

FEATURE



AASL at 65: of Enduring C

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A Reflection on and Affirmation of Core Values that Sustain Us

Socrates is said to have noted that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” As AASL celebrates sixty-five years as a division of the American Library Association, it is wholly appropriate for us to examine the life of our organization as we contemplate what the future holds for school librarians. At the very heart of why we choose to cast our lot together are the understanding of our past and our abiding certainty and steadfast adherence to a set of guiding principles, core values, and beliefs. This adherence to core values also explains why AASL is the standard-bearer and undisputed leader in the ongoing commitment to excellence in school librarianship and school library programs.

What Are Professional Core Values?

Core values are those essential guiding principles that form the basis for how we go about conducting our personal and professional lives. Despite an ever-changing world, the influence and sway of socioeconomics, politics, culture, and technology, and the unrelenting nature of K–12 education, core values keep us grounded. For AASL they serve as our organizational compass to ensure we are heading in the right direction. Our professional core values are the ever-present and unwavering foundational elements upon which librarianship is constructed—part of our professional DNA, so to speak—and we are defined and identified by them. They underlie our communications and interactions with one another and with our various constituencies. Our core values are the basic elements of how we go about our work. And though time may pass, they endure.

Core Values of Librarianship

In its online policy manual (2009) and as a separate webpage (2004) within its section on advocacy, the American Library Association, our parent organization, identifies the Core Values of Librarianship as follows:

The foundation of modern librarianship rests on an essential set of core values that define, inform, and guide our professional practice. These values reflect the history and ongoing development of the profession and have been advanced, expanded, and refined by numerous policy statements of the American Library Association. Among these are:

Access—All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally, and equitably accessible to all library users.

Confidentiality/Privacy—Protecting user privacy and confidentiality is necessary for intellectual freedom and fundamental to the ethics and practice of librarianship.

Democracy—A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community the library serves.

Diversity—We value our nation’s diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full

spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve.

Education and Lifelong Learning—ALA promotes the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of a learning society, encouraging its members to work with educators, government officials, and organizations in coalitions to initiate and support comprehensive efforts to ensure that school, public, academic, and special libraries in every community cooperate to provide lifelong learning services to all.

Intellectual Freedom—We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

The Public Good—ALA reaffirms the following fundamental values of libraries in the context of discussing outsourcing and privatization of library services. These values include that libraries are an essential public good and are fundamental institutions in democratic societies.

Preservation—The Association supports the preservation of information published in all media and formats. The association affirms that the preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship.

Professionalism—The American Library Association supports the provision of library services by professionally qualified personnel who have been educated in graduate programs within institutions of higher education. It is of vital impor-

tance that there be professional education available to meet the social needs and goals of library services.

Service—We provide the highest level of service to all library users. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Social Responsibility—ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement. (ALA 2004)

I think we would all agree that these values do form the *raison d'être* of the profession. However, among the ranks of youth-serving librarians—especially school librarians—additional core values are at the very heart of our endeavors. Despite the march of time and the passing of the baton from generation to generation of practitioners, these values continue to motivate us and have a profound influence on our day-to-day efforts and our collective vision for the future.

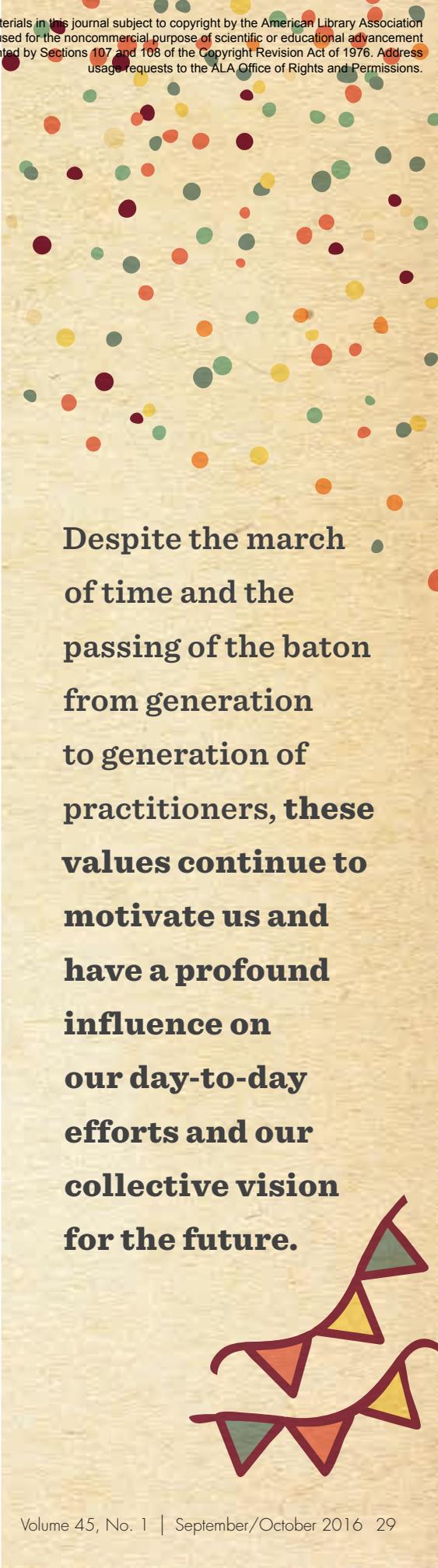
These additional core values include such areas as:

- instructional responsibilities
- collaboration
- design of meaningful and relevant learning opportunities
- continuous improvement through evaluation
- standards-based practice
- integration of new resources and technologies
- advocacy
- leadership
- research and evidence-based practice

Roots and Pioneers

“We understand now, we’ve been made to understand, and to embrace the understanding... that who we are *is* who we were.” These are lines from the 1997 movie *Amistad*, based on actual events surrounding the uprising by a group of Africans against their enslavement. These words represent the eloquent remarks of John Quincy Adams during his Supreme Court appearance in defense of the captives and underscore the importance of heritage and the contributions of those who have come before. The proposition that who we are *is* who we were is a compelling one as we reflect on how we came to be and how we intend to continue.

Looking back at our history as an association, four remarkable pioneers stand out, people who, early on, gifted us with their insight and intellect to articulate the theoretical base of what constitutes excellence in our field. It’s worth reviewing, remembering, and honoring the journey they embarked on to get us under way and to guide us as we have developed, grown, and prospered.



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Mary P. Douglas

As noted on the AASL website (2016), AASL had its early roots in the ALA School Libraries Section formed in 1914; in 1941 this section was incorporated into the Division of Libraries for Children and Young People. The name American Association of School Librarians was adopted in 1944. Shortly thereafter, in 1945 a major development in advancing the field occurred when Mary P. Douglas along with others, including the legendary Frances Henne, worked to establish the first set of national school library standards: *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* (Douglas 1945). These standards helped to delineate and distinguish the responsibilities of school librarians, and they encouraged school librarians to work with teachers “to include library skills education in the context of subject-based learning” (Kester and Jones 2004, 954). Sound familiar? Of course it does, because this concept was the cornerstone that provided the foundation of our **essential teaching role and the importance of collaboration**. These 1945 standards also acknowledged the need to identify curriculum access

points to **ensure meaningful and relevant learning experiences**.

Douglas was acknowledged as a firebrand who took on fellow ALA Councilors whose objections to establishing standards for school libraries “ranged from frivolous to ignorant. She incisively disposed of each, approval was voted and *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* became a reality” (Miller 2003, 47). How many of us have felt the fervor and perhaps a bit of the fury that Douglas experienced in her quest to help educate the uninformed about our work? Quite a few, I suspect, and we can call upon her example to continue to inspire us when the going gets tough.

Frances Henne

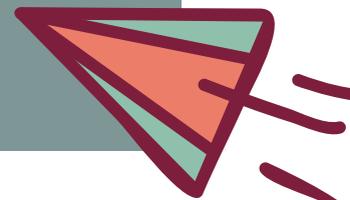
After AASL achieved recognition as a separate division of ALA in 1951, Frances Henne coauthored *A Planning Guide for the High School Library Program*, the first evaluative guide for school library programs (Henne, Ersted, and Lohrer 1951). “The Planning Guide provided a pattern for developing **school library evaluation** materials, including those used for self-studies for regional accreditation of schools, that continued to be

influential in the future” (Kester and Jones 2004, 955). Thereafter, Henne persisted in efforts to periodically update and revise **standards to reflect research, best practice, and the importance of incorporating and integrating new and emerging resource formats and technologies** into collections and instruction (Kester and Jones 2004).

Henne was also instrumental in establishing **principles and criteria for the selection of materials**, and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, which she founded in 1945, remains a leading review medium. It's no wonder that the American Library Association's publication *American Libraries* recognized her influence by including her in a list of the one hundred most important library leaders of the twentieth century (Kniffel, Sullivan, and McCormick 1999).

Henne's aura continues to inspire, and when we follow her lead in seeking continuous improvement of our practice and revision of our standards, we know that such periodic evaluation and reflection lead to helping our students more effectively.

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Mary Virginia Gaver

Another force in advancing school librarianship and the concept of the school library as a unique innovation to empower learning was Mary Virginia Gaver. In 1958 when ALA published her groundbreaking work *Every Child Needs a School Library*, she established one of the fundamental core values that has sustained and guided the efforts of school librarians ever since: our **belief in equity and access, both physical and intellectual**. Like Henne, Gaver was an advocate for standards and, in fact, worked with Henne on the 1960 standards.

The World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services notes that the enormous success and influence of these particular standards are directly attributable to a national promotion campaign conceived and executed by Gaver (Wedge-worth 1993). She provided us with an outstanding example of **advocacy and leadership** in action. Her study on the school library program's positive impact on elementary reading scores (1963, 1964) remains a pivotal work in the evolution of **evidence-based practice** (Dickinson 2005).

She also stressed the importance of ongoing professional development and led early efforts to work with state affiliates to improve **leadership** capabilities among school librarians in the field.

Gaver exemplified the competencies and dispositions that our core values help us to develop. She also is an exemplar of the value of being strategic and planning accordingly.

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Cora Paul Bomar

With the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), at long last school librarians and libraries are once again on the national radar because of their inclusion in a number of provisions in the legislation. We have longed for this recognition since 2002 when we were not mentioned and, therefore, by default left out of any consideration in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Not since our inclusion in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) during the Johnson administration have we had such an opportunity to demonstrate that we make a positive impact on student achievement and on instructional design, delivery, and assessment. We owe a great debt to school library advocates like Cora Paul Bomar for their perseverance and dedication to ensuring a golden age of school library development.

In 1962 AASL received a grant from the Knapp Foundation to provide for school librarian education and support the development of model programs across the country. The first objective of the five-year project was “to demonstrate the educational value of school library programs, services and resources” by upgrading their materials and developing qualified personnel. Grant funds were used to expand and renovate hundreds of school libraries across the United States. The project was guided by the AASL learning standards adopted in 1960. As the project developed,

Bomar, then director of the Division of Educational Media for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, ensured that significant progress and implementation in North Carolina led to the development of robust model programs and services and collected data to document impact.

As the Knapp project wound down, Bomar, working with the U.S. Office of Education (then in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), testified in support of federal legislation before House and Senate committees on six occasions. This testimony was instrumental in the passage of dedicated funding for the creation and expansion of school libraries in Title II of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Woolls and Loertscher 2013).

As we gear up for implementation of ESSA, Cora Paul Bomar’s legacy of **determination, advocacy, and use of data** looms large. As we strive to ensure the future of school library programs, we must follow Bomar’s example and demonstrate to stakeholders and decision makers that we are essential for student success.

Today’s Pathfinders

We certainly owe a debt to Douglas, Henne, Gaver, and Bomar as champions of the value of the work we do in empowering learning at every stage. They informed their practice with evidence and research. Throughout the succeeding years

a whole corps of distinguished researchers have followed the path that pioneers established. These researchers have provided us with ample evidence of the need for access to inquiry opportunities, resources, programs, and services. Today’s pathfinders represent the scholarship that we connect to the **development of a knowledge base** that contributes to our understanding of why we do the things we do:

- Academic Achievement: Keith Curry Lance, Deb Kachel
- Action Research: Carol Gordon
- Advocacy: Ken Haycock
- Assessment: Violet Harada
- Causality: Gail Dickinson, Sue Kimmel, Jody Howard
- Collection Mapping: David Loertscher, Blanche Woolls
- Critical Thinking: David Loertscher
- Curation: Joyce Valenza
- Data Utilization: Marcia Mardis, Kristin Fontichiaro
- Digital Youth: Joyce Valenza
- Evidence-Based Practice: Ross Todd, Carol Kuhlthau, Carol Gordon
- Information Literacy/Problem Solving: Mike Eisenberg, Bob Berkowitz, Joyce Valenza
- Inquiry: Carol Kuhlthau, Barbara Stripling
- Instructional Intervention: Carol Kuhlthau, Violet Harada

- Knowledge Construction: Ross Todd
- Leadership: Ken Haycock, Nancy Everhart, Ann Carlson Weeks
- Learning Spaces: David Loertscher
- Management and Supervision: Blanche Woolls
- Motivation/Engagement: Ruth Small
- Multiple Literacies: Joyce Valenza
- Professional Development: Carol Gordon, Violet Harada

All have helped to move our work and our profession forward, and the list goes on, as do the continuing efforts of the next wave of researchers and the advocacy of emerging practitioners in our field. All are invaluable as they help us seize the opportunity to demonstrate that we make a difference and that the core values of school librarianship remain solid, relevant, and ready to sustain our profession in taking the next steps forward.



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Certification program at Granite State College, part of the University System of New Hampshire. She serves on AASL's 65th Celebration Task Force, is a member of AASL's Standards and Guidelines Editorial Board, and cochairs the School Libraries Working Group within ALA's Todaro Initiative Steering Committee. Recent honors include being an invited scholar at the 2014 CLASS Summit and Research Institute jointly sponsored by AASL and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, receiving a 2010 Thinkfinity/Allison Zmuda Challenge Grant, and having an article selected by LIRT (ALA's Library Instruction Round Table) as one of the Top Twenty Library Instruction Articles published in 2009. Her "Coming This Fall to a School Library Near You: The Challenged, the Banned, the Filtered" was published in the May/June 2015 issue of *Knowledge Quest*.

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