, from <https://qnl.librariesshare.com/eng/keys-to-palestine>

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School Libraries in View (SLiV) is the journal of CILIP School Libraries Group and is published annually. Views expressed in SLiV are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of SLG or of CILIP.

This edition of SLiV has been designed and edited by Charlotte Cole, Publicity Officer of the Schools Library Group. Keep up to date with SLG by visiting our website <https://cilipslg.com/>