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How Intellectual Freedom Can Be Highlighted, Integrated, & Safeguarded in Modern Public Library Instruction

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Intellectual freedom is a staple of modern American libraries, particularly public libraries. The American Library Association (ALA) has a long history of defining and supporting intellectual freedom, and currently describes it as "the right [for all users] to seek and receive information on all subjects from all points of view without restriction and without having the subject of one's interest examined or scrutinized by others" (Intellectual Freedom, 2016). It is a moral outlined within the ALA Code of ethics that provides both security and revolution because its inherent goal is to guarantee safety for those seeking to understand, create, or promote ideas outside the accepted norm.

The general idea behind intellectual freedom is that a library cannot deny services, resources, or information based on personal biases. But how is this applied in an everyday setting? Several aspects of public librarianship encompass and protect intellectual freedom while also acting as either conditions of or outright complete instruction modules. These include collection management, understanding & acquiring new technologies, and workshopping.

The following sections will examine two main avenues of incorporating the principle of intellectual freedom into facets of library instruction. The first is to use factually questionable materials to highlight how to evaluate good sources, and the other is examine how intellectual freedom interacts with copyright law. The foundation of both of these concepts should already be incorporated into public libraries' everyday framework, but by also showcasing them in the forefront of specific instruction sessions, libraries have to opportunity to strengthen both their own policies and the public's everyday understanding of why intellectual freedom should be a valued commodity in their community.

Collection Management:

When building a collection, multiple perspectives should always be considered, regardless of the topic. Controversial topics may require special attention to fully enact this idea. Communities served by public libraries cannot be considered and are not ever homogenous entities. They encompass a variety of tastes, opinions, experiences, and ideals. Therefore, they cannot be expected to approach information in a uniform manner.

Interpretation is another mitigating factor that can limit how patrons are connected to information. It can depend on multiple factors, such as education level, political background, and reason for connecting with the information in the first place. Was it for a school project? Did they have a personal connection to the resource? Was it needed for a professional reason? Was the patron hoping to confirm an already preset belief or were they hoping to simply

obtain new information? Did an agenda, political or otherwise, help the patron form their current opinion and if so, in what way? Allotting for a variety of patron backgrounds & purposes when collection building can alleviate frustrations and limitations later on.

Recommendations and reader's advisory also need to be fitted for the individual, and every effort should be made to prevent the librarian's personal taste from affecting the answers they provide. A vital function of librarianship is understanding how to find resources unique for every situation. By limiting what one recognizes as suitable material to only what one find personally acceptable creates an environment small in scope and of little use to communities as a whole.

However, no collection is able to completely satisfy every patron and should not be considered a static or routine mechanism. Collection management is an ongoing process, one that may need to be reevaluated as patron bases change or new resources become readily available. Budget plays a significant role, as does overall community needs and marketplace trends. A large urban system may have to consider several branches' requirements when creating a collection development plan that looks wholly different than a single rural independent library's. But the idea behind both is similar: a balance must be reached between serving the general population and helping specific individuals. Therefore, material cannot be dismissed solely on the basis that the majority will not seek it out, even if the majority has compelling reasons for ignoring it.

Controversial subjects such as abortion, climate change, and creationism often create instinctive knee-jerk reactions. To have a fully realized collection, resources that cover both sides of an issue should be included whenever possible, but most especially when the topic is apt to incite decisive sides. Intentionally leaving something off of the purchase list because of the perceived truthfulness of it is easily classified as a violation of intellectual freedom. But it also requires clear standards for how to find the information specific to a situation easily, without wading through everything under the broader heading of its generalized topic.

Cataloging Techniques for Intellectual Freedom:

A significant part of orienting patrons to a library is teaching them how to find materials; process usually begins with how materials are cataloged. By focusing specifically on intellectual freedom in the realm of cataloging, a library ensures the protection of that ethic from the moment materials are introduced. Overall, American libraries have proven that they are willing to provide space for objectionable material, although it may be presented in different ways as standing conclusions regarding its content changes.

For example, the mid-1990s brought up a new subject heading in various classification systems to properly cite holocaust denial materials. There was a substantial libel case brought forth in England between scholar Deborah Lipstadt and writer David Irving. Lipstadt had asserted in a book that Irving was a staunch holocaust denier while Irving maintained that he was simply a historian with a minority viewpoint. The court sided with Lipstadt, and as a result, 'holocaust denial' became an accepted phrase for extreme right-wing historiography regarding the holocaust.

Public libraries were often asked if they stocked any holocaust denial resources within its holdings, and if so, where was it found? Most found that they had been actively collecting it, and then placing it in standard WWII history subject headings, or in some cases, in Jewish studies. But the Lipstadt brought about the importance of the material being classified in its own right. By 1997, the Library of Congress introduced two new call numbers, one for holocaust denial materials directly and one to be applied to critiques of holocaust denial materials. The Dewey classification system followed suit in 2003 (pg 59). Thus, libraries were able to showcase that they were providing the material and making it more easily searchable for those looking into that particular discipline. Similar 'reclassifications' have occurred with subjects such as creationism and LGBTQ materials.

Moreover, the "correct" set of fact can be incredibly difficult to pin down. Disciplines, such as both the hard and social sciences, frequently debate the validity of various theories, and over time, accepted doctrine can be challenged and overthrown. It is often the scholastic conversation surrounding an idea that changes the public's perception of it. Areas like history can be subjective, like an eyewitness discussing their experience, or it can be hard data, such as how many times an event occurred in a specific place during a certain time period. But the two are not always presented in mutually exclusive territory. It is impossible to evaluate the entirety of a source before adding it to a library's collection.

Therefore, it is important and practical for a public library to allow patrons access to a wide range of opinions about a desired topic. Showing the progression of an idea can be as beneficial as producing an outcome. School librarian Jole Seroff notes that "intellectual freedom is undermined if the … discourse becomes hegemonic" (p.21, 2015). Competing viewpoints and multiple perspectives can help patrons understand how the evolution of thought can affect their own research or understanding of a subject. It also helps them learn to evaluate sources themselves. It empowers an individual to appraise resources without relying on another's insistence on what formulates the "right" information. It also give the library staff the benefit of more independent patrons, freeing up time for more complex reference and research questions.

Intellectual Freedom as Presented in Instruction:

While the presence of intellectual freedom is generally understood within the direct contact of library resources, how intellectual freedom plays a role in instruction led or sponsored by the library is somewhat less clear. Instruction within the library setting has become a consistent way to attract new patrons and inform current ones. Libraries, at their hearts, strive to connect patrons to information. Often though, the ability to actually perform that task becomes complicated based on factors such as the extent of the patrons' digital literacy skills, what resources a particular library has, and how much staff time can be devoted to solving an individual's question. Instructional sessions are a way to bridge those literacy gaps and create space specific to how precisely that library can help connect their patrons to a designated set of information.

Library classes already integrate reference help into numerous topics. By framing it as a matter of intellectual freedom, it opens up the institution up to discussing its commitment to that idea and how the application of it in a day-to-day setting. Trending topics, hashtags, and breaking

news are often discussed on various kinds of social media sites, and can be used as examples of different kinds of legitimacy. Examining social media sites are an adept way to examine how bias, opinion, and research interact with one another.

Genealogy is another opportunity. How do you access personal records and why do some remain unavailable? How has the keeping of personal records changed over time? How has technology opened up genealogy research? Why are some individual's records easier to track than another's? This can be a favorable time to introduce how the absence of information can instruct nearly as much as a plethora of resources.

Technology, Copyright & Intellectual Freedom:

Maybe your library wants to produce programming and instruction about fanfiction. That can become a perfect moment to talk about how libraries balance intellectual freedom and copyright. Some authors heavily fight against the unlicensed use of their characters while others vigorously defend the right for anyone to write whatever they wish. How can the library classroom respect both of these viewpoints and encourage their own patrons to become a part of that ongoing conversation?

After noting that while students have a basic understanding of using other's original content, Seroff concludes that they have less comprehension regarding their own legal rights regarding copyright. She asks "how can we empower students to fully exercise their intellectual freedom as content creators, while still instilling a respect for intellectual property?" (p.22, 2015). Workshops can be designed to clear up confusion regarding copyright, open access, and creative commons licensing, as well as how it affects individual pieces of original works. For instance, there are currently six types of creative commons licenses, and they vary in level of restriction and general functionality (Fargo McKinnon & Helge, p. 13, 2014). How would that affect what you are asking your students to produce? Give them an overview and specific examples to help illustrate the differences.

Discussion in instruction sessions regarding internet filters is a wonderful segue into examining intellectual freedom. Does the public library use any filters? Why do the disadvantages of using one include comprising a foundational property so highly regarded by libraries? Furthermore, what has contributed to such a long-standing respect in regard to intellectual freedom within the profession? Do other professions share similar positions?

More and more public libraries have begun building makerspaces and purchasing 3D printers, making an expensive technology readily available for public use. Supplying instructional overview to patrons looking to use this service should be standard along with providing basic directions how to actually utilize the machine. The functionality of the machine and the responsibility of how to use it should be considered inseparable when training employees who supervise the machine.

Libraries need to understand the full scope of ideas that can be rendered using a 3D printer. Guns and other weapons are the most common argument against supplying one for seemingly unrestricted public use. The guns produced are currently in what many consider to be

an ethical gray area because they require neither a license to own or provide a number to register it with any governmental agency (Griffey, p. 22, 2014). Furthermore, they have the potential to get through metal detectors undiscovered because they are made from plastic, not metal. But they are fully operational instruments comparable to their traditionally manufactured counterparts.

There is also the possibility of other questionable material being produced through the library's 3D printer. Sexually explicit material could be produced, with no regard for the age of the patron requesting its production. Adaptive parts for pre-existing items are easily found online; one that have the potential to change the legal standards that official manufacturers are held to when making products to be sold in the United States.

It is essential that libraries carry through their foundational principle of intellectual freedom to more than traditional literacy and its associated sources. It must be transferred to new and emerging technologies that libraries either acquire or advocate for. Laws and other legal frameworks may take a considerable amount of time to catch up to these legal inconsistencies, and it is therefore up to communities and companies to assess how to establish best practices. Libraries have an unqualified opportunity to shape how new technologies can be used in conjunction with intellectual freedom.

Resources & Organizations:

There are numerous support systems in place to help promote intellectual freedom, particularly within a library setting.   The Free Expression Policy project is an online organization that questions the often routine censoring of materials focused on children and young adults. The Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF) is set up to specifically help libraries and individual libraries advocate for intellectual freedom by offering grants and legal counsel as well as arranging access to current studies and emerging information regarding intellectual freedom.   Banned Books Week, sponsored and organized by the ALA, is an oft celebrated part of fall programming, and provides materials that discuss censorship and campaign for open access (Greechie, p. 90, 2016). These are all organizations designed to promote, protect, and explain intellectual freedom.

Conclusion:

It is often overlooked how the practice of instruction and the theory of intellectual freedom can be intertwined to provide better services for all patrons. A better understanding of how intellectual freedom is implemented helps librarians better discern how their collections benefit and interact with their patrons. It had the potential to create stronger development policies and exemplify the trust between patrons and libraries. And it maintains the public library's duty to remain a neutral, safe place to ask questions and seek knowledge.

By building collections and cataloging those materials with intellectual freedom at the forefront, public libraries model neutrality and understanding of a community's diversity in backgrounds, purposes, and ideas. It fortifies the concept that a public library holds a place for anyone who wishes to use it and empowers every individual to further their own understanding of the world.

Take advantage of librarianship's willingness to pursue as valuable a commodity as intellectual freedom. Test its flexibility and question its limits. When used correctly, it can both safeguard against censorship and rally for the undeveloped idea. By actively teaching it within the field, it gains support in the very communities we serve and dispels rumors that it can be easily set aside. It can be demonstrated in everyday scenarios today and be a step in future plans to help project their success. Intellectual freedom is multi-purpose and helps everyone navigate how to achieve their own version of success. Do not let it become a theoretical nicety but instead implement it in every aspect of the profession.

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