

Association for Library Service to Children

NATIONAL RESEARCH AGENDA FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN (AGES 0-14)

Approved by the ALSC Board of Directors on June 22, 2019



ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY
SERVICE TO CHILDREN

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Introduction

In its 2017-2020 strategic plan, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) called for the creation of a prioritized research agenda to highlight the need for research in the field and to assist with advocacy for the field. In 2017, a task force was formed to lead the development of the research agenda. The task force also established a research agenda advisory board, consisting of academics and practitioners, to provide feedback throughout the process of creating the research agenda.

Creation of the ALSC Research Agenda

The task force began the process of creating the research agenda by reviewing other associations research agendas. From this review, the task force modeled the ALSC research agenda after the Young Adult Library Service Associations (YALSA) research agenda to maintain continuity between the two associations. Because of this, the ALSC research agenda follows a similar format to YALSAs in its organization around broad strategic research areas with potential research questions under each of these strategic areas.

To understand what areas of research were important, the task force conducted a survey of current ALSC members, asking respondents to identify priority areas for research and provide potential research questions they felt needed to be explored. The task force used these survey results to develop broad strategic research areas for the agenda. Feedback on these areas was gathered from the ALSC board and the Research Agenda Advisory Board before formally creating the six final strategic research areas:

- Learning and Development for Young Children and Families
- Learning and Development for School-age Children and Families
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Children and Families
- Media Mentorship and Technology Use with Children and Families
- Impact and Exploration of Literature and Resources for Children
- Professional Development of Library Staff to Serve Children and Families

Next, the task force identified research questions to be included under each strategic research area. The task force conducted a thorough review of the existing research literature in each strategic research area to gain an understanding of which questions had already been addressed as well as any recommendations for future research questions that had emerged from the research projects. The task force used these recommendations, along with the research question ideas, to guide the development of the research questions that were included under each strategic research area. Feedback from the Research Agenda Advisory Board helped refine the research questions. Finally, the task force members composed introductions to provide context for each strategic research area, as well as recommendations for promoting and sustaining the research agenda.

Use of the ALSC Research Agenda

ALSCs motivation and purpose for the research agenda was to create a document that guides inquiry in the field. This research agenda assists with focusing research into areas and questions that ALSC members feel are important. While it is not meant to be exhaustive, the research agenda indicates areas where new or additional research is needed along with potential research questions to explore, thus ultimately helping libraries best serve children and their families through evidence-based practices. Academics and practitioners can use the research agenda to both gain ideas and demonstrate the need for their research.

The six strategic research areas all appear in the same format: an introduction provides context for each area; and a series of salient research questions follow that offer directions for potential inquiry. Though these strategic research areas are denoted separately in this document, these areas are inherently interwoven and inform each other as they provide insight into the broader field of library service for children. Therefore, the task force recommends that academics and practitioners recognize these connections and acknowledge their interrelatedness in their research.

Learning and Development for Young Children and Families

Public libraries have a long and recognized history of promoting early childhood learning and providing caregiver support and modeling through initiatives like Every Child Ready to Read @ your library, 1st and 2nd editions (ECRR), a joint initiative between ALSC and the Public Library Association (PLA) (Neuman et al., 2017). Library storytime programs, in particular, have been found to provide rich environments for the development of early literacy and other early learning skills (Campana et al., 2016; Campana, 2018). Furthermore, research demonstrates that an intentional and interactive approach for storytime planning and delivery can support an increase in child attendees exposure and practice of early literacy skills (Mills et al., 2018). Children's primary caregivers, who are considered a child's first and most important teachers, have been found to benefit when a storytime provider models activities that reinforce early literacy behaviors, showing an increased motivation to engage in these behaviors with their children (Stewart et al., 2014). While this research provides some insight into the early learning environment provided by public libraries, additional work is needed to explore the types of programs and services families with young children would like the library to offer and how those families can be further engaged with the library.

While recent work has focused on the early learning benefits of in-library storytimes (Campana, 2018) and library spaces (Becker, 2012), there is a need to expand research on programming for young children that takes place outside of library walls (Mills et al., 2018). Past case studies and other research focusing on library outreach programs have shown that librarians are providing valuable opportunities for development of pre-literacy skills and community engagement in their work outside of library walls (Martinez, 2008; Fehrenbach et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2017), but more questions remain regarding best practices for community engagement and sustainable partnerships that can support learning for young children and families, especially those from underserved communities.

School readiness is an area of increasing concern for caregivers with pre-kindergarten children. Summer

reading/learning programs are one way that libraries can offer opportunities for engagement surrounding school readiness skills and knowledge for young children. Past research studies have found strong support for a link between kindergarten readiness and access to library reading material and programming (Samiei, 2016; Slaby, 2014), although longer-term and more extensive research is needed to gain a full understanding of how public libraries can better prepare young children and families for later academic success (Cahill et al., 2017).

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores library service and outreach to young children, ages zero to five, and their families. This includes the need for research in the area of early literacy and learning, summer reading/learning, and community engagement, particularly around family engagement, community partnerships, and outreach for young children and their families.

Research Questions

1. Why do families with young children come to the library? What do families with young children want from the library?
2. How, if at all, are libraries engaging families with young children? What, if any, impact does this engagement have on the young children and their families?
3. How, if at all, do families with young children use the library, in terms of spaces, collections, programs, and services?
4. How, if at all, are children's library staff supporting, mentoring, and modeling behavior for caregivers in storytimes and other early childhood library programs? How, if at all, do these efforts help caregivers learn how to be effective in supporting learning for their child?
5. What, if any, impact has storytime had on how caregivers interact with and support their child(ren)s learning outside of storytime?
6. How, if at all, do children's spaces in the public library support early literacy and learning?
7. How, if at all, are summer learning programs supporting learning for young children?

8. How, if at all, do public children's library staff define school readiness? How, if at all, does this definition align with how school readiness is defined in the education field?
9. How, if at all, are existing public library programs for young children supporting school readiness?
10. How, if at all, do libraries assess/evaluate their programs for young children? What are common assessment strategies for these programs that occur in public libraries across the country?
11. What are common outcomes that can be measured across different types of programs for young children?
12. What can libraries learn from other informal learning environments (museums, zoos, aquariums, etc.) with respect to how they engage young children and their families?

Learning and Development for School-Age Children and Families

As children enter school and progress through their years of formal education, they begin to take ownership over their own interests and learning. Libraries can play a role in supporting this independent learning process through play and hands-on explorations. And yet when young children leave story-time and enter school, there is likely a dearth of readily available, engaging, and developmentally appropriate programs that support children's transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Though, historically, library programs and services for school-age children have not been as robust as those for young children, libraries are beginning to realize that there is a need for expanded services for this age group (Toronto Public Library, 2014), with summer reading/learning programs serving as a key piece.

According to the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) Summer Reading White Paper, several studies have looked at school-based or private-based summer enrichment programs and reduced academic loss, but few have examined summer reading programs offered by the library (NPC Research, 2015). The studies that have explored library-based summer reading programs have mainly examined the relationship between these programs and the test scores from the beginning of the following school year. The studies have revealed mixed results—some demonstrated a positive impact on academic achievement (Goode and Ho, 2015; Roman and Fiore, 2010), while others found no impact (Dyonia, Piasta, and Justice, 2015). Most of the studies recommend additional funding, staff time, and energy devoted to libraries serving lower socioeconomic status (SES) families (Dyonia, Piasta, and Justice, 2015). Given that many libraries have transitioned from summer reading to summer learning, which carries broader goals than just literacy, research is needed that provides insight into the structure and effectiveness of summer learning programs.

While summer reading/learning programs remain a cornerstone in library services for school-age children, libraries are also exploring how to better serve these children during the school year by offering out-of-school-time programs in afternoons, evenings, and

weekends during the school year, such as homework help, active learning programs, passive programming, and pop-up programs. Program themes of STEM, art, movement, nature, and more have also become a focus for school-age children (McChesney, 2019; Mitra, 2019). In addition, libraries are taking children's programs and services into community locations to reach and serve families in underserved communities. Research is needed that explores the content and impact of these programs and services offered both in and out of the library. In addition, research could explore school-aged children's evolving wants and needs from the library along with their use of the library as an after-school and summer resource.

Family engagement begins to look different with this age group as well, since parents may or may not be present for programs in which children are often quite independent (Lopez, Caspe, and Simpson, 2017). And yet research is needed into how families would like to be engaged to understand the learning that is taking place for their child and how to best support that learning beyond the library program. Furthermore, as a part of family engagement, libraries are in a position to offer crucial guidance and mentoring for families on technology use for school-age children, because school-age children are in a key period for learning to navigate digital and analog tools for both enjoyment and to obtain and assess information. Technology-based programs can often bridge digital divides in communities, providing access and instruction for communities who do not already possess digital devices (Campana, Mills, and Martin, 2018). Research into effective practices regarding how to support children learning various emerging digital literacies, through the use of online spaces, is crucial, to foster critical analysis and robust information and media literacy.

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores how libraries are supporting out-of-school time learning for school-age children and their families. In particular, it highlights the need for research in the area of summer reading/learning, community engagement, particularly around family engagement, and outreach for school-age children.

Research Questions

1. What do school-age children and parents/caregivers want from the library? Why do school-age children and their parents/caregivers choose the library versus other informal learning environments?
2. How, if at all, are libraries engaging families with school-age children? What, if any, impact does this engagement have on school-age children and their families?
3. How, if at all, do libraries sustain literacy development through early grade-school years?
4. What are common trends in public library programs for school-age children? How do these trends represent areas of interest identified by children who participate?
5. What learning goals do libraries have for their summer learning programs? How are libraries addressing these goals?
6. What effect, if any, do summer learning programs have on learning for the children who participate?
7. What are the various types of after-school programs offered in public libraries around the country? Which strategies do library staff feel are effective in planning and offering these programs and why do they feel they are effective?
8. What are the components of library spaces for school-age children? How, if at all, do these spaces facilitate learning, interaction, and play for school-age children?
9. How, if at all, are libraries working to support school-age children and their learning through outreach and partnership efforts?
10. What is the landscape of technology use in libraries with school-age children?
11. How, if at all, are public libraries working to support media literacy and information literacy skills for school-age children?
12. How, if at all, do libraries assess/evaluate their programs for school-age children, including summer reading and learning programs?
13. What are common outcomes that can be measured across different types of programs for school-age children?
14. What can libraries learn from other informal learning environments (museums, zoos, aquariums, etc.) with respect to how they engage school-age children and their families?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Children and Families

Children should be supported and encouraged to learn about themselves and their world, to build a healthy sense of their own identity and agency. However, research demonstrates that children of color younger than 5 are encountering and suffering the effects of bias and racism (University of Pittsburgh, 2016; National Black Child Development Institute, 2013; Derman-Sparks, 2012). Studies show that children as young as 3 can recognize race and are aware of racial bias (Winkler, 2009); in fact, children can pick up on cues from the adults around them regarding race and bias (Skinner, Meltzoff, and Olson, 2017). It is clear that it is never too early to start talking with children about race and bias; what is unclear is the most effective, inclusive way to do this. Adults are not always prepared for how to approach conversations about race with young children (University of Pittsburgh, 2016). Formal sites of learning, such as schools, have explored various anti-bias, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches. Boutte (2015) discusses the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy as not only a way to support and encourage pride in one's own culture but also to enable students to attain scholastic success. This represents a shift away from a deficit model of focusing on the obstacles and setbacks faced by children and communities of color to placing an emphasis on *"what we as educators can change and what strengths already exist that we may build on"* (p. 4). This aspirational standpoint urges educators, and by extension children's library staff, to see the assets that already exist and then look forward to what can come next.

Because storytimes reach young children of all ages, storytime providers are uniquely positioned to combat this early introduction to bias and racism by offering culturally inclusive programming that provides welcoming spaces and a wide variety of materials that reflects the entire community. Through their selection of materials, activities, and even physical space, library staff may convey their own implicit bias and thereby perpetuate existing structures of racism with or without knowing the effects of their actions. If libraries ignore these prevalent problems and fail to respond to bias in their programming, spaces, and collections, they risk perpet-

uating the problem. It is therefore vital that library staff understand how diversity and inclusion fit into every aspect of their work—the programming they design and the perspectives and knowledge of the children who attend as well as those of the parents and caregivers.

Research that looked at how libraries are serving LGBTQ families found that about half of the participating libraries served LGBTQ families. In the interest of not wanting to invade privacy, these libraries sought "under the radar" approaches to providing needed services and collections for this population of library patrons (Naidoo, 2013). Other research has explored the role of the library in helping children with disabilities develop their early literacy skills in and out of the home (Prendergast, 2016). Among the various findings was the conclusion that librarians seem open to offering programming inclusive of those with disabilities and parents want and need such services, but librarians are often not sufficiently prepared or educated to meet this community need (2016). While these studies provide initial insight into how libraries are providing inclusive programs and services, more research is needed to understand and communicate the impact and importance of this kind of inclusive librarianship.

As communities evolve, so too should the programming and evaluation designed to serve those communities. Library staff can best use culturally diverse and equitable programs to meet the needs of diverse children and their families by considering the needs and aspirations, as well as the cultural backgrounds, of the communities they serve. In designing and offering culturally diverse and equitable programs, library staff should consider their role in facilitating social and cultural learning along with parents/caregivers. Patricia Montiel Overall's cultural competence framework (2009) offers a road map, beginning with inward gazing, that library staff can use to deepen their understandings of their own cultural backgrounds and perspectives and then engage with those of their communities, to develop a meaningful relationship that portrays the library as a welcoming space of cultural learning and positive interactions. Overall's framework indicates that amidst the library

profession's efforts to serve diverse groups, there is little emphasis on discovering and being aware of one's personal cultural attitudes and understanding. This represents an important area of future research to understand current practices and perceptions when designing tools, programs, and services that ultimately benefit all of the community.

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of public library service for children and their families, including library staff, literature and other resources, and services. This section both sits next to, and within, all the other areas in this research agenda, as diversity, equity, and inclusion should be a part of all conversations regarding potential inquiry that seeks to move the field forward.

Research Questions

How, if at all, do library staff's backgrounds and intersectional identities impact children's and families' perception of libraries as welcoming spaces?

1. How, if at all, do library staff's backgrounds and intersectional identities impact their development, delivery, and assessment of library programming, collection management, and services?
2. What, if any, effect does exposure to stories that reflect the identity of the children engaging with the story have on the children exposed to them? How, if at all, do these stories impact children's feelings of self-worth and confidence?
3. What, if any, effect does exposure to stories that reflect a different identity than that of the child engaging with the story have on the children exposed to them? How, if at all, do these stories impact children's empathy for, and understanding of, others' diverse identities?
4. How, if at all, do library staff develop, deliver, and assess inclusive library programs, collections, and services?
5. How, if at all, do they incorporate community knowledge and traditions into these programs, collections, and services?
6. What are the barriers to library patronage and participation for underrepresented children and families? How, if at all, are libraries bridging these barriers?
7. How, if at all, do libraries support children and/or families experiencing trauma, crisis, or discrimination? What do care-based practices for children look like in the public library?
8. How do children with disabilities and their families perceive the services, programs, materials, personnel, and equipment provided by the public library?
9. How, if at all, are libraries conducting activities related to Día¹ in their communities? How, if at all, do these activities support cognitive and literacy development and/or embrace the different languages and cultures present in the community?
10. What, if any, are the unique issues facing rural and small public libraries in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
11. How, if at all, are children's library staff ensuring that library programs, collections, and services are equitable and inclusive of underserved members in their community?
12. How, if at all, are children's library staff reaching out and serving immigrant, refugee, and non-English-speaking children and families?
13. How, if at all, are children's spaces inclusive of underserved populations?

1. "El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day), commonly known as Día, is a celebration every day of children, families, and reading that culminates yearly on April 30. The celebration emphasizes the importance of literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds." (Dia website, n.d.).

Media Mentorship and Technology Use with Children and Families

Current research demonstrates that families and children are living connected lives. Caregivers are using a variety of devices—from mobile phones to tablets to coding toys—with young children for both entertainment and educational purposes (Common Sense Media, 2017; Erikson Institute, 2016). At the same time, families are trying to navigate perpetual, conflicting messages from all sides—medical practitioners, social science researchers, and advocates for tech pushback—that can seem overwhelming. Moreover, educational apps are flooding the app stores at a bewildering rate, and families need guidance to develop a media plan, not only regarding the effects of screen time and age-appropriate device use, but also on which apps are best for their young child (Levinson et al., 2015).

Library staff's expertise in media evaluation is needed now more than ever to help families choose apps and digital games, as well as books, films, and other kinds of media, to support their children's learning and entertainment and to offer additional ways to play. Many library staff are incorporating new media devices into their programming for children and families and are seeking guidance on effective practices, such as joint media engagement and the importance of using technology as a tool rather than the focus (Mills et al., 2014; Campana et al., 2019; Takeuchi and Stevens, 2011; Roseberry et al., 2013). Additionally, rubrics such as the KIDMAP checklist (Haines, 2017; Nankani, 2015), offer library staff concrete tools to evaluate and select diverse media for young children and their families as part of their media mentorship work. A recent review of studies uncovered several research-based effective practices that library staff can use to inform the work they do as media mentors with families (Campana et al., 2019). But how do many of these effective practices, rooted in research from education, manifest in informal learning environments such as libraries? And what do library staff think of the presence and use of technology in libraries with young children and their caregivers? Continued inquiry is needed in the area of media mentorship and libraries to guide the field and provide support to the frontline staff helping families make informed media decisions for their children.

A new area of study and exploration in the area of digital youth involves computational thinking (Bers, 2010) and how it intersects with current work on early learning, emerging digital literacies, and family learning. Many programs for children and youth already incorporate several of the tenets of computational thinking, including problem solving, pattern recognition, and others (Grover and Pea, 2013). Dedicated inquiry into defining this area, exploring effective practices in more formal educational arenas, and seeing how they might apply to the informal learning that takes place in libraries would provide the field with current, relevant research that can help library staff prepare the children and families they serve with twenty-first-century skills.

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores media mentorship and technology use in public library service for children and their families. The suggested research questions focus on these and other topics related to media mentorship and technology use in library services.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, are children's library staff using technology in their programs for children? What are the goals behind this use? What strategies, practices, and/or principles are they using to guide their work?
2. How, if at all, are children and their caregivers engaging with technology in library spaces outside of programming?
3. What, if any, differences exist in the early learning environment (skills, spaces, resources) across digital storytimes and non-digital storytimes?
4. What, if any, differences exist in the learning environment (skills, spaces, resources) across digital and non-digital programs for school-age children?
5. How, if at all, are libraries mentoring families using technology?
6. What are families' perceptions of the role of libraries in providing media mentorship? What do families feel they need in terms of media mentorship?
7. What are families' perceptions of the role of libraries in providing access to technology?

8. How, if at all, are libraries providing access to technology for children and families in underserved communities?
9. How, if at all, do library staff members' attitudes about the use of and access to technology shape the way(s) in which they provide access to and use technology with children in their library? How, if at all, do staff members' attitudes about the use of and access to technology shape their interactions with families?
10. What is the current understanding in the field about computational thinking for children? How if at all are the principles of computational thinking present in the current library programming for children?
11. What is the current understanding in the field about emerging digital literacies for children? How if at all are libraries supporting and encouraging the development of emerging digital literacies for children?

Impact and Exploration of Literature and Resources for Children

Literature has always served as the foundation for library services to children. Even as libraries are placing a growing emphasis on programming, literature still remains central to these programs and to the library's purpose of providing access to literature and information for children and their caregivers. Extensive research has demonstrated the impact that access to books has for children across literacy (Neuman, 1999) and academic achievement (Evans et al., 2010). In addition, scholars have offered evidence that children need access to books in which they can see themselves and their experiences as well as the experiences of others (Bishop, 1990; Naidoo, 2014; Martin, 2018).

Historically, literature for children has predominantly portrayed the experience of white, middle-class, Judeo-Christian children (Larrick, 1965; Hill, 2011). This has led to a focus in the field on the lack of diverse books, with activist movements such as #WeNeedDiverseBooks and 1000 Black Girl Books, which seek to call attention to and rectify the problem. As a result, the industry has started to shift in the past few years with increased publication of diverse books. However, there is still a long way to go before achieving adequate representation of all experiences (Huyck et al., 2016).

As libraries have the goal of providing access to resources for all children, they need to be searching out, evaluating, selecting, and promoting literature that represents the broadest possible range of experiences, including those found in their community and those that are not. ALSC awards and notables lists are one important way libraries, educators, and families can find, evaluate, and select literature, and in the past few years, diverse books have been more prominent in the awards. However, research could provide greater insight into other ways that practitioners and families find, evaluate, and select diverse literature. Moreover, research is needed that explores how children interact with the books and resources on these lists.

The greater variety of formats and platforms available to children today also brings the need for more re-

search. Technological advances have brought changes in how children read and interact with stories and other information across various platforms. Children now access information and stories via print, e-books, interactive books, apps, hands-on manipulatives, and others. To adapt to these changes, libraries have begun to build collections of resources such as toys, blocks, digital devices, STEM kits, puzzles, and more. This demonstrates that libraries seek to provide access to a variety of resources and experiences for their communities to support different types of learning. Because of this, it is important to have research that provides insight into the impact that literature in all forms, as well as these other information resources, have on the children who interact with them.

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores a variety of aspects around literature and other resources for children, with a particular focus on research that aligns with the awards administered by ALSC.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, are children's identities shaped by the literature they read? How, if at all, do they choose literature based on representations of that identity in the literature?
2. How, if at all, are children's reading habits influenced and shaped by gender representations in the literature they read?
3. What, if any, impact do literature awards for excellence and diversity/inclusion have on children's book selection? What impact do they have on caregivers' selection?
4. What are the various ways that children are reading in digital formats in the library?
5. How, if at all, are library staff using specific formats and/or genres in library services (including reader's advisory, programs, and other services)?
6. Which works of children's literature tend to experience censorship? What are current practices in school and/or public libraries to address these events?

7. How have libraries helped to shape the types of stories and illustration styles that make up the classic canon of children's literature? How have these storytelling and illustration styles changed over time?
8. How, if at all, are children's library staff finding and evaluating diverse and inclusive resources? How, if at all, are library staff using diverse and inclusive resources in their work?
9. What does reader's advisory look like for children of different ages? What are effective practices for reader's advisory with children of different ages?
10. How, if at all, do children's library staff evaluate the books and other resources they use in their work? What, if any, selection tools and resources are children's library staff using to evaluate books and other resources?
11. How do libraries maintain their children's collections? What are the common characteristics of most public library children's collections (age, mix of resources, size, diversity, organization)?

Professional Development of Library Staff to Serve Children and Families

Library services for children are changing dramatically. Building on the traditional roles of providing access to books and supporting literacy for children and families, libraries are now informal learning environments that provide access to a variety of resources and support many types of learning, including STEM and emerging digital literacies, as well as addressing other needs in their communities (Shtivelband, Roberts, and Jakubowski, 2016; Howard, 2013). In addition, the work of children's library staff has shifted from primarily performative to interactive, hands-on experiences that support many types of learning (Howard, 2013). These changes have brought about an increased need for relevant preparation for children's staff that equips them with the knowledge and skills to take on these current roles. To prepare children's staff, research is needed that provides evidence-based effective practices.

Two key areas of children's services where staff need additional professional development opportunities are in the use of technology with children and families and working with diverse populations. The use of technology with children and families includes aspects such as media mentorship, supporting emerging digital literacies, providing connected learning programs, and facilitating informal learning in makerspaces (Braun et al., 2014; Ito et al., 2013); however, much of the current work in these areas focuses primarily on older children, leaving space for exploration with younger populations. One professional development tool in this area is the ConnectedLib Toolkit which addresses connected learning and developing interest-driven programs for youth in libraries (ConnectedLib, 2019). However, gaps remain in media mentorship training and makerspace facilitation. There is also a need to provide inclusive and equitable programs and services for diverse populations, including children with disabilities and their families, immigrant families, and families from marginalized communities. Professional development is limited in this area, and very little of it is evidence-based. As a result, research is needed that provides evidence-based effective practices for working with children and families from diverse populations.

A variety of training and educational opportunities currently exist that help to prepare children's staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. These include MLIS programs, certificate programs, training classes, webinars, print resources, and more. While many children's staff use these resources, research could provide insight into which ones are used most often and perceived to be most effective. In addition, research could explore how the roles and responsibilities of children's staff are changing and which aspects they feel least equipped to take on, as this may help inform the development of additional training and educational opportunities. Along with more formal methods of professional development, there are also informal methods—peer mentoring and self-reflection—that can be useful for helping children's library staff grow in their practice. Many libraries and children's staff are using these techniques to refine their approach, get feedback on current ideas, and gain new ideas (Mills et al., 2015; Dymarz and Cameron, 2015). However, research is still needed to understand the effectiveness of these informal methods in preparing children's staff for their many duties.

Professional development, though key to an informed field, is not enough. When community members come into the library and see a diverse workforce, with a plethora of perspectives, backgrounds, and lived experiences, they are more likely to feel the library is a welcoming place for them (Schadt, 2016). However, despite evidence of these types of benefits to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, library staff of color remain few and far between in a field that is more than 80 percent white (ALA Office for Research and Statistics, 2014). Research is needed to help libraries understand how to move beyond existing diversity initiatives (Larsen, 2016) and more effectively recruit, retain, and promote staff of color, who reflect the communities they serve. In this way, libraries can continue to be meaningful community catalysts in helping all families support their child's learning and development. Similarly, research can help the field understand the needs and aspirations of individuals of color who want to join this field but face barriers as underrepresented minorities.

This priority area focuses on encouraging and emphasizing research that explores professional development of library staff working with children and families. This includes the knowledge and skills necessary for the role, professional development and training opportunities, and library programs in higher education institutions.

Research Questions

1. What skills, knowledge, education, and/or practices do children's library staff perceive they need to be effective in their role(s)? How are children's library staff acquiring these skills, knowledge, education, and/or practices?
2. How, if at all, are library staff working to grow and evolve their practice? What, if any, resources and training are they using to support this practice?
3. How, if at all, are underrepresented populations recruited into and retained in the field of children's librarianship? What, if any, challenges do underrepresented populations face in entering and staying in the field?
4. What, if any, types of preparation are offered to library staff to prepare them for mentoring and using technology with children and families? What, if anything, is lacking in the preparation?
5. How, if at all, are children's library staff prepared to equitably serve diverse populations? What, if any, evidence-based resources are library staff using to support their work?
6. How, if at all, can peer mentoring/coaching networks support children's library staff in their work?
7. How, if at all, are LIS graduate programs preparing students to fulfill the responsibilities of a children's librarian? What areas, if any, need expansion or revision in current programs?
8. What aspects of public library service to children and families do library staff feel least equipped to fulfill? How, if at all, is this being addressed?
9. What qualifications, knowledge, skills, and abilities are hiring managers looking for in children's services staff?
10. How, if at all, are library administration and/or other library departments supporting the work of children's library staff?
11. How have perceptions of children's services and staff changed over time? How, if at all, have these impacted organizational decisions (budget, staffing, etc.) around the role of children's services in public libraries?

Conclusion

The goal of this research agenda is to help inspire and instigate research in the field of children's services. Libraries are constantly evolving and changing, and research can provide insight into what the field is currently doing and communicate the effectiveness and the impact of those approaches. Having that insight can encourage the spread of effective, successful practices and provide a source for advocacy with the community, the funders, and library administrations.

Academics and practitioners can use this document for new research ideas, and justification, to demonstrate

that their idea is a demonstrated need. While specific questions are laid out in the research agenda, these questions and topics are flexible. The research questions can be broadened or narrowed in scope or used as a starting point to grow a related project. What matters most is that the field is intentional about doing research that covers a wide variety of libraries, communities, and topics, because libraries will benefit from increased insight into the work they are doing, both with an eye toward demonstrating impact and effectiveness in engaging and supporting the children and families in their communities.

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