

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 54, NO. 4

JULY/AUGUST 2015

WWW.PUBLICLIBRARIESONLINE.ORG

ISSN 0163-5506

Using
Superhero Comics
to Teach
Intellectual Property
Concepts

ADVOCACY
and
SUSTAINABLE
Funding

the
teen
EXPERIENCE
IN THE
Library

PLA's
Project
Outcome



TECH TRENDS
AND TENSIONS

Don't Call
THEM **LAZY**
call them
CONNECTED

LIBRARY = EDUCATION



B18

COLUMBIA MD 21044-2728
10935 SWANSFIELD RD
VALERIE J. GROSS
0218842 MEN NOV-15

*****AUTO**SCH 3-DIGIT 210
P1

Trending features brief essays on current issues or new ideas in public librarianship.

Guest contributor **VALERIE J. GROSS** is President and CEO of Howard County (Md.) Library System and author of *Transforming Our Image, Building Our Brand: The Education Advantage*.



Contact Valerie at valerie.gross@hclibrary.org.



Valerie is currently reading *Disney U: How Disney University Develops the World's Most Engaged, Loyal, and Customer-Centric Employees* by Doug Lipp.

Moving Up to First Class: Libraries = Education

Reclaiming Our Purpose for the Twenty-First Century

You may have heard about Libraries = Education. Introduced in 2009, the simple, powerful strategy is ushering in a new era for libraries everywhere.¹ Why might you wish to consider joining in? Because when the economy is good, we don't always receive the funding we deserve. When times are bad, library budgets may be cut severely and never restored. As a profession, we know why we are important, but many outside the field do not. We're often treated as second class. Well, we're first class. We're better than first class. And this game-changing vision takes us there.

In August 2014, I had the privilege of presenting a seminar on a new vision for libraries during Indiana's statewide Library Camp, hosted by the Allen County Public Library.² Toward the end of the session, a hand in the audience shot up. Alexandra-Monroe Public Library Director Montie L. Manning had learned about Libraries = Education earlier in the year, and he wanted to describe how he had struck gold applying the concepts.

Having been somewhat anxious about needing to convince his library's governing body to approve \$360,000 for a branch renovation, Manning explained, "I had been to Madison County Council meetings before. I knew how challenging the council members could be. They demanded thorough justification before approving even a few thousand dollars."

So Manning prepared. He armed himself with not only the usual facts and figures, but also with something new: Libraries = Education. When called to testify, Manning highlighted the marked increases in visits to his library, as well as items borrowed, and attendance at classes and events. What else did he highlight? A new angle. He emphasized that, as the statistics proved, township residents of all ages rely on the Alexandria-Monroe Public Library for *quality education*. He asserted that an investment in the proposed renovation was *an investment in education*.

Animated, Manning continued, "One of the council members immediately seized upon the 'E' word. He spoke about the importance of education and how it should be supported. It didn't take long for the other members to show their support for education."

Reliving the remarkable experience, Manning said, "Before I knew it, our request passed unanimously without me being raked over the coals!" He concluded, "I was simply stunned by the power of the 'E' word . . . Education."³

Moving Up to 100 Percent

Like many others who have joined the growing movement, Manning experienced the potency of Libraries = Education, which *Library Journal* hails as "a 21st Century model worthy of study and consideration by every library in American if not the world."⁴

Trending—Moving Up to First Class: Libraries = Education

Use it and you may never again have to face puzzled people who say, “Tell me again what you do?” Why do so many people ask this question? It’s because, according to a recent Pew Research Center study, fully one-third of Americans do not know what we do (and, I would wager, that most of the two-thirds who think they know what we do, really don’t either).⁵

What percent of America’s population would you say know what schools do? Your answer is likely 100 percent, which is precisely where Libraries = Education can take us—to a time when all Americans know what we do. This means we will never again hear “I get everything I need off the Internet—why do we need libraries?”

Indeed, your inherent value will never again be questioned and most importantly you will receive top funding priority—in any economy. This is because Libraries = Education permanently dispels misperceptions. And the best part? It does not require changing anything we do—only what we say.

It’s Simple

Implementing Libraries = Education is simple. The strategy repositions libraries as educational institutions and library staff as educators. It further categorizes all that libraries do under three easy-to-remember “pillars.”⁶

1. Self-Directed Education—using our diverse collections;
2. Research Assistance and Instruction—this includes classes, seminars, and workshops for all ages, taught by library instructors; and
3. Instructive and Enlightening Experiences—through cultural and community center concepts, events, and partnerships.

Finally, the strategy replaces traditional terminology and jargon with strategic language that people outside of the field will understand. Examples include:

- education, instruction, or research replace words like information and reference;
- class takes the place of storytime and program; and
- curriculum replaces “programs and services.”

From the very words you use, everyone will understand that you are the provider of what the world values most, education.

Think Big—We Are Education

It is important to first understand what this vision is not. It is not “we support education,” or “we play a role in education,” or that we are an “educational resource.” This statement implies that all we do is support the schools—which we obviously must, as kindergarten through college students comprise a significant segment of our customer base. But this vision is way too small. Libraries = Education is much, much bigger. We are education. We are an educational institution in our own right, on equal footing with all other educational institutions.

The Definition of Education

It is important to understand that the complete definition of the word education includes not only formal education that leads to a degree, but also:

- information about a subject matter;
- knowledge acquired by learning;
- activities of educating, instructing, or teaching;
- the process of acquiring knowledge; and
- an enlightening experience.

Everything we do is education, what the world values most. We have always been education. It is just this idea is not understood outside of the library world. We can easily correct this misperception through the language we use.

Suggested Phrases

We can use the following phrases to immediately convey our true value:

- We are a major component of (your county’s/city’s/state’s) strong education system.
- We deliver equal opportunity in education for everyone.
- We deliver public education for all.
- We deliver excellence in education.

- We are partners in education.
- We are education.
- Line of work? Education.

Any of these phrases can be continued with a version of “. . . through a curriculum that comprises Three Pillars: Self-Directed Education, Research Assistance and Instruction, and Instructive and Enlightening Experiences.” In addition, we can describe our staff as *a team of educators and support staff that delivers on our educational mission.*

The Highest Priority

It is high time that we teach America that we are education, one of the country’s highest values. Although recovering somewhat from the recent recession, disproportionate cuts to our budgets at the local, state, and federal levels continue. For instance, state funding decision-makers recently proposed nearly 80 percent in cuts for Missouri’s libraries,⁷ and the federal government again tried to eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which channels millions of dollars annually.⁸

Would such misguided, short-sighted proposals ever occur for state funding for Missouri’s schools or the US Department of Education? These examples demonstrate how beneficial it would be for our profession to teach people, through the very words we use, that like the schools, we are their highest priority.

Alan Pakaln, a biomedical engineer with a real concern for the future of libraries recently opined that our profession seems to have “no real direction, no comprehensive plan” and “what is required for libraries to survive is a unifying message.”⁹ His assessment is correct. When Pakaln learned about Libraries = Education, he said, “Looks extraordinary to me!”¹⁰

Success! A Report from the Field

Here is a snapshot of where the Libraries = Education movement has already taken us. At Howard County (MD) Library System, we have seen our visits, and also attendance at classes and events, triple since implementing the strategy. Items borrowed and research assistance

interactions have doubled. Most notably, our operating budget has doubled, and our capital budget, which had been non-existent, built us three new branches (all paid using public funding), with a fourth underway.³¹ Other jurisdictions have experienced success as well:

- Doreen Hannon, director of Salem-South Lyon District Library (MI), is quick to say that everything libraries do is about education. According to Hannon, applying the strategy was a precursor to her library's successful millage request that passed by a margin of 3 to 1 in February 2014. A frequent presenter, Hannon writes: "Any time I speak . . . I am excited to let audiences know how much this new vision helped us to transform our image and portray what we really do: education. To be firmly established as such is imperative well before asking for additional millage."³²
- Delane James, director of Buckingham Memorial Library (MN), attributes Libraries = Education to a recent feat. She wrote, "Applying the vision's words and attitudes resulted in our receiving budget increases when every other library in our area continued to see dramatic funding cuts."³³

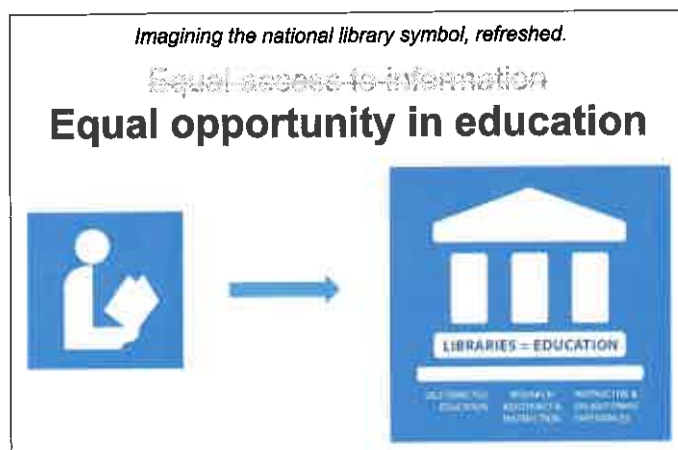
Using Strategic Terms in the Library World

On library websites across the country, and around the world, the terms education, instruction, research, and customer service are replacing the traditional terms, information and reference. Strategic words like classes, seminars, and workshops have also replaced the traditional nondescript terms like storytime and programs. Check out these examples:

- The Libraries = Education approach is incorporated into HCLS's website.³⁴ Also in Maryland, Cecil County Public Library aptly proclaims itself an "award-winning educational institution."³⁵ Yet another example from the East Coast, Chesapeake Public Library

in Virginia now uses the value-enhanced descriptor "classes & events."³⁶

- Among the first library systems to join the movement, the website of the Citrus County Library System in Florida includes the powerful words education, classes, and research throughout its website.³⁷
- The Lewisville Public Library in Texas trumpets its status as an educational institution through its tagline, "Educate, Engage, Enrich."³⁸ Further, "storytime" has been replaced with "children's classes."
- Brown County Library in Wisconsin has switched from "programs" to "classes and events" as has the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library in Ohio.³⁹
- Alan Chabot-Stahls from a library in Haiti wrote, "As of right now, we no longer have a reference section—tomorrow up goes "Research Department."⁴⁰
- Recently, as the Urban Library Council (ULC) effectively lobbied the FCC to fund E-rate, ULC President and CEO Susan Benton used Libraries = Education as the first point in her letter to FCC Chairman Wheeler. She concluded with "Libraries are key to our country's education infrastructure and must be seen as equal in importance to schools for receiving their share of E-rate."⁴¹
- In October of 2014, ULC held a conference "Libraries as Education Leaders," which focused on positioning libraries as educational institutions within their communities.⁴²



- ULC added the e-discussion group ULC-EducationLeaders@mail-list.com for "Education Leaders." Susan Benton explains the listserv intends to connect "leading libraries across the US and Canada that are focused on the role public libraries play in education."⁴³
- A final example, ALA president-elect Julie Todaro asserts, "The fact that libraries are not designated educational institutions by the federal government, is a huge loss for us."⁴⁴

Education vs. Learning

As a profession, we seem a bit reluctant to use the word education, preferring the term learning as in we are "learning leaders" and "learning institutions." (We might not realize it, but these phrases imply that we have room for improvement!) We would benefit from using the word "education" more often. Consider that elected officials often say that their highest priority is education (as opposed to learning).

In addition, the word learning places the emphasis on the student, while education assigns the credit to the educational institution and educators designing and delivering the curriculum that enables learning. Perhaps the best rationale for invoking education is iterated in a cover letter for the ULC brief, "Partners in Education:"⁴⁵ "Education is perceived as a critical necessity for a strong economy and future" while "learning is perceived as nice, but not essential."⁴⁶

Trending—Moving Up to First Class: Libraries = Education

Using Strategic Titles

Our job titles present a golden opportunity to harness the power of language to achieve the optimal respect and assigned worth we seek.

At many libraries, the term for the top staff leadership role is now a version of “president and CEO” (many were previously labeled director or executive director, which are middle-management positions in most business and academic realms). Check out this episode of Comcast Newsmakers (bit.ly/1Hhpw6j). Note the powerful effect on the audience when Mary Hastler is introduced as CEO.²⁷

Next Step

Across the country, visionary leaders are working to implement Libraries = Education. In May, I was invited to present in Florida for the state’s 120 library directors.²⁸ The all-day event concluded with participants noting how they would begin to implement Libraries = Education. Feedback included:

- This was a significant event—a distinct transition for libraries. The exchange of words (e.g., learning versus teaching) and the emphasis on education is something we will implement.
- I loved how changing vocabulary can be used right away. We have a new quarterly events guide and we can change vocabulary based on what we learned.
- The State Library should take the lead in adopting the vision, to influence libraries throughout the state to also implement. I will implement this terminology in my communications with city administrators, articles, and press releases, as well as in every aspect of communication with coworkers and the public to educate and inform them about the role of libraries.

The comments also revealed that other libraries are planning to:

- Change storytimes to children’s classes, programs to classes, and register to enroll.
- Implement academic competi-

tions with the schools, such as spelling bees.

- Integrate the Three Pillars into strategic planning.

Ready to Move Up?

Consider joining the growing Libraries = Education movement. Through the very words we use, all of America will understand that we are what the world values most. Just like schools, colleges, and universities, libraries are education—a timeless, economic imperative that merits immense respect and maximized funding.

We have the power to revolutionize our great profession. Let’s work together to implement Libraries = Education. 📖

References

1. Valerie J. Gross, “Transforming Our Image through Words that Work: Perception is Everything,” *Public Libraries*, 48, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2009): 24–32; *Transforming Our Image, Building Our Brand: The Education Advantage* (Libraries Unlimited/ABC-CLIO, 2013).
2. Allen County (IN) Public Library/Library Camp 2014 Keynote Address, “A 21st and 22nd Century Vision: Why Indiana Needs Libraries More Than Ever,” Aug. 19, 2014.
3. Montie L. Manning, email to author, Sept. 16, 2014.
4. John N. Berry, “2013 Gale/LJ Library of the Year: Howard County Library System, MD,” *Library Journal* (June 5, 2013), http://bit.ly/HCLS_Library_of_the_Year.
5. Katryn Zickuhr, et al., “How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities,” Pew Research Center (Dec. 2013): 26, <http://bit.ly/PewDec2013PDF>.
6. Three Pillars image available at <http://bit.ly/LibEduThreePillars>.
7. Bob Warburton, “MO 2016 Budget Drops Aid to Libraries Almost 80 Percent,” *Library Journal* (May 11, 2015), <http://bit.ly/1HuCBRT>.
8. Jazzy Wright, “ALA President Responds to House Proposal to Eliminate IMLS,” *ALA News*, Mar. 25, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1OYhPeF>.
9. Alan Pakaln, “Public Libraries: How to Save Them,” *Public Libraries* 53, no. 4 (July/Aug. 2014): 7, <http://bit.ly/PakalnPubLib>.
10. Alan Pakaln, Guest Book Post (Aug. 28, 2014), <http://bit.ly/1KiPE3x>.
11. Howard County (MD) Library System, www.hclibrary.org.
12. Doreen Hannon, emails to author, Oct. 9, 2014, Oct. 21, 2014, and Apr. 9, 2015.
13. Delane James, email to author, Feb. 19, 2014.
14. Howard County Library System.
15. Cecil County (MD) Public Library, www.cecil.ebranch.org.
16. Chesapeake (VA) Public Library, www.infopeake.org.
17. Citrus County (FL) Library System, www.citruslibraries.org.
18. Lewisville (TX) Public Library, <http://bit.ly/LewisvillePubLib>.
19. Brown County (WI) Library, www.browncountylibrary.org; Toledo-Lucas County (OH) Public Library, www.web2.toledolibrary.org.
20. Alan Chabot-Stahls, Internet conversation with author, Oct. 22, 2013.
21. June 9, 2014, letter from Urban Libraries Council President & CEO Susan Benton to the FCC in support of E-Rate funding for libraries, <http://bit.ly/FCCJune2014>.
22. Urban Libraries Council Conference, “ULC Conversation: Libraries as Education Leaders,” Washington, D.C. (Oct. 16, 2014), http://bit.ly/ULC_LibEduConf_Oct2014.
23. Susan Benton, email to ULC-Education Leaders@mail-list.com, Mar. 18, 2015.
24. Lisa Peet, “ALA President-Elect Julie Todaro on Transforming Librarians,” *Library Journal* (June 18, 2015).
25. Urban Libraries Council, *Leadership Brief: Partners for Education* (Winter 2015), <http://bit.ly/1ETb9Hg>.
26. Feb. 5, 2015, letter from Urban Libraries Council President & CEO Susan Benton to ULC library executives accompanying the *Leadership Brief: Partners in Education*, http://bit.ly/ULC_Feb2015_edu_v_learning.
27. Comcast Newsmakers, Yolanda Vazquez speaks with Mary Hastler, CEO of the Harford (MD) County Library (Oct. 3, 2014), <http://bit.ly/1Hhpw6j>.
28. Florida Library Association Conference (Orlando): DLIS Public Library Director Academy, Conference Session, “Libraries: Key to Florida’s Education Enterprise,” (May 12–13), http://bit.ly/VJG_Presentations.