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INCLUDE

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THEIR
VOICES

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Students' ideas and thoughts matter. Though I created school library programs and projects for years that centered around students' needs as I perceived them, I had not intentionally asked students for their input until I had an epiphany at "The Future of Social Media Education," a Connecticut Association of Independent Schools' (CAIS) workshop in Middlebury, Connecticut, a few years ago. This workshop changed the way I run the library at Rumsey Hall, an independent, co-ed junior boarding (fifth through ninth grades) and day school (pre-K through ninth grade) in Washington Depot, Connecticut. At the workshop Laura Tierney, founder and CEO of The Social Institute, talked about the importance of including students in the decision-making process of planning and implementing the programs we create. It sounds so simple. Since Tierney's workshop, I now always think about how to incorporate students' voices and ideas throughout programs. The examples below provide a variety of ways that students have enhanced programming at Rumsey and beyond.

Casual Conversations about Social Media Group

After Tierney's workshop, I invited interested eighth-grade students

While conversing with one another, students discovered that they all had different life experiences. They also had varied feelings about and comfort levels with social media. Having a space to talk about these platforms helped with their understanding of others' views as well as their own.

to take part in a new program "Casual Conversations about Social Media" during Monday lunches. No marketing was needed beyond one announcement; enough students were intrigued enough to participate. The goal was to provide a safe space where students could share their perspectives on social media. They could discuss, ask questions about, and become more knowledgeable about platforms that seemed to be taking over so much of their lives. Participants agreed to be open-minded, non-judgmental, and supportive.

An interesting mix of eight students joined: international, domestic, boarding, and day students. They committed to meeting through the end of the 2019 school year (about six weeks). I wanted to keep it informal and hoped students would take ownership of the conversations. I quickly found that I needed to bring a topic to talk about each week; otherwise, the boarding students mostly wanted to talk about extending the Wi-Fi hours later into the evening. This program format was new to students, too, so it was fine that each week I brought something to get the conversations going and keep them focused on a specific topic related to social media. At the time, TikTok was taking off in the U.S., so that was one of our topics for a lively discussion. Articles that discuss bizarre caricatures, hoaxes, and urban legends, such as John Herrman's article "Momo Is as Real as We've Made Her," inspired good conversations as well.

Through these discussions, I discovered that helping students become more media literate should become an essential part of education at Rumsey Hall. While conversing with one another, students discovered that they all had different life experiences. They also had varied feelings about and comfort levels with social media. Having a

space to talk about these platforms helped with their understanding of others' views as well as their own. To this day, through our advisory program as well as in parts of the academic curriculum, we discuss social media topics and media literacy. The Casual Conversations about Social Media program added some variety to eighth-grade students' lunchtime experience and primed them for the following year: their final one at Rumsey where they could serve as leaders of the school. This experiment showed them the benefits of volunteering for programs and that their voices mattered. Some became elected senior committee members during their ninth-grade year, helping to shape school events and decisions. As a result of this brief program, I knew that including students in conversations would remain a key component of what I do in education.

Collaborative Project for State Award Nominees

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, schools clamored for ways to connect students and communities. Rae Anne Locke, another Connecticut library media specialist reached out after viewing a video I made (with Rumsey faculty members' voices) that shared a couple of our state book award nominee lists. After some back and forth e-mails, Rae Anne and I thought it would be fun to have our fourth- and fifth-grade students create a promotional video to share with our school communities the 2021 Connecticut Nutmeg Award nominees in the "Elementary" category. Each student used a template in Google Slides to write and record a thirty-second audio clip for one of the fifteen nominated books. The students worked independently and never met in person or virtually during the creation of the videos. Since we were all teaching and learning virtually,

students met via Zoom or Google Meet with their respective librarians to learn about the program and ask questions before creating their videos.

The students were so excited about the project and wanted to meet each other. Some of my students suggested having a glamorous (virtual) reveal party to enjoy the video together synchronously. What a fabulous and fun idea! We all got dressed up, (some wearing pearls, fancy dresses, and/or blazers with ties), and had a Zoom reveal party where students could finally talk to one another. Here was a student-generated idea that brought joy, fun, and connection at a time when all of us really needed it. Think back to conditions in May 2020 and then view the video at bit.ly/2021NutmegElementary. Students' enthusiastic voices brought incredible energy and excitement to the launching of books for this state book program at our respective schools during a period when we didn't have much to celebrate.

Library Prefect (Student Volunteer) Program 2020

During the fall of 2020, though we had countless plans in place, no one knew what the school year would look like. Would there be a library prefect program at Rumsey Hall where the library was designated as the school's surge space? The library space was used as a classroom for in-person students when their teacher was in quarantine because of Covid-19, yet that instructor could still teach via Zoom to students both on site and at a distance. Therefore, no traditional library programs took place in the library that school year, but I adopted the theme "Beyond the Library's Walls" and was excited to see how the year unfolded.

Before the school year even started, I had a student who would be attending

school in person reach out to see if she could be a library prefect again. Shortly thereafter, another said that since she would be a distance learner, she was sorry that she could not be a prefect. I responded that I could still have distance learners as library prefects, especially eager and engaged students like her. Having taught her for library and information literacy sessions during fifth grade, I knew she would make an outstanding prefect, even at a distance. Right at the beginning of the year, she voluntarily created an excellent tutorial from a student's perspective that showed how to upload work to Google Classroom. When I saw her completed tutorial, I jokingly responded, "When did you get your MLS?" That tutorial was extremely helpful to Rumsey students, parents, and teachers alike, proving that students' ideas and work have far-reaching effects.

Without my ever making formal announcements, a handful of other students continued to reach out through the year to join the library prefect team, resulting in one of the most successful library prefect programs ever. Though meeting times were problematic with some students literally in other parts of the world, we did meet occasionally over Zoom to plan, organize, and complete a plethora of projects. We kept track of our projects using Jamboard (see figures 1 and 2).

Each project had a student manager who would come up with ideas, guide others, and keep them on track. Students were an essential part of the library's relevance and effectiveness for the entire Rumsey community (including alumni, grandparents, and special friends) during that unforgettable year when the physical library served as a surge space.

Inspired by his volunteering in Rumsey's library, one library prefect (who was a distance learner at the

TEAM:
Ryan
Veronica
Serena
Claire
Isabella
Melissa
Yeejune

WE HAD A GREAT, PRODUCTIVE YEAR!!!

Spring '21 COMPLETED PROJECTS
(Next panel lists Fall & Spring Projects!)

Mr. Craig, our new Head of School, has already visited our library. He loves our favorite lines white birch tree!!!

nERDCampCT Jr: Rumsey students were a HUGE part of this pilot program's success!!!

Favorite Lines from Book Fest '21 Books

BLOSSOMS-- Ryan fixed fav sentences spreadsheet; Melissa/Claire/Yeejune cut out &/or hung blossoms; Melissa wrote fav lines for all distance learners & alums that submitted

FAVORITE LINES! BOOK FEST 2021

Summer Reading Planning team: Mrs. Mandl, Mrs. McGrew, Ms. Cooper, Mrs. Saxe, Mr. Mandl, Mrs. Dilorenzo, Oliver A, Ryan Z, Veronica A, Alice X, Jami H, Fiona S, Hezzy B, Mr. Brenner

bit.ly/rumseySummerReadingSlides21

Earth Day- Project Manager: Isabella and Claire: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X_pp9p8W4tEa5dqdH8OWAKo0JAk8tCq/view?usp=sharing

2021 Nutmeg Book Award Voting! Project Manager: Ryan

2021 NUTMEG ELEMENTARY Voting Form

Book	Author	Student Moderator	Student Moderator
Session Title: "Let's Discuss, Share, and Discuss"	Vanita Ballig	Student moderator: Veronica A	Student moderator: Veronica A
Session Title: "Nature Book"	Deborah Freedman & Laura Rusk	Student moderator: Veronica A	Student moderator: Veronica A
Session Title: "The Last Library"	Simon St. Laurent	Student moderator: Veronica A	Student moderator: Veronica A
Session Title: "Lulu in Space"	Carla Applegate, Gregory Rogers, & Sarah Johnson	Student moderator: Veronica A	Student moderator: Veronica A

Figure 1. Library Prefect projects completed during spring 2021.

Fall & Winter Completed Projects '20 - '21

Book Club Video complete 4/1/21! Project Manager--Serena <https://bit.ly/BookFest21PhotosQuotes>

Rumsey Hall Book Clubs 2021

Veronica created Book Fest '21 Intro video for faculty/staff

Snowflakes for Snowstorm of Reading completed Winter Term: Project Manager: Melissa

Parent, Student, and Faculty Create a Snowstorm of Reading January 26, 2021

HOW TO UPLOAD WORK TO GOOGLE CLASSROOM
Created by Veronica A. '24
September 2020
Project Manager: Veronica

Summer Reading Tree completed Fall '20, Project Manager: Melissa

Made mini books for IIRD Form...Flight of the Puffin...read aloud.

Maybe Mrs. D will add Stamped and The Rent Collector, though those clubs reach beyond library prefects

Nursery Rhymes for Rumsey's Kindies & Pre-Primes
Project Manager: Ryan
All recordings due by Friday, October 30th
Part of Global Read Aloud '20
Illustrator study--Juana Martinez-Neal

Figure 2. Library Prefect projects completed during the 2020-2021 fall and winter terms.

time) from Shanghai, China, created a community service program in Yunnan. His family had created a bridge in that province long before Ryan was born, so he felt a familial pull to that place. He set up a Zoom meeting with me to solicit my ideas. After much thought about how he could give back to a community in China, Ryan embarked on an elementary school library renovation program. He knew that it could be much more child-friendly since the current space had row after row of sterile metal shelving much taller than the children at the school. He asked if I would reach out to my

librarian colleagues to share images of their libraries. As a result, he received photos with suggestions, guidance, and documentation from eight different elementary schools in Connecticut and Rhode Island. He assembled the photos into a presentation and met with the head of the elementary school in Yunnan. With his family's support, he spearheaded and saw the completion of the school's library renovation. Giving students the confidence and opportunity to share their voices led to incredible creations, connections, and programs.

Learning from these successful experiences, I continued to include students' ideas throughout my work as a librarian. While attending a Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL) monthly meeting, I learned that the board was looking for volunteers to work on the 2021 nERDCampCT program. (The nERDCamp events focus on literacy and use the Edcamp unconference model for their structure.) CASL board members were searching for someone to help organize and create the first ever nERDCampCT Jr. program for children and teens. Remembering how amazing

nErDCampCT Jr. 2021



nErDCampCT 2020 had been, I quickly said, "I'd like to do that. Can we involve students in the planning, too?" The answer, of course, was "Yes!" Could nErDCampCT Jr. have been organized without student involvement? Sure. Might it have been easier to create without their involvement? Perhaps. Would it have been better without their involvement? Definitely not!

Melissa Thom, then VP and now president of CASL, and I worked together to recruit students from throughout Connecticut to create the nErDCampCT Jr. program. We reached out to librarians across the state hoping to acquire a diverse team. It was a challenging time of year to recruit students to volunteer for a program that was new and rather unknown. Many students were just returning to in-person classes for the first time in a year. Other students were still online. We ended up with a nErDCampCT Jr. team that ranged from fourth-graders through high school students. We met in the evening on Zoom to accommodate a variety of schedules. Though most team members were in Connecticut, we had one fifth-grader from Minnesota, and some Rumsey students logging in from China.

The nErDCampCT Jr. team, which also included author Deborah Freedman, held several brainstorming sessions during which we gathered students' ideas and even artwork for this new program. The adult nErDCampCT team, under the leadership of Barbara Johnson, Melissa Thom, Jenny Lussier, and Katie Gordon, had already gathered

a wide array of interested authors and illustrators who wanted to take part in the first-ever nErDCampCT Jr. event. The Jr. team, therefore, had to create the schedule for the two-day event to be held in June. Student members of the Jr. team were thoroughly engaged in the whole process; they even wrote the draft of the e-mail used to reach out to authors to find out their availability and propose title sessions.

Authors, illustrators, librarians, and teachers commented on how professional our student moderators were. Of course they were professional. They are young, bright reader leaders.

Sometimes serendipitous events occur that end up helping to create something marvelous. Toward the end of the nErDCampCT Jr. planning process, a friend reached out to see if I had any summer projects for her daughter who was finishing her sophomore year of high school. Since nErDCampCT Jr. was just around the corner, maybe her daughter would like to be part of it? After having an hour-long Zoom session with Julia (a student at Westover School in Middlebury, Connecticut), I knew we had found another special student to be on our Jr. team. Out of that first conversation with Julia, an additional session was born from a comment she made: "I Like to Read the Endings First. How Do You Read?" Again, simply listening to students generates

great ideas. This session that Julia moderated with authors was highly engaging and thought-provoking for all in attendance.

Final preparations for nErDCampCT Jr. required student facilitators to research their authors and illustrators so they could introduce and moderate their sessions. Authors, illustrators, librarians, and teachers commented on how professional our student moderators were. Of course they were professional. They are young, bright reader leaders.

One of these reader (and writer) leaders, seventh-grader Veronica, stated about the nErDCampCT Jr. experience: "nErDCampCT Jr. was a great opportunity for all of us students passionate about reading and creativity. Moderating the sessions and meeting authors was especially thrilling for me as I aspire to be a writer one day too. Mrs. DiLorenzo had told me about the adult nErDCampCT prior to the creation of the Jr. version, and I remember really wanting to attend; now I could!" Truly, giving students the opportunity to share their voices through nErDCampCT Jr. has been a highlight of my life as a librarian. More importantly, it has enriched students' lives.

Question Formulation Technique

Later in the summer, while attending Harvard Graduate School of Education's "Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions: Best Practices in the Question Formulation Technique" online workshop, I had to create a lesson using this technique. Though I was not sure if I could get participants for a Question Formulation Technique (QFT) session during the summer, I had a feeling that some library prefects would be happy to participate. Never letting me down, a couple of them made it to the live Zoom session. Three other library

prefects watched the recording and shared their questions afterward. An administrator and a teacher attended the session also. The question focus for the session was “improve the culture of reading in the Upper School [at Rumsey Hall].”

Students’ questions and comments generated during the QFT live and asynchronous sessions helped drive the library program for the 2021–2022 academic year at Rumsey Hall. Jami, one of the student attendees at a scheduled face-to-face session, shared the question: “Why is reading not preferred over games?” This prompted us to focus on the ever-present quest for ways to get students to enjoy reading more. A Free Book Friday cart had already been a part of the Lower School for years to make books as accessible as possible at no cost to learners. Why not create one for Upper School, too? Therefore, a newly acquired cart (free from a local thrift shop) was decorated by Rumsey’s National Junior Art Honor Society members. It was easily filled with fantastic high-interest donations, and this Free Book Friday cart has been rolled out to the library’s main entrance ever since. Additionally, since library prefects, teachers, and administrators agreed it is important to encourage reading in any way that we can, the IRB (Independent Reading Book) program (which had fallen by the wayside years before) was reinstated in the Upper School.

After working our way through the QFT sessions, another student attendee at a face-to-face session Yeejune remarked, “Choice is important. I like mysteries.” In the fall while attending a session on genre-fying a fiction collection at AASL’s 2021 National Conference in Salt Lake City, I made a connection back to Yeejune’s comment. I knew that it was time to genre-fy Rumsey’s Upper School fiction section. That

way, students who like a particular genre, such as Yeejune, could easily find many book options within their genre of choice. Once the collection had been genre-fied, students, of course, created a video to introduce this major organizational change to the rest of the Rumsey community.

Conclusion

Time and again, students’ input and participation improves a library’s reach. Programs are more enticing for students when librarians include learners’ perspectives. The interest level for students improves drastically when their peers announce programs and/or create promotional items to share what is happening in the school library. As school librarians, it is our job to do everything we can to pull students into our libraries and programs. We do our best to help everyone find pleasure in reading, find success in researching, create in our makerspaces, and do so much more. I will continue to listen to and include students’ voices wherever I can because I know that programs are more successful and meaningful with student involvement. Though some of us are young at heart, librarians are not the age of our students. Students’ perspectives and life experiences are different from ours. We do our research, but we are not young people. Students’ voices make library programs better and give learners a sense of ownership of the library and its programs. Let’s make sure we continue to include them.

Works Cited:

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DiLorenzo is library media specialist and new-faculty coordinator at Rumsey Hall School in

Washington Depot, Connecticut. A member of ALA, AASL, and Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL), she is CASL VP Intern and chaired the November 2022 CASL/CECA Conference. She is a frequent presenter and/or moderator in Edcamp and nErDCamp programs. Valerie presented “Libraries, Literature, & the Counseling Connection” at the International Association of School Librarians conference in July 2022 and will present an updated version at ALA Annual Conference and Exhibition in Chicago in June 2023. She also presented “Podcasting: Easy as 1, 2, 3!” in 2021 for Connecticut Association of Independent Schools. Valerie wrote “Qui Non Proficit Deficit in the Age of the Pandemic” for the 2020/2021 issue of Rumsey Rarebits. Her “The Meanderings of a Librarian” podcast is available at <<https://anchor.fm/valerie-dilorenzo>>.

Resources of Interest

“Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions: Best Practices in the Question Formulation Technique.” Workshop presented by Harvard Graduate School of Education. <www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/program/teaching-students-ask-their-own-questions-best-practices-question-formulation-technique>

“We’re on a Mission to Fuel Students’ Health, Happiness, and Future Success.” Gamified online learning platform focused on social media literacy presented by The Social Institute. <thesocialinstitute.com/about>