CHAPTER 1

Programming as Praxis

Library programming at its core is a series of specialized events or learning experiences. Ideally, programming is culturally relevant and tailored to the needs and interests of the patrons, be it first-year college students, young adults, or adolescents just starting their journey into secondary school.

Effective Library Programming for Tweens and Teens

Programming for teens and young adults is a catalyst for learning and exploration. It is also where we see practice and pedagogy come together—a term education practitioners refer to as "praxis." Library programming activities and learning experiences should pique students' interests, capture their imaginations, and advance and deepen their learning.

Piquing Interests of Students

Programming should appeal to tweens and teens and reflect their interests. For example, if your student population is already

part of the workforce, working part-time in a myriad of sectors, a program on creating a winning resume for the workforce and college or a Get Interview Ready program may pique their interests. The librarian can not only instruct them on how to craft a winning resume but also show them technology tools they can use to build a resume, guide them to advice on how to prepare for an interview, and suggest resources that will assist them further. After you complete the programming reflection piece at the beginning of this chapter, you may have ideas of what will pique the interests of students and patrons at your library.

Capturing the Imagination

Library programming should capture students' imaginations and generate new ideas or new questions of inquiry. Aspire to create programming in which tweens and teens will walk away inspired to imagine, think of possibilities, and ask new questions. As a librarian you can guide students in the right directions to further explore the subjects and topics that have captured their imaginations. Capturing the imagination can lead to new discovery and new learning.

Inquiry is a major part of instruction, particularly in advanced placement and international baccalaureate courses, as inquiry is taught from elementary with the primary years and middle years programs and then continued through high school when students take on writing the extended essay. Students often select topics that have captured their imagination and that they wish to research further, which leads to the next component of effective programming: advancing and deepening learning.

Advancing and Deepening Learning

All libraries can serve as the place where teens can advance and deepen their learning through programming. According to its mission statement, the Zula B. Wylie Public Library in Cedar

Hill, Texas, seeks to "be the community place that acts as the Door to Discovery connecting our culturally rich and diverse community to resources and services that promote lifelong learning, personal growth and development, and awareness of the arts."

Consider the mission and vision of your library as you develop programs to advance and deepen the learning of tweens and teens. Students can take advantage of what the library has to offer and search the collections and online resources to obtain the answers to their questions, thereby advancing and deepening their learning. They can then go into the community to further their knowledge.

Now that you know it is important to define exactly what programming means, it's time to ask why programming is critical for you and in your library, and to establish ideas for goals you wish to achieve through library programs.

Start with the Why

In many sectors, a key concept in professional development is finding your why. Simon Sinek's TED Talk "Start with Why," and his 2017 book *Finding Your Why* helped to popularize this concept (TEDx Talks, 2009). Everyone will have a different why depending on the campus or type of library you work in and the patrons you serve. During the 2019–2020 school year, librarians in the school district Valerie works in were asked, "What is your why? Why are you doing what you do, and how you do it?"

What does finding your why mean, and why is it important? It is a reflection on the purpose of your work as a librarian and the outcomes you desire to see as a result of this work. Change is a constant in any profession, particularly professions that are rooted in service to the community. Libraries are no different, as they operate within or alongside many sectors: K–12 and higher

education, city or county governments, health care, and more. No matter what type of library you serve in, it is important to take a step back and reflect on the purpose of library work and library programming.

Start this exploration by asking the following questions. In your answers, you may discover things about yourself that will help guide you in your path and help you develop a clear set of goals.

Questions to Help Define Your Why

Reflection questions such as "Why are you doing what you?" do may also include:

- Why did you become a librarian, and what are the professional goals you set for yourself to achieve?
- What is the essence of your work?
- What motivates you to do the work you are doing in the library?
- Who is the community you serve, and what are their information needs, educational needs, personal needs, and goals?

Similar questions can be applied to library programming:

- Why is programming critical in your library?
- What results do you want to achieve as a result of library programming?

Additional key points to reflect on are:

- What brings students or patrons to the library?
- Did a program or event further their learning?
- What made it such a positive experience that they returned to the library?

To take the reflection further, examine why programs are held in the library:

- Are programs just to mark an occasion, such as a change in month and season?
- Is the reason for organizing programs curriculum-driven?
- Is a particular program the trend in libraries, in vogue at the time? That is, are programs created due to a current event or current trends, such as a new film?

The answers, of course, will vary depending upon the type of library and the population it serves. Curriculum and instructional needs; student/patron interests; community interests and needs; technology, its availability, or even lack of; and funding all have an impact on library programs.

After reflection, seek out a framework from which to build programing upon, such as the ISTE Standards.

Standards and Library Programming

Standards can serve as a framework or a basis for library programming. In school state curriculum standards—for example, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) or the Common Core Standards that are used in various states throughout the country—are the basis of instruction. Curriculum standards basically state what educators should teach students at each grade level. The standards can also be tied to library programming. In schools where librarians are required to create lesson plans that include what state standards are covered, librarians can also tie standards to library programs and events.

In writing a lesson plan for library programs, create a SMART goal for programs that incorporate the standards, stating what

the students and patrons have learned or what they will be able to do after attending the program. Public librarians can do the same in collaboration with school librarians and incorporate state curriculum standards and national standards from professional organizations (such as ISTE, American Association of School Librarians (AASL), Future Ready, or ACRL), depending on the type of library and the patrons served.

AASL Reading Standards

Explore the AASL Standards and related resources. (standards.aasl.org)

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has developed some standards for school libraries to adhere to when designing programming. These can be helpful in thinking about your programming and to advocate for your goals in terms of the standards.

For example:

Inquire. How will programming support students' learning to inquire about their world through fiction and nonfiction?

Include. What efforts does library programming make to include students and community members from historically marginalized or disenfranchised groups (for example, special education, English language learners, or visually impaired students)?

Collaborate. How do students collaborate with one another in library spaces (for example, creating digital book reviews)?

Curate. How are students included in the process of curation?

Explore. What library programs encourage students to explore the world outside the physical or virtual library space (for example, collaborating with local museums and organizations offering programs for young people)?

Engage. How are young people engaging others in the world around them through sharing their experiences in the library (for example, community book clubs or whole-school reading initiatives)?

ISTE Standards for Educators

Explore the ISTE Standards and related resources. (iste.org/standards)

The ISTE Standards for Educators can be used by librarians as a framework to develop effective and successful programs for all types of libraries that serve teens and young adults. The shift to online programming that libraries were forced to make due to the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a challenge to some librarians. The need to innovate and become tech savvy in a short amount of time definitely presented a challenge. However, many were able to make the transition and build on their technology integration skills by earning certifications and participating in tech webinars during this time. It has never been more important to the future of library programming and library services to integrate technology and innovation in programming instruction for the digital realm than it is now.

The following ISTE Standards in particular stand out for programming from the librarian's perspective.

ISTE Standards for Educators

2.3.b. Establish a learning culture that promotes curiosity and critical examination of online resources and fosters digital literacy and media fluency.

2.4a. Dedicate planning time to collaborate with colleagues to create authentic learning experiences that leverage technology.

2.4.b. Collaborate and co-learn with students to discover and use new digital resources and diagnose and troubleshoot technology issues.

2.4.c. Use collaborative tools to expand students' authentic, real-world learning experiences by engaging virtually with experts, teams, and students, locally and globally.

2.5.a. Use technology to create, adapt, and personalize learning experiences that foster independent learning and accommodate learner differences and needs.

2.6.a. Foster a culture where students take ownership of their learning goals and outcomes in both independent and group settings.

2.6.c. Create learning opportunities that challenge students to use a design process and computational thinking to innovate and solve problems.

ISTE AASL and Future Ready Librarians Crosswalks

See the National School Library Standards crosswalk with ISTE Standards. (bit.ly/3ixxyV7)

In order to utilize the ISTE Standards into programming and other activities surrounding programming such as

program promotion, collaboration with other educators, and measuring programming results, librarians can refer to the ISTE Standards crosswalks that are available from AASL and Future Ready Librarians. The crosswalks help librarians look at how their daily practices align with the Standards and see opportunities where they can grow and institute new practices and methods. School librarians can reference the crosswalk of AASL Standards and ISTE Standards for Students and Educators to ensure they are not only developing programming that allows learners to inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage but also embed digital citizenship. Take the ISTE Standards further to help build out library programs.

Leverage the ISTE Standards and crosswalks in your program planning, be it in-person programming or online, program execution, and in assessment of the results of a program. Use them in developing yearly program goals. Leverage the standards and crosswalks in library reports to stakeholders in order to demonstrate the effect or impact Standards integration and implementation have on the purpose and power of library programming.

Many times, in order to fund programs, librarians (especially in the K–12 world) have to be grant writers. This is a perfect opportunity to leverage the ISTE Standards and crosswalks to tell the story of why the funds will be used, who the funds will be used for, and the sustainability of the programs.

Programming is multifaceted. Its basis may come out of the personal and professional goals librarians wish to achieve or its framework, or justification may lie in the Standards. It can be based on student interests, community interests and needs, as well as curricular/instructional needs, but it must also fit into library budgets and be scheduled at optimum times. This leads us to scheduling and time—not just time to hold programs but

the time to develop them and curate resources and supplies for them, along with the technology and tools that will be used and more.

Who Has the Time?

Scheduling is a component of educational spaces that both fascinates and perplexes librarians. Julia has always been interested in the mystery of the process that is the "Master Schedule," finding it fascinating that so many moving parts and pieces come together in a way that works for hundreds, sometimes thousands of people. However, these days, living and writing these words in the time of a global pandemic, she has observed that scheduling has become a new sort of challenge, as administrators and educators become accustomed to the work and language of "cohorts" and "cross-contamination."

Scheduling has to be communicated more as a suggestion than an absolutely hard-and-fast rule everyone must follow. As educators, we know that a schedule is only as effective as those who adhere to it are able to be dedicated. Though scheduling in library spaces sometimes has more flexibility than the scheduling of a traditional classroom teacher, librarians can and do still design time in a way that supports the achievement of both long- and short-term goals.

One example is monthly recurring library appointments with individual classes. Educators set up the recurring library visit appointments during the first beginning-of-the-school-year orientation, then choose from a menu of options provided by the librarian for subsequent calendar appointments. Some offerings might include "Critical Media Literacy" or "Independent Reading Support."

Online and Hybrid Programming

As of the year of publication for this book, library programs during the pandemic have had to be creative about programming as part of the continuing work of advocating for librarian positions, which continue to be eliminated at an astonishing rate, and as the work of adapting to the needs of learning communities shifts between in-person, hybrid, and completely virtual forms, sometimes overnight. Though for so many of us, the constantly changing amounts of time we actually have with students has been a challenge, for some students the flexibility of hybrid and virtual learning environments allows freedom to access libraries and learning in ways that simply were not commonplace before. Nontraditional students and those who benefit from a more flexible, home-based learning environment have flourished during this time. It's safe to say that the way we schedule educational programs has changed forever.

For the purposes of librarianship, we have begun to envision a new era with almost limitless time to engage young people with the act of reading and all the joys experienced when people come together around the stories that unite us.

Making Time

Librarians are pressed for time. Calendars are booked with classes, and school librarians are often looking to carve out time to collaborate with staff by attending professional learning community meetings with teachers on campuses and with other librarians. It may be helpful to have an overarching plan of programming for the year. Utilize the calendar for your institution and sketch out a plan months or a year in advance. Set deadlines, gather input and ideas, review results and reports from the previous year, then forge ahead with the programming plan.

Along with the changes that have happened to educational programming as a whole, the role of the librarian shifted and adapted to fit virtual, hybrid, and in-person spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. A common misconception is that the only, or primary, role of the librarian is circulating physical books. Librarians are not only the principal architects of school-wide reading culture; we are also responsible for developing independent reading programs and supporting them, managing collections, monitoring circulation, and developing support for community engagement. All of these initiatives require a level of advocacy and collaboration to develop and maintain.

For Julia, she knows that her time as a librarian looks very different from the way her time was organized as a classroom teacher. She no longer has specific periods during which she has to be engaged in certain tasks. She no longer has prep periods to take care of the "business" of education, including grading and entering grades into a virtual platform. She does spend hours and hours, if not days, preparing spreadsheets of titles for a virtual order form for our free book fair. She has also done an inventory that took weeks and weeks, full days of scanning titles, and participated in a genre-fication process that took five people over a week and a half to complete. So when designing library programming, an important part of her process is to consider both long- and short-term projects that need to be completed in order to keep the library running smoothly, as well as programming she would like to recur every year in order to gain momentum and establish a sense of tradition.

Reimagining Library Legacies

In popular media, librarians are often stereotypically depicted as female, bespectacled, and aggressively defending the sanctity of a silent environment. As more and more libraries adapt to

become spaces that live virtually, as well as in physical spaces, it seems like an excellent time to reframe what it means to be a librarian and reenvision some of the images that are pervasive within society. When creating a plan for programming, think about each student's individual experience as part of the story of our collective experience. What is it like to be a part of our library community during the time spent in the school system? What is the legacy you would like to leave behind? Furthermore, what will students think about their experiences with the library when they go on to the next level of their education—and many years after, when they look back as adults?

WE DO THIS IN COMMUNITY

Protecting Students' Right to Read

Since her time as a full-time classroom teacher, Julia no longer thinks in terms of a year-long plan, especially after this past year spent teaching during a pandemic. Flexibility is so important when designing library programming, and making time for lane changes along the road to where you want to be is crucial. Another point of consideration is, as activist and organizer Mariame Kaba says, "Everything worthwhile is done with other people" (Ewing, 2019). Though reading is thought of as a solitary activity, so much of what we do in library spaces can and should be done in community. When we work together to build a reading community, we dismantle the stereotypical depiction of an authoritarian librarian enforcing rules and regulations, making the library a place where few patrons feel welcome.

One of the most important actions Julie takes at the beginning of each year is to survey students first, then staff, so she can see what kinds of programming they liked from the year before and what their attitudes about, and experiences with, reading have been. She then uses the data from the surveys to

design programming, with several check-ins along the way. For example, if students have stated they don't read much of their assigned reading, but enjoy graphic novels and manga, Julia might develop a plan to work with language arts teachers to support curriculum development around popular graphic novels or manga.

Though it takes time to get new content for courses approved, students can often be wonderful advocates for the types of reading they like to do. Making time for students to build a community around the books they like to read and with people who share their interests is essential. World-renowned educator and reading advocate Donalynn Miller has said, "Students will read if we give them the books, the time, and the enthusiastic encouragement to do so. If we make them wait for the one unit a year in which they are allowed to choose their own books and become readers, they may never read at all. To keep our students reading, we have to let them" (2009).

Unfortunately, independent reading is often an activity that commonly gets the least amount of support, particularly in environments that prioritize high-stakes testing. In all environments, but particularly those with high populations of students belonging to groups that have been historically disenfranchised or marginalized, it is the work of whole communities, not just individual librarians and literacy advocates, to come together to protect a student's right to read—and the time to do so.

In 2019, the International Literacy Association created a document defending children's rights to read (see Figure 1.1). The document and accompanying position statement states, "Children have the right to extended time set aside for reading." In a time when virtual learning is becoming more normalized, it is crucial for librarians to learn about what "extended time … for reading" means in their specific learning environments and to design programming accordingly. This may include

reading initiatives that are more flexible with time and space, and that do not happen during traditional school hours, but live in a virtual space so students and the larger community can access the content at times that are convenient for them. Historically, educational, non-profit, and public institutions focus reading initiatives on defining and defending reading time for our youngest students but all students, at all levels, need and deserve to have their reading lives nurtured and time for reading defended.

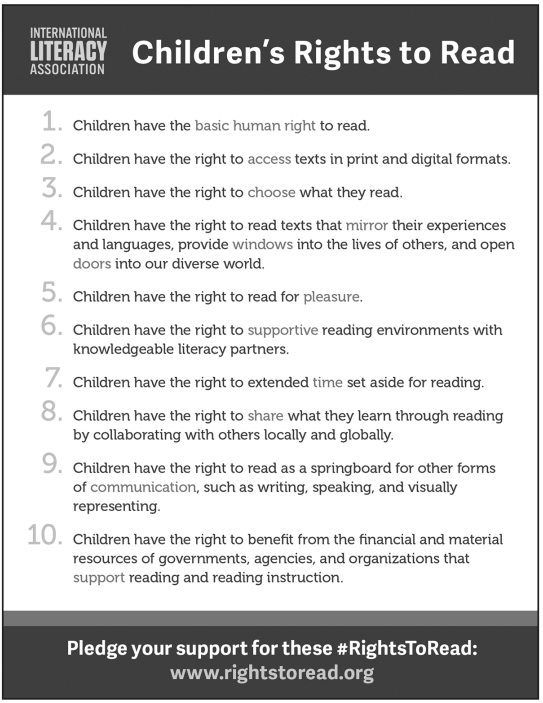

Figure 1.1 "Children's Rights to Read" by International Literacy Association. Download the poster at bit.ly/3KSy5Nv.

How to Tell What Programs Are Right for Your School Culture

Library programs should be as unique as the communities they serve. However, it is helpful to consider some basic points of organization, which we will discuss further in Chapter 5. When organizing her library program for the year, Julia breaks it into three components:

- actions I could take as a librarian,
- actions teachers and administrators can do to support, and
- what students can do to participate.

She regularly collects data via surveys and informal conversations to understand whether her programming is working for all stakeholders and to better see gaps, such as library users who are privileged or excluded by her policies and procedures. Each stakeholder in an educational community has different demands on their time, so when developing the ideal program, it's important to recognize time constraints, but as mentioned previously, remain flexible and expansive with respect to envisioning what is possible. At every step, it's important to help library patrons (and those in charge of supporting the library) see what is possible within the world of education technology because so much is changing so fast.

As a librarian, Julia believes it is her job to be a visionary, to remain curious, and to stay focused on what is possible, rather than remaining stuck in the traditions and customs of the past.

LIBRARIAN SPOTLIGHT

Bethany Dietrich, Young Adult Librarian at Bastrop Public Library in Bastrop, Texas

The best thing I have done to promote a strong, positive culture in my library is to encourage my teen patrons to bring their own ideas for weekly programs and coach them on what we need to do to adjust their ideas to fit our 90-minute time slot, our very small budget, and safety concerns. This practice took time because I had to really listen to their ideas; brainstorm out loud the modifications to make it safe, cheap, and time-appropriate; and convey all that back that while sharing how I really loved their original idea. It has really been about building their confidence that their ideas are valid (with some tweaking) and that I value their opinions. I really started doing this in winter 2018, and it took at least six months for them to feel comfortable just walking up to me or emailing me their ideas and modification "plans."

If other librarians were to replicate this practice, I recommend starting by making sure that your teens know (and believe) that you truly care about their likes and dislikes. You can do this by having people share YouTube videos the first (or last) 15 minutes of the program (set some guidelines, of course, so that you aren't blasting curse words through the projector speakers).

Next, make sure you're already planning programs that 1) may not go as planned. (Failure is okay! Model for them what it looks like when you fail and how you should respond to failure.) and 2) aren't "typical" library programs. Let them run around and don't make everything book or curriculum-centric. Maybe play ultimate frisbee one week, or do messy relays, or play human foosball, or carve bars of soap.

In all, this approach allows us to celebrate when someone's program idea is a lot of fun. It also allows us to try new things we wouldn't necessarily think of trying. Lastly, it builds students' self-confidence, showing that their ideas—and therefore they themselves—are valid.

Be Flexible

In Marlon Carey's 2012 TED Talk "About Time," the slam poet ruminates about the nature of our clockwork existence, and we've all heard the saying, "We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day." Library life, though, has changed dramatically in the way that we, as librarians, organize our time. Simultaneously, the times and formats in which patrons can access the items we have in our collections have also transformed.

If we think of libraries like a Rubik's cube, instead of a flat square, they are now so much more than just a quiet place for people to come and escape from the world. Library time can happen anywhere and anytime, with virtual libraries, ebooks, and audiobook collections accessible 24/7 on any number of devices. The time it used to take to read books is also different now that we have the ability to read graphic novels and comics on e-readers, zooming in to see detail and taking time to click on embedded external links. Audiobooks can be read at 1.25 speed, enabling readers to listen to favorite books faster while multitasking or commuting to school or work, for example. Librarians and the tools that help us are also available anytime, now that search algorithms are smart enough to learn an end user's preferences and make book recommendations that match as soon as a title is completed.

A Change in Plans

If the year 2020 taught us anything, it is that plans change. However, librarians are flexible and creative. If the budget, equipment, technical capacity, and pure ingenuity are available, programming can be done virtually or in a hybrid environment. In Valerie's experience at a public library, the go-to word to describe a change in plans or a shift during this period has been "pivot." Librarians must have a pivot plan. If conditions determine that a shift or change to how a program is presented must be done, can you pivot? Can you join forces with other staff and departments or librarians at other schools or cities to present programs in the event of a sudden change?

Key Points

So now that we have the tools and technology to maximize time in the library and access to it, how does all of this come together? It's about time we rework the time we have and reimagine what can happen in library spaces.

- Libraries can now exist in virtual and physical places simultaneously, so librarians do not have to limit library time to what happens during traditional school hours. Some activities that can happen anytime include virtual author visits, community book club conversations, collaborating via digital book reviews, and/or blending the worlds between curriculum and independent reading.
- Consider both long- and short-term goals and develop library programming that explicitly connects to library advocacy. Focus attention on how libraries can support individual, school, community, and curricular objectives.

- We have come a long way from the stereotypical library space where information gatekeepers keep patrons from accessing the collection and one another with the stereotypical "Shhhhhh!" followed by a hard stare.
- We all need to work in community to make sure a legacy lasts, because the work is so much bigger than any one individual.
- Though the age of technology and information continues to surprise us with tools that help librarians maximize time spent on the work of librarianship, we each still have the same twenty-four hours in a day. Modifying thinking about what is possible and, even more importantly, when library time can happen, benefits everyone.

Reflection

- What do you want your community to take away from their library experience, and how will your organization of time reflect that?
- Do you have a plan in place to make a shift in programming, if needed?
- What technology tools do you currently have, and do they have the capacity to help deliver programing if a pivot or shift must be made?
- What do you want your legacy to be as a librarian?
- How do you currently engage with the community in terms of programming and working to serve teens and tweens?