Goal: 1) Disruptive thinkers will identify strategies that will position libraries as lead organizations that innovate new opportunities for learning that augment (and disrupt) learning happening in formal educational settings. 2) A non-library audience will gain a deeper understanding of the contribution libraries can make in addressing national priorities—specifically in education and economic development. 3) Funding sources will be identified to investigate government policies/practices that inhibit and/or stall education innovation and the role of libraries in circumventing institutional barriers to responsive learning design.

Premise: The nation is not developing next generation learners prepared with skill sets that are necessary to advance innovation in US and global markets. Opportunity is unequal with barriers to achievement impacted by race and ethnic background, gender, income levels, and geographic location, among other factors. Education reform is insufficient; it is necessary to explore new learning models from outside institutionalized systems.

Why libraries: Libraries operate outside formal education parameters and are therefore a natural lab for exploring how to effectively disrupt educational practice.

Libraries particularly excel in opportunities for less-structured learning and creativity. They provide a safe space for exploration of information and technologies outside the mainstream experience where “failure” is a positive and expected stage of learning. They foster the intellectual, emotional, and social tools necessary for success regardless of what field of expertise a child might follow over the course of her educational and professional careers. Finally, libraries welcome collaboration and integration with community stakeholders whether other community anchor organizations (government or non-profit), businesses, foundations, or others.

Libraries can help identify trends and lead changes in educational pedagogy necessary for the above described learning to take place on a broad and routine basis. On a practical level, libraries are the premier institution to support and promote innovative programming that engage young people with technology so they become both explorers and creators of knowledge.

Outcomes of informal learning in libraries:

- Young people will value failure as one component of ultimate success. Indeed, they will embrace the concept of “pivoting” to replace the concept of failure. They will appreciate that success is not stagnant but an evolving concept. They will seek opportunities to collaborate and share ideas. They will create new knowledge and contribute what they learn in such a way that it spurs creativity and innovation among peers and beyond.
The Big Idea: Libraries are essential for new learning paradigms to take root

Where can learners of all ages discover and develop a passion and stay curious? Where are learners encouraged to explore, try things out, make mistakes, while exposed to a variety of technology resources? Where can learners develop the skills necessary for full participation in today’s, and tomorrow’s global innovation economy? Welcome to the library.

An invitation to test the big idea

Step 1: Let’s think of the library as an incubation space for yet-to-be imagined approaches to learning. Rather than “fixing” education, what if people who care about ensuring the nation has a perpetual cadre of innovators across different sectors gathered together to look at learning from outside a traditional education framework? What if a group of creative thinkers and doers from a variety of fields were posed a series of questions that ask how people become passionate about a topic, any topic, and through that passion how do they become experts?

Using the questions as fire starters the task of this group is to: identify stages people go through while they turn an interest into a passion; capture the skill set(s) that are developed through the process; posit a framework for learning based on these skill sets; and describe a series of learning opportunities for young people that would foster these skills. Discussants will also work to identify connections between the skill sets and STEAM fields.

Building evidence for libraries

Step 2: The well-articulated skill set and the discussions leading up to this product will be used to inform possible policy directions for ALA’s Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) Youth and Technology portfolio. One outcome of the discussion will provide fodder for further exploration of how we, library policy advocates, can strengthen and institutionalize the role of the library in fostering creativity, curiosity, and grit in young people.

OITP undertook a major review of how we “do” policy through a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The “Policy Revolution!” initiative resulted in a policy agenda for libraries and identified several priority areas. The Youth and Technology portfolio will operate under the Policy Revolution! umbrella to focus the portfolio on increasing awareness of the contributions libraries can make to education and economic development. We are focused on STEAM themes as a framework through which to articulate a library-centric contribution model. As an initial matter, we want to build evidence that libraries provide critical opportunities for young people to develop skills that may not otherwise find an outlet for expression. Part of our success depends upon interactions with non-library innovators and creative thinkers to help shape a vision for our policy agenda in this space, a set of goals and steps to achieve them.
[[Notes: I think it is important to not portray this piece as “anti-school or anti-teacher.” I would like it to be read as outside of school/teacher or to the extent possible to consider our exploration as parallel to innovations occurring from within the education sector. We also need to acknowledge that within the education sector, there are certainly equal and/or different and successful explorations and interventions that we are not aware of. Our library focus should not in any way diminish such activities. Our exercise is completely library-centric. However, I think we must involve educators and education thinkers]].