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School librarians as stakeholders in the children and media community: a dialogue

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ABSTRACT

To examine how teacher-librarians perceive the work of researchers in children and media and the relationship between JOCAM's core audience and school librarianship, Renee Hobbs and Joyce Valenza share their thoughts about the future of research and practice in the field of children and media in the form of a dialogue. After discussing librarians' perceptions of the children and media research community, we explore the relationship between research, policy, and advocacy; the ever-expanding media resources for children and youth; and the gaps between research and practice. The dialogue is intended to inspire JOCAM readers to imagine the next decade with a deeper awareness of the possibilities and benefits that could accrue by connecting researchers to vital stakeholders within the school library community.

People who care about children and media take many career paths. A small number of people become media professionals, working in publishing, music, television, videogaming or film to inform, entertain and inspire children and young people. A larger number of individuals choose to enter the fields of elementary and secondary education, where they can spend time interacting with kids to help them develop the cognitive, social and emotional competencies they need to thrive in a media-saturated society. Other people enter the field of librarianship, where they specialize in connecting kids with media in school and public libraries. Others become researchers in children and media, exploring the influence of media and technology on the lives of children and teens. In the pages that follow, Renee Hobbs and Joyce Valenza examine how teacher-librarians perceive the work of researchers who specialize in children and media. Researchers and teacher-librarians both examine the messages and meanings of media produced for young audiences and appreciate the political and economic contexts in which children's media is produced. Perhaps JOCAM readers will be inspired to imagine the possible benefits that could accrue by deepening the connections between academic researchers and the school library community.

1. How people discover the research community in children and media

Renee Hobbs: When you hear the phrase, "research on children and media," what springs to mind?

Joyce Valenza: I think about the rich learning involved when children and teens deconstruct media messages and then construct and create original media. I also think about the influence of media on children's habits and lifestyles, as well as issues relating to corporate influence and privacy. Work related to transmedia storytelling and participatory culture come to mind. I think of the work of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), the Digital Media and Learning (DML) Hub–particularly the work of Howard Gardner, Mimi Ito, Henry Jenkins, James Paul Gee, danah boyd, and Cathy Davidson. I also admire the early literacy and technology work of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center.

Renee Hobbs: Can you share your understanding of how your practitioner colleagues—school librarians—understand the work of researchers in the area of children and media?

Joyce Valenza: I asked several school library colleagues to brainstorm that a bit. They came up with the following topics: children and their screen-time habits on computers, tablets, smartphones, Internet, and television; how media help children learn; children's consumption and creation of media on a variety of platforms for both school and personal use; our consumer culture and the impact of commercials; gender representations; video games; cyberbullying; habits, preferences and consequences related to children's interaction with media; the role of parents and caregivers; and the consumption and creation of media on a variety of platforms.

Renee Hobbs: So teacher-librarians appreciate that children and media researchers examine the behavior and attitudes of children as they use a variety of forms of entertainment and informational media and technology both in and out of school. How do school librarians learn about research on children and media?

Joyce Valenza: Librarians browse widely, as you can imagine. Several I know use Frank Baker's books and his website. We rely on the resources and reviews presented by advocacy organizations like Common Sense Media and Susan Linn at the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. When I asked about this, several colleagues made reference to the columns in the *Huffington Post* that feature experts on children and media. One referenced Michael Rich, of Boston Children's Hospital, "the mediatrician," who offers advice to parents on issues of parenting in a media age. When a media literacy issue or an example of children and media research finds its way to a TED talk, it's far more likely to be discovered.

Renee Hobbs: So it seems like many school librarians gain access to research on children and media through people who are able to advocate for a cause, using research evidence to attract attention and address the needs of non-specialists.

Joyce Valenza: Indeed. Librarians' perception of the discourse community of children and media researchers is influenced by the work of bloggers, columnists and other such intermediaries.

Renee Hobbs: This makes me wonder if the voices of advocates and mommy bloggers on issues related to children and media have become more visible than the voices of academic scholars. Is this a good thing or not, do you think?

Joyce Valenza: I am not sure. As non-specialists, librarians appreciate the value of people who can contextualize scholarly work and connect it to real-world experience. Frankly, it's also about access and discovery. Popular exposure may lead us to seek the research. But, generally scholarly research in this arena is not on our K-12 radar screens unless we get a request to search for it.

Renee Hobbs: The research of children and media scholars is inaccessible to many practitioners because of the limited accessibility of the journals. JOCAM is available by subscription to researchers and through university libraries; for K-12 practitioners, it's largely inaccessible.

Joyce Valenza: That's true. When I conduct a simple search through the university library, JOCAM results show. But if I search more specifically in say ERIC or Library Literature or EBSCO's Academic Search Premier, JOCAM content does not appear at all. Many people who are inexperienced in the finer points of online library databases will not be likely to find JOCAM articles.

Renee Hobbs: Many of us scholars are not aware of our privilege if we work in university libraries where scholarly journals are readily available. It's an important fact: Many of our practitioner colleagues in both industry and education lack access to the knowledge we produce. This issue has significant implications for global scholarship in children and media and it is something that JOCAM editors should examine and address in the decade to come.

2. Shared values: literacy, inquiry, and service to community

Renee Hobbs: What do you think that children and media researchers need to know about the practice of school librarianship?

Joyce Valenza: You were my very first media literacy friend and that's the reason I know we have lots in common and share very similar goals. We are all about literacies. And those literacies come in an array of glorious flavors. Should we call it information literacy, we are talking about what we see as a far bigger umbrella, one that absolutely embraces the development of the same capacities and dispositions media literacy scholars and experts embrace. The Standards for the 21st Century Learner (American Association of School Librarians, 2007), now targeted for revision, mentions the phrase *information literacy* only once, emphasizing:

the definition of information literacy has become more complex as resources and technologies have changed. Information literacy has progressed from the simple definition of using reference resources to find information. Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, textual, and technological, have now joined information literacy as crucial skills for this century.

The document discusses how learners use skills resources and tools to inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge; draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge; share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society; and pursue personal and esthetic growth. (American Association of School Librarians, 2007, p. 3)

Renee Hobbs: This same broad idea is described as media literacy by some.

Joyce Valenza: Librarians also use concepts including transliteracy and metaliteracy. The new Association of College Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education is organized around six conceptual frames central to its definition of information literacy (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). All of these ideas resonate clearly with all the core concepts of media literacy as provided by the National Association of Media Literacy Education (2007).

Renee Hobbs: These concepts—and the overlaps between them—are fascinating. We created a table to compare and contrast the conceptual frames used by two organizations associated with information literacy and media literacy. Notice on Table 1 as the media literacy concept acknowledges all media messages are constructed, we see that the information literacy concept acknowledges that *authority* is constructed and contextual. That is a key insight that has important implications for the fields of both education and media studies.

Table 1. Conceptual frames of information and media literacy.

Information literacy (Source: Association of College and Research Libraries (2015))	Media literacy (Source: National Association for Media Literacy Education (2007))
1. Authority is constructed and contextual	1. All media messages are constructed
2. Information creation is a process	2. Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique language of construction
3. Information has value	3. Media messages are produced for particular purposes
4. Research is an inquiry process	4. All media messages contain embedded values and points of view
5. Scholarship is a conversation	5. People use their individual skills, beliefs and experience to construct meaning from media messages
6. Searching is a form of strategic exploration	6. Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, and the democratic process

Joyce Valenza: That's right. We are all about access, analysis, evaluation of credibility and creation and sharing of new knowledge. My colleagues and I see video and photographs and songs and commercials and web content and data as *text*.

Renee Hobbs: So then, is this just a matter of differences in terminology? You know, you say texts and we say media?

Joyce Valenza: Perhaps. In school libraries we regularly analyze political cartoons and campaign ads and clips from television shows. We encourage the deconstruction and construction of media messages. We analyze and we create digital stories and infographics as part of the inquiry process. When we read and create picture books with children we encourage visual literacy. In our libraries, we now see the prevalence of makerspaces, production centers, studios, and learning commons models, emphasizing the importance of participatory culture engaging multiple literacies. I am a fan of Debbie Abilock's Show Me! Modules. These are easy-to-use lessons that help students recognize how to interpret and analyze the many different types of texts available in a library and online.

Renee Hobbs: One of the things I learned, as I began to spend more time with researchers, is that they do not always know what's available in the education and library marketplace. Out of ignorance, we may accidentally reinvent the wheel. We could benefit from school librarians to help us put into practice many of the ideas and theories that we are testing. I wonder: Can school librarians help connect the home and the classroom more effectively? What are your thoughts on this?

Joyce Valenza: Perhaps, but there may be some reasons why connecting home and school is challenging for us. We don't focus so much as you do on the products of entertainment culture. We seek opportunities to communicate with parents and we'd love for such transfer to happen. We support students' academic development and encourage exploration of personal interests and passions. We help learners develop questions, find, evaluate, analyze, synthesize and synthesized ideas and knowledge with media. We want them to be able to choose and leverage the best tools and media to organize their thinking. We want them to be able to tell a powerful and ethically remixed story. And we want them to reflect on the effectiveness of their work. Like you, we emphasize that creation, publishing and sharing is the product of inquiry and knowledge building.

3. Connecting research and practice to policy and advocacy

Joyce Valenza: Let's talk about advocacy. I have always wondered: What happens after publication? Do children and media researchers move beyond research, teaching and writing and take on positions of advocacy? Is that part of the expected role for your community?

Renee Hobbs: Children and media researchers are also deeply interested in the practice of community and civic engagement and many find ways to address policy issues related to children's media and technology environments. It seems like some researchers in this area are active in the world of policy and advocacy—but not all, of course. It's not easy work. I think of Rebecca Hains, who researches girl culture and goes head-to-head on FOX News explaining how parents guide children through the pink tiaras of what she calls the "princess industrial complex."

Joyce Valenza: That kind of advocacy and outreach really helps increase public awareness. How are children and media researchers addressing the issue of protecting the use of online data collected from children?

Renee Hobbs: It's a hot topic right now. danah boyd and Monica Bulger are active in helping the public understand the need to update the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a 1974 law which restricts what schools can do and cannot do with data. While many parents may care about what commercial companies might do with data collected about students in school, danah wonders who will protect economically disadvantaged youth—those low-status kids whose lives are already under constant surveillance.

Joyce Valenza: That's important work. I know you have also been active in the policy arena to advocate for expanding fair use around the issue of copyright and digital media. What are you up to these days?

Renee Hobbs: In 2015, I've been helping persuade the U.S. Library of Congress to enable teachers and learners to legally "rip" copy-protected DVDs and streaming media for educational use. When the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (1998) criminalized the practice of making video clip compilations, I knew this was a policy issue that was highly relevant to media educators and it required action. I have been able to secure an exemption that enables K-12 teachers to legally "rip" videos. But now I seek to expand that exemption for students themselves—and for others working in informal learning environments like libraries, museums and cultural institutions.

Joyce Valenza: The practice of advocacy, research, service and education are interconnected, aren't they? School librarians also aim to tie inquiry to real-world issues. We believe that successful inquiry helps students discover their voice, builds agency and encourages them to make a difference in the world in and beyond school. We understand that student interaction with media promotes civic engagement, that their products allow learners to participate in worlds beyond our schools, and that student voices have the potential for global impact.

Renee Hobbs: We both want children and young people to develop an understanding of how best to critically analyze messages. We want kids to create and collaborate to produce media and use their voices to contribute to social/intellectual networks. These are core issues that I would consider to be fundamental media literacy competencies.

Joyce Valenza: We want children and young people to appreciate intellectual freedom and we want them to actively manage and grow their academic digital footprints.

Renee Hobbs: I think that a very large proportion of children and media researchers are motivated by their interest in making a difference in the lives of children and teens and in improving the overall quality of the television, movies, music, websites, videogames and apps that get created for them. Policy work is one of many avenues toward this goal.

Joyce Valenza: Whose work in this field most inspires you?

Renee Hobbs: I think of the work of Sonia Livingstone, whose work has directly addressed policy issues and helped educators, parents and researchers speak to policymakers. Livingstone knows that people need to better understand the extent to which information and communication technology (ICT) enables children to have greater access to information and education. We need to know more about how the use of media and technology by children compounds existing vulnerabilities and introduces new risks or harms to children's well-being. Sonia's work

has made important contributions to knowledge that helps policy makers decide which initiatives, policies and practices are effective in maximizing the benefits and minimizing harms.

Joyce Valenza: I'm glad to hear that children and media researchers are engaged political actors on topics related to children, media and youth. Of course, school librarians are deeply concerned about the physical and emotional safety of children.

Renee Hobbs: What forms of political advocacy issues are important to the school library community?

Joyce Valenza: We value equity and we are about access, not just on a physical, but also on an intellectual level. In schools, we are usually the first to wave the banner for intellectual freedom, for a more open internet, for unbanning websites, for incorporating use of new tools for content creation. We are behind Banned Books Week and Banned Websites Awareness Week. Recently, school librarians played an active role in the #weneeddiversebooks campaign, which is a grassroots organization created to address the lack of diverse, non-majority narratives in children's literature. This group is committed to the ideal that embracing diversity will lead to acceptance, empathy, and ultimately equality.

4. Ever-expanding media resources for children and youth

Renee Hobbs: One of the things that I have always appreciated about school librarians is how much knowledge they have about the resources available for children and teens. Speaking personally, I will admit that researchers in children and media are sometimes not so up-to-date on the latest products and services for children and teens. It's the nature of our work. A children and media researcher may spend two years studying a TV show like "iCarly," looking at the representation of gender or adult-teen interaction only to have it go off the air and be replaced by another show.

Joyce Valenza: Producing research on the cutting edge is certainly a challenge in a world where media texts and technology tools are a continually moving target. The field especially needs more research on the children's use of the newest forms of social media—this can guide our work in supporting the needs of students, teachers and librarians. But research takes time.

Renee Hobbs: I'm especially interested in the meta-competencies involved as children learn to make good choices when it comes to media content and digital tools. That's the media literacy skill we usually call "access." How do school librarians teach this skill to children and teens? And how do you yourself learn to match the best media text or technology tool to the needs of the learner and the learning context?

Joyce Valenza: Back in library school, many of us took collection development courses and studied literature and services for children and young adults. But, it would be impossible to be able to make decisions about selection of tools and materials without continual retooling. We use the traditional sources to keep up—review journals for books and publishers catalogs—but today's collections are not just what we buy; they are about what we curate, point to and make available 24/7. User-generated content has become important.

Renee Hobbs: What strategies work best for you?

Joyce Valenza: New media ecologies require new scouting strategies. We read book bloggers, look at book trailers, and seek professional reviews online. Relying on new tools like Common Sense Media's Graphite and edshelf, as well as each other's blogs, we discover, select and manage (and smash) apps for students, classes and grades. Librarians are the go-to people in our school districts for making decisions on how to select new content and tools and make them easily available. We maintain curated digital dashboards that offer children easy access

to resources and facilitate and model workflow for new media landscapes. We hope children will curate around their niche interests, build their own dashboards or personal learning environments to manage their information lives and their workflow. We network and we model networking. We ruthlessly share discoveries with each other on tools like Pinterest, Twitter, and Scoop.it.

5. Minding the gaps

Joyce Valenza: What are some of the gaps between the world of children and media and the world of school librarians?

Renee Hobbs: In the world of children and media researchers, the relationship between protection and empowerment is a key theoretical construct, as we consider the affordances and the limitations of children's media and technology use. We also are obsessed with the question of whether audiences are active or passive in the way they use and interpret media messages. Of course, we spend a lot of energy looking at socialization practices as peers and parents shape the development of children's uses of media and technology. And some people in our field even think about education as a kind of "intervention" that can mitigate negative media influence for children and youth. Others however, conceptualize education more broadly than this. Theories like these shape the way we think about our work's past, present and future. Joyce, what is the relationship between theory and practice in school librarianship? I sense that your own work does not focus on testing theories as much as solving the puzzles and problems you find in working with your own students in the field.

Joyce Valenza: As a recent migrant to the world of academia, I see a disconnection between theory and practice that limits our field. The scholarly and professional journals and the indexes of our fields do not yet cross-pollinate. While a number of the well-known scholars make an impact, largely because of their presence on social media, other critical and often very creative and relevant work goes undiscovered.

Renee Hobbs: So true. I think that we're both trying, at our respective institutions, to produce a generation of new young librarians, educators, scholars and practitioners who explore connections among researchers and practitioners and between these different fields. From what I can tell, the community of library media specialists is considerably *more plugged in to social media* than the children and media researchers are—many of whom are just barely findable online.

Joyce Valenza: I wonder if this reflects the children and media community's deep ambivalence about technology and consumer culture.

Renee Hobbs: That's probably right. It also probably reflects the general tendency of children and media researchers to be suspicious of the commercial values of media industries that create products and services for children, youth and families. We see how entertainment content is designed around marketing imperatives. Promotional hype from media giants like Disney and Viacom make it difficult for independent children's film and media makers to find an audience. In the United States, the history of the field is littered with examples of how well-meaning legislative action (on issues like advertising and violence) has been co-opted by the media industry to render it toothless. And since children are not naturally critical thinkers when it comes to advertising, media violence, and depictions of gender, racial and ethnic stereotypes, many media researchers who address the needs of children and youth tend to see children as vulnerable to media influence. When I see the ads for mobile phones that manipulate parents into feeling their children must have the latest smartphone to be popular at school, it sickens me. Ads for cell phones, in particular, seem to celebrate people's dependence on and addiction to technology.

6. Social media connectedness

Joyce Valenza: I hope in the next ten years to see more children and media researchers making use of the power of social media for connecting and communicating with parents and practitioners.

Renee Hobbs: You make great use of Twitter to share knowledge, Joyce. Twitter is pretty important to my outreach efforts as well, as I use #medialiteracy as the hashtag to share my discoveries, find new research and showcase innovative instructional practices in the field. I also scan the #kidmedia, #digcit #kidmarketing and #kidtv hashtags to connect to the world of practitioners.

Joyce Valenza: Right, so when I scan that #medialiteracy hashtag my eyes open to content I want to investigate and new folks I want to follow. For many of us Twitter is a lifeline.

Renee Hobbs: If children and media researchers simply added the #tlchat or #library or #infolit hashtags to relevant tweets, we could begin to cross the streams. It would be a very simple way for us to build social media bridges between our two worlds.

Joyce Valenza: The same might hold true with subject headings and descriptors attached to scholarly journal articles.

Renee Hobbs: JOCAM's audience could expand dramatically by 2025 if we start thinking of librarians as allies and key partners. Let's also consider how we can leverage social media bridges if the related work we do is to connect meaningfully. Let's tag our blog posts, slides and videos in ways that attract each other's notice.

Joyce Valenza: Sounds like a plan. After all, it all starts by intentionally sharing information and ideas in order to stimulate a dialogue—like this one!

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Joyce Valenza is an internationally recognized leader in library and information studies, on the cutting-edge of digital librarianship in the context of K-12 education. With more than 23,000 Twitter followers, Valenza's outreach to the professional community of educators is expansive. Her Never Ending Search blog for the School Library Journal offers ideas and resources for teacher-librarians. She also trains the next generation of school librarians at Rutgers University School of Communication and Information.

Renee Hobbs is a leading authority on digital and media literacy education. She has offered professional development to K-12 educators on four continents, authored five books and more than 120 scholarly and professional articles, and created award-winning media literacy curriculum resources. She is currently Professor of Communication Studies at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island and Founder, where she directs the Media Education Lab (www.mediaeducationlab.com).

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