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### ON THE COVER: ARTWORK BY ELLE MAXWELL/ADOBE STOCK
From the Editor

Kathleen M. Hughes / khughes@ala.org

Public Library Transformation

As I write this, the COVID-19 pandemic rages on and social unrest continues to shine a spotlight on police brutality and racial inequality. Most libraries are currently providing services to their patrons in a limited capacity, while dedicated to meeting the needs of their communities in safe yet innovative ways.

While it may not be a physical possibility right now, some of the articles in this issue focus on the library as third place. You’ll find considerations for transforming the library into a new third place that ensures we aren’t leaving anyone behind (EDISJ Matters, p. 9); ideas for library as a virtual third place in Best Practices (p. 12); and shifting the conversation about the library as third place to the library as an integral part of the social infrastructure in the feature “Aging in (Third) Place with Public Libraries” (p. 22).

We also dive into a few exciting initiatives and ideas in our other feature articles. Take a look at “Cooking with Confidence: Partnering to Support Teenagers and Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum” (p. 32); “Making the Connection: Computational Thinking and Early Learning for Young Children and Their Families” (p. 44); and “Design Thinking in Public Library Makerspaces” (p. 58).

The main theme that emerges from this issue, while also reflecting on the current zeitgeist, is one of transformation. As PLA President Michelle Jeske points out in her column (p. 3), these times are actually an opportunity for libraries. Jeske says, “The opportunity is here to transform ourselves and our libraries to truly work with—not for—our communities. Together, we can dream of and work toward a better and just society.”

I sincerely hope this issue of Public Libraries leaves you feeling hopeful and excited about the possibilities and opportunities that exist for public libraries as we navigate these unprecedented challenges together.
Just a few months ago, some of us participated in PLA’s excellent conference in Nashville. Shortly after that, a devastating tornado hit Nashville, and before we knew it, COVID-19 had hit most of our communities. Personally, I had to quickly transition from the high of introducing Samantha Bee as our closing conference speaker to the low of leading my library team in an historic shutdown in response to this pandemic.

On the heels of that, my library, like many across the nation, is facing staggering budget cuts at a time when our community needs us more than ever. Now, just as we’re preparing to phase in our in-person services, our community members have taken to the streets for weeks protesting the horrific killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor (and many that came before them). This has been necessary and tumultuous.

Library staff are reeling from all of this and more. There is so much uncertainty, almost an unbearable amount of pain, and it is natural to wonder where all this is leading. How will our nation heal? How will our cities, towns, and counties recover? How will our community members survive? How will our library staff persevere? How will we come together when we often stand so divided? These questions could be asked of all the crises we are facing—health, financial, cultural, and political.

This is certainly an historic moment on multiple levels and we have the opportunity to step up as individuals and libraries to meet the challenge. I say that fully recognizing how difficult this moment is. Too many people have lost their lives to this virus. Too many people have lost their jobs in the financial fallout. Too many Black people have suffered far too long in a white supremacist culture. Too many people of color have been oppressed by our racist policies and systems. All of this and more is why we are challenged in this moment to grow, act, and change.

We have talked about transformation in libraries but how far have we really gone? We have the opportunity to seize this moment as individuals and as libraries. While opening back up is important and challenging, there is more to discuss than how and when to do curbside pickup. PLA can assist with this. As it turns out, the first goal listed in PLA’s Strategic Plan is “Transformation: PLA advances public libraries’ transformation from a library focus to a community focus, to meet the specific needs of people and communities.”
I have more questions than answers and I’m sure you have many you could add. How will we pivot our services and resources to meet the changed needs of our community? What can we stop doing that is library focused so we can free up resources to center our work more fully on the community? Which organizations around us won’t exist because they’ve run out of funds? What did they do that we may need to supplement and that fits within our mission? What new partners make sense to bring assets together in meaningful ways? How do we finally agree to stop duplicating efforts?

Another PLA goal is “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice: PLA advocates for equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice in order to enable every member, library, and community group to fully and equally participate in a society mutually shaped to meet their needs.” This pandemic is disproportionately affecting people of color. Native Americans are facing some of the worst effects of this disease. Unemployment has hit people of color the hardest. We’re also seeing increasing racist sentiments and actions, aimed particularly toward Asian communities. At the same time, we continue to see racial violence and police brutality targeted especially toward Black people. We know these abhorrent acts are based in personal, institutional, and structural racism. We have to do better. We can be better.

How will we respond to this? Perhaps your library has already committed to challenging inequity; perhaps not. Even libraries leading the way are still early in the journey. We know the history of our profession is steeped in racism just as everything in our culture is. In the February 2019 Bloomberg CityLab article “A History of the American Public Library,” visual storyteller Ariel Aberg-Riger depicts the noble and the not so charming components of our public library history. In this moment, what can I as an individual do to learn, grow, and act? What can our libraries do to move forward on our journeys of anti-racism? It’s not enough to make a statement. We must take action. What does that look like in your library, in your community?

I’m asking myself these same questions. During this year when I have the honor of being PLA president, my library will be focused on these questions. I hope to learn from you. We can’t waste this moment. The opportunity is here to transform ourselves and our libraries to truly work with—not for—our communities. Together, we can dream of and work toward a better and just society.

To bring it back to Samantha Bee, she (along with other amazing PLA conference speakers such as Soledad O’Brien and Stacey Abrams) recognized that libraries “have a role in getting the US back on track,” are “where all types of people can come together to figure out what their beliefs are,” and are “great unifiers at a time when, frankly, we don’t have a lot of stuff we can point to that’s unifying.”

Keep your chins up and your heads high, colleagues! We have work to do.
PLA 2020: Ten Essential Programs consists of ten articles highlighting educational programs that took place at the PLA 2020 conference. Chapters include: An Empathetic Approach to Customer Service; We’re Doing WHAT?! Working Through Transitions and Institutional Change; Library Space Designed by Library Staff; What Your Onboarding Says About Your Organization; Socialized Justice; Mentoring to Diversify Librarianship; Book Matchmaker; Early Literacy in Unexpected Places; Navigating Hot Topics with Media Literacy Skills; and Pitching and Producing a Library Podcast.

Available via the ALA Store. To order your copy visit bit.ly/3ccl8O2.
PUBLIC LIBRARIES  VOLUME 59  NUMBER  4

PLA NEWS

FULL COVERAGE OF ASSOCIATION NEWS AND EVENTS AT PLA.ORG

2020 CENSUS ENDING EARLY

The 2020 Census count is ending a month early, on September 30. Find tips and ideas for getting a complete count in our free, on-demand webinar (https://bit.ly/33XJysS). Complete 2020 Census count is essential to make sure libraries and their communities don’t miss out on billions of dollars in needed funding, as well as political representation. Learn how the US Census Bureau, libraries, and community partners have adapted their operations and outreach in response to COVID-19, and how libraries can support a complete count before the Census ends in September.

COVID-19 RESPONSE SURVEYS

PLA coordinated with several ALA units and other organizations to survey the library community to learn and share information about the impacts of COVID-19 on libraries, library staff, and our work serving our communities. On June 3, ALA released the findings from the “Libraries Respond: COVID-19 Survey,” where more than 3,800 K–12 school, college/university, public, and other libraries from all fifty states responded between May 12–18. Public libraries represented about 2,900 of all responses, with an estimated 30% response rate. The results can be found at www.ala.org/pla/issues/covid-19/surveyoverview.

NEW LIST OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS RELATING TO RACIAL JUSTICE

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) and The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) have created an extensive list of children’s books relating to racial justice. The “Community, Connecting, Cultivating & Constructing Conversations through Literacy” list highlights books for pre-K, elementary, and middle school ages. Titles on this list were compiled by members of BCALA and members of ALSC’s Quicklists Consulting Committee. ALSC’s Board of Directors endorses BCALA’s statement condemning increased violence and racism toward Black Americans and people of color and stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, BCALA, and those working to dismantle racial capitalism and white supremacy in all of its forms. See the complete list at https://bit.ly/3iwg60W.

PLA SOCIAL WORK INTEREST GROUP

Join the PLA Social Work Interest Group (membership not required) on ALA Connect for conversations, documents, and resources that will help your library provide the best service to patrons. Visit http://bit.ly/36FdQyb for more information.
ALA 2021 MIDWINTER MEETING WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY

The American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Meeting & Exhibits scheduled for January 22-26, 2021, in Indianapolis will be held virtually.

“It is clear that as we continue to coexist with coronavirus, we need to adjust our approach to meetings and events,” said ALA President Julius C. Jefferson, Jr. “In the last few months, we have successfully pivoted our delivery to present the Virtual Event in June and ALA’s Holding Space tour series this summer. Though we very much hoped to be able to meet in person in Indianapolis, the health and safety of conference attendees, ALA members and staff, exhibitors, and other stakeholders are the priority.”

The preliminary speaker roster will be announced early this fall, along with ongoing announcements of programs, sessions, meetings, and exhibits. Registration and housing will open on November 5, 2020.

“This Midwinter would have been ALA’s last before we introduce a totally new convening that I think will truly excite members and the larger field,” ALA Executive Director Tracie D. Hall said. “It would have been great to have a sense of closure and to generate collective excitement in a face-to-face setting for what’s to come. But I am inspired by the more than 10,000 attendees, authors, speakers, and stakeholders who came together for the June Virtual Event and related business meetings, convenings, and award ceremonies. We had people who were able to attend an ALA conference for the first time in their careers connecting with the Association and all that we offer. So, from my vantage point, I am also looking at the members and new constituents our virtual convenings are allowing us to reach.”

PLA CALL TO ACTION FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY WORKERS TO ADDRESS RACISM

PLA STATEMENT CONDEMNING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST BIPOC PEOPLE

The Public Library Association (PLA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), calls on public library workers to commit to structural change and to taking action to end systemic racism and injustice. PLA thanks members of its Task Force on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice for their guidance and leadership in development of this statement and call to action. The statement recognizes and supports ALA’s statement condemning violence against BIPOC, protesters, and journalists, and ALA’s statement acknowledging ALA’s role in perpetuating structural racism.


ON-DEMAND SESSIONS: PLA 2020 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

The PLA 2020 Virtual Conference took place during PLA 2020 in Nashville. The Virtual Conference consisted of live programming on Thursday, February 27 and Friday, February 28, 2020, including five 60-minute programs each day. Programs were chosen from among the highest rated in PLA’s session preference survey. These on-demand sessions are archived recordings of those five programs available 24/7 for viewing at your convenience and are priced separately for individual and group access. Individual rate is for personal viewing only. Group rate is for viewing by staff at a single library, including all its branches/outlets. You’ll have access to the program recording for one year from date of purchase. Visit http://www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/pla2020/ondemand for more details.
In order to be more accessible, responsive, and sustainable, *Public Libraries* magazine is going digital for the July/August and September/October 2020 issues. Instead of a paper issue, PLA will produce and email to you an easy-to-access digital flipbook and pdf version.

Take advantage of this opportunity to insure that PLA has permission to email to you. Check your communication preferences in your ALA member profile and contact pla@ala.org if you have not been receiving PLA emails.
Reimagining the Library as Third Place

Christina Fuller-Gregory / cfuller-gregory@scgsah.org

When I first read Ray Oldenburg’s book, The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community (Da Capo Press, 1999), I instantly felt that, in fact, the great, good place that he described was the library. Of course, there were other spaces that invoked the attributes that Oldenburg detailed, but no one environment quite embodied the completeness of the third place mindset like the public library. Libraries checked off the descriptors like the list had been made specifically for us—neutral ground, regulars, accessibility, and accommodation, an easygoing environment where conversation is key, and most significantly, a home away from home.

Yes, libraries are a third place. I would argue that we are in fact the third place. This mindset has grown to inform the ways in which I develop programming, services, and support for the patrons I serve. But can the current iteration of libraries as third place—a highly transactional construct with physical proximity, connectivity, and collaboration at its core—work for the current and possibly future state of libraries?

The very nature of our work requires us to proactively begin building ideas and momentum around the idea of libraries as third place 2.0. As we evaluate the internal and external structures of our libraries post-COVID, the idea of reimagining, reigniting, and reconfiguring a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse library as third place should rank high on the list of must-have conversations.

Let’s spend this time together starting the conversation with the understanding that the complexities around this discussion will require continued problem solving and ideating.

Moving Beyond the Constraints of Physical Space

Back in February (the “before” times), as many of us enjoyed PLA Nashville, we couldn’t have imagined that, just a few short weeks later, we’d be closing our doors to the public. It was shocking, unfathomable, and it all happened so quickly that it left us no time to fully process. But as resilient as ever, libraries began
implementing creative ways of connecting with patrons.

As libraries begin the slow process of reopening, we’ve got much to consider. In addition to thinking through best practices for how to safely open our spaces, we have the additional responsibility of thinking through how to configure these spaces to equitably support newly identified community needs.

Many libraries may find that while they have the ideas, energy, and workforce needed to serve the community they may not have the physical space (at present) to support this work. It’s important that we give ourselves permission to negotiate the idea of transitioning from libraries as spaces of community collaboration and convening to turn outward, leveraging the community partnerships that we’ve built. If we embrace the mindset that our physical space isn’t what makes the library a third place, we open up possibilities to forge new paths.

**How Can We Ensure That We’re Centering Equity?**

One of the primary descriptors of the third place mindset is the idea of “regulars” and the accompanying feeling of being made welcome. As we navigate the barriers to accessibility and safety caused by COVID-19 the regulars that find place in the library have lost access to resources, services, and support. To a greater extent, patrons who consider the library to be their third place have also lost access to the interpersonal connections that drive and define what many consider to be their only sense of community.

And while we’ve shifted to virtual platforms in a reactive attempt to maintain our connection with patrons and provide a seamless continuation of our services, we’ve in many ways compounded the disconnect between library services and the very patrons who have depended upon the library as a lifeline for human connection, connectivity, and information.

As we reimagine the idea of how third places can transform libraries, we have to ensure that we aren’t leaving anyone behind. We must find a balance between engaging new patrons through virtual platforms and finding ways to continue to build connections with the often marginalized patrons who’ve consistently utilized library services.

We center equity when we take the time to ensure that we continue to think of safe and innovative ways to provide options for those patrons who rely heavily on our in-person services. Doing this helps us to remain wholly engaged in the process of helping our communities to rebuild, reconnect, and heal. Consider the *Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide* (2015), developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to guide your work (www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide).

Be thorough and thoughtful in examining how your future ideas for implementing the libraries as third place mindset may impact BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color) individuals as well as other marginalized mem-

**RELATED RESOURCES**

- **Richland (SC) Library** is finding new ways to connect with job seekers. In addition to curating a resource list, they’ve also created a hub of information allowing job seekers to schedule time to work with a learning coach. Learn more about their resources at www.richlandlibrary.com/i-am-employee.

- **Skokie (IL) Public Library** is creating a platform for inclusive conversation with its Civic Lab. The lab offers information, activities, and discussion on issues facing the community. While the program was traditionally offered in-person, the Civic Lab team was able to pivot and move these important community conversations first to Twitter, then to Zoom. Learn more about the Civic Lab at https://skokielibrary.info/resources/civic-lab.

Looking for inspiration to reimagine your organization? Check out nonprofit **OF/BY/FOR ALL**’s “Five Steps to Reimagine Your Organization,” www.ofbyforall.org/updates-feed/2020/6/12/five-steps-to-reimagine-your-organization.
bers of your community. If you don’t know how to identify the marginalized individuals in your community, start by asking:

- Who am I welcoming?
- Who am I excluding?
- Who am I asking to take on additional risk?

**Charting the Path Forward**

There is no one path forward in reimagining libraries as third place, rather there will be many stories that start with the common narrative of community.

Maybe your idea for the library as third place 2.0 involves finding new ways to support job seekers. You may turn outward to identify safe and wide-open spaces in your community to facilitate socially distanced programs. Perhaps your reenvisioned third place concept includes mapping your current library space to identify ways in which you can safely support community engagement.

How will you reimagine your library as third place? I look forward to the challenge of finding new ways to enrich this mindset and support the human connections that make librarianship so rewarding. Won’t you join me?

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**PublicLibrariesONLINE**

**Digital Highlights**

“**Collections May Be Low Risk but Public Spaces are Not**” by Nadine Kramarz  
*Posted August 24, 2020*

“Research Shows Virus Undetectable on Five Highly Circulated Library Materials After Three Days – Findings are Part of REALM Project to Produce Science-Based Information to Help Mitigate Exposure to Virus,” reads the press release headline put out on June 22, 2020 by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). According to the press release, the five materials are hardcover book surfaces, softcover book surfaces, the pages of circulated materials, mylar protective book jackets, and DVD cases. This research implies that it is highly unlikely to transmit COVID-19 through borrowed materials and provided data that made many public libraries feel comfortable re-opening over the summer with curbside contactless material pickup, limited library hours and services, or embracing a full-time library schedule. Read the entire article at [http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/08/collections-may-be-low-risk-but-public-spaces-are-not](http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/08/collections-may-be-low-risk-but-public-spaces-are-not).

“**Libraries Launch BLM Book Clubs**” by Suzanne LaPierre  
*Posted August 7, 2020*

As indicated by the ALA’s response to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, libraries have an obligation to act on behalf of racial justice with genuine systemic change, not just statements or book lists. Hosting a book club on a topic that explicitly addresses race relations in the United States is among the items on the ALA’s plan for action. One example is the Toledo Lucas County Public Library (TLCPL) BLM Book Group in Ohio, facilitated by King Branch Assistant Manager, Franco Vitella and Teen Librarian, David Bush. The first meeting was on July 30. They agreed to answer some of my questions about the initiative. Read the entire interview at [http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/08/libraries-launch-blm-book-clubs](http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/08/libraries-launch-blm-book-clubs).
Libraries and Virtual Third Spaces after COVID-19

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Krista is Library Director, Madera County (CA) Library.

Krista is currently reading Camino Winds by John Grisham.

Many public libraries throughout the country are closed due to COVID-19 and are just starting to reopen to the public in gradual phases. It’s hard to predict when a full return to in-person programs and services will be possible. My library is currently closed, my staff is just returning from administrative leave, and we’re only starting to plan for phased reopening with limited services. It’s hard to predict what levels of access we’ll be able to offer by late summer. Without the allure of physical buildings, materials, and meeting spaces to draw people in, public libraries are redefining their virtual presence as a welcoming third space to connect the community with trusted information, electronic resources, and online programs and services. (Note: For this article, “virtual space” will mean use of a platform to gather online with others, not a room or space created in virtual reality.)

Great Space/Third Space
The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) defines four attributes that create a “great space”: sociability, uses and activities, comfort and image, and access and linkages.¹ A great space becomes the “front porch” of public life, one that is easily accessible, inclusive, and interactive. PPS notes that great spaces tend to share four main qualities:

1. Each space is accessible and connected to other local places.
2. The space projects an image of comfort and safety.
3. It draws people in to gather and socialize.
4. It attracts repeat visitors.²

Similarly, a “third space” or “third place” is a gathering place beyond the home or workplace. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg first coined the phrase in his 1989 book, The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community. He describes a space where, “the unrelated can relate,” and “community is most alive and people are most themselves.”³ Often considered community living rooms, public libraries meet the definition of a third space by being free, easily
Libraries and Virtual Third Spaces after COVID-19

Best Practices

accessible, and open to everyone. As Diane Bruxvoort describes, “The set of characteristics that are used to define a third space are well within the library environment: a third place provides a level playing field, has long hours, is low stress, interactive, and has a loose structure. The primary characteristic of a third place is the idea of the level playing field. . . . This is, of course, the very definition of a library.”

Creating an Online Third Space

Developing a virtual presence is common practice for public libraries, pre- or post-COVID-19. Most already excel at offering access to information and electronic resources through their websites. Some libraries also offer live chat for reference help, and many engage with their communities through social media platforms. The adventurous set tests the waters with livestreamed author talks and online teen advisory group meetings. Yet, during the pandemic, public libraries have reconsidered virtual spaces as an alternative place to provide social connection and interaction. PPS’s four attributes of a great space can be applied when creating and maintaining virtual third spaces to optimize community participation.

1. Sociability

PPS uses the term “sociability” to label a space that is welcoming, diverse, neighborly, and cooperative. Public libraries from Sacramento to Red Bank, New Jersey, host library happy hours on Zoom as a space to discuss books and movies with a favorite beverage and virtual company. Red Bank Public Library has patrons register in advance to prevent “Zoombombing,” while Sacramento shares the meeting ID and password on their online calendar. Brooklyn (NY) Public Library offers a virtual English conversation circle via Zoom, while Oak Park (IL) Public Library hosts virtual conversation circles to practice other languages such as Spanish and French.

Iowa City Public Library hosts a Virtual Craft & Chat program on Zoom for participants to “grab a cup of tea, your latest craft project, and your digital device to join fellow local crafters online as we gather for casual conversation about what we are working on and anything else that strikes our fancy.” They also require registration in advance for the program. Offering these programs live via Zoom allows participants to bridge geographic barriers to see, hear, and connect with each other in real time. In addition, many public libraries are experimenting with virtual story times, science demos, and craft projects for children, teens, and families via Zoom, Facebook, or library YouTube channels.

2. Uses and Activities

PPS lists aspects under “uses and activities” that include vitality, usefulness, uniqueness, and authenticity. Features of a selected online platform should create the most ideal third space environment for a program while maximizing participation within a specific community. Livestreaming allows participants to type in questions and comment in real time, but interaction might be limited depending on the platform. YouTube channels allow material to be viewed and shared multiple times while providing space for commenting, yet restricts interaction with performers and presenters in real time. Form should follow function when choosing the ideal platform to host an online space. Consider the level of interaction needed among participants, and choose the platform with optimal features to maximize connection.

For example, platforms such as Zoom allow for “breakout rooms” where large groups can be divided into smaller ones. While this feature is becoming more common for work meetings and online schooling, it also has useful implications for public library programming. If a large number of participants attend a Zoom meeting for a book discussion, the host can divide the group into breakout rooms for smaller groups to better facilitate conversation. After the breakout groups have a discussion, they can be reunited as a large group to share and compare.

3. Comfort and Image

As with the physical environment within a library, the “com-
fort and image” of a virtual space determines how welcome and at ease a person feels upon entering. PPS lists “sittable” as one of the corresponding intangibles under this attribute. Although furniture isn’t a concern within virtual spaces, this aspect can be determined by how long a user wants to pull up a virtual chair to stay and interact. Virtual meeting spaces such as Zoom or Google Hangouts don’t always allow much customization of the platform’s appearance, but libraries can control the background and environment portrayed in their webcam frame. Safety is also an aspect of comfort and image, which includes being transparent and protecting privacy concerns for online participants.

4. Access and Linkages
PPS uses “access and linkages” to describe the physical and visual connections a place has to its surroundings, such as walkability, parking options, and traffic and transit patterns. For virtual spaces, access and linkages have an even more important role in creating trust and visibility for a third space. However, too much information in one location can overwhelm users. As Claire Robertson describes of place-making, “It is argued that modernist architects designed buildings and areas that were so large that they forgot about the people they were serving.” Public libraries tend to strive to be everything to everybody, but offering too much virtually may make accessibility and navigation difficult. One main access point, typically a banner or button featured on the library website, can simplify access and linkage to all virtual/online resources, programs, and services in a single location.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many public libraries have temporarily replaced regular content on their homepages to highlight online offerings. Widgets and links to online calendars help advertise virtual programs. As with web design during ‘normal’ times, the most popular and necessary links should be kept “above the fold” to avoid the endless scroll of bogged down websites. Analytics can measure the most popular links and typical behavior on a site to weed out unused or unpopular material. Robertson argues that “personal observation is the best way to gauge how people interact with a public space.” The same argument can be made for online/virtual spaces, with observation occurring through surveys, metrics, and analytics in addition to standard measurements of program outputs and outcomes.

Promotion
To quote the movie Field of Dreams, “if you build it, they will come” does not always relate to virtual spaces. Active promotion is necessary to increase awareness of online offerings. Public libraries with active e-newsletter subscription lists can reach established patrons electronically to share news and promote virtual offerings. The library’s website and social media platforms also help reach users that already interact with the library online. Reaching regular visitors to physical locations, as well as new audiences while library buildings are closed, is more of a challenge while sheltering in place. Posting signs on building entrances reminds patrons to connect with library staff via the website and social media. Encouraging community partners to share library links and posts on their websites and social media accounts also helps libraries reach more people online while physical locations are closed.

Sustainability
Once buildings reopen, libraries must decide how much of the virtual offerings should be retained, and how much can be sustained. Answers may vary depending on what is best for the community each library serves. Offering mostly virtual programs and services creates barriers for people in areas experiencing a digital divide. Oldenburg argues that virtual spaces also lack the authenticity of in-person interactions, stating, “Third places are face-to-face phenomena. The idea that electronic communication permits a virtual third place is misleading. “Virtual” means that something is like something else in both essence and effect, and that’s not true in this instance.” Conversely, while not always an ideal substitute for a physical third space, virtual spaces can expand a
library’s scope to reach people that may not be able to visit a physical location, or those that are more comfortable interacting online. As Colleen Reilly notes, “Introverts, homebodies, and anyone unable to travel to a third place also need what the third place offers those who are mobile: accessibility, connectivity, a space for to be vulnerable and authentic, and safe.”9 Going forward, public libraries should consider their organizational vision and priorities and allocate resources accordingly to support and sustain the physical or virtual spaces that best fill community needs.

**Conclusion**

As Oldenburg describes, third spaces create homelike psychological safety by hosting, “regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals,” where, “people put aside their concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation around them.”10 Public libraries often serve as third spaces by providing a free, accessible space for socializing that is open to everyone. When physical buildings are closed, patrons continue to seek psychological comfort and combat isolation through shared experiences via virtual spaces. Public libraries across the country have met this challenge in creative and innovative ways to continue serving the needs of their communities.2

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**LIKE PUBLIC LIBRARIES ON FACEBOOK @PUBLIBONLINE**
Public Computer and Internet Access in the Time of COVID-19

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Nick is currently reading Stone of Farewell by Tad Williams.

With the COVID-19 pandemic present in regions throughout the US, libraries are left adapting their programs and services to best operate within the current environment. At present, public libraries may find themselves closed completely, offering full services, or somewhere in-between, given the prevailing conditions of their region (or, in some cases, in spite of them). While individual circumstances may vary, many libraries continue to seek ways to provide critical computer and internet access to their communities. Given the current environment, just what does that look like?

Public Computers
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, public computer terminals were a mainstay of library service. In seeking to continue this service, the most common elements that need to be addressed are maintaining social distancing and providing the most sanitary environment possible.

To create an effective social-distancing model for computer use, consider creating space between terminals. This can be achieved in one of several ways. Computers and associated furniture can be moved to create the recommended six-foot distance between patrons. Such an approach relies on unused library floor space and the availability of electrical outlets. Access to Ethernet ports may also be a concern for computers lacking Wi-Fi capability. If relocating public computers is not an option, then you may need to instead reduce the number of available stations to achieve the desired distance. The unavailable stations can be turned off with signs placed on them. If there is concern that patrons may still attempt to use those terminals, consider removing the monitor from the public floor. This approach will allow your computers to still sit on your network and receive scheduled updates while rendering them unusable to the public.

As you work to create distance between your public computers, there are several ways you can augment your approach. Placing limitations on the length of a patron’s computer session can help improve your turnover rates, an extremely important consider-
Public Computer and Internet Access in the Time of COVID-19

If you’re reducing the number of available computers. While safety must inform our policies, so too should empathy. When placing limits on the duration of a patron’s session, do so with the knowledge that many users may be seeking to navigate unemployment for the first time, performing a job search, or otherwise engaged in a matter of critical importance.

As staff know, patrons using library computers often require personal assistance—a risky proposition in the current environment. As we clearly want to avoid a situation where a staff member is hovering over a patron’s shoulder, technology affords us the opportunity to offer remote assistance. If your library utilizes public computer automation to manage patron use, it is worth exploring whether they offer an add-on module for remote support. For example, Cybrarian allows for remote viewing of a patron’s screen, a chat tool, and temporary takeover of a keyboard and mouse. Other options, including those nonspecific to libraries, are commercially available. When using such remote control features, ALA’s Library Privacy Guidelines for Public Access Computers and Networks indicates the importance of informing the public of their existence and purpose.

Aside from meeting social-distancing requirements, the other challenge of public computer use is one of sanitation. In its public guidelines, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends routine cleaning of high-touch surfaces, such as keyboards. When cleaning electronics, it is important to follow the manufacturer’s guidelines, lest you inadvertently damage your equipment. In absence of such guidance, the CDC recommends utilizing wipeable covers and cleaning with alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol.

In-House Device Lending

Maintaining social distance at a bank of computers can be challenging to say the least. One way of addressing the twin challenges of social distancing and in-house use of library technology is to go mobile. When using in-house lending, Chromebooks, laptops, and tablets are all potential options, though you should consider the following:

- **Purpose:** Simply put, what is the intended use of these devices? Are they merely for browsing the internet, or are they expected to carry a robust suite of software? Will they be used for network printing? Videoconferencing?

- **Budget:** Often, these decisions come down to money. Here, Chromebooks can be an affordable purchase, with good options at the $250 to $300 price point. The iPad Mini is slightly more expensive, while a full-sized iPad will cost you several hundred dollars more. A laptop, while affording you the closest experience to a desktop computer, is the most expensive option.

- **Device Management:** When your equipment goes out, you need to take steps to ensure their safety and security, as well provide a means of efficient upkeep. Laptops can be added to your existing computer network with an appropriate level of access. Chromebooks can be administered through Chrome Device Management. Finally, tablets and other mobile devices can be handled through a third-party mobile device management (MDM) solution. Ultimately, proper management of equipment can prevent theft, and ensure a consistent patron experience.

- **Sanitizing:** Given the potential turnover rate for equip-
ment loaned in-house, it is highly advisable to purchase keyboard covers and device-specific cases for mobile equipment. In absence of a cover, continuous cleaning, even within a manufacturer’s guidelines, is likely to damage electronics.

Accessibility: The equipment that you lend should be accessible to all. The iPad has a number of built-in accessibility features, while the Chromebook, in addition to built-in features, has Chrome extensions which, once installed, can optimize accessibility. Train staff on the accessibility features of any equipment you intend to loan. Ensure that any third-party management software you use does not interfere with or otherwise disable the device’s accessibility options.

Serving Users Remotely
Whether a library’s physical location is closed, or a portion of its patrons fear entering the facility, there is a clear need to deliver critical internet access remotely. With the addition of wireless access points, libraries may extend an available Wi-Fi signal to their parking lots, removing the need to enter the facility. This has the added benefit of extending access beyond the library’s regular hours of operation, and reduces the potential for a rush of users all gathering to use the service at once. Similarly, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has taken note of some organizations repurposing their bookmobiles as mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, traveling their communities to provide free internet access. Hand-in-hand with internet access and computer use, many patrons rely on their library for printing. Remote printing software is widely available and can be adapted to augment a curbside pickup service or even bookmobile access.

Another option for remote access is to make equipment available for checkout. Instituting a mobile hotspot lending program can provide home internet access to patrons. While the costs and plans vary, nonprofits like TechSoup do offer affordable options. While many library users own their own computers or mobile devices, not all do. Offering Chromebooks or tablets on loan in conjunction with a hotspot lending program can help meet the needs of patrons who lack an internet capable device. As with any material we loan out during a pandemic, you should consult the CDC guidelines and determine an appropriate quarantine period upon its return.

Conclusion
The COVID-19 pandemic poses an incredible challenge to public libraries. As we work to provide critical computer and internet access to the public, we must chart a course that is both safe and rises to the occasion. Remaining cognizant of local conditions, let us meet this challenge with caution and creativity.

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May the ZOOM Be with You!

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“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”—Dr. Brené Brown, The Gifts of Imperfection

When I read this quote, my first thought was “The way Brené Brown describes connection makes it sound like Luke Skywalker using the Force.” Think about it, when all the good users of the Force wield this power in the Star Wars movie franchise, it works best when they draw upon the connection to a loved one. All the villains feed off of the hate they have for the people in their lives who have done them wrong.

Does this insight make Brené Brown a Jedi Master? If so, where can I get her action figure?

The wisdom of Dr. Brown, and Yoda, are to be acted upon during the worldwide pandemic within which we currently reside. Connecting is an important practice to keep us healthy while we social distance, isolate, and quarantine. According to research conducted by insurance company Cigna, loneliness is growing year to year. In a 2019 survey, they discovered that 61% of Americans over the age of 18 identify as being “lonely,” a number that rose from the previous year. This is not even taking into account the high numbers of teenagers being treated for depression. The writers of the article go on to write that the effects of loneliness are “equal to or greater than the risk of early death from widely known risk factors including obesity and smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.” Now add in what the mental impact of being alone has on your brain. It’s time to let the Force guide our actions.

Science has proven how not being connected to other humans can be very unhealthy to both mind and body during a pandemic, but now think about how it affects your team’s work life.

Working remotely went from being something public librarians rarely did to standard operating procedure overnight. That shift was jarring, and a majority of staff did not have the tools or tech skills to be successful. More importantly most library workers did not pos-
The Big Idea / MAY THE ZOOM BE WITH YOU!

The mental strength to navigate a new way to work. It was like going from one day working in the rock quarries of Bedrock to suddenly designing space sprockets in the floating offices of Orbit City! (Never pass up a chance to drop a *Flintstones* AND a *Jetsons* reference.) Sprinkle the above work at home stressors with whiny kids, barking dogs, and an unreliable internet connection! Yabba, dabba, delirious.

Connect Again, and Again, and Again . . .

One of the best tactics to keep work teams connected is to communicate as much as possible. In the pre-pandemic world, communication at work would often consist of in-person team and maybe, one on one meetings. When the Kalamazoo (MI) Public Library (KPL) library closure increased from days to weeks, I developed an online communication plan that kept workflows moving and encouraged team members to stay as connected as possible. It was vital that all meetings allowed for time to connect with one another. The team needed to feel the Force.

Patrick Lencioni wrote in his book *The Advantage*, “Great leaders see themselves as Chief Reminding Officers as much as anything else.” His point is that leaders can never ever communicate too much to their team especially when they are all working remotely. Any piece of information that helps a direct report do their job effectively and efficiently has to be said over and over. This strategy should be ramped up during a time in which at work connections are not happening. “Heightened communication is necessary, not only to keep your remote team productively focused, but because the sudden move from the workplace to home space can take an emotional toll on people when they no longer have the social contact with work friends and colleagues,” writes Nicole Bendaly in a *Forbes* article. Over-communicating also sends a clear signal that you are caring for them from afar by keeping them in the info loop. Remind yourself that all good Jedi Knights practice using the Force again and again and again.

Connect Four

When crafting a communication/connection plan for my remote team, I discovered four strategies that—when combined with over-communicating—were most effective for moving the team forward. Each strategy focused more on personal well-being, aspirations, and future planning. My goal was to strengthen the connections the team had made before self-isolation, for fear they would crumble. If they could feel the power of the Force via a computer monitor, that feeling could in turn keep the team both physically and mentally healthier. Powerful teams can make rocks float and lift X-Wings out of swamps.

1. One-on-One Meetings:
   Establish regular meetings with your direct reports that are the same time and day every week. Start the meeting asking the personal questions about family and home life. Share new information and gather anything they need to succeed. Listen to their worries about work and the world at large.

2. Team Check-Ins: Opportunities for the team to gather online and connect. Bendaly suggests to, “Ask each person to share one word to describe how they are feeling in that moment. There is no discussion in the exercise, it is simply a way for team members to connect with how others are feeling in the moment.” In the department I lead, team check-ins happen at both the branch and department levels.

3. Team Info Sharing: These meetings consisted of team leaders sharing important info on KPL’s plan for services during COVID-19. Often, we would consider a possible change and consider how it would look at all locations. These meetings would end with time for questions and answers. Even though these events skewed toward “library business” leaders, the meetings would open with an invitation to share.

4. Fun Check-Ins: This meeting happened when someone needed connection. Smaller teams within the department would use the online platform to check in on one another’s
physical and mental health. Since two people in the department had just given birth, we would usually ask to see the baby. The rest of the time was spent talking about what we were reading or watching.

I encouraged all the leaders in the department to make sure they also connected with everyone who worked on their team, from library aide to librarian. It was eventually clear that it was the responsibility of all staff members to fortify connections during the pandemic.

Training to be a Jedi Master is super similar to learning how to be a master of connectedness. It takes lots of intention, communication, and practice. Leaders need to trust that the employees’ efforts to make the library great via Zoom are just as powerful as at a reference desk. Just because the team has to communicate by the glare of a computer monitor it does not mean that they are not able to call upon the Force to change the world. Jedi Master Brown speaks!

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Aging in (Third) Place with Public Libraries

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An aging population presents both opportunities and challenges for a range of community spaces and organizations, including public libraries. Rather than focusing on the challenges, as is so often done, here we position public libraries as key community hubs that can (and do) reach out to and engage with community-dwelling older adults with socially inclusive programs, services, materials, and spaces. Exploring the meaning of the public library for older patrons, we begin with an overview of two key concepts that are shaping the importance and implications of the library as a third place for this population: the trend toward aging in place and concerns around social isolation. We then provide an overview of an environmental scan of older adult programming provided by forty Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) member library systems' websites. Findings from this study lead us to consider how the organization of programming based around age might alter experiences of the public library as a third place and prompt us to shift our conversation from an understanding of the library as third place to the library as social infrastructure.

**OLDER ADULTS, PUBLIC LIBRARIES, AND PLACE**

Public libraries are part of our culturally constructed space and “have an important role to play in fostering and developing varying senses of community and providing services to different communities.” Whether we think about library as place as referring to its physical place (its structure and architecture) or its social place (its role as connector with other social spaces), library and community are imbricated and can be mutually reinforcing. While public libraries were curiously excluded in urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s examples of the different public places that can be considered as a third place, public library practitioners and researchers have both used Oldenburg’s notion of the third place as a means to highlight the value of and the many roles public libraries play in their communities. Third places, such as restaurants, parks, gyms, coffeeshops, or museums, are places distinct and separate from the home (a first place) or work environments (a second place), where social connection, social capital, and community building can be fostered. In further contextualizing his vision of third places, Oldenburg outlined the following eight characteristics of successful third places:

1. Occur on neutral ground: “places where individuals can come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel welcome and comfortable”;
2. Be “levellers”: inclusive places that do not require individuals to meet particular criteria or be of a certain social rank to enter;
3. Have conversation as a main activity: places that are conducive to, value, and nurture casual and sociable talk;
4. Are accessible and accommodating: places that people can easily enter after fulfilling work, school, or home commitments;
5. Have regulars who can nurture trust with newcomers: places that foster a sense of familiarity among those who frequent them;
6. Keep a low, unpretentious profile: places that are comfortable and approachable;
7. Maintain a playful mood: places that invite people to return with their playfulness;
8. Serve as a home away from home: places that offer a congenial and familiar environment.

Research by library practitioners and scholars has demonstrated the importance of public libraries as hubs of sociocultural connection, with relationships between patrons, library staff, and the surrounding community cultivating social capital and nurturing social inclusion for people of all ages. Research in fields related to aging has highlighted the importance of sociocultural links as having a measurable, positive impact on older adults’ physical and mental well-being, including bolstering feelings of social inclusion. For older adults who may no longer be participating in paid work, and thus may lose connections associated with their second place, the third place(s) in their everyday
lives may take on increasingly significant roles. This is especially so as a sense of belonging or attachment to a place, such as a community public library branch, can “help maintain a sense of identity and well-being, and facilitate successful adjustments in old age.”

As a third place, public libraries can “provide a sense of place, a refuge, and a still point; they are a vital part of the public sphere and an incubator of ideas.” They are well-poised to provide inclusive support to older adults, given their distribution in high- and low-income neighbourhoods (corresponding to Oldenburg’s first and second characteristics of successful third places), their long history of social inclusion in their values and mandates, and their range of materials, programs, services, and spaces that can be used without expectation of payment or pre-existing level of expertise (Oldenburg’s fourth and sixth characteristics). For older adults, libraries are trusted third places for discovering and accessing resources, enabling lifelong learning, and fostering community relationships (Oldenburg’s third, fifth, seventh, and eighth characteristics). In alignment with the general theme of community and social inclusiveness that encapsulates Oldenburg’s conceptualization of third places, Sloan proposed that public libraries’ services for older adults can support four key areas of well-being: (1) stimulation, (2) bringing older people together, (3) cutting isolation, and (4) ensuring equality of access.

Taking up the public library as a third place for older adults may, however, require a critical and nuanced lens due to two particular contexts that are shaping how institutions understand both aging and the services they provide for older adults: the trend of aging in place and the increasing incidence of social isolation.

1. Aging in Place

While Oldenburg noted that “houses do not a community make,” for older adults who are estimated to spend 80 percent of their time at home, their home and local community are especially pivotal in their lives and their understanding and making of community. Governments at all levels have embraced aging in place policies and strategies to empower older adults to remain in their homes and local communities as they age, instead of relocating to more costly hospitals or long-term care facilities. Aging in place has many different definitions but generally means continuing to live in the same or a familiar place or community for as long as possible, even if health changes occur. In addition to fulfilling an economic imperative, aging in place aligns with the preference of a vast majority of both Canadian and American older adults, who intend to remain in their homes to maintain their independence and remain strongly connected to their communities.

In considering the public library as a third place for older patrons, it is critical to recognize that not all older adults benefit from often-idealized versions or visions of aging in place. Not all older patrons can age in a safe or inclusive place, and some patrons may not have a place within which to age. In such cases the library as a third place might take on a more essential role in these patrons’ lives, perhaps even blurring the lines between first and third place.

2. Social Isolation

The International Federation on Ageing has stated that the number one issue surrounding aging populations is keeping older adults socially connected and active. Third places are noted for the rich social interactions and sense of community they foster. Of the eight characteristics that Oldenburg ascribed to third places, a majority center around creating opportunities for social inclusion and interaction, including conversation as the main activity, accessibility and accommodation, a playful mood, and a sense of belonging—a home away from home. This focus on social interaction is especially salient given the increasing awareness and attention paid to the prevalence of social isolation among older adults. An estimated 17 to 24% of American and Canadian older adults experience some level of isolation. Social isolation has many definitions, but essentially entails a lack in quantity and quality of social contacts. Social isolation has received increased attention in the news and among researchers as it carries a variety of negative effects...
Aging in (Third) Place with Public Libraries / FEATURE

Aging in (Third) Place with Public Libraries

on older adults’ physical and mental health and well-being, including premature mortality, depression, and increased risk for falls, cardiovascular disease, and dementia. Social isolation among older adults can be a result of several factors, including physical changes (such as sickness, disability, or reduced mobility), life course transitions (such as the loss of a spouse, retirement, or geographically distant family), and social and environmental factors (such as poverty, inadequate transportation, or inaccessible communication tools). As socially isolated older adults have poorer health outcomes and more complex support needs, they therefore often require access to a complement of community-based supports and third places to thrive—including public libraries.

These two concepts, aging in place and social isolation, can be mutually reinforcing with potentially adverse outcomes. An unintended consequence of aging in place for some older persons may be increased risk for social isolation. Indeed, aging in place strategies and policies can exacerbate experiences of social isolation unless adequate, accessible, and responsive community infrastructures, including public libraries, are in place. Ultimately, these two emerging contexts are shaping how the public library, as a third place, is or can be experienced by its older patrons. If the majority of older patrons are aging (or intend to age) in their homes and communities, they require access to inclusive and accommodating programs, collections, and spaces (both online and offline). Public libraries, which often play a role in serious and casual leisure time spent across the life course, can be that third space to nurture or sustain older patrons’ evolving connections, curiosities, and communities.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

These considerations of library as third place were borne out of a larger study that sought to more broadly explore how public libraries are responding to an older adult population by asking: “What are the common and promising practices for and the barriers faced when developing, executing, sustaining, and evaluating programs?” As public library programming can provide older patrons with opportunities for leisure, discovery, reflection, learning, and social connection (all attributes that contribute to the experience of the public library as a third space), as one component of this study a research team searched forty CULC member public library systems’ websites for two months in the summer of 2018 and documented the different library programs that older adults may attend. Information was collected about the type of program, the age(s) designation assigned to each program, and whether the program entailed a partnership with an identified community organization. Information collected about the type of program included details regarding the program’s title; the content, characteristics, or activity pertaining to the program; location(s); and time(s) offered. To gain an inclusive and broad understanding of what programs are available to older adult audiences, in addition to older adult-specific programming, both intergenerational programming (sometimes labelled as “all ages”) and adult programming were included in this scan. Our team was curious in gathering information about the presence of partnerships in programming to understand the community building and community making that programs comprise, further entrenching public libraries within the fabric of a community’s third places.

In total, this scan identified 691 programs across the 40 public library systems. For ease of sorting through and making sense of the sizeable amount of data, as illustrated in figure 1, these 691 programs were further divided into the following 16 different program categories:

1. Reading and writing (n = 125, 18%): included book clubs, writing groups, author conversations, poetry readings, and storytimes;
2. Technology (n = 88, 13%): included technology drop-in sessions, basic computer training tutorials, and podcast clubs, as well as overviews of online privacy, securing home wireless networks, and Google Maps;
3. Arts and crafts (n = 84, 12%): included knitting, sewing, and crochet circles, life drawing, paint
nights, fiber art, and coloring clubs;
4. Health and wellness (n = 78, 11%): included sessions about pain management, fall prevention, cannabis, brain health, Lyme disease, stress relief, diabetes prevention, and prostate health as well as guided meditation sessions. Of the programs categorized as health and wellness, twelve were focused on topics related to Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias;
5. Instruction (n = 63, 9%): included lecture-style programs on a variety of topics, including repair cafés and lecture series on current or historical events, cultural traditions or holidays, and social justice initiatives;
6. Language (n = 51, 7%): included programs where patrons can learn, practice, and improve their language skills in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, French, Hindi, Punjabi, and Cantonese, among others;
7. Games (n = 37, 5%): included programs dedicated to playing Scrabble, checkers, trivia, bridge, bingo, board games, chess, Dungeons & Dragons, and card games, as well as more general game nights;
8. Social (n= 32, 5%): included a number of programs explicitly titled as and designed to bring patrons together to be in community and conversation with one another, often including coffee or tea;
9. Movies (n = 27, 4%): included programs where libraries hosted a movie viewing for any interested patrons, often titled as “movie nights” or “movie marathons”;
10. Fitness (n = 19, 3%): fitness sessions included programs where library patrons would be moving their body in some way, including yoga sessions, walking tours and walking groups, Nordic pole walking, chair yoga, and Wii bowling;
11. Legal (n = 19, 3%): included sessions where patrons could ask questions to a practicing lawyer, attend a legal clinic, learn about preparing or revising a will, and learn about the legalities surrounding end-of-life care and planning;
12. Food (n = 18, 3%): included sessions that touched on the topic of food, including healthy eating, meal planning, understanding one’s relationship with food, a celebration of strawberry season, and a workshop on preparing one’s own Kombucha;
13. Music (n = 14, 2%): included programs where patrons could listen to music, bring their own acoustic instruments to play with other patrons, learn a new instrument, meet others interested in vinyl, or join others in singing folk songs;
14. Genealogy (n = 13, 2%): included sessions where patrons learned about genealogical research or could learn more about their ancestry;
15. Finances (n = 12, 2%): included sessions around taxes, how to manage one’s finances, investing for education and retirement, and how to create a financially sustainable budget;
16. Environment (n = 11, 2%): included programs that touched on the environment and nature, including how to reduce waste, composting, gardening, and seed libraries.

Nearly all of the forty library systems offered book clubs, writing groups, computer training, English as a Second Language resources and learning opportunities, knitting circles, author readings, informational sessions, and movie showings. Programming designated exclusively for older adults primarily consisted of informational sessions, fitness classes, and social hours. Such informational sessions were largely biomedical in theme, including lectures and sessions related to dementia, fall prevention, advanced health care planning in later life, suicide in later life, and safe use of medication. Libraries also offer activities specifically tailored to older adults, such as paint nights, film screenings, book clubs, and colouring afternoons. The content of these programs largely fits within the traditional categories of public library services targeted at older adults that Kendall outlined nearly 25 years ago: education (including technology teaching and training), community information, and cultural services.

Programs that included participation from a partner organization or agency accounted for 107 (15%) of the documented programs. Partnerships with external organizations were especially prevalent in
those informational sessions related to health and well-being, and included municipal government and non-profit organizations such as local Alzheimer’s Societies, cities’ Public Health or Community Health offices, and local chapters of national osteoporosis organizations and mental health associations. Other external partners included local genealogical societies, legal clinics, and police and fire services. Public libraries located in a city near a large university often offered informational sessions led by the university’s faculty members or research centre staff.

Tied to our focus of considering public libraries as third places, one particularly revealing finding was the way in which age categories were assigned to the different programs. As outlined in figure 2, 440 programs (64%) were designated as either “adult” or “adult to older adult,” 173 programs (25%) were categorized as “all ages,” and a remaining 78 programs (11%) were designated exclusively for older adult patrons (also sometimes labeled as “seniors”). The implications of these ratios will be further discussed in the following section.

OPENING UP UNDERSTANDINGS OF AGE IN THIRD PLACES
Age is used as a ubiquitous (and sometimes problematic) categorizing tool throughout our everyday lives, and this extends into LIS theory, education, and practice. While the use of chronological age to distinguish between our library spaces, collections, and programs affords an alluring sense of order, organization, and objectivity, prescribing what is or may not be “age appropriate” can simultaneously propagate or further entrench stereotypes of different age groups.

As 89 percent of programs were designated as either all ages or as ranging from adult to older adult (which, conservatively, allows for a range of
60 to 70 years), findings from the environmental scan of the 691 programs offer some promising points of departure in rethinking library as a third place. Whereas age groups have traditionally been kept in isolation from one another in LIS practice, education, and research (keeping, for example, children, teens, adults, and older adults separate from one another), findings from this scan indicate a potential shift in public library programs coming to value “different ways of growing rather than the linearity that age presupposes,”19 opening up opportunities for public libraries to differently explore and consider their position as a third place.

Demas and Scherer have highlighted that libraries as third places “create opportunities for people who do not necessarily travel in the same disciplinary, social, political, or economic circles to frequently meet and greet each other.”20 As evidenced by the data gathered in this study, a majority of the programs documented provide the occasion to connect patrons not only with new ideas or opportunities, but also with patrons of other ages whom they might not otherwise have encountered. One of Oldenburg’s eight characteristics of third places is that they are *levellers*, in that social status (which we would argue would include one’s age) is inconsequential in that space. Therefore, maintaining this generous “agelessness” to library programs is a key mechanism that can contribute to patrons’ experiences of the library as a third place. As social inclusion includes not only older people’s involvement in community life, but also their social capital, their civic participation, and the nature of their social networks and reciprocity, maintaining an age inclusivity might be a means to nurture social inclusion in libraries. The high ratio of age-neutral or age-inclusive programs uncovered in this study’s environmental scan indicates the possibility for libraries to serve as a third place for reflection and dialogue on age and aging. In providing programs where several generations can attend and be in community together, libraries “can help to counter traditional stereotypes and promote awareness of the historical and cultural circumstances that determine our attitudes about aging.”21 The library as a third place creates and hosts programs (in addition to collections and spaces) that invite individuals of all ages to gather and be in conversation and community with one another, opening up opportunities to challenge static preconceptions of what it necessarily means to belong to one age group.

It is important to note, though, that the decision to move toward age-neutral or age-inclusive public library programs can be a fraught process as it can be difficult to delineate programs (or spaces or collections) by age group in a manner that does not create “others.” The heterogeneity inherent within different age categories must be considered. For example, those libraries within the environmental scan that offered older adult–exclusive programming may have done so either as a means to recognize and address the unique program needs of older adults or as a means of keeping with their patrons’ preferences to participate in age-segregated programs and spaces. Those libraries that did not offer older adult–only programming may have done so as a means to ensure their programs remained inclusive to all patrons of all ages who might enjoy, attend, or benefit, recognizing that intergenerational or all-ages programming can be of benefit to all patrons of all ages. A library’s community will be a reflection of the diversity of meanings, experiences, and preferences of its patrons. Accordingly, in her in-depth survey of suburban public libraries’ information services to older adults in two American metropolitan areas, Perry cautions that the implementation of age group designations must be carefully considered based on each library’s community: “how a community chooses to segment its population of older adults depends largely on how it understands its challenges and opportunities and what its objectives are in addressing the issue of civic engagement.”22

**FROM LIBRARY AS THIRD PLACE TO LIBRARY AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Oldenburg’s third place has served as a helpful concept and framework for public librarians and library scholars to use when studying, discussing, and highlighting the value of public libraries and the many
different roles they play in their communities. Connecting public libraries within larger, dynamic social issues and contexts (such as aging in place, social isolation, and questions around age categorizations), as we have done in this article, has prompted us to consider refocusing our conversations, moving from the library as third place to the library as social infrastructure.

Eric Klinenberg’s recent book, *Palaces for the People*, provides an overview of social infrastructures: “Social infrastructure [includes] . . . the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbours writing.” Specific to libraries, Klinenberg goes on to note that “social infrastructure provides the setting and context for social participation, and the library is among the more critical forms of social participation we have.” In conceptualizing the library as social infrastructure, there are obvious points of commonality with the library as third place in that, as per Oldenburg’s eight characteristics, it is a place that engenders local, face-to-face interactions, encouraging the forging of bonds. What is different and what renders framing the library as a social infrastructure so compelling is that it draws attention to and emphasizes the changing and evolving social dynamics, contexts, demographics, and communities within which libraries are embedded. Importantly, then, thinking of the library as social infrastructure is a reminder that the library is not static; it is, as Shannon Mattern has so eloquently posed, a “network of integrated, mutually reinforcing, evolving infrastructures,” deeply and intimately involved in the development of knowledge and the nurturing of community, imbued with cultural, political, and economic values. She goes on to note that the library as a social infrastructure forces us, importantly, to consider, question, and grapple with “the larger network of public services and knowledge institutions of which each library is a part.”

An aging population is but one area (albeit one that is swiftly growing and transforming) in which changing and evolving social dynamics and demographics are changing the use of, the place and expectations of, and the understandings of public libraries. In closing and hopefully inspiring further conversation, as a means to responsively reflect these changing contexts and in recognition of the complex roles libraries play in engaging with and creating their communities, we are excited by the possibilities a movement from library as third place to library as social infrastructure facilitates:

- **Library as social infrastructure draws attention to the multiplicity of interconnected actors, organizations, and elements that are involved in creating an inclusive community space.**
- **Library as social infrastructure highlights and promotes the civic engagement and social interaction that public libraries enable and foster.**
- **Library as social infrastructure is a means to acknowledge that the constraints and diversity among and between library branches and systems are dependent on intersecting contexts, including location, available resources, etc.**
- **Library as social infrastructure, as a “network of integrated, mutually reinforcing, evolving infrastructures,” by emphasizing collectivity, provides a mechanism to differently contend with challenges.**

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The Free Library of Philadelphia is a hub where education and communities intersect. In Philadelphia, where residents are dealing with disparities across income and opportunities, the Free Library represents a space that neutralizes the resource inequity. Individuals come as they are, knowing that they too have the ability to enjoy rich programming, extensive services, and life-changing resources available to them. Under this platform, a successful partnership was formed between the Free Library’s Culinary Literacy Center and the Philadelphia Autism Project to provide a program for individuals on the spectrum to learn independent life skills through cooking classes. The Philadelphia Autism Project acts as a conduit to which autism-related resources, community needs, and innovative projects meet. It is a citywide initiative operating under the Policy and Analytics Center (PAC) at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute. The Philadelphia Autism Project is funded by Philadelphia City Council, the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), and Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health Urban Health Collaborative. Combining the core mission of the Culinary Literacy Center to educate about and through cooking and the deep knowledge and resources of the Philadelphia Autism Project on supporting individuals on the spectrum, the Cooking with Confidence program was born. We hope this article inspires and guides you to pilot a similar program in your library or classroom!

COOKING WITH CONFIDENCE

Started in 2014, the Free Library of Philadelphia’s Culinary Literacy Center was created with the aim to advance literacy in Philadelphia in a unique and innovative way—with a fork and spoon. The Culinary Literacy Center provides educational opportunities about cooking, and through cooking. Our staff recognizes that there are many different ways to learn and have found that an interactive cooking program can teach math via measuring, reading via recipes, and science via seeing a transformative cooking process. Chefs of all ages can experiment with new foods, new tools, and new ideas. Through the cooking classes offered, the Culinary Literacy Center (CLC) helps strengthen the Library’s commitment to providing accessible and inclusive learning opportunities throughout Philadelphia.

Cooking with Confidence is one such inclusive program targeted for teens and young adults on the spectrum or who may have learning differences. Together with the Philadelphia Autism Project, this program was created with specific adaptations for

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Autism Spectrum Disorder (or autism) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. Just like you and I, people on the spectrum are diverse, with strengths, challenges, and individual preferences. While the characteristics of autism can be expressed in a variety of unique ways, all people on the spectrum share certain traits that include social-communication differences, restrictive and repetitive behaviors, and sensory differences. It is important for all staff to learn about autism and other developmental differences when preparing programming for this population, and to keep an open mind to learning throughout the process. To learn more about autism, please visit www.phillyautismproject.org, or the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT) at www.paautism.org.
the needs of individuals on the spectrum. Through hands-on classes, participants learn how to read recipes, how to use basic cooking skills, and how to stay safe in the kitchen. Participants prepare a plant-based meal and share it together at a communal table—often trying and discussing unfamiliar foods in a new social setting.

While learning basic cooking and safety skills in the kitchen is an integral part of this cooking class, what has resulted organically is so much more. Participants who attended the cooking classes had a diverse range of experiences and took a chance to try something new. They took a chance to be in the same space as others, knowing the vulnerabilities that accompany new social situations. Participants not only discussed nutrition and food, but also pushed their limits to try something new, with the urging of their peers. While these moments may seem small, they are not to be taken for granted. In the lives of individuals who require consistency and routine in their schedule, environments, and even the foods that they consume, trying new things can change what they, and their circle of support, perceive as possible.

This program offers the dignity of risk to individuals. The dignity of risk is the concept that inherent in building self-esteem and self-determination, is the right to take reasonable risks that come with life experiences. As professionals, family members, and as a community, we must support people with experiencing the successes and failures that come with living. You will see that this concept has implications throughout these cooking classes.

**LITERATURE**

We consulted current literature and data to learn about social opportunities, and the availability of nutrition and culinary curriculums for individuals on the spectrum. According to the Pennsylvania Autism Needs Assessment, over one third of adults on the spectrum reported peer mentorship and social supports as an unmet service need.³ While communication difficulties can be a barrier to building peer mentorship and social support, social opportunities that are facilitated for positive experiences are also limited.

Although data and literature provides a more global perspective on how many individuals are faring when it comes to social opportunities, you need not go far to learn about these limited opportunities from individuals, families, and providers. Through the practice of community engagement and providing resources to families, you can hear the concerns that they face trying to find social opportunities and educational outlets for their loved ones. You can also hear the worry from providers who search for a social outlet that their clients may be interested in, in the hopes of alleviating the isolation.

In addition to the social aspect of this program, participants have the opportunity to discuss and apply healthy eating and nutrition. Research indicates higher rates of obesity, gastrointestinal issues, and eating disorders among individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism.⁴ This pilot program creates an introductory discussion on the role of food and access to food in people’s lives.

A dive into culinary curricula and interventions for individuals on the spectrum and other developmental differences yielded some interesting findings. In one study, video modeling and prompting were used to teach cooking skills to students with
disabilities. Another study looked at whether custom-made videos were more effective for teaching independent cooking skills compared to commercially available videos. And yet another study explored Active Engagement, a systematic and step-wise program designed to promote generalized skills in the kitchen environment for adults on the spectrum. Behind Active Engagement is the concept that when psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, the learning environment is optimized to promote the teaching of life skills.

While initial goals were to address health promotion, independent living skills, and social opportunities for adults on the spectrum, the project has also brought forward a place to explore how people relate to each other, and to food.

**PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

Partnership between the Philadelphia Autism Project and the Free Library of Philadelphia began prior to work with the Culinary Literacy Center. The two organizations previously collaborated on creating sensory storytimes, where libraries remained open for additional hours, exclusively for families of children on the spectrum, to provide them with an inclusive and judgment-free storytime experience. When the Philadelphia Autism Project learned about the mission and programming of the Free Library’s Culinary Literacy Center, an opportunity was identified to create a similar, inclusive experience using cooking as a platform.

The mission of the Free Library’s Culinary Literacy Center is to advance literacy through food and cooking around a communal table. Culinary literacy is really a twofold concept, as it emphasizes learning about cooking as well as learning about a host of other subjects through cooking. For individuals on the spectrum, learning to cook not only emphasizes practical, independent living skills, it also helps to reinforce the importance of critical reading and paying attention to a multi-step process. The Philadelphia Autism Project was also drawn to the Culinary Literacy Center’s goal to bring classroom participants together to share a meal around a communal table. In Cooking with Confidence, students have fun cooking and socializing while learning skills that can support living healthy, independent lives, like how to measure ingredients and prepare simple plant-based meals.

Drexel’s ExCITE Center’s seed funding project provided the perfect opportunity for the Philadelphia Autism Project and the Culinary Literacy Center to launch the Cooking with Confidence pilot for individuals on the spectrum. Initial funding supported piloting two free cohorts of classes, consisting of two classes each, in November/December 2017 and February 2018. In planning for the classes, we discussed who the target audience was, recruitment and outreach strategies, measuring outcome, registration process, staff to participant ratio, and sensory needs we should consider.

It was a conscious decision to offer the pilot program during evening and daytime hours to assess which time slots would work best for participants. The first cohort was offered during the daytime and participants were recruited directly from provider agencies that support adults on the spectrum. The participants needed a fair amount of support and accommodation to participate. The second cohort was open to the public and offered in the evening. It was interesting and surprising to see the contrast...
between cohorts. For the publicly offered classes, participants functioned more independently, and many did not need additional staff support. We witnessed a fair amount of bonding in the second class with lively conversation around superheroes, and speculation around who would win in a fight between Superman and Black Panther!

After the initial program pilot, staff realized that the Cooking with Confidence program was a great platform for helping teenagers and young adults on the spectrum to learn independent living skills in a supportive environment. The program shifted focus from an adult-only audience, to primarily partnering with the School District and local high schools who have active programs for students on the spectrum. The program remains primarily funded by an annual grant from the Philadelphia Autism Project.

A LOOK AT OUR PILOT PROJECT

STAFF

It took a dedicated behind the scenes team to plan and implement this multi-agency, transdisciplinary project. Cooking with Confidence has truly been a collaborative effort between the Free Library and the Philadelphia Autism Project. For groups seeking to create similar programming, we highly recommend building partnerships with organizations experienced working with individuals on the spectrum. The resources and knowledge provided by the Philadelphia Autism Project have been invaluable in helping to make this program a success.

In this effort, the Culinary Literacy Center has one primary staff member assigned to the program who helps reserve the space, set up the kitchen equipment, and assist with program scheduling and logistics. The Philadelphia Autism Project provides two staff members who spearhead marketing and scheduling of groups, collect and analyze program data, and provide insight and recommendations on how to best make a positive impact on this community.

Another absolutely critical piece of the staffing puzzle is finding an enthusiastic, empathetic chef instructor. Cooking with Confidence has been exceedingly lucky to have worked with a passionate and professional chef instructor who has been a driving force of our program. The instructor was an extremely valuable addition, as she is not only an experienced food educator, but also the parent of a teenager on the spectrum. She balances providing a welcoming and reassuring space for participants and their family members, while also pushing them to try something new. It is crucial to find an instructor who is flexible and caring; as this is important to the interactions they have with participants. For example, one participant had transportation issues and arrived to the class late. He was frustrated and agitated. He asked if he could hug the instructor, which she allowed, and it helped to calm him down. He felt better afterwards and was able to join the rest of the class in the cooking activity. While this example is not isolated, it highlights the importance of quality of interactions over quantity of interactions. You do not need a lot of staff and support, but if you have the right staff, it can make a difference.

Though we did not actively recruit for volunteers, quite a few people reached out offering their assistance. When sharing information about your pilot project and seeking volunteer support, consider reaching out to local universities, colleges, and partners. It can be the next step toward building stronger relationships with departments and agencies.

Since we capped each class at ten participants with the option for each participant to bring someone to support them (if needed), sustainability of the project only requires a cooking instructor, assistant instructor, and a staff member to handle outreach and program registration. Often times, support workers that accompany individuals also provide a helping hand throughout the class process. Sometimes, however, too many observers on site can interfere with the hands-on efforts of students, as we are trying to build their confidence and raise their self-determination in the kitchen. Volunteers and caregivers can become overeager in trying to help facilitate these experiences, so we recommend preparing them in advance to allow for maximum independence of the students.
Recipes and Tools

For our pilot program, the tools and ingredients for each class varied based on the selected recipes. Recipes were chosen based on affordability (all recipes consisted of ingredients costing less than $4 per item), accessibility (such as ability to open packages), and level of simplicity (one pot meals versus more complex ones). All recipes used were plant-based, with the intention of being a slightly new culinary experience for participants to help broaden their palates. Recipes were adapted to fit the needs of the audience and were strategically broken down into sequential, manageable tasks. Staff were also conscientious of the sensory needs of participants and provided gloves and goggles as needed.

To optimize participant interactions, it was essential to prepare and organize the tools, stations, and recipes before each class and to break each recipe into tasks that could be completed either individually or in small groups. All students were given an opportunity to directly participate in the creation of the meal. Breaking down the tasks allowed individuals to work on activities at their own pace and their own ability level. For example, individuals that required more support and needed more time, worked on tasks such as grating cheese while other individuals helped with measuring ingredients and cutting vegetables.

One of the most popular recipes used was for pierogi. Pierogi are a great option as they can easily be made in bulk, with a total grocery cost of approximately $25 for a class of fifteen participants. Many of our students had not had pierogi before, but they were similar to other foods they had experienced (dumplings, empanadas, mashed potatoes) which made them more willing to try something new. Pierogi are a very messy, hands-on experience so we provided gloves for students who were hesitant to handle the dough due to sensory concerns. We also provided a variety of dips and sides for the pierogi, such as apple sauce and plain Greek yogurt, so students could experiment with different flavors to see which was their favorite.

Space

Classes took place in the Culinary Literacy Center’s kitchen classroom, the first space of its kind in a public library. Located at the Free Library of Philadelphia’s Parkway Central Library, the space combines commercial-grade kitchen equipment with classroom-style seating for up to 36 students. Conscious planning of the space was important to facilitate social interactions. While most cooking programs were set up in a simple classroom style, this program arranged the format so that there was room for a communal table in the center of the room. During the lessons, the students were arranged in pairs throughout the room which encouraged collaboration and socialization. For specialized tasks which required close supervision, students were called to the front of the classroom to complete the recipe component alongside the chef instructor. Once the cooking was completed, the students arranged place settings at the central table and enjoyed the meal together.

While it certainly was helpful to have the use of a professional kitchen, such a location is not necessary to present this program. The Culinary Literacy Center’s programming expands beyond their main location classroom and into the many neighborhood libraries of the system through the use of mobile kitchen carts and self-created “kitchen kits” which are shippable totes of basic kitchen equipment. If your location has a sink with running water and a conference table, then it’s possible to host this or similar cooking programs. (Make sure to check local regulations!) For more information about hosting cooking programs in your library or classroom, please visit www.freelibrary.org/cook for a free copy of our Culinary Literacy Toolkit.

Accommodations

In order to provide the best possible experience for students, special accommodations often needed to be made to address the unique needs of participants. Dietary concerns were communicated to all staff ahead of time to ensure that all students were able to participate and enjoy the meal. For visual learners, volunteers added pictures of the ingredients to the
recipes to help identify different tools and ingredients. Tools were safe and protective in nature. For example, lettuce knives were used whenever possible as they do not pose a serious cutting hazard. All participants wore aprons and were informed that gloves were available if they were sensitive to touching certain food textures. Certain ingredients, such as onions, were frozen beforehand and goggles were made available to limit the impact of tearing eyes while cutting. Tables with lower heights were brought in if an individual required the use of a wheelchair.

Additionally, staff were conscientious that trying new things and being in new spaces can sometimes cause individuals on the spectrum to feel anxious or overwhelmed. Staff ensured all participants had access to a quiet space, if needed. For any programming geared towards the autistic community, it is essential to provide a quiet space and ensure that all participants know where they can go if they need to take a break.

REGISTRATION

Flyers with a description of the program, dates, qualifications, and contact information to register were provided. Interested participants were asked to register with the Philadelphia Autism Project by phone or email. Upon registration, they were asked the following questions:

- Contact Person
- Participant Name
- Participant Age
- Support Agency (if applicable):
- Contact Information (Phone):
- Contact Information (Email):
- Support staff or family members attending?
- Any relevant communication needs we should be aware of?
- Any adaptations we should be aware of?
- Any dietary concerns?

Once session capacity was filled, additional registrants were informed they would be placed on a waiting list until more classes were made available or participants canceled. The Philadelphia Autism Project then provided the Culinary Literacy Center staff with information on registered participants, so that they would be prepared and informed on what to expect.

The registration process is an important initial interaction with individuals and their supporters. Therefore, it is important that the staff members handling this portion are understanding, flexible, and helpful to registrants. For example, if registrants were waitlisted or did not meet the qualifications, they were provided with the Culinary Literacy Center’s other programs that were available, as well as available culinary programs outside the Free Library. We had one registrant who was nervous about attending and called back multiple times to ask if staff and other participants would be nice. It was important for staff to validate the person’s concern, assure them that everyone would be nice, and that the other participants may be just as anxious since it was their first time as well. The communication with registrants, and some of the concerns or fears they may be coming with, is important for staff members to know so that they can check in with participants.
to see how they are doing during the class and after.

**FLOW OF COOKING CLASS**

**PREPARE THE SPACE**
Prior to participants arriving, the stations were prepared with tools, recipes, and ingredients. The chef instructor completed any preparatory tasks for the ingredients. Water was set to boil, ovens were preheated, and ingredients were arranged. As students arrived, they were welcomed and given a space to place any personal items. With the exception of assistance devices, no mobile phones or electronic devices were permitted. All participants were given aprons, instructed on how to put on and tie them, as well as why the aprons are needed. It is important to note that for students on the spectrum, walking into a new space with unfamiliar rules and people can be overwhelming. Staff ensured the classes had ample time to settle in, were mentally prepared and felt comfortable prior to moving forward.

**HYGIENE RULES**
Food safety and personal hygiene are of the utmost importance for any culinary program. The chef instructor began each class with a lesson on handwashing and set out classroom rules which stressed the importance of personal hygiene. For example, participants were asked to take off their aprons before heading to the bathroom. If they forgot, she reassured participants it was okay and that they just needed to use a new apron. Participants were also directed to clean their hands before touching the food, and after they have touched their face or any other body parts. While this may be considered standard procedure, it proved to require more time for some individuals who often touched their ears and had to wash their hands repeatedly. Staff gently, but firmly, ensured that these rules were followed to help model good personal hygiene in the kitchen space.

**SHOW THEN TRY**
During the class, the chef instructor followed a “show then try” curriculum plan which had participants closely watch an instructional demonstration before trying an activity themselves. For example, she would carefully demonstrate how to slice an onion with appropriate knife safety skills before students were permitted to pick up their knives. To reiterate proper technique, varied methodologies were used to accommodate different learning styles. Some students required repeated demonstrations before they felt comfortable completing an activity, while other students worked best in tandem with a staff member or volunteer. Other individuals did not need as much support and followed directions independently. Staff in the classroom maintained constant communication with participants to ensure their needs were being met and they were clearly understanding the instructions. It’s important to be adaptable so that students can get the most out of the class, as a hands-on experience was a primary driver for the program.

Occasionally, provider staff brought by the students were too hands-on. This meant that their students were mostly watching and did not get as much of a chance to practice themselves. In cases where provider staff were too hands on, program staff gently intervened so that participants could try completing the activities themselves.

One concept repeatedly emphasized throughout the Cooking with Confidence program is effort is better than perfection when it comes to trying new things. When students became frustrated that their outcome wasn’t perfect or didn’t look exactly like the instructor’s, staff reiterated that “practice makes perfect.” Trying things and doing it your own way can still bring you to the same result, if not better. Creating a space that allowed for imperfection and individual style goes hand in hand with creating a safe environment.

**ENJOYING THE MEAL**
While the meals were being finalized (either in the oven or on the stovetop), participants were tasked with cleaning their work spaces and setting up the table with utensils, plates, and water for everyone. This was a good opportunity for students to practice additional independent living skills in terms of meal preparation. While likely not the highlight of
the program, staff encouraged the students to work together to ensure the space was properly cleaned, hands were washed, and there were enough place settings. Once everything was set and the meal was ready, all participants gathered around a communal table to enjoy the fruits of their labor together.

Under varying levels of staff direction, the students engaged in a discussion about their experience and what they enjoyed most about the meal. To maximize social interactions, staff gently coaxed the conversation and asked question prompts to help get the discussions started and keep it flowing. Staff encouraged honest feedback about whether the students liked the recipe (without using discouraging terms such as “gross” or “yuck”) and what they found challenging about the experience. The discussions also touched on what participants enjoyed eating, and the importance of trying something new instead of shutting the idea down immediately. This often led to larger, more organic conversations amongst the students about other foods they enjoyed and other interactions they have had with the library, such as favorite books or television shows.

Some of the most memorable discussions were prompted by questions from participants. One participant asked why all of the recipes were plant-based. This started a discussion on why the recipes were selected, as well as about vegetables in general, peeling carrots, and learning more about mushrooms. The mother of one participant expressed how happy she was, and that she never thought she would see her son make a friend.

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

Through the use of surveys, we sought feedback on outcomes of participants’ goals for the program, their cooking and eating habits, and their general confidence navigating a kitchen. For all programs to date, participants reported higher confidence levels in cooking skills, preparing a healthy meal, following a recipe, and practicing food safety. Participants also enjoyed the chef instructor very much, consistently rating her with high marks. Analysis of responses from the Spring 2019 classes showed that 94% of students met their predetermined goal for the outcome of the class, while 100% of students reported they were happy with the assistance they received during the class.

Open ended questions included what they enjoyed about the class, areas for improvement, and what would make cooking easier for them. We received many positive comments on the most recent survey, with a favorite being, “I love making new things and I had fun and now I can go home and show this to my grandma.” Many students noted this had spawned an interest in taking additional cooking classes and they were enthusiastic about practicing cooking at home in the future.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Since the initiation of the program in 2017, staff from the Culinary Literacy Center and the Philadelphia Autism Project have prioritized collaborative communication about Cooking with Confidence and have kept track of lessons learned to ensure not only that the program is sustainable, but also that it is continually improving. In addition to frequent email check-ins, staff meet to debrief and analyze the program’s effectiveness at least twice per year.

One of the things we learned from the onset was...
that there was an overwhelming interest in the program. Each session has had a lengthy waitlist with frequent inquiries about additional classes. Initial pilot programs focused on multi-class sessions geared towards adult participants. We found that while there was great interest in the program, it was difficult for adult learners to consistently attend classes and we did not have the high turnout we anticipated. By shifting gears towards the teen and young adult population, we were able to partner with local schools to expand our program as a classroom activity geared towards helping this age group develop autonomous living skills and increase their social interactions in a new environment. This adjustment greatly increased attendance numbers.

The survey format was updated after feedback from cohorts, to make it more accessible and shorter. This was especially important given feedback from high school teachers about the time required for their students to understand and comprehend the questions.

In terms of the actual class experience, we learned that classroom setup, including ingredients and tools, needed to be well thought out and intentional to encourage social interactions, and that it is essential to make the cooking process as hands-on as possible for participants. It is especially important to emphasize that the class is for participants to build skills, with staff and caregivers providing space to enable this. Thinking about jobs ahead of time, such as setting up the table for the communal meal, can encourage more participation. We also realized that we could simplify our recipe choices and maintain student engagement and practical impact. The goal was to teach students how to prepare a healthy meal on their own, so the less complicated the recipes were, the better. Additionally, by narrowing down our recipe options to one or two choices it allowed us to streamline grocery ordering by purchasing items in bulk which also helped us cut down on programming costs.

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

**INTEGRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Cooking with Confidence has many opportunities for replication and expansion. Cooking with Confidence capitalizes on publicly available space and the programming expertise of librarians, connected to a partnership with resource experts at the Philadelphia Autism Project to build opportunities for providers and school districts. Strong interest from high school autism support classrooms has shown that this can be a great opportunity to partner with local school districts, where students can also apply opportunities to use public transportation to participate in the program. Partnerships with culinary schools can offer the opportunity for culinary students to volunteer at the Culinary Literacy Center and interact with neurodiverse peers. It can be mutually beneficial, as participants can foster their vocational interest by visiting the culinary schools and meeting experts and culinary students in the field.

Similarly, partnerships with nutrition programs (e.g., academic institutions or supermarkets) can build upon the knowledge base about healthy eating. Naturally, this program can also serve as an opportunity for past participants to volunteer if they would like to continue to be involved. Occupational therapists and physical therapists can also be optimal candidates for volunteers.

Cooking with Confidence is primed to expand in Philadelphia by moving into the Free Library of Phil-
adelphe’s neighborhood library locations. Staff are currently testing a pilot location in South Philadelphia which will focus on outreach to nearby high schools and teaching students how to make and pack a sandwich lunch. By pairing local schools with a need for programming for students on the spectrum with a simplified, no-cook recipe, we hope to be able to add more location options in the future.

The relatively low cost and staffing structure of Cooking with Confidence supports sustainability and capacity-building for libraries and other learning institutions of all sizes. Funding opportunities are available via public funds, nonprofit grants, and corporate sponsorships at all levels. Cooking with Confidence is a program which is truly adaptable to your institution and your community. In replicating this program, it is important to recognize that its philosophy is about more than the act of cooking. For people who may have a difficult time forming relationships or interacting with others, the kitchen classroom can be a space where they can feel safe to do so. We encourage you to find ways to partner and host this type of program at your institution.

REFERENCES

It’s **NOT TOO LATE** to respond to the **2020 CENSUS**

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#CountOnLibraries
MAKING THE CONNECTION

COMPUTATIONAL THINKING AND EARLY LEARNING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

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In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us to swim.”—Linton Weeks (“The Old-Fangled Search Engine,” The Washington Post, January 13, 2001)

Libraries have long been an important source of traditional early literacy learning and support for young children and their grownups. However, as technology continues to grow and change, traditional literacy skills alone may not be sufficient to solve twenty-first-century challenges. Children and adults are now in need of a larger set of skills to help them successfully navigate, consume, and create information across a variety of digital and analog formats—from the paper book, smartphone, and virtual assistant to the yet to be imagined. While traditional literacy skills are still crucial, they need to be supplemented with an emerging set unique to the digital landscape, often referred to as twenty-first-century competencies.

Twenty-first-century competencies have come to the forefront as a way of helping people develop essential media literacy skills, including the “ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication,”1 and successfully navigate this digital landscape. These competencies are crucial for everyone, but in a constantly evolving, information-rich, technology-driven society, it is particularly critical to introduce these competencies to children and youth starting at a young age so they may be fully media literate and thrive as twenty-first-century world citizens. While the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has identified an extensive list of twenty-first-century competencies for all ages,2 Grover has put forth a simplified list of four twenty-first-century competencies for children and youth that schools are focusing on—creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication—and argues that computational thinking should be the fifth competency emphasized for children and youth.3

Public libraries may already be supporting some aspects of these competencies for older children and youth in their library programming. However, it is important to consider how libraries are supporting these twenty-first-century competencies for young children, ages 0–9, and their families, especially the competency of computational thinking. Computational thinking, most simply, can be considered a replicable process that assists with completing a task or developing possible solutions to a problem. While computational thinking may seem too advanced for young children, it can, in fact, be introduced and encouraged in developmentally appropriate ways. Similar to early literacy and early math, emerging computational thinking concepts can be incorporated and encouraged, using play-based methods, in library programs and services, helping families build a foundation that will enable children to fully engage with more advanced computational thinking concepts as they grow and develop. Additionally, by being intentional with how they model, incorporate, and make computational thinking concepts accessible for all young children and families, library staff can reassert their dedication to equity and empowerment by making mastery of twenty-first-century competencies and media literacy skills achievable for everyone.

This article aims to empower library staff to embrace and integrate computational thinking concepts and skills into their programs and services for young children and their families by presenting the following information:

- an overview of computational thinking concepts and skills;
- detail on computational thinking’s role in early childhood development and relationships with other early learning domains; and
- examples of how to integrate computational thinking into library programs and services for young children and families.

**WHAT IS COMPUTATIONAL THINKING?**

Computational thinking was first described in Seymour Papert’s seminal research on children’s computer culture in 1980 and Jeannette Wing’s later work in 2008, and since then multiple definitions of computational thinking have arisen, but researchers have yet to agree on one universal definition.4 In...
In general, computational thinking can be thought of as an expressive or creative process that helps children and adults create solutions to a problem or complete a task in a manner that could be replicated by others. Problems can be as routine as “How do you tie a shoe?” or as complex as “How might humans survive on Mars?”

Many early definitions of computational thinking shared conceptual elements with other academic fields like math, science, and engineering, and emphasized computational thinking as akin to “thinking like a computer scientist” by developing solutions that could be effectively carried out by either a computer or a person. However, more recent definitions shift computational thinking towards something beyond computer science, positioning it as a type of higher-order thinking or mindset that involves skills that are applicable across multiple fields. While the term’s origins lie within computer science, computational thinking is now thought of as applicable to a variety of problem-solving situations that do not require digital technologies, but can be expanded when partnered with them. However, the use of digital technologies, coding for example, does not necessarily correspond to the use of computational thinking.

Overall, the general concept of computational thinking is reflective of recent educational paradigm shifts that place a focus on higher-order critical thinking skills and other twenty-first-century competencies. While the twenty-first-century competencies are all related, creativity shares strong ties with computational thinking. Though creativity was not identified in early descriptions of computational thinking, it has emerged as an important aspect of computational thinking’s problem-solving mindset. In fact, WGBH, the creators of Aha! Island, a television show and curriculum designed to introduce computational thinking to preschoolers and their families, defines computational thinking as “a creative way of thinking that enables children to identify and systematically solve problems.”

Creativity serves as a fundamental catalyst in using computational thinking, and working with computational thinking skills can support creative thinking.

### SUPPORTING COMPUTATIONAL THINKING

Computational thinking consists of a number of different concepts, which are classified as either skills (specific abilities that relate to computational thinking) or dispositions (broader character traits that support effective computational thinking). These concepts are broadly defined and can be applied to all ages and abilities as youth grow. The scaffolding nature of the skills allows young children to begin exploring them, even during the first few years of their lives.

### COMPUTATIONAL THINKING SKILLS

Currently, there is not one universally agreed upon, definitive set of skills that support the computational thinking mindset, especially for young children. However, various organizations and scholars have identified a number of different skills that fall under computational thinking. For the purposes of this article, we have narrowed down the skills to the six most common (see table 1).

The development of each skill is interdependent on the other skills. Logic and evaluation develop as children explore the world, build knowledge, and experiment. Critical thinking skills, another twenty-first-century competency, emerge as children’s logic and evaluation skills become more nuanced.

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**Computational thinking concepts have grown out of identified computer science skills but can and should be universally applied to situations that include tech and those that do not. These concepts are applicable on the playground as well as in the classroom, in conjunction with high and low tech materials.**
and complex. Decomposition and algorithm design both require problem solvers to understand the different components or steps that are needed in problem solving or to accomplish a task. When dividing a problem or solution into smaller, easily accomplished parts, a problem solver is decomposing. When those smaller components must be completed in a specific order, a problem solver is using algorithm design. Abstraction and pattern recognition both support the other skills and computational thinking more broadly. Abstraction is the act of reducing complexity by stripping away the extraneous details to get to the essential pieces of a task. Pattern recognition is identifying commonalities in material, actions, or steps that can help to classify the “problem” and identify possible solutions.

### Computational Thinking Dispositions

Also significant in the conversation of how to successfully support young children’s emerging computational thinking skills is a set of important dispositions, sometimes referred to as “soft skills.” These dispositions apply to the use of both traditional and “new” media as well as to social interactions and experiences with no media at all. They allow children to be agile in their media literacy skills and use media of all kinds effectively, helping to build twenty-first-century competencies that enable them to live and learn in a connected world.

While there is no formal list of dispositions required to be fluent in the relatively new area of computational thinking, certain dispositions seem to be considered necessary for successful computational thinking. ISTE and CSTA are some of the only organizations to identify a specific list of dispositions that contribute to computational thinking. “These dispositions or attitudes include:

- Confidence in dealing with complexity
- Persistence in working with difficult problems
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- The ability to deal with open ended problems
- The ability to communicate and work with others to achieve a common goal or solution

Two other researchers, Brennan and Resnick, add two additional dispositions to the list: expressing themselves through creative means and questioning concepts and ideas that are “taken for granted.”

These computational thinking dispositions may be familiar to those versed in whole child development, as they are relevant to what children need to succeed when living and learning in a connected world.

Providing developmentally appropriate, low-tech and high-tech opportunities for young children and their caregivers to “tinker, create, debug, persevere and collaborate” can support the growth and development of emerging dispositions and skills that are fundamental to computational thinking and various academic fields. Furthermore, supporting the growth and development of these dispositions and skills can help children and youth to be collaborative, confident, creative, flexible, communicative, persistent, curious, and interested in experimenting, all crucial traits for living and learning in a media-diverse, highly connected world.

### Computational Thinking and Young Children

As computational thinking has become more widely accepted, it has fast become thought of as critical for academic success, even in early primary grades. Wing, one of the more recent drivers behind the computational thinking movement, has been quoted...
as saying that ideally “this learning should best be done in the early years of childhood” in order to provide for a solid foundation of skills that are developed over time, because young children are naturally curious and are learning rapidly about the world around them.

Computational thinking can actually be seen, and supported, from infancy onward. For example, very young children (birth to three years) have been found to use statistical patterns and modeling to learn language, social responses, and causation. Strengthening a child’s computational thinking mindset can help them, later in life, with handling more complex problems that cannot be solved by a more traditional trial and error method. In addition, they will be better positioned to function and succeed in a world of ubiquitous and constantly evolving digital technology and new media. Finally, given that computational thinking shares skills with early literacy, math, and scientific thinking, placing an emphasis on supporting computational thinking can also help support early learning skills across multiple developmental domains.

In fact, computational thinking and its core skills are closely related to a few domains of child development that have been identified as essential for school and lifelong learning by the National Education Goals Panel: approaches to learning, cognition, and language and literacy. Cognition is split into two domains—mathematics development and scientific reasoning—which both share a variety of skills with computational thinking, including logic, evaluation, decomposition, patterns, and algorithms. Similarly, literacy and language share similar skills with computational thinking, such as pattern recognition, sequencing (which falls under algorithm design), logic, and evaluation.

Given the relationships between computational thinking and these important areas of child development, there is a pressing need to add a layer of intentionality in supporting computational thinking in young children. This is particularly key for at-risk and disadvantaged children who typically start school behind their more advantaged peers and may not have access to a variety of learning experiences, including those with digital technology; experienced mentors and facilitators; and other resources that might help to increase their computational thinking skills. Because computational thinking can be present in almost all activities for young children (see figure 1), families and educators may already be using or encouraging computational thinking for their young children without being aware of it, possibly because they lack an understanding of the concept. Once parents, caregivers, and educators understand how everyday activities can support computational thinking skills, they can be more intentional with these activities, helping to strengthen the development of computational thinking skills.

**COMPUTATIONAL THINKING AND LIBRARIES**

While some schools have made progress in incorporating computational thinking concepts into their curriculum, it is likely that current K–12 and preschool educational practices do not fully support the development of the computational thinking mindset for young children, even though it has been demonstrated that younger children use and would benefit from computational thinking teaching support. Parents and caregivers could also play a crucial role in supporting computational thinking for children, but they may lack an understanding of its underlying...
including computational thinking vocabulary and activities in the settings where young children and families spend their time can introduce and reinforce these fundamental skills and dispositions in developmentally appropriate ways for all children as they grow, setting the stage for deeper understanding and complex use later on.

Out-of-school learning environments—such as libraries and museums—hold the potential to serve as a community-wide support system for young children and their grownups who are learning and practicing computational thinking concepts. Libraries, in particular, are well-situated to support computational thinking and have begun to make significant progress in supporting computational thinking for teens through library programs. As many libraries are already offering a variety of free literacy and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) programs for young children, they are uniquely positioned to support computational thinking for young children in a developmentally appropriate way as well. Furthermore, programs for young children offer opportunities to learn through play, which is an ideal method for introducing emerging computational thinking skills and dispositions in both individual and collaborative ways, because it often includes rules and schemas as well as the development, sequencing, and enforcement of a child’s own instructions—all concepts usually associated with computational thinking.

It is crucial that libraries take on this role of supporting computational thinking for young children and their families as libraries are not only strong in supporting early learning but also in engaging families with young children. Historically, these family engagement practices included supporting learning for parents and caregivers through techniques such as incorporating early learning tips and suggestions into programs and services. However, given the increased attention on the library’s important role in family engagement, these practices have begun to include opportunities that engage the whole family and encourage them to learn together.

Family learning experiences—which sit at the heart of family engagement efforts—are ideal for supporting computational thinking. Family learning occurs when families interact around experiences, media, objects, and information to learn together. The grownups help to mediate the learning experience as active participants with their child, essentially creating a “state of togetherness in learning.” In addition, an important aspect of family learning is giving the grownups opportunities to learn more about the concepts and experiences they will be engaging in with their children to empower them in their role with learning support and scaffolding. Providing opportunities for family learning that support computational thinking and broader media literacy skills is crucial: It promotes grownups’ active engagement in the child’s learning and family bonding. When libraries provide opportunities for families and children to play and interact with com-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Concept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping children figure out the steps involved with building a house with blocks</td>
<td>Decomposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking children to identify the salient details in a story</td>
<td>Abstraction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking what is happening in a picture and to predict what will happen next based on prior knowledge</td>
<td>Logic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baking cookies with a child because the specific steps must be done in sequential order</td>
<td>Algorithm Design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing a jump rope game with the days of the week or sorting items by color, size, or other aspects</td>
<td>Pattern Recognition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving children a building prompt and having them determine if their structure would be successful</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
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puterational thinking concepts, they are ultimately encouraging and bolstering families’ intentional nurturing of their children’s computational thinking mindset.

In addition, through free programs and services, libraries have the capability to reach and serve all children and families, especially those in underserved communities.  

In underserved communities may lack the resources needed to be able to expose their children to opportunities and digital technologies that could support computational thinking.  

By incorporating computational thinking activities and vocabulary into a variety of programs for children and families, libraries are providing inclusive opportunities for all families to engage with computational thinking concepts and increasing equity for the diverse communities they serve.

SUPPORTING COMPUTATIONAL THINKING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN THE LIBRARY

Libraries have become early literacy leaders in their communities for families with young children through the ways that they have embraced and integrated early literacy and learning practices into their programs and other efforts. However, information is no longer contained in just one or two media formats. Supporting families as they work to navigate, communicate, learn, and play in a rapidly evolving digital landscape necessitates that libraries embrace and integrate computational thinking in a similar manner. For libraries to become leaders in encouraging computational thinking for families with young children, it is important to focus on how library staff can support computational thinking for young children, including both the skills and dispositions, alongside the other learning outcomes they already integrate into library experiences. Individual computational thinking skills and dispositions, as discussed, are not new and unique per se, but collectively they enhance current library objectives and practices and provide critical digital literacy skills necessary for living and learning in a connected world. Remixing traditional activities in innovative ways and introducing new kinds of learning tools can provide opportunities to support computational thinking for young children and their families, although just one program will not logistically or theoretically be filled with activities or tips that support all of the early literacy skills, computational thinking skills, early math, etc. As with any library program, individual skills are highlighted through engaging experiences for children and families, and when combined with other library programs, at-home activities, and outreach opportunities with other community organizations, over time, they provide access to new ideas that support a range of needed skills.

The following examples help demonstrate what supporting computational thinking can look like with young children and their families in library programs. While these examples may look familiar, by adding a layer of intentionality around incorporating computational thinking, library programming can successfully support the development of computational thinking skills and other twenty-first-century competencies for young children and families. Hopefully these examples, which use both low- and high-tech tools, can serve as inspiration for how to integrate more opportunities to help young children grow their emerging computational thinking skills and dispositions.

0–3 YEAR OLDS PROGRAM: FACILITATED PLAY DATE

Play can take on many forms from facilitated play sessions with specific themes or objects to open free play with unrestricted access to material. Emerging computational thinking skills can be introduced through these activities. Sorting, or grouping like materials, is a precursor to pattern recognition that can easily be incorporated into facilitated play sessions by curating a selection of toys and manipulatives that can be organized or grouped based on discrete parameters, like color, shape, size, function, etc. In addition, facilitated play sessions are an opportunity to create a community for families with young children, support grownup-child interactions, and demonstrate how to incorporate early and emerging learning skills into informal and everyday activities.
Little Builders and Early Literacy Play Date are two play-based toddler programs that can support computational thinking. Little Builders is a library staff–facilitated program guided by caregivers. Families have access to a variety of building materials, along with a prompt to direct the building process, if needed. Some of the prompts are open-ended (e.g., “How would you travel to the moon?”) to offer young children and their families developmentally appropriate opportunities for supporting creativity, time for experimentation, and opportunities for young children to gain confidence successfully solving problems. Others focus on the actions, such as “Build a tower with three different colored or shaped blocks.” These types of everyday activities provide opportunities to practice computational thinking skills like algorithms and decomposition in developmentally appropriate play experiences initially with an eye toward applying these skills in a variety of situations as children grow.

Early Literacy Play Date is a library practitioner–facilitated program. Household objects, like empty cereal boxes, paper rolls, and cans, are transformed into maracas, building blocks, and toys, helping to support the computational thinking dispositions of creativity and curiosity. Grownups and young children talk, sing, and dance while playing. These programs also provide families access to informed library staff who can model grownup guided learning moments that support emerging computational thinkers. For example, library staff and caregivers can support emerging computational thinking skills by asking questions that help young children talk about the steps or order involved in their play and practice cooperation, an emerging disposition, by playing alongside or with another child.

4–6 YEAR OLDS PROGRAM: STORYTIME

Storytimes offer a unique opportunity to support young children’s learning while at the same time empowering grownups in their roles as a child’s first teachers. While many preschool storytimes are geared toward children ages three to five, libraries often expect younger and older siblings to come along, making storytime a family affair. Libraries can easily infuse computational thinking into storytime. One example of a computational thinking–infused storytime was a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Eric Carle’s iconic book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, that included low-tech, play-based activities that supported computational thinking skills along with early literacy and early math.

This storytime began by reviewing the image-based, visual scheduler, which helps children, especially those with sensory integration challenges, navigate the order of the storytime program, make predictions, and see the computational thinking concept of sequencing, part of algorithm design, in action. Next, families played the ABC Body Game with preselected letter cards that, when ordered in a specific way, spell a word related to the theme of the program. The letter cards (Twist and Spell Cards) were placed in a bag and children took turns selecting individual letters. The group, as a whole, identified the name of the letter on the card and then individually made the shape of the letter with their bodies to the best of their abilities, matching the child pictured on the card. When children struggled to make the shape, the librarian prompted the group to practice decomposition. The group first looked to the top or bottom of the image, then identified what each body part was doing—the hands are extended up toward the sky in the letter “i,” for example—and adjusted their own bodies, one part at a time. Once all of the cards were drawn, named, mimicked, and placed in the particular
order, the mystery word was read and defined. When the word appeared in the stories shared later in the program, the librarian paused and drew attention to the letters in the matching order. Activities like this support a child’s ability to logically organize and find patterns while also working collaboratively to solve a problem.

Following the opening game, the librarian shared The Very Impatient Caterpillar by Ross Burach and The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle. These two books, with very different styles, explore the life cycle of a caterpillar and allow space for children to recognize patterns and make comparisons between the two. Between stories, families danced with scarves to a movement song that included four previously introduced ordered actions, or parts, featured in the song’s verses: jump, shake, spin, and flap. Identifying the individual actions performed during the song and their order modeled the use of decomposition and algorithm design skills in play-based activities.

Sequencing and algorithm design are a fundamental part of Carle’s book. As the story was read, a visual map of the story’s events was created on the felt board, including the metamorphosis process and representations of the foods the caterpillar consumed. Felt pieces were added in the same order as the book to introduce families to abstraction and algorithm design skills. After reading, families made edible caterpillars on skewers using a selection of foods featured in Carle’s book. Referring to the felt map or Carle’s book, they added foods in a similar order, which provided another opportunity to support sequencing, pattern recognition, and algorithmic thinking in the program. Grownups were encouraged to ask questions that drew their children’s attention to the order of the food. Sharing a book-inspired meal together sparked conversation, encouraged children and adults alike to make new community connections, and incorporated the communication disposition into low-pressure learning experiences. Several young children demonstrated other dispositions during the activity, such as curiosity and experimenting, when they tried foods that were new to them.

7-9 Year Olds Program: LEGO Club

Afterschool LEGO Clubs are almost as common at public libraries as storytime programs. These programs use low-tech tools, LEGOs, to offer building experiences that develop traditional literacy as well as computational thinking skills and dispositions. During one LEGO program, for children ages 7–11, the librarian encouraged young builders to apply their creativity, tolerance for ambiguity, and individual perspective to a monthly challenge, which consists of a “problem” that requires children to use computational thinking skills and dispositions to solve. Children are also guided to use a design strategy that includes four key elements: think, design, build, evaluate and modify.

For this program young makers built a replica of their town out of LEGOs. At first glance, the project seemed daunting, but computational thinking made it possible and fun. First, the whole group collaboratively decided what buildings and features were important to them and should be included in the replica, thus working on the computational thinking skills of abstraction and decomposition. Then the footprint for the replica, a map of sorts, was drawn on brown paper and locations for each creation were identified using spatial vocabulary like east and west, below and above. Due to time constraints, interest, and resources, not every building would be included in the replica, much like how a map designed for a specific use includes only necessary features. The
builders used abstraction to decide what features they would include in the map and what others (extraneous information) they would not.

Once the map was created, makers then divided up into teams or worked individually to design and build the selected buildings and features for the rest of the ninety-minute program. Both experiences involved collaboration—children built together at the same time or individually contributed a part that supported or benefited the whole group project. Throughout the program, the young makers talked and consulted with each other and the librarian, growing their project-related vocabulary and social-emotional skills as well as practicing the computational thinking disposition of communication.

As individual buildings were completed, they were placed on the brown paper map. Some children built highly detailed, individual models while others worked on multiple, more basic, buildings. There was no assigned endpoint, so participants felt free to design, build, and modify at their own pace accommodating not only individual interests, but also various developmental stages. Not every building was completed, but the young makers confidently gave their grownups a tour of the replica before clean-up.

**MULTI-AGE FAMILY PROGRAM: DIGITAL STORYTELLING**

Digital storytelling programs provide families with multi-aged kids the opportunity to explore early literacy, strengthen bonds between grownups and children, celebrate shared family experiences, develop both the important computational thinking skills and dispositions outlined previously, and build new relationships between grownups in a community (one of the 5Rs of Family Engagement identified in PLA’s Ideabook). The library’s low-stress learning environment is an ideal place for this to happen.

During a Saturday workshop, families created personalized digital stories. Using library iPads and the ScratchJr app as storytelling tools, families remembered special events, celebrated family members, and retold traditional tales. After an icebreaker game and introductions, grownups and their children worked together in pairs or family groups to brainstorm a story of their own and talked about an event, person, or tale they wanted to feature. Identifying and then writing or drawing the places, order of important moments, actions, conversations, and characters on paper in a type of storyboard helped the storytellers explore the computational thinking skills of decomposition, abstraction, and algorithm design that they need to create a digital version of their story in ScratchJr, a free digital tool designed for young children that is a simpler version of the popular Scratch programming language.

After the brainstorming segment, families learned how to manipulate the ScratchJr app. Coding a story with ScratchJr (or the more robust version, Scratch) empowers children and their families to tackle an ambiguous, open-ended “problem” and be the authors, illustrators, directors, playwrights, programmers, set designers, and actors. Grownups and their children learned how to navigate the app, design characters, and connect blocks of code into algorithms that direct the story’s events and the characters’ actions and conversation. The programming teams collaborated and communicated to create and modify their story. The flexibility of the tool allows families to create stories in a style that reflects their storytelling traditions and incorporates their home language, with content that reflects their life experience (self-expression). They tinkered with the app’s features, modified their story until it reflected their intentions, and then shared their digi-
tal story (if they wished) with others at the workshop and with family members at home.

Limited access to digital devices and learning platforms like ScratchJr can be a hindrance to learning. Therefore, an iPad loaded with the ScratchJr app and tip cards to help users get started are freely available in the library so families can keep exploring the app and creating stories after the program, even if they do not have an iPad at home. Increasingly, library staff are providing supported, mediated access to resources, like expensive robots or devices, that may be otherwise out of reach for families.45 Offering an array of digital storytelling experiences outside and inside the library provides families with multiple entry points to learning computational thinking skills and dispositions for young children as they can be incorporated through countless techniques and activities. It may be challenging and unfamiliar at the beginning, but if taken one skill, disposition, and activity at a time while also articulating to grownups the importance of what is being done, library staff should find that it will get easier to incorporate computational thinking into their efforts to support learning for the families in their community.

By incorporating computational thinking skills and dispositions into their work with young children and their families, library staff are also supporting the key twenty-first-century competencies of creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication for the young children in their community.46 They are also engaging caregivers of young children with these competencies, helping them to be intentional with encouraging learning outside of the library. Most importantly, library staff are ensuring equitable access to a variety of learning opportunities and experiences for all children and families in their community, demonstrating the crucial role the library is positioned to play in supporting all children and families in a media-rich, highly connected world.47

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in these examples, computational thinking can be incorporated into a variety of programs that libraries are already offering and adapted to meet the diverse needs of families in the communities they serve. Using the examples and information presented here, library staff can more confidently explore how to support computational thinking for young children and families in their community. There is no right way to encourage and build these computational thinking skills and dispositions for young children as they can be incorporated through countless techniques and activities. It may be challenging and unfamiliar at the beginning, but if taken one skill, disposition, and activity at a time while also articulating to grownups the importance of what is being done, library staff should find that it will get easier to incorporate computational thinking into their efforts to support learning for the families in their community.

By incorporating computational thinking skills and dispositions into their work with young children and their families, library staff are also supporting the key twenty-first-century competencies of creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication for the young children in their community.46 They are also engaging caregivers of young children with these competencies, helping them to be intentional with encouraging learning outside of the library. Most importantly, library staff are ensuring equitable access to a variety of learning opportunities and experiences for all children and families in their community, demonstrating the crucial role the library is positioned to play in supporting all children and families in a media-rich, highly connected world.47

### Read More

- Computational Thinking for All, www.iste.org/explore/ Solutions/Computational-thinking-for-all
- Computer Science in Early Childhood Education, https://k12cs.org/pre-k
REFERENCES AND NOTES


15. New media is all media that use text, sound, images, and video in a digital setting and can include ebooks, apps, digital music, Makey Makeys, websites, robots, digital audiobooks, computer programs, paper circuits, movies, virtual reality, and more.


17. “Operational Definition of Computational Thinking for K-12 Education.”

18. “Operational Definition of Computational Thinking for K-12 Education.”


28. While the National Education Goals Panel used slightly different terminology for the domains, we have used the specific domains (and domain information) from the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (2015). We suggest referring to your own state’s early learning guidelines to understand how they might align.


42. See ALA’s “Core Values of Librarianship” and ALSC’s “Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries.”

43. We have used bold text in the examples below to highlight the computational thinking skills and dispositions that are intentionally incorporated in these programs.

44. Rudine Sims Bishop, “Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,” Perspectives 6, no. 3 (1990): ix–xi.


46. Grover, “The 5th ‘C’ of 21st century skills? Try computational thinking (not coding).”
2021 EARLY LITERACY ACTIVITIES CALENDAR—COMING SOON!

Based on the Every Child Ready to Read® practices of Reading, Writing, Singing, Talking, Playing, (+Counting) the PLA Early Literacy Calendar contains activities for every day of the year.

The 2021 version will be available in October, 2020. To be notified when the product is in the ALA store, and available for purchase, send an email to pla@ala.org.

Public Library Association
DESIGN THINKING IN PUBLIC LIBRARY

MAKERSPACES
In recent years, making activities have emerged as a valuable way to engage participants in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) practices, including design, fabrication, creative problem-solving, iteration, and collaboration.¹

Public libraries have played a key role in the expansion of makerspaces around the country, offering patrons opportunities to collaborate, problem solve, craft, and create.² Just as public libraries have long played a critical role in democratizing access to information, the growing availability of makerspace technologies in public libraries serves to democratize access to technology and expand opportunities for STEAM engagement and learning. The Build a Better Book project provides a blueprint for libraries to leverage their resources for meaningful making, providing patrons with a valuable opportunity to design for others and connect with their communities.

BUILD A BETTER BOOK PROJECT
The Build a Better Book project (BBB), based at the University of Colorado Boulder, engages youth in an authentic, empathy-driven design experience in which they create inclusive, multimodal learning materials for children and youth who are blind or low-vision (BLV). The library of accessible materials available for BLV youth continues to be extremely limited, leading to sharp disparities in access to information and learning opportunities.

Youth participating in BBB programs use a variety of different maker technologies, including 3D printers and laser cutters as well as basic craft materials, to help address this need. Initially, they engage in empathy-building and immersive tactile activities in order to better understand the unique needs of their end users. They learn how to use different maker tools and assess the relative affordances of each in making learning materials more accessible.
Throughout the design exercise, youth select materials, tools, and technologies that will most effectively enable them to communicate information via tactile and sound elements. Youth designers test their products at different stages with end users, receive feedback, and iteratively improve upon their designs. Youth-designed products span a range of formats, including tactile picture books, museum exhibit elements, board games, and digital products such as apps.

The unique opportunity to support people with different abilities through Making and crafting provides a strong hook, motivating many youth to participate and persist in improving their designs over multiple sessions.

**DESIGN THINKING**

At the heart of all BBB programs is an empathy-driven design thinking process, in which designers connect with potential end users in order to better understand their needs and perspective. When done well, design thinking enables designers to identify unmet needs and develop new, creative solutions.

We introduce participants to design thinking as an iterative, non-linear process grounded in empathy, as presented by the Stanford University d.school. The process contains the following key steps:

- **Empathize** by connecting with end users in order to learn more about their specific needs.
- **Define** the nature of the problem and determine what aspect of the problem you intend to address through your design.
- **Ideate** to generate multiple ideas for potential solutions.
- **Prototype** to develop and fabricate a possible solution.
- **Test** to get feedback from end users in order to improve a design or consider a different approach.

In BBB programs, we typically introduce youth participants to this process through a hands-on activity in which they work in teams to design a product for an imaginary character. We facilitate this activity with a game called Extraordinaire, in which participants receive an illustrated card that shares information about their specific client, but this exercise also works well using characters from books as unique clients. Each team reviews what they know about their client and considers this information as they brainstorm ideas for a particular product. For example, teams may be tasked with designing a communication device for a teen vampire, a cooking utensil for a snow queen, or a chair for an elderly wizard. Although this is a quick exercise, it serves to emphasize to participants the need to gather as much information about their client as possible, and to use that information in customizing their product’s design.

**BUILDING EMPATHY**

We follow this initial introduction to the design thinking process with a series of empathy-building activities, designed to increase participants’ understanding of the unique needs of learners who are blind or visually impaired. This may involve meeting with peers or community members who are blind or have low-vision, viewing videos that help share the perspective and accomplishments of different individuals who have visual impairments, or completing different hands-on activities while wearing vision simulation glasses. Combined, these
activities help to broaden participants’ awareness of disability, particularly blindness and vision impairment, increase their knowledge of how to create effective tactile materials, and improve their understanding that different end users have their own unique preferences and abilities.

**CHALLENGES OF BUILDING BETTER BOOKS IN LIBRARIES**

Early on, we recognized that there were certain challenges inherent in implementing the BBB project in public libraries. Public librarians consistently expressed concern that it would be challenging to have youth patrons return to the library on a regular, ongoing basis to continue working on a longer-term BBB project. The open nature of public libraries meant that we wouldn’t always have a consistent number of participants, and we might have a much broader age range of participants than we were planning on.

Other librarians expressed concern that they didn’t have a designated makerspace or they lacked maker technology, like 3D printers and laser cutters. Fortunately, involving public librarians in the early design and testing phases of the project enabled us to create a flexible program that is readily adaptable for different settings. Regardless of program format or the level of technology used in the project, librarians across the US have found that the BBB model enables them to engage youth in a motivating, empathy-driven design thinking process.

**PROGRAM FORMATS**

Initially, librarians’ concerns about repeat participation led us to implement short (1–2 hour) “one-off” experiences designed to introduce participants to the BBB project, particularly the need for more accessible books and games. To attract teens to these programs, we designed individual sessions that focused on exploring a specific technology used in the fabrication of tactile books, including 3D modeling and printing, pop-up books, paper circuits, and soundscape design. Although these workshops were fairly successful, in terms of both youth recruitment and engagement, we found it challenging to complete a full project within the short period of time allotted. Designing more inclusive books is a challenging design task, requiring a series of steps in which designers prototype, test, and improve their products, and this wasn’t feasible in a short window of time. Additionally, we realized that many of the same teens were returning week after week to participate in multiple sessions. As a result, we reshaped the program as a longer program with multiple sessions in order for youth to participate in, and complete, an iterative design process. This enabled youth to complete a final project, which, in turn, increased the pride they felt in their design.

Over the past several years, different libraries have implemented BBB in a variety of different ways. Across different public libraries, the program has been implemented as a summer camp (with sessions held over multiple days or weeks); a Design Internship for teens (ranging from one to four weeks); a one-day Make-a-Thon event; a homeschool program and a Teen Maker Program, both taking place over several consecutive weeks; and in multiple instances, as a multi-week collaboration between a public library and a nearby school. These programs have differed in the age of their participants (ranging from elementary students through adults), the technology used (from cardboard and craft materials, to textiles, to 3D printers and Makey Makeys), and the length of their programs (from single day workshops to multi-week programs), but all have one critical element in common: their focus on expanding access to information for specific end users through the design and fabrication of more inclusive materials, including books and games.

In Colorado, AnyThink Libraries began an after-school program in which middle and high school students opted in to weekly BBB workshops focused on different technologies. After learning some fundamental skills in 3D design and printing, using craft cutters to create pop-ups, and sound design using paper circuits, teens became interested in working on a longer-term project that could benefit youth with visual impairments. They were excited to work on games and spent several weeks working to design and fabricate more accessible games,
including game boards and playing pieces for chess and checkers.

Several public libraries have run the program during the summer months, either as a summer camp for younger students or as a more in-depth design internship experience for teens. In Broomfield, Colorado, the public library first tested a summer camp format in which participants attended two times per week over a period of four weeks. Using 3D printed and craft materials, they created tactile adaptations of existing picture books.

The Boulder Public Library restructured its initial weekend workshops as a 5-day design internship for teens. Teens applied for the experience and were selected based on interest and motivation, rather than on their past experience with technology. Over the course of five days, interns gained experience with 3D printers, laser cutters, and sound boards as they worked in teams to design interactive stories, maps, and games. The library later collaborated with a local museum to run a similar internship program for middle school students, focused on creating accessible elements for museum exhibits. The group met weekly in the evening over the course of several months, initially to gain experience with the different maker technologies available and later to design, test, and refine specific exhibit elements, such as a tactile map of the exhibit space.

A critical element of both internship programs was the active involvement of community mentors who were blind. These mentors participated in each class, shared with teens their experience of living with blindness, and provided feedback to teens throughout the design process.

Feedback from teen interns suggested that the mentors’ participation was extremely impactful for the youth, broadening their understanding of what it means to be blind in our community and helping to improve their product designs with specific useful feedback.

The Springfield-Greene County Library in Missouri engaged teens in the BBB project through a series of Teen Night workshops. The project’s introductory activities—including a design thinking game in which teens design a product for an imagi-
nary character and a tactile guessing game—served to hook teens and spark their interest in working on a more extended project.

After learning about 3D Giving Day, a collaboration between BBB and 3Doodler, the maker of 3D printing pens, Youth Services Manager Phyllis Davis connected with 3Doodler to obtain a set of 3D printing pens and filament and worked with teens to adapt picture books and games for children with visual impairments. She developed collaborative partnerships with a local school district and, specifically, with a special education classroom serving a group of preschool children with visual impairments. Through this partnership, she was able to connect her teen designers with actual child “clients,” who shared their interests and needs with the teens.

Over the course of several weeks, the teens worked hard to complete their adapted books in time for the first annual 3D Giving Day. According to Davis, “Many of the teens came in on other days to work on their projects. They became invested in the project and there was a lot of intrinsic motivation to finish their projects on time. Having a concrete client who they were designing for really helped.”

In New Jersey, 3D Giving Day sparked a shorter BBB implementation: a one-day Make-a-Thon. The Mountain Lakes Public Library encouraged youth of all ages to come to the library’s makerspace on a Saturday and engage in tactile book making. The library has also been successful in working with a local public high school. Over the course of a school year, Ian Matty, the library’s makerspace manager, has collaborated with a computer science teacher, engaging students in the design of more inclusive tactile materials, including board games and math models and puzzles, as well as accessible apps. They are currently collaborating with a nearby school for the blind to co-design and test new materials.

**FINDINGS**

Over the past several years, we have found evidence that the BBB model is flexible and highly adaptable, making it suitable for implementation across a wide range of settings. The project doesn’t require any one specific tool or technology, but rather can be facilitated in regular library settings as well as in high-tech makerspaces.

Some programs have utilized makerspace equipment, like 3D printers, whereas others have completed impactful programs using just cardboard and craft materials. With its emphasis on design thinking, the program’s value is in the design process itself, rather than in any type of equipment or technology.

The project’s focus on empathy and designing for others serves as an effective hook for many youth, including some who otherwise wouldn’t elect to participate in a STEAM or maker program. Several librarians have also expressed that the nature of the program motivates youth to continue their participation throughout the design process, in some cases even prompting participants to come to the library outside of regularly scheduled time to work on their projects.

Regardless of program format, it is critical to provide sufficient opportunity for participants to develop, prototype, test, and improve their designs. Design thinking is an iterative process and fabricating effective tactile materials is a challenging design task. Providing sufficient time or opportunity for participants to iterate on their designs increases the likelihood that they will leave feeling satisfied and proud of their designs, rather than feeling frustrated or disappointed.
Library partners have expressed that the project prompted them to develop new partnerships with community organizations that have benefited their patrons and their programming. For example, BLDG 61, the Boulder Public Library’s makerspace, hired one of the BBB community mentors as an artist-in-residence, which helped provide new insights into how the makerspace could adapt certain technologies to make them more accessible for users who are blind or visually impaired. The Springfield-Greene Public Library developed new relationships with the local school district, a rehabilitation center for the blind, and their State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. These organizations collaborated on BBB programs at the library, contributed advice on the design of effective tactile materials, and provided feedback to youth about their products. Perhaps the most important outcome is that the project helps bring together youth interested in technology and connects them with a real-world purpose so that they feel empowered to help others through design.

**CONNECT YOUR LIBRARY TO THE BBB NETWORK**

Substantial interest in this effort has enabled the BBB project to develop a national network of librarians, educators, and youth engaged in the design, fabrication, testing, and sharing of multi-modal products, like books and games. We have compiled resources on our website (http://buildabetterbook.org) to help interested librarians and educators get started with the project. The website also includes an online design gallery, in which participants can share their digital designs with others or download and remix existing designs. The global need for more accessible learning materials is substantial and we encourage interested libraries to connect with local organizations, including schools and centers for the blind, state libraries for the blind and physically handicapped, and special education departments in nearby school districts, to identify the community’s most pressing needs.

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**REFERENCES**

PL ONLINE IS SEEKING CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors produce at least one 800-word library-related post per month. Interested? Send an email to publiclibrariesonline@gmail.com. Be sure to include a bit about your library and writing background and topics you might be interested in writing about. Our site targets the library world so preference is given to those who are in (or retired from) the field.
Community Voice
A Conversation with Cyns Nelson

Catherine Hakala-Ausperk / chakalaausperk@gmail.com

Many years ago, back before libraries worried too much about competition from technology, bookstores, and even apathy, wise leaders among us were touting something they called added value. Through workshops and in professional literature, we were beginning to learn that, with everyone else sharing the same material, we had better come up with something special; something unique to our communities; something of value.

It didn’t take long for us to realize personal, community, and local business histories were going to fit that bill. What wasn’t clear, however, was exactly how to grow that type of collection, where to put it, and how to make sure it was used. In Oral History in Your Library: Create Shelf Space for Community Voice, Cyns Nelson has answered that question. In the foreword to this book, author R. David Lankes goes even further, suggesting that capturing and sharing oral histories helps people “make meaning in their lives” (ix).

Sounds like a worthy cause. Read on for some tips on how to make it happen.

The subtitle of your book is Create Shelf Space for Community Voice. How would you respond to someone who says, “that’s not the library’s job!”

Ack! (That’s my gut response.) The vision of “shelf space for voice” is, of course, a metaphor. The suggestion is that libraries have capacity for more than standard, pipeline resources (books and publications, movies, database subscriptions, etc.), and they can be instigators of unique, local content in the form of

Oral History in Your Library: Create Shelf Space for Community Voice
Cyns Nelson and Adam Speirs
recorded interviews. Do you see the library—your library—only as a place where people retrieve things? Or is it a place where people find belonging? What kind of message do you want to send? The identity of your library is a reflection of what you offer and what you facilitate. Oral history, as a library function, tells community: You have a place here. You are recognized for your experiences and knowledge. The existence of an oral history collection communicates that the library is where people learn from one another and about one another. Exposing the firsthand knowledge of community members releases the power of their voices; I would be sad to discover that this outcome contradicts a rational picture of what libraries should work to accomplish.

On library social media pages (and elsewhere), there is an ongoing debate about whether or not to add local authors’ titles to the collection. You suggest that we should “always consider how the interview(s) will work with the broader library focus and collection” (p. 9). So, what’s your stand on accepting local authors’ works?

I see a strong parallel between the case for oral history and the idea of accepting the work of local authors. “Choosing to bring oral history into your library, making it a part of your dedicated mission, you become a publisher of community” (p. 81). Oral history is effective for illustrating the perspectives of individuals who have been underrepresented or intentionally overlooked—the same individuals who would struggle to gain traction in publishing and publicity industries. Libraries can showcase local authors without promising that the writing will compete for any awards. I advocate a channel and process for bringing in homegrown titles, the same way that oral histories are pursued with forethought as to how they complement the library’s mission.

**How would you define “engaging” as it applies to libraries engaging communities?**

My definition: **Drawing into participation; creating a circumstance of involved commitment.** This means that community members see the library as a venue for their contributions, in addition to the many “takeaways” they get from the library (i.e., not just checking out stories but thinking about a time when they might add their own history).

**Your book offers advice on the best equipment and format to use in capturing oral histories, but that can get very expensive. What’s your advice for containing costs or obtaining funding to support this program?**

I try to offer advice about how to think about equipment—the considerations—versus suggesting any single brand, model, or other delineation. For oral histories that do not involve a visual demonstration, audio will be far more cost effective in the short- and long-term. The market for digital audio recorders is populated with affordable options that hit a sweet spot of quality and functionality. Many recorders are bundled with excellent built-in microphones, a feature that simplifies the staging and operation and still gets the job done very well. A project can be accomplished with nominal expenditure on equipment ($200 to $350); the larger output would be associated with staff time for planning, executing, and maintaining the oral histories.

A program can start with a small or manageable project that demonstrates results along with costs; use this to scale up for long-term goals. With something in hand, you’re ready to approach individuals or organizations who might support your work. Parts of my book talk about collaboration, partnerships, relationship building, and cross promotion. These ingredients—along with the existence of volunteers—are catalysts for sustainable funding.

**What are the legal implications of collecting and sharing personal narratives? How can libraries be certain they’re within the law?**

The legal implications hinge on two aspects of the process: (1) the understanding established between the narrator and the library, and (2) the content of what was recorded. If you work with oral history, you must have...
an explicit copyright agreement stating how the interviews will or might be used by the library, in present time and into the future. A signed release or consent must be secured.

The second concern is less cut-and-dry but occasionally problematic. If, for example, a narrator slanders someone during an interview, and those statements are “published” by the library, legal implications could follow. Much of oral history is centered on ethics, good judgement, and basic common sense—with the library as a steward of those behaviors. But you have help: the national Oral History Association periodically updates guidelines related to this and other facets of responsible oral-history creation, collection, and sharing. And John Neuen-schwander has two editions of A Guide to Oral History and the Law, the most recent published in 2014. Lean on these resources.

**How can we be sure the histories being recorded are true. Or, does that matter?**

Oral history is powerful because it demonstrates that multiple truths can coexist, especially when people are describing experiences related to complicated topics or events. The library is not responsible for validating what people say; the library should create conditions where the narrator is, at least, encouraged to be honest. Then, statements can be fact-checked, corroborated, or disputed. (For example, a transcript can make note of discrepancies or proven errors.) The documentation of what people believe—in different times or places—is itself informative, separate from factual accuracy.

*In addition to your program, which you detail in the book, could you share some of the more successful programs you’ve seen or heard about that involve oral-history collections.*

Success usually is in the eye of the beholder. As a starting point, I’m drawn to instances of oral history working within a public library setting, because that is the exception versus the rule (my book aims to correct this imbalance). The British Library collects interviews and, in 1987, established the National Life Stories program, which records firsthand experiences from a cross section of British society. Different projects have been initiated under the umbrella of the Life Stories program, resulting in special collections that document segments of the population, such as: visual arts and crafts, industry and utilities, business and corporations, writing, and publishing. More than thirty entries comprise the full project list. From the Life Stories webpage: “As an independent charitable trust within the British Library, National Life Stories . . . has initiated a series of innovative interviewing projects funded almost entirely from sponsorship, charitable, and individual donations.”

An example closer to home—and less grand in scope—is the Houston Oral History Project, which models a collaboration among the mayor’s office, the Houston Public Library, and the University of Houston. At least six distinct collections exist within the project. Initial interviews were commissioned by Mayor Bill White and focus on Houston’s established political, business, and civic leaders. In 2008, citizens came to different locations of the Houston Public Library and recorded their recollections (Neighborhood Voices); and in 2014, oral histories with architects, scholars, developers, and philanthropists shaped the “Building Houston” collection.

Queens Memory began as an independent-study project that captured twenty oral histories in a single neighborhood; it has evolved into a community archive with more than five hundred interviews documenting contemporary history across New York City’s Queens borough. The ongoing effort is a collaboration between Queens College, CUNY, and the Queens Public Library. Here are some features: staff from the Memory Project provide training and equipment for volunteers who want to conduct interviews; interviews are preserved in the Queens Library digital archive; the project builds resources for educators and community members who want to utilize the archive; and a podcast was launched in 2019.
You suggest that “key relationships can help initiate, sustain, and improve a body of interviews” (p. 89). How do libraries go about starting and developing those relationships and who on the staff should be involved?

Start by identifying your community’s prominent sectors (economic, cultural, educational, recreational, government). Which of these already support the library and which can be approached, to explore the opportunities via oral history? All library departments (leadership teams) can be involved in early brainstorming sessions—or at least be invited to weigh in, so you have a comprehensive picture of existing ties. Ongoing involvement might include community engagement and enrichment, programming and outreach, and collection development. In addition, you might seek input from your library commission, foundation, or Friends group. Broadcast your intentions and be prepared to work with diverse organizations and constituencies.

I talk about key relationships in terms of partnership and collaboration, where mutually beneficial outcomes are defined. A Memorandum of Understanding—even one that is not formal or legally binding—helps to carve areas of responsibility, set expectations, and avoid misconceptions. This document lays the groundwork for a partnering that is fruitful and complementary; it can be revisited over time, as priorities and capacities change.

You suggest “library champions” (p. 102), otherwise known as volunteers, can be a big part of building these oral history collections. How can a library recruit, train, and continually motivate this special team?

Indeed, volunteers can be the heart and soul of a thriving oral history program. Solicit volunteers only after you have a system up and running and know where contributions are needed and what those contributions will look like.

Recruit: Do you have a portal for reaching the volunteer community? A person in charge of volunteer coordination for your library or library system? Articulate the skills, traits, and time commitments associated with specific tasks; as best you can, describe the work and the candidate who will be successful at the job; allow potential volunteers to assess themselves. Meet with candidates and reiterate all of the details. You want people to have an honest picture of what is involved; you don’t want to over-sell the work, and you should not be in a rush to bring people on board. Oral history is not a route activity. By and large, it requires high personal responsibility and self-determination. Try to recruit people who are looking for a long-term opportunity and who feel strongly about the place of the library in the community.

Train: No substitute exists for actually conducting an interview (if you want to become an interviewer) or trying your hand at transcribing, if you intend to help with transcripts. But volunteers will be happier and more confident when they have been sufficiently prepared for attempting the work. Offer detailed, written training materials, and reinforce those instructions with in-person sessions when appropriate. Involve seasoned volunteers who can talk about their early experiences and their trajectory of learning. Provide examples or demonstrations. Thorough training is time-intensive but necessary. And this is why you want to take on volunteers who are committed and motivated.

Sustain = Educate and Inspire: Make certain that each person is acknowledged for their contribution and feels valued. Plan for regular gatherings that are open to all volunteers, regardless of what they are doing for the program. Use these meetings to provide library updates, to explain new projects, and to encourage discussion among the volunteers (reporting on challenges and successes). These meetings can be informal and collegial; the gatherings help create cohesion in the group, even when volunteers are not working directly with one another.

Your book includes an appendix with questions to be asked to determine if you “would make a good interviewer” (p. 34). For those who would like to become one but need to build the right skills, what process would you suggest?
Start by familiarizing yourself with the national Oral History Association and its website (www.oralhistory.org). You’ll find principles and best practices, web resources, print series, and links to discussion forums.

- Donald Ritchie’s *Doing Oral History*, now in its third edition, includes a chapter on conducting interviews, along with chapters that contextualize the discipline of oral history. Ritchie’s work has been considered “necessary reading” for those wishing to enter the field.

- As a next step, you might sign up for a workshop. Baylor’s Institute for Oral History offers online trainings at least twice a year; these webinars are affordable and open to anyone with an internet connection.

- No matter how much time you spend in preparation, the only way to cultivate skill is through experience. Set up one or more practice interviews with a person or people who will help you get comfortable. Try to make the staging and execution as close to “reality” as possible: work on your pre-interview communication; practice formulating topics and questions, operating the equipment, and moving files from the recorder, in addition to conducting the oral history.

- And finally—and ongoing—listen to recorded interviews. Make note of what is done well or poorly; think about how you would approach that same narrator or subject matter. You can correct or improve your style simply by paying close attention to the examples offered by others.

*What would you say are the greatest rewards a library could gain from Creating Shelf Space for Community Voice?*

At times I’ve talked about a return on investment in practical terms: oral history cultivates a nonproprietary and sustainable resource in personal experience; it invites promotional, programming, collaborative, and creative opportunities; it shows the library to be a place of connection and participation (p. 4). That said, “You will find your greatest reward in relationships, contacts, and the response you receive from community. What you hear back—the words spoken about the library—will be the extra jingle in your pocket.” (p. 102).

From a volunteer, you might hear: *I love the experience of capturing individual, personal histories that contribute unique bits or pieces to the larger “public” history.* From the community, you might hear: *You have given me an opportunity to get to know my grandmother.* And if things go very well, from a narrator you might hear: *I’ve been listened to!*

I feel compelled to go a bit further with my response, given that I’m writing in March 2020, on lockdown but thinking about my library, and oral history, and the nearly thirty volunteers who assist with our program. I believe in the power of information to improve the human condition; and I believe that firsthand accounts provide the most consequential type of information. Recently I sent a group email to our volunteer cohort:

*We don’t know when, as a program, we will get back to conducting formal interviews (circulating our equipment, etc.). But we know that this time in history is without parallel. When we are able to come together again, we’ll formulate a strategy for documenting this event and the impacts on our community. Oral history will be THE vehicle for demonstrating the toll of this pandemic as well as the instances of courage, creativity, generosity, and all other human outputs.*

For anyone reading this interview, even if oral history is not your choice, I hope you choose a path that makes your library the vehicle for sharing knowledge and building truth in your community.
Write for Public Libraries!

2021 Themes and deadlines are listed below. Be sure to get in touch with editor, Kathleen Hughes, khughes@ala.org to discuss your idea for contributing.


- March/April 2021 Issue - Theme is FUNDING. Query editor by 12/2/20; submit approved article by 1/6/21.

- May/June 2021 Issue - Theme is PARTNERSHIPS. Query editor by 2/5/21; submit approved article by 3/5/21.

- July/August 2021 Issue - Theme is ANTIRACISM/SOCIAL JUSTICE. Query editor by 4/5/21; submit approved article by 5/3/2021.

- September/October 2021 Issue - Theme is EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING STAFF. Query editor by 6/2/2021; submit completed article by 9/3/21.


For more information about writing for Public Libraries visit https://t.ly/3hrXwa2.
In ALA’s most recent “Libraries Respond to COVID-19” survey (www.ala.org/pla/issues/covid-19/surveyoverview), public libraries (n=2,545) reported helping students and faculty in a variety of ways beyond transitioning summer learning to a primarily virtual setting, including:

- developing new summer enrichment learning activities for students;
- offering curbside pickup or partnering with schools to deliver school materials;
- digitizing materials for remote use and/or increasing access to online research resources;
- expanding access to laptops and other digital devices to support classwork; and
- creating new open textbooks or other educational materials.

Currently, schools across the US are determining how to safely reopen and developing remote educational strategies for the upcoming academic cycle. As new learning models emerge, public libraries can play a critical role in facilitating learning and supporting teaching needs. If your library is interested in learning about your state’s overall academic performance, visit the The Nation’s Report Card (www.nationsreportcard.gov). It provides statistics and data visualizations from national to state level that may help you develop targeted activities around topics of greatest need.

Compiled by Larra Clark, Deputy Director, PLA and ALA Public Policy & Advocacy Office; and Emily Plagman, Manager, Impact and Advocacy, PLA.

**STATE PERFORMANCE COMPARED TO THE NATION**
(Source: National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education)