

NOT YOUR MOTHER'S SCHOOL LIBRARY



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It's enough that students feel they have to post everything on "The Gram" (Instagram) or "The Book" (Facebook). Whether it's their OOTD (outfit of the day), their WCW (Woman Crush Wednesday), or MCM (Man Crush Monday), students may feel the need to tag friends, strike the "tongue out, fingers up" pose in the bathroom, and/or follow and like those who have the lifestyle they wish they could have. In actuality, students may have had enough, enough of pretending to be someone they do not know, and they may decide that they are done being silent and live out loud. Whether students choose to live out loud or keep everything "on the low," they only want one thing: to be accepted. School libraries are places where people seek solace—not just by burying their heads in books to see themselves in the characters or to look up information on a topic they can't bring themselves to ask friends, but as a safe haven, or third space, from those who have prejudices based on one's sexuality.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) community want the same resources, services, and sources as other people, just without the prejudices. They want a place that is a diverse and inclusive environment. This environment should be a place of solace and support. Students are turning away from sitting alone to coming into the school library to be with those with whom they can relate. Everyone wants to be understood, loved, and accepted, but not everyone knows how to show it. School libraries have always been a safe place for all, but now the school library is turning into a safe haven for those who are looking for security.

School libraries of today are not your mother's school library. The library is no longer a quiet place or a meeting place; it is a place with books, posters, displays, and workers who listen to their patrons, look like their patrons, and respect their patrons...it is a safe place. I know you are thinking school libraries have been safe havens for those

who need heat in the winter, air in the summer, unlimited WiFi, and electric sockets, but libraries are becoming safe havens for people who do not feel the love from their peers, are not welcome in the cafeteria, and/or are bullied because of the lifestyle they choose to live.

In 2018, AASL released the *National School Library Standards* to provide school librarians with guidance and structure on how to best tailor their school library space to the needs of their learners. With libraries steadily becoming a safe place for patrons to support inclusiveness, celebrate self-worth, and embrace others' diverse perspectives, the previous standards had to be updated to reflect all types of learners and leaders. The standards contain five levels: Shared Foundations, Key Commitments, Domains, Competencies, and Alignments. Each level is designed to reflect the others, ensuring the standards-related activities are mutually reinforcing, building capacity among learners, school librarians, and the school library (AASL 2018).

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The four Domains are Think, Create, Share, and Grow and detail the school librarian's role in engaging learners and leaders to support the learning community. There are Key Commitments to the Shared Foundations of Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. The Key Commitment is the main objective behind each Shared Foundation (AASL 2018). Although each foundation is equally important when implementing the standards, Include is the foundation that school librarians can continuously build upon. The Key Commitment in Include is to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community (AASL 2018). The Share Domain aligns with Include by providing opportunities to experience diverse ideas and by implementing solutions that address multiple barriers to equitable access to resources and services (AASL 2018).

Let's look at how the Domains in the AASL Standards make school libraries a safer place.

Just **Think** how patrons would be more likely to use the school library because there was no judgment regarding who they were, who they want to be, or who they love. In schools all around the nation, the hashtag movement #attendance-matters is popping up on social media sites, bulletin boards, and in staff meetings. Attendance does matter. If the kids/patrons ain't happy, nobody is happy; and if the kids ain't happy, they are not coming to school or the school library.

One can **Create** a space of acceptance by modeling understanding. When kids feel accepted it gives them a sense that this place "gets me." Being different, looking different, and having different feelings has no place in some kids' homes. In school, we encourage uniqueness

and standing out from the rest. We create a sense of self to have pride in being whatever you choose to be. Last year, we allowed our students with a unique sense of self to assist us with our book order and displays. Let's just say our book display was fierce.

Our workspace is their learning space, their listening space, and their happy place. We **Share** our area with our students. Nothing good ever came out of something that wasn't open. Our students are welcome to come in just to sit and chat, look at library materials, or just look at us, but they are welcome and they bring friends who have never been to the library. It is kind of like when you find something good and you post how good it is on social media; people see it and check it out for themselves. That's how school libraries are now; they are endorsed by people they respect; their peers, the people who look, act, and think like they do.

We **Grow** from what is poured into us. As teachers, librarians, and school personnel, the vibe of the school starts from the administration and trickles down. Building leaders set the tone of the school. If the leaders are not leading in a manner for those to follow, then it needs to be brought to the forefront that the school is a business, the students are the customers, and we aim to please. As school librarians, we want continued business with our customers, and the only way to make sure they come back is to make them feel welcomed, accepted, and respected.

As an ally and advocate for all students (ages 8–80) I am constantly learning. I was taught that there were four basic needs to survive: water, air, shelter, and food. As I have become wiser, I feel there are a few more to add: education, acceptance, and security. The four basic needs have become seven due to the ever-changing needs of the people we

serve as teachers, librarians, and school personnel. Can you even imagine life without an education? Without being accepted for who you are? Or without a sense of security? Ain't nobody got time for that!

As a high school librarian, I have had my fair share of patrons who come in just to "see someone really quick." One day, I decided to go back to the library coursework days and use some of the skills I acquired when learning about our patrons. I used my reference interview questioning skills to get to know about my patrons' interests and hobbies. I talked with one of my "keyless entry" students to make their "real quick" visit more personal and professional for both of us. It went something like this:

Me (in my cardigan): Hey young man, you got one minute to visit your friend because he is independently working on an assignment.

Him (sitting down): Alright, I'm leaving now.

Me: You are welcome here; you just need a pass.

Him: Alright, miss. It's all good, y'all don't have no good books in here anyway.

Me (clutching my pearls): Excuse me, sir. I will have you know I have picked most of these books myself.

Him: What y'all got? (His way of stalling to not go back to class)

Me (since he's here I can promote the library to a potential user): We got every Anime book, books on singers, rappers, entertainers, etc.

Also Me: So what are you into?

Him: Boys!

Me: Oh, I got (insert me rambling off the titles of all the books from our diverse perspectives section).

Him: You lying!! Y'all got books like that? I was just joking.

In life, I have learned that the truth comes out in a joke. He and I talked for the remainder of the block (yes, he won the game of coming in the library and staying without a pass, but I won at the end). He threw out bait to see if I would bite and to see if I like to fish (was gay friendly) or if I was allergic to fish (strait-laced). I shared with him a *Sports Illustrated* magazine because he likes to browse through the sports pages and read up on what interests him. Just from doing reference interviewing I have circulated books that haven't moved, made new friends, and got recommendations on what's trending in my students' world. Spoiler alert:

that student has come back to check out "one of them books" (LGBTQ) for a friend because his friend didn't believe we had those kinds of books. I may have gotten suckered by someone who was looking to skip class, but I earned a patron's respect, got input on book selections, and also became someone's sense of security when it came to who he really wants to be.

There isn't a day that goes by where there is not a new face coming in the library "real quick." These new faces are looking for familiar faces to feel at ease with when it comes to making book choices. I learned from the student that it is no one's business what he reads, and he is most correct. So he asked me if there was any way he could read "those books" without everyone seeing what he was reading. I suggested a book jacket/book sleeve (he had no clue what I was talking about). He suggested an e-book. How ingenious!

Why didn't I think of that? From then on out, we have always talked with students about their book selections and their preferred format because they know what they want to read, what they want to know, and how they want to read.

Future-ready librarians, let's stay tuned to what's going on outside the school so that we meet our students' needs and interests. Let's learn out loud! Let's build an inclusive collection with our students that recognizes and revels in diverse perspectives. Next, let's make sure that there is information on a variety of vantage points, beliefs, and understandings that reflect each of our students. Lastly, let's ensure all students feel safe, secure, and welcome regardless of their race, religion, culture, or sexual identity.

Have pride! Live out loud! Be powerful...because you are enough!



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Work Cited:

American Association of School Librarians. 2018. *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. Chicago: ALA.