

Preparing the Next Generation of Librarians for Family and Community Engagement

Margaret Caspe, *Global Family Research Project*
margaret_caspe@globalfrp.org

M. Elena Lopez, *Global Family Research Project*
elena_lopez@globalfrp.org

Many librarians work in public libraries to make a difference for children, families, and communities and identify family and community engagement as a cornerstone of their responsibilities. For librarians to be successful they must be afforded strong foundations in family and community engagement that begin early in their preparation. Yet little is known about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that librarians need to engage families and communities, and these topics are rarely covered in schools of information and library sciences. The purposes of this exploratory paper are to identify the competencies that librarians need to engage families and communities and to understand promising pedagogical methods for promoting them. Interviews were conducted with 11 library educators at leading schools of information and library sciences within the United States to understand their perspectives on the topics. Results reveal three main goals for the preparation of librarians for family and community engagement: (1) to provide librarians with knowledge of families and communities, (2) to promote relationship-building skills, and (3) to encourage the mindset that librarians are professionals. Experiential and connected learning opportunities are the most promising methods for achieving these outcomes. Findings are discussed in terms of four main recommendations for stronger integration of family and community engagement into existing curriculum.

Keywords: community engagement, family engagement, librarian preparation, LIS Education, pedagogical methods, public libraries

Public libraries have a long tradition in the United States. Constructed with the goal of serving the cultural and educational needs of society, public libraries succeeded in positioning themselves as central to the informational and democratic needs of thriving communities after the nation's civil war, through waves of unprecedented immigration in the early 1900s, two world wars, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. By the 1970s, in line with many of the great social and equity programs of the time, these same public libraries began to experiment with innovative community services such as offering homework help and storytimes for children, and moving resources beyond the library walls to housing projects, shopping malls, and other community spaces (Koontz, 2007).

KEY POINTS

- The authors conducted interviews with 11 library educators at leading schools of information and library sciences within the United States to understand their perspectives on preparing librarians for family and community engagement.
- Library educators point to three main goals for the preparation of librarians for family and community engagement: (1) to provide librarians with knowledge of families and communities, (2) to promote relationship-building skills, and (3) to encourage the mindset that librarians are professionals.
- Experiential and connected learning are the main pedagogical methods that library educators use to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they identified.

organizations to become centers of learning and creativity in our digital society.

Libraries transforming in the service of families

In the United States, families have emerged as a particularly important community constituent for public librarians to engage as part of the larger reconceptualization of the role of libraries. The library has been referred to as the “family room of a community” (Garmer, 2014, p. 13; 2016) and today over 500 libraries across 30 U.S. states hold the distinction of being Family Place Libraries. In this model, libraries transform into community centers for parent education, parent engagement in early literacy and learning, family support, and connectivity (Family Place Libraries, 2018).

Over the last 20 years, libraries in the United States have had to contend with a new period in history, driven by the explosion in the speed, abundance, and accessibility of information and digital technologies. No longer do community members need to visit the library for information, but instead they can get the information they need virtually anywhere, anytime. Social media and other digital platforms have expanded the boundaries of communities, creating a global, multicultural, and diverse society. In this new digital era, library leaders are once again compelled to re-envision the roles and responsibilities of library staff, the physical library space, and how the library as a platform meets the demands for high levels of human information (Garmer, 2016). Libraries have taken on this challenge by turning outward. They are reaching out to communities to ensure that all the constituent groups—for example, professionals, students, seniors, immigrants, the homeless, and the underserved—have equitable access. They are providing safe space for library patrons to grow their social networks, share democratic ideas, and generate new knowledge. And they are forming partnerships with other community

This family-focused perspective is critical, as U.S. library statistics show that parents are more likely than other adults to use library services, and having a child or grandchild increases an adult's use of library services (Horrihan, 2016; Miller, Zickuhr, Rainie, & Purcell, 2013).

Families are also important for libraries to focus on, since families provide its members with physical necessities and emotional care. Although practices and routines vary by community, culture, and available resources, families are integral to instilling into the next generation the moral and ethical beliefs that a society values (Rogoff, 2003). Families also matter for children's academic success. Family engagement in education is related to a range of benefits for students across the developmental spectrum, including improved school readiness, higher student achievement, better social skills and behavior, and an increased likelihood of high-school graduation (Hayakawa, Englund, Warner-Richter, & Reynolds, 2013; Jeynes, 2007). Families are also the main source of advice for youth on matters of post-secondary education and careers (Oymak, 2018).

Statistics show, however, that family life in the United States is changing at a rapid pace. One in four children live with a family member born outside of the United States, and increasingly children are cared for by single parents and grandparents, many of whom are actively employed in the workforce (Generations United, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015; Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). In addition, growing income inequality within the United States has made it difficult for many families to make ends meet (Stiglitz, 2012). In this increasingly complex and dynamic world, families visit libraries to spend quality time together in an environment that offers something for everyone of any age. Families come to libraries to learn new ideas and techniques to support their children's learning and development. They congregate at libraries to connect with other families and thereby share the community's knowledge and sense of belongingness and grow united. Families go to the library to seek out referrals and services in the community to support family well-being. They also look to librarians as media mentors who can guide families to understand the best ways to incorporate digital media into children's education (Haines, Campbell, & Association for Library Service to Children, 2016; Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2013; Lopez, Caspe, & McWilliams, 2016; Lopez, Caspe, & Simpson, 2017; Neuman & Celano, 2012; Weiss, Caspe, Lopez, & McWilliams, 2016).

For all of these reasons, family engagement in libraries can be broadly defined as the process by which families and libraries join together to share the responsibility of supporting children's learning and development, from birth through adulthood. Because family well-being is inextricably linked to the capacity of families to create a pathway for successful and productive lives both within school and beyond, family engagement is also often expanded to include adult literacy and lifelong learning and access to formal and informal community social supports.

Understanding and promoting family engagement in libraries is critical for a variety of reasons, perhaps most importantly because, as free institutions, libraries offer services and resources to bring about educational equity. Research shows that due largely to economic constraints, families from low-income households are significantly less able to complement in-school learning with quality out-of-school learning opportunities, which has a negative impact on children's learning and development (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). The library can shield children from these effects. National data sets from the United States show that compared to families from upper-income homes, parents from lower-income households say that the library helps them find information for their children, allows free access to the Internet, and provides quiet study spaces, a broad selection of e-books, and the opportunity for interactive learning (Swan, 2014). Still, there is much work to be done to overcome lingering disparities in library usage by income and ethnic background (Neuman & Celano, 2012).

Librarian preparation for family and community engagement

Library preparation programs are one vital element in a system of continuous professional learning that can help libraries meet the new needs of families and communities. However, informal landscape analyses of the curricula of many library and information science degree programs reveal that while there are opportunities for aspiring librarians to develop competencies to work with children, youth, and young adults, there are often very few specializations and courses devoted to developing skills around cultural diversity and community engagement, with virtually none focused on families (Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013; M. Semmel, personal communication, January 5, 2018; University of Maryland, n.d.). This orientation toward children and youth without a broader conception of their lifelong learning situated within families and communities is detrimental to librarians who will enter their jobs with little training and marketable knowledge and skills to meet the needs of one of their main constituents. It also becomes a missed opportunity for families to receive the full range of services they deserve.

Accordingly, library educators are being challenged to develop curriculum and learning experiences that will equip librarians to be innovators and continuous learners, and to critically engage with families and communities (Abels, Howarth, & Smith, 2016). The importance of "reskilling" librarians to become leaders in serving the information needs of communities was underscored in a 2015 national forum sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The results of that meeting reinforce the fact that libraries must be more outward facing and can head in this direction by recruiting more diverse librarians to reflect new community demographics, by building bridges within the community and the rest of the world, and by adapting to the future, with considerations for who will teach future students and how will they be taught (Abels et al.). This "new

librarianship” is about librarians who can anticipate and be responsive to the learning and civic needs of the community (Lankes, 2016).

By preparing librarians for the realities of working with families and communities and imparting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required to do so, library educators can spark a new generation of librarians to engage families and communities in ways that can have positive impacts on family well-being and student success. Library educators have begun to focus on the best methods to develop these qualities, with experiential and connected learning emerging as two of the most important (Abels et al., 2016; Brzozowski, Homenda, & Roy, 2012; Kimmel, Howard, & Ruzzi, 2016). Experiential and connected learning serves as a bridge to the ongoing professional development that librarians will experience throughout their careers. Experiential learning has a long history and has been written about extensively in the library and information sciences and education literature. It comes in many forms—such as fieldwork, internships, capstone projects, and service learning—and gives students opportunities to actively participate in and reflect on direct, hands-on, real-world experiences. Connected learning is a more recent approach whose core principles include promoting learning that is peer-supported, interest-driven, user-centered, and production-oriented (Ito & Martin, 2013). Public libraries have emerged as natural environments to connect learning, creativity, and knowledge production, for youth in both school and out-of-school settings (Hoffman, Subramaniam, Kawas, Scaff, & Davis, 2016), and in recent years, library educators have begun to adopt these approaches in their own teaching and curriculum.

Research suggests that librarians desire these types of learning opportunities. In a survey of recent LIS graduates in the United States, when respondents were asked what they found most valuable about their education, by far the most common answer was hands-on experience (Goodsett & Koziura, 2016). Not only are these types of experiences helpful in building aspiring librarians’ confidence, but potential employers also find these skills extremely valuable and marketable. When given opportunities to apply what they learn in coursework to specific community projects and situations, students develop a variety of leadership skills that promote family and community engagement. For example, they begin to clarify their values, envision the future, experiment and take risks, and work collaboratively toward specific goals (Kimmel et al., 2016).

Experiential and connected learning can bring about many other benefits for pre-service librarians. These include an improved capacity to link theory and practice, understand and build communities, engage in leadership and relationship-building, and understand the complexities of culture, diversity, and equity (Abels et al., 2016; Turner & Gorichanaz, 2016). Virtual projects that connect students with libraries from different countries also give students an international perspective on the roles that libraries play in the lives of families in communities and how libraries

within the United States exist within a particular time and economic and policy infrastructure (Hirsh et al., 2015).

In the field of teacher education, opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage directly with families have been found to increase teachers' confidence in their ability to work with families, increase their awareness of personal prejudices and diversity within families, and bolster their ability to use knowledge about families and communities in their practice (Caspe, Lopez, Chu & Weiss, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Evans, 2013; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). These competencies, along with communication, outreach, and perspective-taking skills and the ability to create welcoming environments and understand power structures, are all critical for teachers to meaningfully engage families in student learning (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Walker & Dotger, 2012). Research also suggests, however, that field experiences in culturally diverse settings are not enough and must be accompanied by class discussion and deep reflection opportunities (Brzozowski et al., 2012; D'Haem & Griswold, 2016).

Although public libraries are engaging families in different ways, and library educators are thinking of new and important ways to prepare a next generation of librarians for community engagement with a focus on cultural diversity, very little is known about how to prepare librarians to engage *families*. The purposes of this exploratory paper are to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that librarians need to engage families and to identify promising pedagogical methods for today's family- and community-oriented library preparation programs. Specifically, our paper addresses two main research questions:

1. What are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that librarians need to engage families and communities meaningfully?
2. What are the most promising pedagogical methods of doing so?

Methods

We used an iterative process to address our research questions. First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 library educators at leading schools of information and library sciences in the United States in order to understand their perspectives on preparing librarians for family and community engagement. (It should be noted that one interview was completed via email, and one participant works in a college of media, communication, and information.) We generated our sample by developing a list of the top-rated schools of information and library sciences and searching faculty websites for courses or faculty interests in community and family engagement. We also used our network of library leaders to help us identify universities and individual faculty.

Individual interviews were conducted over the phone, with each lasting approximately one hour. Interviews were structured around five questions: (1) What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do new librarians need to work effectively with families and communities? (2) How well are

institutions of higher education preparing librarians for family and community engagement? (3) How do courses that are taught address family and community engagement and the types of teaching methods used to address them? (4) What would help strengthen the integration of family engagement in the curriculum of librarians specializing in child and youth services? and (5) What role might policy play in supporting institutions of higher education to reorganize librarian preparation for family and community engagement?

We qualitatively coded the interviews, looking for emerging themes within each of the question categories. From our analysis we developed a briefing paper and then held a virtual dialogue with six of the library educators we originally interviewed in order to understand their impressions of the paper. The purpose of this conversation was to introduce the faculty to one another, to encourage mutual learning and share teaching and learning experiences, to verify that the themes we had developed resonated with them, and to listen to new and emerging viewpoints. Ideas from this conversation were integrated into the final paper.

Results

The knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meaningfully engage families and communities

As libraries shift from building collections to building human capital and relationships, library educators identified three main goals to prepare librarians for family and community engagement: (1) to provide librarians with the knowledge and understanding of families and communities, (2) to help librarians develop relationship-building skills, and (3) to internalize the role of a professional who helps people gain and use knowledge. These goals apply to librarians' work with families, the communities of which they are a part, and the community organizations in which families participate. [Table 1](#) outlines these goals.

Knowledge and understanding of families and communities

Library educators stress that librarians must come to know and understand the communities and families they serve. This understanding is inextricably linked to issues of equitable access and services, as well as to various types of diversity. Librarians should know not only who makes up a community and how community residents might differ in culture, race, ethnicity, dominant language, and age, but also how the long-term history of the community can influence how families experience important issues and events. Knowledge about families encompasses both their demographic characteristics and the wide variations in families' employment situations, immigration experiences, and child-rearing and family-engagement practices. An understanding of families and communities affects the visions that librarians will have for them, their conceptualization of the librarian-community-family relationship, the

Table 1: Goals of librarian preparation for family and community engagement

<p>Knowledge goal: Understand families and communities</p>	<p>Skills goal: Develop relationships with families and communities that last over time</p>	<p>Dispositions goal: Internalize the role of a professional</p>
<p>Family</p> <p>Family characteristics: Knowledge of families, especially the underserved, and the diversity that exists within families</p> <p>Child development: Understanding how children learn and grow and what is appropriate at each stage of development</p>	<p>Cultural competence: The ability to take other people's perspective, listen, de-personalize, and reflect</p> <p>Communication: The ability to communicate important ideas (e.g., policies regarding fines, the value of play).</p> <p>Flexibility: The capacity and flexibility to work with different types and generations of families</p> <p>Problem solving: The ability to understand and address barriers to library patronage</p>	<p>Adoption of the ethics and foundations of the profession: The need to distinguish between personal beliefs and professional duties to promote equal access and service for all families.</p> <p>Leadership: A stance in which librarians see themselves as leaders within the library and larger community.</p> <p>Professional learning: Efforts to access ongoing professional learning related to family and community engagement</p>
<p>Community</p> <p>Community characteristics: Knowledge of the demographics and diversity of the community (e.g., race/ethnicity, languages, culture, gender, age, etc.)</p>	<p>Communication: The ability to clearly articulate the value of the public library</p> <p>Partnership formation: The ability to build proactive partnerships and cooperative networks with community organizations based upon a deep understanding of their limitations and strengths</p> <p>Problem-solving: The ability to identify and problem solve broad community issues and gaps in services</p>	<p>Critical reflection: An approach that questions assumptions about how community wants are addressed and needs are met</p> <p>Inquiry: The ability to collect, analyze, and gain insight from data and communicate it to others</p>

actual interactions they will have with each other, and the ways in which they will build relevant collections, services, and programs.

Knowing what is appropriate at each stage of development can also help librarians make recommendations for collections, programs, and resources that are well fitted to children's needs. It also helps set realistic expectations for what family learning events can and should look like. For example, it would be considered developmentally appropriate for a group of 12–24-month-olds to get up and walk around during storytime, or for a group of teens to want opportunities to talk among themselves without adults present.

Relationship-building skills

Library educators stress that the main skill that new librarians need is the ability to build trusting relationships with families and communities that last over time. A key component of this is cultural competence. Library educators think of cultural competence as librarians' ability to interact with families and communities of different cultures and to recognize, accept, and respect the legitimacy of families and communities, language, culture, and practices. Cultural competence is the ability to take families' perspectives, listen to them, de-personalize, and reflect. As one faculty member described, it is about students being willing to "inward gaze, look at their own backgrounds, and shift their perspective." As a different library educator explained,

Students need to be prepared to engage diverse communities which focuses on teaching students to decenter themselves and in a way, deprioritize themselves as a starting point towards community engagement. There needs to be an emphasis on listening and learning how to listen. This involves developing empathy – how do they learn how to take a back seat to themselves.

The notion of cultural competence extends to the ability to partner with community organizations as well. Organizations such as schools, after-school programs, medical homes, senior centers, and even Parent Teacher Associations play a role in family's lives and also have their own organizational cultures. To coordinate with these organizations, librarians have to take into account the strengths and limitations of these institutions, in particular in relation to their leadership and resources. For example, one library educator stated,

Librarians need inter-organizational cultural competence so people think in terms of what are the strategies, missions, and purposes of the institutions with whom they will be called on to coordinate. That's the baseline for collaboration and they need to understand inequity in our society and that exist in each of these programs in terms of their access to resources. A library has a reliable source of funding . . . whereas some of these other organizations are having a difficult time with funding and staff turnover.

Developing a rich set of communication skills is also essential to relationship-building. Communication skills range from the basic, such as saying “hello” or offering a handshake when introductions are made, to talking with families about the value of play and discussing sensitive library policies. As part of their communication skills, librarians must also learn to listen and to raise families’ views, in order to create programs and services with and for them, rather than “fixing” what librarians think are families’ concerns, or blindly adopting programs that other libraries have developed. Library educators also note that in serving the larger community, librarians must also be able to clearly articulate the value of the public library and its role and place in solving wider community problems.

In addition, library educators identify flexibility as a key skill. Trusting relationships develop when librarians are flexible and tailor their programs and services to accommodate different family configurations, including multiple generations of families learning together (e.g., young children, teens, and grandparents). One library educator noted, “Families come in multiple configurations (ranging from babies to great-grandmothers) and having skills to connect with people across that spectrum is really valuable.”

Librarians are called upon to develop skills that allow them to identify and problem-solve solutions. Among families these are likely to focus on the barriers to library patronage, and at the community level to serving the less advantaged, such as the homeless and the incarcerated. One library educator felt that librarians must develop solutions that fit the unique issues that communities face. Another explained:

We want to develop the global or evergreen skills that will help librarians make good decisions moving forward. It’s the skills to connect to networks and do a scan of your community, and handle community questions. I want my grads to make good decision. Not “someone told me family programs are important, I’m going to do it.”

Internalizing a professional role

The main disposition—or inherent belief, stance, or attitude—that library educators aspire to promote in new librarians so that they can effectively practice family and community engagement is the internalization of the librarian’s role as a professional who has a responsibility to help people. Librarians are in a profession of public service that requires creative knowledge and a certain visible and unspoken power in the lives of children, families, and communities. Library educators recognize that this calls for librarians to be more than merely employees. It calls for them to challenge the status quo to meet the needs of their families and communities. It obligates them to be clear about the values and ethical foundations of librarianship in relation to the communities and families they serve. And it requires them to advocate for families’ rights to privacy and equal access and service, regardless of librarians’ personal beliefs.

One library educator explained how being clear on the values and responsibilities of the profession can lead to librarians assuming new roles in serving families and reorienting services toward families rather than children. For example, instead of having librarians lead storytimes, librarians instead can support and teach caregivers to carry out these activities. By doing so, librarians are elevating their professional skills and simultaneously empowering families to be proactive in developing children's activities and to be the leaders in their children's learning.

As professionals, librarians must also feel comfortable being leaders and must embrace a sense of comfort in managing and supervising those within the library, as well as taking an active role in the public sphere and not sitting by as passive bystanders; instead, they must question assumptions about how community and family needs are raised and met. One library educator explained,

Librarians have to venture out of their comfort zone to engage with key decision makers in society to be able to participate in the decisions that are being made. Librarians come with a certain mental mode of what they notice from a historical perspective – taking a neutral stance, being passive bystanders – and so we need to train a new generation of librarians to step out of the comfort zone and take a stand.

It is when librarians are able to assume this stance, and use their knowledge and problem-solving skills, that librarians, families, and communities can join together and create a mindset that anything is possible.

As librarians develop new roles and services for and with families and communities, library educators acknowledge that librarians also need to develop a set of strong leadership skills that enable these actions to be successful. They need to know how to market and show the value of the library through social media and other digital platforms. Management involves knowing how to plan, schedule, budget, fundraise, and write grants. Continuous learning involves collecting, analyzing, and gaining insight from data and communicating it to others to improve services and convey their impact. For example, one library educator noted,

Librarians need to be action researchers. The word doesn't get out about what we have been able to do in terms of quality and quantity of impact so how do we tell the story of the impact that we are having? Librarians need to be able to tell their stories through evidence and through quantitative and qualitative data that is systemically collected.

Lastly, because library services are evolving rapidly, especially with new technologies, librarians also are responsible for their own professional learning. They must seek opportunities to keep abreast of research and practices that improve their services for families and communities.

Experiential and connected learning approaches to promote family- and community-engagement competencies

Consistent with literature on the subject, experiential and connected learning is the main pedagogical method that library educators use to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that they identified as what new librarians need in order to meaningfully engage families and communities. Although library educators rely on lectures, readings, and critical in-person and online discussion to promote competencies, it is hands-on learning that produces the greatest learning results. Library educators are adopting teaching methods to help students (1) reorient their focus to the “end user” of libraries – for example, children and families – and to the specific needs of the community, (2) shift from a “library-centric” mindset—e.g., counting the number of patrons, computer terminals, and programs offered—to one that focuses on community-centered impact, and (3) compare traditional library practices with those that are innovative and are truly engaging communities.

These themes run through courses that are both online and face-to-face. Families, however, are only in a few instances a priority in this work. Much more frequently, library educators focus on communities and youth services, while families become the “audience” for the interactions only tangentially. Below we provide several examples of experiential and connected learning methods that library educators use with their students.

Knowing families and communities

To help aspiring librarians come to know and understand families and communities, library educators employ a variety of different pedagogical methods that give librarians a window into families’ perspectives, desires, and values.

Design thinking

Library educators use a teaching approach called human-centered design thinking. Design thinking opens new possibilities for reinventing how libraries can partner with and engage families and communities. A human-centered design thinking approach begins with empathy—putting oneself in another’s place and imagining what that person feels and experiences (Abels et al., 2016; Reilly, 2017; Weiss et al., 2016). Developing empathy is one way to move from family engagement practices that *librarians* think families need and want, to ones based on what *families* desire and value.

For example, the School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College has offered the Library Test Kitchen in partnership with Harvard University Graduate School of Design. In this course, students engage in a human-centered design-thinking course where they tackle questions such as how libraries can operate as spaces of civic

engagement. Students develop their own projects that address the needs of the diverse community a library serves. Examples of projects include bringing recipes and cooking together as a way to build cross-cultural conversations in library spaces, as well as putting together Makerspace backpacks for elementary school students to borrow and take home (Reilly, 2017).

Project-based learning

In one course at the University of Maryland College of Information Studies, students create their own facilitation guides for a library-based technology program they would offer to children and youth in the community, and one mandatory component of the guide involves considering how they would engage families. The course is modeled after the *Family Creative Learning Guide* (Roque & Leggett, 2017), which offers insights for librarians and other facilitators into how to implement family creative-learning workshops to build children's and families' mathematical, computational, and coding competencies. The developer of the guide explains that as a result of implementing the program, many facilitators change their assumptions and biases about families as a result of direct engagement with them.

Placements in community organizations

The University of Illinois School of Information Sciences offers an eight-week Youth Services Community Engagement course, in which students are placed in a non-library youth-serving community setting of their choice in order to better develop inter-organizational competence and understand the types of organizations librarians are asked to partner with. Students are asked to write a paper about the mission of the organization (e.g., how services are enacted on the ground, who is in power) and to conduct a community environmental scan (e.g., what other services are available to youth in the community and where youth spend their time). Students then complete ongoing site reports, which culminate in youth advocacy papers. Through the process, many students write about the role of families in youth lives. Most importantly, students come to understand the strengths, resources, and needs of organizations they are likely to partner with as librarians in the future.

Developing relationships

Library educators provide students with different opportunities to partner and engage with families directly so that they can acquire relationship-building skills.

Problem-solving

At the University of Michigan School of Information, in a course on engaging with communities, students partner with a community organization for a semester, whether it be a library, a non-profit organization, a government

entity, or a corporate client, to apply and offer solutions to the challenges that the organization faces. Through observations and interviews, students soon come to appreciate that often these challenges are not necessarily technological, but rather lie in the processes and relationships among people and groups. The class helps students apply their skills to build solutions from the ground up and from the users' perspective, users who in many cases are family members.

Communicating with families

To help pre-service librarians reorient services toward families and become comfortable facilitating family learning activities, library educators also offer experiences for pre-service librarians to develop facilitation guides and conduct story times and instructional workshops. For example, at San Jose State University School of Information, a course on storytime gives students opportunities to practice not only engaging young children but also guiding families about what they can do to promote children's early learning. And at the University of Washington Information School, as a part of a community-university summer camp program, students learn how to do interactive read-alouds, share books with children and families, lead a discussion, and offer hands-on activities that extend the experience of the book (Copeland & Martin, 2016).

Internalizing a professional role

Library educators use critical reflection and inquiry as a method for new librarians to consider the ethics and foundational values of the profession.

Critical reflection

In an effort to create learning opportunities for students *with* the community, one library educator taught a course on library leadership *in* the library setting. This approach sought to invert the power differentials inherent in community-university partnerships, with the entire university class leaving its terrain to meet on the library grounds. The first hour of the class was dedicated to discussing readings in a conference room, while the second hour focused on community engagement and having the students immersed within the community settings, specifically being involved in working with youth to raise up their voice in redesigning the teen space to create opportunities for technology innovation and learning. As a result of this work, university students learned to de-center themselves and prioritize teens and learning rather than simply their own and librarians' views and perspectives (Rhinesmith, Dettmann, Pierson, & Spence, 2015). At the end of the course, university students and youth in the course co-presented new designs to architects at a public meeting where families of the youth got involved by attending the event and hearing about what their children had learned and done.

Inquiry

In an action-research-oriented course at the University of Tennessee School of Information Sciences, students partner with a community agency—which could be a library—and engage in a process of developing an external assessment project that meets the agency’s needs. As part of this course, students identify and analyze primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences, and in many cases this includes families. They elect an issue to assess and evaluate, develop evaluation action plans, and collect and analyze data to understand the impact their work has. Projects have ranged from evaluating the success of computer and résumé-writing workshops in libraries to assessing the efficacy of outreach services.

Discussion

In this paper we set out to explore the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that librarians need in order to engage families and communities meaningfully to promote children’s learning and to better understand how library educators are preparing new librarians to develop these competencies. Our exploratory analysis reveals that library educators emphasize three main goals for the preparation of librarians for family and community engagement: providing librarians with knowledge and understanding of families and communities, developing relationship-building skills, and instilling the mindset that librarians are professionals with the primary goal of helping and supporting families they reach. However, our findings suggest that often the focus of much of this work is developing community engagement skills—particularly with a focus on youth and teens—instead of a direct connection with families, which is more limited.

These findings are best understood within the broader framework of libraries during a time of transformation. Library educators acknowledge that they are educating librarians at a time of critical reflection and questioning. They are challenging their students to reflect on “who is our community and how do we serve the community?” Instead of making predetermined assumptions about what communities want and need, library educators are helping their students acquire the knowledge and skills to come to understand the communities they work in themselves and to develop partnerships that better position libraries as hubs of community learning. It is within this context of serving all community members and building bridges with community organizations that families are situated. Families and family engagement are not front and center in coursework, but they are part of broader topics related to skills in relationship building, cultural competence, and literacy and learning.

Library educators also recognize that they are educating at a time when our nation is more diverse—in both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status—than ever before. Across the board, library educators show concern about instilling cultural competence in working with diverse families and communities. The educators identify diversity as

encompassing race, language, immigrant families, and family members with disabilities. Cultural competence is a skill that develops through a learning process. It is a process that begins early through coursework and studies and extends to the on-the-ground practice of listening to and raising up the voices of diverse families and community members.

Perhaps most importantly, though, library educators understand that the dispositions that the new generations of librarians adopt will be the most important to bring about change. A professional librarian must have a desire to work collaboratively with others. This means wanting to create innovation, to engage in continuous learning, and to be curious about people, rather than simply being guardians of knowledge (Maxwell, 2015). By understanding their professional and ethical roles, librarians can put individuals and families at the center of their practice.

Regarding our second question, we found that experiential and connected learning are the main pedagogical methods that library educators use to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they identified. This includes developing opportunities for aspiring libraries to get to know families and communities through design thinking experiences, project-based learning, and placements in community organizations that give them a different perspective on the organizations they might partner with. Library educators promote relationship-building skills by giving library educators opportunities to problem-solve and communicate directly with families in different community locations. They also help librarians internalize the role of a professional through experiences that promote critical thinking and inquiry.

Recommendations

The insights offered by our key informants suggest a number of future directions for library educators. First, our findings call for better integration of family and community engagement, with an emphasis on families, into library education based on critical reflection, experiential, and connected learning. In recent years, public library initiatives have begun to provide practicing librarians with methods and ideas to turn outward to align library services to community aspirations and work with families effectively (Family Place Libraries, 2018; Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 2018; Neuman, Moland, & Celano, 2017; Public Library Association, 2018). But this training needs to start before librarians commence their careers. The library educators in this study have begun to provide these opportunities through the profound and multifaceted experiences they offer students.

To make families even more at the forefront, library educators can create occasions for students to link with practicing librarians who regularly engage and communicate with families, to lead parent focus groups, to observe and reflect on diverse families' use of the library, to interview families about their role in their children's learning and perceptions of the library, and even to visit families' homes to understand their literacy

or technology practices. The goal of these experiences should not be for librarians to perpetuate old paradigms or to become equipped to implement pre-packaged curriculum or storytime routines, but instead for there to be authentic opportunities for librarians to learn with families, listen to their ideas, and begin to redesign and re-orient services that meet their needs.

One particularly ripe area for this work is through digital media. In today's rapidly changing technological world, libraries are amplifying their digital services for parents and families in support of such vital twenty-first-century learning skills as problem solving, collaboration, digital media literacy, and creativity (Semmel, 2014). Librarians are also becoming media mentors, where they are providing guidance, support, and new ideas to parents looking to make sense of technology in the lives of children and youth (Donahue, 2016). Similar to the movement to co-design library programs and services, both for and with teens, around new technologies (Subramaniam, 2016), students along with practicing librarians can engage whole families to co-develop services and learning experiences with a digital media emphasis. These family-centered initiatives with and for parents can open new doors to services and more agentic views of families. These opportunities with families can also help students and practicing librarians see families' perspectives and needs in new ways and provide seeds to sow new ideas and services.

A second new direction is for library educators, in partnership with librarians, library directors, and library policymakers, to have conversations that clarify both how the library and information science field defines and envisions families and how families utilize libraries, identify the challenges they face, and develop evidence-informed solutions to promote their engagement and best practices for professional learning and library education in this domain. These dialogues can also include a "second conversation"—a more difficult conversation that involves suspending constrained beliefs about what can and cannot be done—and instead contemplates broad and bold changes that might yield big returns (Jackson, 2017). Similarly to conversations in the field of young adult services (Bernier, 2013), these dialogues can foment more contemporary thinking that does not simply reflect the views of families that educators, social workers, or psychologists might have. These conversations can resist legacy assumptions and practices and create new views of families on the library terrain and more equity in access and utilization.

Third, library educators can begin to work more closely with faculty, deans, and other administrators within the university setting to develop systems to better recognize, reward, and incentivize the type of pedagogy required for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work meaningfully with families and communities. As many of the library educators noted in this study, helping students find practica and supporting their reflection process is time-consuming and not often acknowledged. In

many higher education institutions, faculty are often rewarded and promoted based on indicators such as the number of books authored, peer-reviewed journals written, and teaching evaluations (Foster, 2010).

One way to address this challenge—that several library educators in this study mentioned—is to review and revise the accreditation standards put forth by the American Library Association and various professional organizations to include family and community partnerships. Another solution is to promote and elevate the intersection of research, practice, and teaching through community-engaged scholarship. Library educators focused on community-engaged scholarship can fully engage in service while living up to responsibilities to teach and conduct research through community-based research projects in partnership with graduate students. These projects concretely serve libraries and other community agencies, are a source of learning and funding for graduate students, and lead to publications in peer-reviewed journals. This type of intersectional scholarship also yields value by generating new theories and research that can better help librarians to redefine and evaluate their services and that libraries and library educators can utilize to inform curriculum (Bernier, 2013; Mehra, Bishop, & Partee, 2016; Rhinesmith et al., 2015). These partnerships benefit universities that seek to demonstrate a mutually beneficial relationship with the community through curriculum engagement, outreach, and productive partnerships (Pearl, 2014). These partnerships also benefit libraries by providing an avenue for professional learning for staff who might not have attended library and information science schools for their training.

Last, library faculty can consider creating cross-departmental partnerships wherein students from different fields—including library and information sciences, sociology, education, social work, and others—have opportunities to share and learn about ideas related to family and community engagement together. This might come in the form of shared seminars, cross-listed courses, collaborative list-serves, or workgroups. The value of cross-departmental collaboration lies in the potential for shared research, resources, and curriculum ideas that are not siloed to one theoretical perspective. They may also inspire students in cognate disciplines to consider careers in library services, where they can contribute their learning to this work.

Limitations

The results of this investigation should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, this study is exploratory in nature. We interviewed only a small sample of library educators from a select number of institutions within the United States to better understand emerging themes in librarian preparation for family and community engagement. This study does not cover the wide range of courses being taught in this area. Future research can expand on the most recent pedagogy through a more systematic survey of a larger sample of institutions and library educators in order to potentially uncover

other innovations. Second, when most people think of family engagement they often think of schools. Although there is a body of research in the field of education exploring the competencies that educators need to engage families effectively, there is very limited research on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that librarians need to do the same. The lack of prior research on this topic limits the extent to which we are able to develop a robust analytical literature review. Subsequent studies and symposia can seek to uncover additional competencies, the validity of those discussed in this paper, and the ways in which they relate to later job satisfaction and on-the-ground success. Third, this study is also limited in that it draws only from the perspective of library educators. Future work can glean the perspective of librarians, library directors, and library candidates themselves, to understand what they need and want to know to effectively engage families.

Conclusion

Libraries today are undergoing transformations in the ways in which they meet and serve families and communities. In this study, we sought to uncover the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that library educators seek to instill in aspiring librarians in schools of information sciences. We also sought to understand the main pedagogical methods that library educators use to do so. By bringing to light interesting ideas and methods around family engagement in libraries, we hope that other library educators will take up this conversation and collaborate in order to advance ideas and innovations in the preparation of librarians to bring about equity in library access and services for children and families in all communities. Many librarians entering the field do so to make a difference for children, families, and communities. For them to be successful they must be given the foundation to do so.

Margaret Caspe is director of research and professional learning at Global Family Research Project.

M. Elena Lopez is co-director of Global Family Research Project.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the library educators who generously volunteered their time and insights for this project.

References

- Abels, E. G., Howarth, L. C., & Smith, L. C. (2016). Envisioning our information future and how to educate for it. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 57(2): 84–93.
- Bernier, A. (Ed.). (2013). *Transforming young adult services*. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schumann.
- Brzozowski, B., Homenda, N., & Roy, L. (2012). The value of service learning projects in preparing LIS students for public services careers in public libraries. *The Reference Librarian*, 53(1), 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2011.591690>

- Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E., Chu, A., & Weiss, H. B. (2011). *Teaching the teachers: Preparing educators to engage families for student achievement*. Cambridge, MA: PTA and Harvard Family Research Project.
- Copeland, C. A. & Martin, M. H. (2016). Camp Read-a-Rama and fully-engaged literacy learning: Implications for LIS education. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 57(2), 112–130.
- D'Haem, J., & Griswold, P. (2016). Teacher educators' and student teachers' beliefs about preparation for working with families including those from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. *Education and Urban Society*, 49(1), 81–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516630602>
- Donahue, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Family engagement in the digital age: Early childhood educators as media mentors*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (Eds.) (2011). *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Epstein, J. L. & Sanders, M. G. (2006). Prospects for change: Preparing educators for school, family, and community partnerships. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(2), 81–120. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327930pje8102_5
- Evans, M. P. (2013). Educating preservice teachers for family, school, and community engagement. *Teaching Education*, 24(2), 123–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2013.786897>
- Family Place Libraries. (2018). *Family Place Libraries*. Retrieved from: <http://www.familyplacelibraries.org/>
- Foster, K. M. (2010). Taking a stand: Community-engaged scholarship on the tenure track. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 3(2), 20–30. Retrieved from <http://jces.ua.edu/>
- Garner, A. K. (2014). *Rising to the challenge: Re-envisioning public libraries*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.
- Garner, A. K. (2016). Public libraries in the community. *I/S: A Journal of Law & Policy for the Information Society*, 13(1), 1–28. <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/81147>
- Generations United. (2017). *State of grandfamilies in America: 2017*. Retrieved from <https://dl2.pushbulletusercontent.com/uhDY7UgdGYnOod6G7VfkdKnuzE3yALmr/17-InLovingArms-Grandfamilies.pdf>
- Goodsett, M., & Koziura, A. (2016). Are library science programs preparing new librarians? Creating a sustainable and vibrant librarian community. *Journal of Library Administration*, 56(6), 697–721. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1134246>
- Haines, C., Campbell, C., & Association for Library Service to Children. (2016). *Becoming a media mentor: A guide for working with children and families*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions.
- Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. (2018). *Libraries: Become a potent force for change*. Retrieved from <https://theharwoodinstitute.org/libraries/>
- Hayakawa, M., Englund, M. M., Warner-Richter, M. N., & Reynolds, A. J. (2013). The longitudinal process of early parent involvement on student achievement: A path analysis. *NHSA Dialog*, 16, 103–126. Retrieved from <https://journals.uncc.edu/dialog>
- Hiatt-Michael, D. (2001). *Preparing teachers to work with parents*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education.
- Hirsh, S., Simmons, M. H., Christensen, P. Sellar, M., Stenstrom, C., Hager, C., & Alman, S. (2015). International perspectives in LIS education: Global education, research, and collaboration at the SJSU School of Information. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 56(S1), S27–46.
- Hoffman, K. M., Subramaniam, M., Kawas, S., Scaff, L., & Davis, K. (2016). *Connected libraries: Surveying the current landscape and charting a path to the future*. College Park, MD; Seattle, WA: The ConnectedLib Project.
- Horrigan, J. B. (2016). Library usage and engagement. In Pew Research Center, *Libraries 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/library-usage-and-engagement/>
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2013). *Growing young minds: How museums and libraries create lifelong learners*. Retrieved from <https://www.ims.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/GrowingYoungMinds.pdf>

- Ito, M., & Martin, C. (2013). Connected learning and the future of libraries. *Young Adult Library Services*, 12(1), 29–32.
- Jackson, M. (2017). Don't let "conversation one" squeeze out "conversation two." *Pathways*. Retrieved from http://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways_Spring2017_Conversation-Two.pdf
- Jaeger, P. T., Bertot, J. C., & Subramaniam, M. (2013). Preparing future librarians to effectively serve their communities. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 83(3), 243–248. <https://doi.org/10.1086/670699>
- Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Urban Education*, 41, 82–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085906293818>
- Kimmel, S. C., Howard, J. K., & Ruzzi, B. (2016). Educating school library leaders for radical change through community service. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 57(2), 174–186.
- Koontz, C. M. (2007). A history of location of U.S. public libraries within community place and space: Evolving implications for the library's mission of equitable service. *Public Library Quarterly*, 26(1/2), 75–100. https://doi.org/10.1300/J118v26n01_05
- Lankes, R. D. (2016). *The new librarianship field guide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lopez, M. E., Caspe, M., & McWilliams, L. (2016). *Public libraries: A vital space for family engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Lopez, M. E., Caspe, M., & Simpson, C. (2017). Engaging families in public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(4), 318–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1354364>
- Maxwell, B. (2015). 'Teacher as professional' as metaphor: What it highlights and what it hides. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 49(1), 86–106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12106>
- Mehra, B., Bishop, B. W., & Partee, R. P., II. (2016). Information science professionals as community action researchers to further the role of rural public libraries in small business economic development: A case study of Tennessee. *The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science/ La Revue canadienne des sciences de l'information et de bibliothéconomie*, 40(4), 289–299. Retrieved from Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS, <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ojs.cais-asci.ca/index.php/cais-asci/article/view/966/861>
- Miller, C., Zickuhr, K., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2013). *Parents, children, libraries, and reading*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Neuman, S. B., & Celano, D. C. (2012). *Giving our children a fighting chance: Poverty, literacy, and the development of information capital*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Neuman, S. B., Moland, N., & Celano, D. (2017). *Bringing literacy home: An evaluation of the Every Child Ready to Read program*. Retrieved from <http://everychildreadytoread.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-ECRR-Report-Final.pdf>
- Oymak, C. (2018). *High school students' views on who influences their thinking about education and careers*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018088.pdf>
- Pearl, A. J. (2014). Predicting community engagement? The Carnegie Foundation's elective classification. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 7(2), 50–59. Retrieved from <http://jces.ua.edu/>
- Pew Research Center. (2015). *The rise in dual income households*. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/
- Public Library Association (2018). Family engagement task force. <http://www.ala.org/pla/about/people/committees/pla-tffameng>
- Reilly, E. (2017, April 13). Design thinking and doing design, part 2 (Blog post). Retrieved from <http://slis.simmons.edu/blogs/unbound/2017/04/13/design-thinking-doing-design-2/>
- Rhinesmith, C., Dettmann, M., Pierson, M., & Spence, R. (2015). YouthStudio: Designing public library YA spaces with teens. *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 6(4), 1–24. Retrieved from <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/>
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Roque, R., & Leggett, S. (2017, June). *Family creative learning: Facilitator guide*. Retrieved from <http://familycreativelearning.org/guide/FCLGuide-20170628.pdf>
- Semmel, M. (2014). *Lessons from museums and libraries: Five ways to address families' digital learning needs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Shartrand, A., Weiss, H., Kreider, H., & Lopez, M.E. (1997). *New skills for new schools: Preparing teachers in family involvement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2012). *The price of inequality: How today's divided society endangers our future*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Subramaniam, M. (2016). Designing the library of the future for and with teens: Librarians as the “connector” in connected learning. *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 7(2), 1–18. Retrieved from <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrly/a/>
- Swan, D. W. (2014). *The effect of informal learning environments during kindergarten on academic achievement during elementary school*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from <http://www.aera.net/Publications/Online-Paper-Repository/AERA-Online-Paper-Repository/%20Owner/335159>
- Turner, D., & Gorichanaz, T. (2016). Old skills and new practices mean radical change for library education. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 57(3), 239–248.
- University of Maryland. (n.d.) *Youth experience (YX): Embracing participatory design and design thinking in children and youth librarianship*. Retrieved from <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/re-40-16-0060.applicationcomponents.pdf>
- Weiss, H. B., Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E., & McWilliams, L. (2016). *Ideabook: Libraries for families*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Walker, J. M. T. & Dotger, B. H. (2012). Because wisdom can't be told: Using comparison of simulated parent–teacher conferences to assess teacher candidates' readiness for family–school partnership. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(1), 62–75.
- Zong, J., Batalova, J., & Hallock, J. (2018, February 8). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>