Editorial: How Does a Policy Mean? Cultural Signifiers in the Lives of School Librarians

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In *How Does a Poem Mean?* John Ciardi (1959) explained poems and the process of creating poetry. Ciardi told us that poems are valuable both as completed works and as compilations of common elements like rhythm, meter, and language that express the skill and value of the poet (Ciardi 1959). Just as Ciardi gave readers an accessible framework for appreciating poetry, policies give us a cultural framework in which to contextualize and express the school library's contributions to learning.

For Volume 23, Number 1 (January 2017), *School Libraries Worldwide's* editors were especially interested in papers in which policy was an aspect of the research. Because formal and informal policies exist in community, cultural, school, governmental, and national contexts, they often influence the work of educators and learners. We defined school library policy topics to include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- National and local funding distribution policies;
- Privacy and intellectual freedom policies;
- Technology use and management policies;
- School scheduling and facilities policies;
- Governmental and legislative mandates that affect librarians and libraries;
- Codes of conduct and ethics; and
- Inclusion and diversity legislation.

In the library, a policy is a carefully designed, broadly stated, written guideline for actions and decisions of the library. Policies provide consistency and uniformity in library service at all levels, reinforcing libraries' role as institutions for fairness and equality. Policies exist at many levels, ranging from providing guidelines for librarians and library users; protecting the library from particular legal challenges; and stating a desired level of performance by the library. Because policies tend to be approved by an external body such as a library board or a municipal governing body, there is a weight behind them that can communicate the library's values and mission to the public. Policies on collection development

and challenged materials, for example, illustrate that intellectual freedom is an important value. Internet policies can communicate the need to respect an individual's privacy, while also stating the library's adherence to federal filtering requirements (as is the case in the United States).

Signs of a Culture

Culture is like personality. In a person, the personality is made up of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, interests, experiences, upbringing, and habits that create a person's behavior. Culture is made up of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people in a specific context. Culture is the behavior that results when the group arrives at a set of (often unspoken and unwritten) rules for working together; policy results from those rules being written down and followed. Your library's culture is bounded by these rules and the ways in which they are implemented by the unique personalities who work there.

Although culture may be reflected in something as simple as the objects chosen to grace a librarian's desk, bulletin board content, the library newsletter, and the ways in which people collaborate (or don't collaborate!). Library culture is particularly influenced by school and governmental leaders because of their roles in decision making and strategic direction are often tied to resources such as funding, facilities, and access to community engagement. The visual and verbal components of an organization's culture are noticeable every day at work. Whether you are walking through a work area, sitting in an office, attending a meeting, or eating in the lunchroom, the organization's culture surrounds you and permeates your working life.

Growing a School Library Culture Through Policy

Since located in the democratic idea of a society that welcomes conflicts of views and debate on rights, policies are a path to development. A policy, therefore, must be reinvented as design and practice that goes beyond the politicians' politics and must belong to people's lives, helping them to respond to their needs and desires. That is, if, on one hand, public policies as a national, state, or municipal policy, can contribute to the formation of the school library culture, on the other hand, it is necessary the construction of a local policy, carried out in partnership between the librarian and the community. Building a local policy for your school library may involve tasks such as the creation of an internal regulations, a code of conduct, or even setting standards for local operation. This means restoring political doing as an activity concerning issues that are essential to the human being in community, not to bring definitive answers, but so that we never stop asking ourselves who we are, why we are together and what goal we want to achieve.

Three main categories to policies, whether public or local, are community participation, evaluation, and renewal.

1. Community participation is essential in democratic perspective, making decisions go beyond offices, leaders and other administrative bodies, and are made taking into account the community involved. As is fact that the policy for the school library will affect its culture,

nothing more coherent than this dimension to be considered for the subjects to create effective links with the school library.

2. The evaluation of a policy is the activity focused on the verification of results, and guides the renewal of processes and practices, insofar as it allows to know positive and negative elements of the action. Whenever possible, an external viewer should be included in the evaluation process, since those who are immersed in the process (in this case in the policy evaluated) will not always be able to identify the various elements that interfered in the action. It is essential that, in addition to satisfaction, identify whether public, political, pedagogical and technical objectives are being achieved.

3. Finally, every policy must be renewed. This is intrinsically related to the evaluation, because its results will allow the resizing of actions. Measures to reinvigorate a policy will be essential, not only to improve processes that are deficient, but also for the school library to accompany, in a critical and creative perspective, the transformations that mark the contemporary informational context.

Taking this into consideration, proposing an internal policy for the school library is the first step towards building a school library culture. To do so, it is necessary to know the public policies that influence its sector - in terms of budget, legislation, rights, access to the collection, etc., as well as the school culture in which the library is inserted. Let's define school culture as a set of norms that define knowledge to teach and behaviors to instill, and a set of practices that allow the transmission of this knowledge and the incorporation of these behaviors; norms and practices coordinated for purposes that may vary according to the times. As part of the school, the library shares the school culture. Therefore, library culture will be a reflection of public policies for existing school libraries in their context, of the school culture in which the library is located, and of policies that are set to organize and manage the library itself.

In This Issue

In this issue, researchers from all over the world provided us with a range of papers that explore the ways in which policy is shaping and reflecting school library culture from a number of points of view.

We lead this issue of 8 exciting papers with Brian Sturm's "Storytelling's Impact on School Library Circulation," a study in which he examined the relationship between storytelling activities and student interest in checking out books. His cost/circulation analysis showed a much better return on the financial investment in the books that were explicitly shown to children. Then, Barbara Guzzetti and Marcia A. Mardis (*SLW* editor) assess "The Potential of Graphic Nonfiction for Teaching and Learning Earth Science," the extent to which learners can use graphic nonfiction to learn earth science, particularly in the area of climate change. In another study of policy as it relates to the library collection, Akhilesh K.S. Yadav and Poonam M Kharate investigated "Access to and Use of Traditional and Internet Media by Secondary School Children in Mumbai, India." In contrast to other studies of youth Internet use, these high school students mainly used the Internet for school work—even in the absence of policies restricting learners to this use. In our final paper that examines policy at the building level, in "Care Based Practices in the School Library: Helping Students who Hurt," Meghan Harper describes how school libraries provide unique opportunities to help students who are

experiencing difficult or hurtful situations in their lives and suggests ways school librarians can build a library program based on the ethic of care including providing instruction, curating a collection and creating a library environment as a healing space for those who hurt.

We conclude this issue with three papers that review policy at the state and national levels. Jennifer Luetkemeyer explores whether "Are School Librarians Ready to Lead Mandated Digital Integration?" Her survey of Florida's school librarians are prepared to enact state level digital textbook and online learning requirements. Gift Alfred B. Dube provides a policy analysis of an emerging school library in "School Libraries Funding and Educational Policies in Malawi." Finally, Marília Paiva and guest editor Adriana Sirihal Duarte document the state of school libraries in Brazil in "School Library Contribution to Student Achievement as Measured by the Brazil-Reading Test." Their results provide an interesting view of the variations inherent in a single set of policies.

We hope these papers inspire you to take a walk through your community, school, and library to see, appreciate, and observe your current culture. You can also change your school's culture, a tough, but achievable, option, by reflecting your best practice in clear policy.

References
Ciardi, J. (1959). How does a poem mean? Boston, MA: Riverside.

Author Notes
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