
Intellectual Freedom Policies and Current School Practices

Frances M. McDonald

School library media specialists attempting to practice the intellectual freedom principles of their profession in an institutional milieu antithetical to intellectual freedom face a professional dilemma. Unlike public and academic librarians who work in institutions where the principles of intellectual freedom are generally accepted, and who work with other individuals who profess a similar professional ethic, a school library media specialist usually works alone, in an educational setting where protection of children is the norm and "causing trouble" elicits censure from administrators and colleagues. Faced with this dilemma, only the most courageous are able to apply the concepts of freedom of access to information in the schools, while others feel forced to compromise their professional principles to keep the peace, to pacify administrators, to avoid parental and community wrath, and apparently (unfortunately) in some cases to keep their jobs.

Most media specialists face some pressures to restrict access to information in schools. Some media specialists are able to resist these pressures and foster an atmosphere of intellectual freedom in the media center and in the school. Others, contrary to their professional beliefs, restrict access through regulations, closed collections, and self-censorship. This discussion focuses on the variety of ways, consciously or unconsciously, that school library media specialists violate their professional ethics and provides some guidance to those who, while compromising, feel some measure of guilt for their actions, and would prefer to promote free and open access to information.

The courts have told us that students and teachers do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate (Tinker 1969), and that the school library media center is the marketplace of ideas where students "explore the unknown, and

discover areas of interest and thought not covered by the prescribed curriculum" (Right to Read Defense Committee 1978). While children are a captive audience in the classroom, children are not captive in the media centers. There, children have unrestricted, voluntary access to information. There, children may select from a variety of points of view and a diversity of ideas. However, in some media centers ideas are restricted, diversity does not exist, and unpopular points of view are not available.

Educators, including school library media specialists, suffer from a doctrine called *in loco parentis*. While the application of the doctrine in the classroom in terms of health and safety makes sense, the application of the doctrine in the school library media center in terms of access to ideas does not. *In loco parentis* has been used to limit resources, to restrict the curriculum, and to impose personal beliefs and values on the educational process. The problem is defining what acting as a parent means when the actions relate to providing information, unlike the clarity which seems to exist when the actions relate to health and safety. One assumes, rightly, that parents want their children to be safe from physical harm in school. But, may one assume just as confidently that parents want their children protected from ideas or indoctrinated with an orthodox point of view? Should media specialists assume that parents want their children to have access only to what the media specialists, the teachers, and the administrators have prescribed as reflecting the values of the community? Do the teachers, administrators, and media specialists know what community values are? Or do the teachers, administrators, and media specialists who use community values or *in loco parentis* as a rationale for restricting information know what their personal values are and assume they are the values of the community? The principles of intellectual freedom adopted by the profession of librarianship exist to protect the freedom to read and the rights of the minority to locate the strange idea, to hear the unpopular point of view. Is this in conflict with *in loco parentis*?

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Background and Observations

Rare is the school library media specialist who did not in professional preparation read and discuss the Library Bill of Rights and learn that it applies to all types of libraries. Equally rare is the school library media specialist who was not taught that political views, religious beliefs, and personal values have no place in the selection process. Also rare is the school or district selection policy which does not make reference to the Library Bill of Rights and the First Amendment as the basis for collection development and access to information. Yet, professional practices illustrate that the concepts of the Library Bill of Rights are violated with restricted shelves, with selection decisions made on the reputation of the author, and with regulations limiting access to collections by age group.

Conversations with school library media specialists are sprinkled with arguments of why their professional beliefs, stated in the Library Bill of Rights, are not applicable in the speakers' schools. Cited are the administrators who advise the school library media specialist to keep the community in mind when selecting books. (Why does the media specialist always conclude that this means avoiding purchasing certain items?) Cited are the teachers who advise that the prudent course of action is not to cause trouble in the school. (Why do educators conclude that defense of freedom to read will cause trouble?) Media specialists tell of coloring over or removing pages or illustrations because the parents might be displeased with the content. Media specialists also admit that certain subjects are avoided and certain authors or titles are not purchased. Two assumptions form these arguments: the first, an assumption that the media specialist knows what is best for all children and next, fear, based on an assumption of repercussions from administrators, teachers, and community. These assumptions reflect little understanding of the concepts of intellectual freedom and almost total avoidance of the professional responsibility to resist efforts to censor. There is rarely evidence from conversations that school library media specialists see that informing and teaching others the meaning and importance of intellectual freedom is part of their professional ethic.

Downs (1984) wondered whether there was something in the personality or psychological makeup of librarians which caused them to violate the principles of their profession. Farley (1964) and Fiske (1959) told us that librarians do censor while expounding the principles of intellectual freedom. Fiske found that librarians who work for

restrictive administrators tend to be restrictive in selecting resources. O'Neil (1981) and Woods and Salvatore (1981) pointed out that protections for employment do not appear to exist for librarians who defend intellectual freedom principles. For whatever reason, there is evidence that the ethics of the profession are not followed by all librarians who work in schools. What is not evident, however, is the degree of discomfort these librarians feel, if they do.

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Violations of Professional Beliefs

Identifying typical violations provides a good place to begin. The quiz at the end of this article was adapted for school library media specialists from one developed by the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association in 1982. The list includes some of the violations common in school library media centers. Some are obvious, such as not purchasing the Judy Blume books; while others are more subtle, such as skipping over words when reading to children. Sometimes, because of the climate in the school, media specialists avoid issues considered extreme or controversial. An administrator tells a media specialist to remove a book or periodical, and the librarian does it. Or, media specialists quietly secrete books to restricted shelves at the first hint of controversy. Some of these violations are based simply on assumptions of the wishes of superiors and the community. Limiting interlibrary loan to teachers might have its roots in limited funding for the school library media center; but that reasoning might also disguise the real motive, that a teacher will then make a judgment about the appropriateness of the item for the student. Still other violations, such as not purchasing the sex education book because the perspective was personally repugnant to the media specialist, are caused by the imposition of personal values and beliefs on the collection.

Further examination shows that these violations and others like them fall into four categories: the imposition of personal values and beliefs on the selection process, the wish to protect children, pressures or directives from superiors and colleagues, and, a perception of the wishes of the parents and an assumption of community values, largely myth. The violations result in res-

stricted shelves or collections, self-censorship at the point of purchase or later in expurgation, regulations which restrict access to information, and not following school selection policy and review procedures. Whatever the action and whatever the reason, in addition to violating the principles of the profession, the result is limited access to information and ideas for the users of the media center.

The exact intellectual freedom violations in this simplistic quiz will be obvious to most school library media specialists. For them, picking up an *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (1983) and rereading the Library Bill of Rights and all of the Interpretations may serve as a reminder. Other media specialists, however, might be surprised that practices performed over the years, in reality, serve to limit access to information. For those librarians, a more careful reading of the Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations might help to clarify the intellectual freedom principle being violated. School library media specialists who find themselves responding "yes, but ..." may need to reevaluate their commitment to intellectual freedom and analyze the personal motivations underlying their actions.

Fortunately, many school library media specialists do not need a quiz to remind them of violations of intellectual freedom. They seem to have an innate sense of the freedom and right to read. These individuals are likely to be working in an intellectually free school library media center and, no doubt, have played a large part in orienting those around them to an understanding of the importance of fostering this environment. Others appear to need experience before the concepts of intellectual freedom make sense. Freedom to read concepts become clear when the media specialist begins to search for an additional point of view and becomes aware of applying educational criteria to the selection of resources, rather than applying personal opinion. Still other school library media specialists do not begin to understand intellectual freedom until a crisis forces them to reexamine their professional beliefs.

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However, the crisis which strengthens them will cause other media specialists to pull back in fear

and further compromise intellectual freedom principles. What happens as a result of a crisis probably relates to the degree of risk the media specialist experienced, how the crisis was viewed by others in the school, and the degree of support the media specialist felt. And, unfortunately, some media specialists never seem to understand the concepts of intellectual freedom. It is to be hoped that this group is a small minority.

Basic principles which guide the profession of librarianship have their roots in the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution. Access to information finds its expression in the First Amendment. The selection policies adopted by school boards are based in due process and the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. Applications of these basic rights are described in the Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights. The Interpretations, adopted as needs arise, explain, provide detail, and guide library practice. For example, three of the latest were developed directly in response to needs of the profession. One, the Circulation of Motion Pictures and Video Productions (1984) answers librarians' questions about using the motion picture rating code in libraries. The second, Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program (1986) was developed as a result of a need to interpret the Library Bill of Rights in school library media centers. Evolving concepts of individual rights and rights to privacy resulted in the confidentiality statement.

Solutions

Putting aside the idea that censorship might have its roots in demographic characteristics of librarians or in their developmental levels (speculations about which the profession has no real evidence), we must believe that persons who work in libraries, who have selected librarianship as a profession, want to practice the ethics of that profession. Two areas of responsibility are identified. Individual librarians have a professional responsibility to be informed, to act as intellectual freedom advocates, to foster an intellectual freedom climate in the school, to resist efforts of others to censor library resources, to be responsible for practices in their own media centers, and to serve as part of a support network for all other librarians. The other responsibility rests with the profession: to interpret the Library Bill of Rights, to develop statements to guide the actions of librarians, to disseminate these statements widely, to participate in the vast responsibility of educating others, and to help to organize the support system.

Ignoring personal beliefs and values as causes for self-censorship, suppose the media specialist wants to adhere to professional principles but outside pressures force the media specialist to violate them. Contrary to popular belief, librarians who work in hostile environments need not accept those conditions. Rather, they should "challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility ..." and "cooperate with all persons and all groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas" (Articles 3 and 4. Library Bill of Rights 1980) and "foster a climate of intellectual freedom in the school" (Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program 1986).

School library media specialists begin the task of creating an intellectual freedom climate in the school by modeling intellectual freedom behavior and by creating situations to help others understand intellectual freedom concepts. Obviously, intellectual freedom concepts will be learned through the process of developing policies and during the yearly review of selection policies. Beyond that, and expanding on that base, school library media specialists might organize and lead a long term staff development program dealing with this issue. Discussions of the meaning of intellectual freedom might begin with the Library Bill of Rights, and continue with documents from other professional organizations: National Council of Teachers of English, National Council for the Social Studies, International Reading Association, Parent Teachers Association, American Association of University Women, and national teacher organizations. State intellectual freedom documents provide another resource for these sessions, as do films and video tapes about the issue.

Beyond helping to raise awareness of the issues, school library media specialists must assume the professional role of intellectual freedom advocate for all who work in schools. Teachers also benefit from an intellectual freedom atmosphere. Collectively, teachers and media personnel must work together to support intellectual freedom in the school and to support one another. Perhaps the leadership of teacher organizations might focus on contract language which promotes intellectual freedom as a condition of employment and negotiate the support for teachers and media professionals that a selection policy provides.

School library media specialists teach intellectual freedom concepts to students by modeling behavior. Perhaps there is a parallel between the atmosphere in a school library media center and

what we are now learning about abusive behavior. Children who grow up in an atmosphere of caring and loving, grow up to be caring and loving individuals. Children who grow up abused, grow up to be abusers. So, children who attend school in an atmosphere of restriction and orthodoxy might become the censors and pressure groups of tomorrow (hopefully, they will not become librarians), and children who grow up with the opportunity to choose freely from ideas and allow others the same right will be intellectual freedom advocates. Some might even become school board members and librarians, thus firmly establishing an environment in which media specialists are able to practice their profession without fear and intimidation.

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Lest the reader conclude that readings, discussions, and contract language provide a simplistic solution to the problem of self-censorship in schools, be reminded that raising awareness is the first step in the process of adopting a value, in this case the professional value of intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom requires persons willing to act on their values. Awareness can lead to actions, especially in a supportive environment. Creating that environment is the first step toward eliminating timid and fearful censoring media specialists.

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Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Do School Practices Reflect Association Policy? Intellectual Freedom Practices Quiz

Have you ever:

- Yes No 1. Not purchased a popular title such as *Forever* or *Blubber* because it might be unpopular with parents?
- Yes No 2. Checked magazines or other materials for potentially controversial content and then restricted access to the item or removed the entire item from the collection?
- Yes No 3. Not purchased an item because a review or publisher's catalog indicates the book is "for mature readers," has explicit language or illustrations, or might be controversial?
- Yes No 4. Not purchased sex books from a conservative religious point of view because a staff member found them personally repugnant?
- Yes No 5. Skipped over words while reading to students?
- Yes No 6. Reviewed potentially controversial materials and decided not to purchase because of poor characterization, poorly developed plot, or other violations of the "Law of Literary Merit," even though other non-controversial materials in the collection also violate the "Law of Literary Merit"?
- Yes No 7. Established restricted shelves of materials which might offend parents or administrators?
- Yes No 8. Used MPAA rating codes on videocassettes to determine circulation policies?
- Yes No 9. Restricted interlibrary loan services to teachers?
- Yes No 10. Established separate collections for specific age groups in a 7-12 media center or K-12 media center?
- Yes No 11. Not purchased materials concerning minorities because of people saying "We don't need that book because no one in our community is gay" (or Jewish, Black or of Hispanic origin)?

- Yes No 12. Not purchased publications representing diverse points of view because some might consider the viewpoint "extreme"?
- Yes No 13. Colored in pictures or removed pages from books?
- Yes No 14. Used a circulation system which allows anyone to identify who has checked out an item?
- Yes No 15. Removed a book when requested to do so by an administrator even though your policy says a hearing must be held before a book is removed?

Answers to the Intellectual Freedom Practices Quiz

If you answered YES to any of the questions, your library practices violate the *Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations*.

1. *Library Bill of Rights. Article 2.* Free Access to Libraries for Minors.
2. *Article 5.* Restricted Access to Library Materials. Free Access ...
3. *Articles 1, 2, and 5.* Free access ... Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program.



Full-color, 9 x 22", *Change Your Mind* streamers by Nancy Tafuri (cat and parrot) for the 1987 National Children's Book Week sponsored by the Children's Book Council. For an illustrated Book Week brochure that includes prices and ordering information, send a 22¢-stamped, self-addressed, #10 envelope to CBC, 67 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. Attn: Book Week Brochure.

4. *Article 2.* Diversity in Collection Development.
5. *Article 2.* Expurgation of Library Materials.
6. *Article 3.* Free Access ... Access to Resources ...
7. *Article 5.* Restricted ... Free Access ... Access to Resources ...
8. *Article 3.* Circulation of Motion Pictures and Video Productions.
9. *Article 3.* Restricted Access ... Access to Resources ...
10. *Articles 2 and 5.* Labeling. Access to Resources ...
11. *Article 2.* Diversity in Collection Development. Free Access ...
12. *Articles 1, 2, and 5.* Diversity ... Access to Resources ...
13. *Article 2.* Expurgation of library resources.
14. *Article 5.* Confidentiality of Library Records.
15. *Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.* Administrative Policies and Procedures. Evaluating Library Collections. Challenged Materials. Access to Resources ...

The Library Bill of Rights and its Interpretations:
 Free Access to Libraries for Minors
 Administrative Policies and Procedures Affecting
 Access to Library Resources and Services
 Statement on Labeling
 Expurgation of Library Materials
 Diversity in Collection Development
 Evaluating Library Collections
 Challenged Materials
 Restricted Access to Library Materials
 Policy on Confidentiality of Library Records
 Circulation of Motion Pictures and Video Productions
 Access to Resources and Services in the School
 Library Media Program

Intellectual Freedom Manual and recent Interpretations are available from:
 Office for Intellectual Freedom
 American Library Association
 50 East Huron Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60611
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 (1982), by Fran McDonald for *Focus '86* AASL
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Confidentiality of Library Records in School Library Media Centers: An Explanation of Confidentiality of Library Records Statutes and American Library Association Policy

The members of the American Library Association,* recognizing the right to privacy of library users, believe that records held in libraries which connect names of individuals with specific resources, programs, or services are confidential and not to be used for purposes other than routine record keeping. Records are collected when needed and destroyed when no longer needed for routine purposes such as: to maintain access to resources, to assure that resources are available to users who need them, to arrange facilities for the comfort and safety of patrons, or to provide resources for patrons to accomplish the purposes of the program or service. The library community recognizes that children and youth have the same rights to privacy as adults.

School library media specialists using record keeping systems which reveal the names of users would be in violation of the confidentiality of library records statutes adopted in many states. School library media specialists are advised to seek the advice of counsel if in doubt about whether their record keeping systems violate statutes in their states. Efforts must be made within the reasonable constraints of budgets and school management procedures to eliminate such record keeping systems and records as soon as possible.

With or without specific legislation, school library media specialists should respect the rights of children and youth by adhering to the tenets expressed in the Confidentiality of Library Records Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA Code of Ethics.

January 25, 1987
 *ALA Policy 52.5, 54.15

Access To Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program

An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The school library/media program plays a unique role in promoting intellectual freedom. It serves as a point of voluntary access to information and ideas and as a learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem solving skills needed in a pluralistic society. Although the educational level and program of the school necessarily shape the resources and services of a school library/media program, the principles of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS apply equally to all libraries, including school library/media programs.

School library/media professionals assume a leadership role in promoting the principles of intellectual freedom within the school by providing resources and services that create and sustain an atmosphere of free inquiry. School library/media professionals work closely with teachers to integrate instructional activities in classroom units designed to equip students to locate, evaluate, and use a broad range of ideas effectively. Through resources, programming, and educational processes, students and teachers experience the free and robust debate characteristic of a democratic society.

School library/media professionals cooperate with other individuals in building collections of resources appropriate to the developmental and maturity levels of students. These collections provide resources which support the curriculum and are consistent with the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the school district. Resources in school library/media collections represent diverse points of view and current as well as historic issues.

Members of the school community involved in the collection development process employ educational criteria to select resources unfettered by their personal, political, social, or religious views. Students and educators served by the school library/media program have access to resources and services free of constraints resulting from personal, partisan, or doctrinal-disapproval. School library/media professionals resist efforts by individuals to define what is appropriate for all students or teachers to read, view, or hear.

Major barriers between students and resources include: imposing age or grade level restrictions on the use of resources, limiting the use of interlibrary loan and access to electronic information, charging fees for information in specific formats, requiring permissions from parents or teachers, establishing restricted shelves or closed collections, and labeling. Policies, procedures and rules related to the use of resources and services support free and open access to information.

The school board adopts policies that guarantee student access to a broad range of ideas. These include policies on collection development and procedures for the review of resources about which concerns have been raised. Such policies, developed by persons in the school community, provide for a timely and fair hearing and assure that procedures are applied equitably to all expressions of concern. School library/media professionals implement district policies and procedures in the school.

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