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**Janette Derucki:** Hi, welcome back to *Can't Shelve This*, the podcast where we hammer home the importance of school libraries. I'm Janette Derucki, and I'm joined by my co-host, Leah Gregory-

**Leah Gregory:** Hello, everyone.

**Janette:** -and our producer, Ola Gronski.

**Ola Gronski:** Hi, everyone.

**Janette:** I'm so excited to be back with you both, but I wanted to start off this episode by wishing you both a very happy National School Library Month. School librarians deserve more than a month to celebrate all the work that they do.

**Leah:** They definitely do.

**Janette:** We will take what we can get. I hope everyone's having a great month.

**Leah:** I hope that everybody has co-workers and administrators who are celebrating them this month-

**Janette:** Me too.

**Leah:** -because it's hard to celebrate yourself. I hope that everybody out there knows that it's School Librarian Month.

**Janette:** It's okay to just hang up a little sign in your library that says it's School Library Month, right?

**Leah:** Shameless self-promotion.

**Ola:** It's okay to just get yourself a little treat, because you deserve it.

**Janette:** Absolutely.

**Leah:** Absolutely. I am always down for a little treat.

**Janette:** When this episode airs, we will have missed School Librarian Day. That was April 4th. We are now in the midst of National Library Week. Hopefully a lot of libraries across the country have exciting things happening, including school libraries.

**Leah:** I love the energy that National Library Week brings, because everybody-- I think especially this year, a lot of people are reminding everyone they know of all the great things that libraries do. I love National Library Week, because it's sometimes easy to forget.

**Ola:** And reminding people who you don't typically see in the library about libraries, like those non-users, and focusing on those. I was recently at a medical appointment. My doctor, making small talk, is like, oh, what do you do? Then I'm hit with the whole, how do I explain what a library system is to people outside of the library world? Then after that, he's going on and on about how libraries are amazing. My kids are such avid readers. It's so cool.

Then at the end of that conversation, he's like, but libraries are really well-funded though, right? I was like, oh. I think that was just a moment where it hit me, where Janette talks a lot about getting out of this echo chamber. We can preach to librarians all day and night, and they get it. I think reaching those outside people who are supporters in theory, but still need that extra knowledge about what is actually going on. Hopefully for National Library Week, School Library Month, you all reach our non-regular users and help promote what we offer.

**Janette:** It's really hard to advocate for yourself outside of the library space sometimes. This is also a great moment for us because of the challenges that our libraries are facing right now, in particular. Th ere is a lot of discourse about libraries and there's a lot of opportunity to set the record straight about funding and the way that they operate and really to promote and share all the work that we do.

There still are people out there who say, why do you need libraries if you have Google? I was like, please do not put Google in charge of your information retrieval. There is a lot of that mindset out there. We're fighting all of those things every day. National Library Week gives you a great opportunity and an excuse to toot your own horn and talk about libraries and the great things that we do.

**Leah:** I say librarians and people who love libraries and people like us who work for the system, we have to be missionaries in a way and go out and spread the good word because a lot of people have never heard of it. Go forth and spread the library news, folks.

**Janette:** Go forth. Before we get into today's topic, I do have one quick question for you. This just came up recently when I was having a conversation with someone online, actually on Bookstagram. Does it bother either of you when a publisher changes the way a series or cover art looks in the middle of a series? There's people on both sides of this. I'm like, this is something that we need to debate.

**Leah:** I only care if it's a box set and the heights are a little bit different. If I'm buying them one at a time and they've changed the cover because now there's a movie and the later ones have the movie poster--

**Janette:** Don't even get me started on movie art covers. Not a fan.

**Ola:** I feel like there needs to be a rule that if you're in the middle of a series and you release a movie and you want to release a book with the movie cover, that's fine, but you also need to go back and make one that fits with the series artwork that you've already published. You can't do that. It's not fair.

[laughter]

**Janette:** It's not fair. Just full disclosure, it does bother me when the size changes.

**Ola:** Gee, I couldn't tell.

**Janette:** I know, right? Here's me asking this question because I'm like, I need people on my side.

**Leah:** Tell us how you really feel.

**Janette:** Don't worry. I will. Unfortunately for you. I was reading a series and I'm trying to even remember what it was. It was coming out in trade paperback. Then all of a sudden the publisher decided mass market was, it was only going to come out in mass market, which, okay, the older I get, I cannot read a mass market paperback anymore. The print is way too small. I was like, okay, but now the books on my shelf, were going to all not match. I either needed to re-buy everything in mass market, or I had to decide that I was just going to stop purchasing the books in that series.

**Ola:** Which actually, as a marketing person, this is now-- I'm like, this is a marketing ploy. This is how they get you to re-buy all of the things that you already bought to make more money.

[dogs barking]

**Janette:** My dogs are barking. Sorry.

**Ola:** Very strong opinions on this topic.

**Leah:** Yes. They strongly feel that all of the covers should stay the same.

**Janette:** I feel like that's the same thing with all the special editions. I understand marketing to exclusive editions, like Barnes & Noble has their exclusive that has an extra chapter or whatever. We could get into a whole equity discussion around that type of thing. How many special editions do you really need to own or do you want to buy? They do different cover art and different end papers and all the things that are different.

**Ola:** I'm so sorry. You keep making special editions. They start feeling less special.

**Leah:** Exactly. If there's 10 special editions, none of them are really special.

**Janette:** Have you ever collected special editions? Do you have a book you love enough to buy that many times?

**Leah:** Let's say that I love a series. For instance, I loved Mary Poppins. I went and bought a special set of a special edition of that set so that I could put that on my shelf and it looks beautiful.

**Janette:** Alas, my four series of *Bridgerton* behind me.

**Ola:** I will say actually Maggie Stiefvater's *Raven Boys*,-

**Janette:** The *Raven Cycle*?

**Ola:** -the *Raven Cycle* series. Maggie Stiefvater is also an incredible artist. She did come out with-- I don't think it was a box set. I'm trying to think of what I have. I think it was just a new one with a cover of her illustrated artwork in it, and so I got that.

**Leah:** Now, that would be cool. See, that really is special.

**Ola:** She released tarot cards with the artwork from the series, which of course I snagged. I'm more interested in artwork in that way, but not necessarily the movies. It is satisfying when you have a beautiful-- I'm looking at your *Bridgerton* box sets.

**Leah:** Yes, very beautiful.

**Ola:** That is very satisfying.

**Janette:** It is nice when they all match and they look so pretty lined up side by side. I will say, more so than special editions, I will purchase the European covers. I don't know what it is about the American publishers and the artwork that they choose, or maybe it's just the trends in America. They are very different than particularly the UK version of books. They usually have extremely beautiful artwork and it will be way more detailed. I'm more likely to seek out those types of versions and editions, as opposed to buying just a special edition, it would have to be really, really great. Although I guess I fell in this *Bridgerton* hole.

**Leah:** As an aside, my daughter and her boyfriend went to a party over the weekend and they met the person who does music for *Bridgerton*, which I love the music for *Bridgerton*.

**Janette:** Oh, everyone does.

**Ola:** I do too.

**Janette:** Those playlists are so amazing, all the soundtracks.

**Leah:** That was pretty cool. Now I'm realizing, as we talk about this, the reason that I don't have strong feelings about this is that I am almost 100% eBooks nowadays. It doesn't affect me as much.

**Ola:** Janette has talked about how being a reader and being a book collector are different things. I think that's why I have opinions on them, but they're not so strong because I don't buy a lot of books.

**Leah:** I don't buy a lot of books to have on the shelf.

**Ola:** Shockingly, when I go to a bookstore, even if I have a gift card, it's so much pressure to figure out what I want to buy because I don't want to buy something I haven't read yet because I'm like, I'll get it from the library. That's what I do. I really need to love a book to go out and buy it. Usually I'll buy it because I know of someone I want to give it to to read so we can talk about it. I think that's a big part of the discussion is if you actually collect books.

**Janette:** There are very specific series that I like to collect. I am mostly a series reader. A lot of the books I buy are series books. To your point, Ola, if I'm going to share a book, I think about like the recent *Hunger Games* release, the Haymitch's story. I did buy a physical copy of that, one, because I already had all the *Hunger Games* books. Also because I knew that several of my family members were going to read it and I was definitely not going to hand over my Kindle to someone and be like, here you go. I will never get it back. Handing over that book, it's just much easier to share that way.

It's always great catching up with both of you, but I think it's time to dive into this episode's topic. Today, we're tackling something that's really sensitive and heavy, but it's very important, especially in the library world. We're going to talk about equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in school libraries today, or as we like to call it, EDIA. We're talking about it specifically at this moment in time and with all the changes that are being made under the current administration, particularly to education and to libraries. To discuss the many facets of this topic, we've invited two guests to join us. First is a local school librarian who we'll be referring to as A to protect their identity. Welcome, A.

**A:** Hi. Good to be here.

**Janette:** We're also joined by RAILS member engagement specialist, Jessica Silva. Hi, Jessica.

**Jessica Silva:** Hi. So happy to be here.

**Janette:** Thanks for joining us today. Before we get going with really getting into the meat of our discussion, we always to start off each episode with a little bit of a warm up for you. We're going to ask you the very hard-hitting question of which best describes you. Would you consider yourself to be an eBook reader, a physical book reader, or an audiobook reader? A, do you want to go first?

**A:** Sure. I definitely prefer physical books. For some reason, I don't know, it doesn't stick in my brain when I read it as an eBook. Audiobooks, unfortunately, distract me. I can barely listen to podcasts. I try very hard. I try very hard, but I get distracted so easily. I can power through a podcast, but an audio book, it doesn't stick in my brain. I am definitely a physical print person.

**Leah:** I too get distracted easily. I feel you.

**Janette:** How about you, Jessica?

**Jessica:** I would say pan. I like all types of--

**Janette:** Depends on the story?

**Jessica:** Yes, it really depends. I would put eBooks last. I love physical books and I really love audiobooks. I listen a lot while I'm driving to site visits and things like that.

**Janette:** That's nice. I'm definitely team gets distracted during audio books. That's probably the last platform that I use for stories, but it is helpful if I'm on a road trip by myself and things like that. To help our listeners get to know you a little bit better before we begin our conversation, do you mind sharing how both of you got into school libraries?

**A:** I originally started off like many people, in a very different field. I was originally going to be a translator and interpreter. As I was living that life, I was also doing a lot of local queer organizing on the side bilingually, and I was getting really burnt out from translation and interpretation. I loved that community aspect, and so I decided to look into other professions that really had that community work. I'd always loved reading and research, and so I saw librarianship as an option.

I moved back to the U.S. Then I was starting my MLIS, I worked at a public library for a while, I worked at archives for a while. Then I got a job as a school library assistant. I was like, ooh, this is my niche. It was so rewarding to support young people as they were figuring themselves out and helping them grow into curious and critical thinkers. I stayed on and I got my teaching credential and did my student teaching, and then got hired as a school librarian. I've been doing that for the past few years.

**Janette:** Wow. You have such an interesting background. That's amazing. Jessica, how about you?

**Jessica:** My dad would take me to the library all the time. I was a big reader, big library head. I started reading really early, before I even went to school. I was just in the corner a lot reading. Always loved the library. I graduated from college a year early and I thought, what am I going to do? I applied to grad school for library science, because I had written in my diary at 15, oh, I'm going to be a librarian maybe at my high school, which I did end up doing. Which is really cool. Manifestation works.

I was in my MLIS program. I got a school librarian job at the Austin International School. At the time, I didn't realize, in Texas, you have to also be teacher certified and teach for two years. I did that later. Had a great first library job. My first library was in a closet. That was a really unique story that I like to tell. Here I am now.

**Leah:** Jessica, I also got my teaching credential after my MSLIS. You're in good company.

**Janette:** That's a really great way to point out too, that the school librarian licensure is so varied across states. If you're not in Illinois or Texas, you want to make sure that you're looking at your state's licensure requirements to see what is required before you get on that path.

**Leah:** You don't want to be surprised, like I was by that.

**Jessica:** I very much was. When I realized, oh, to work in public schools, I'd have to do more, an alternative certification program. Then I taught kindergarten for two years, so you can't hurt me. Then I was an elementary school librarian. My last five years in the school library was at my alma mater.

**Janette:** I can't imagine what it would be like to work in the school library at my high school.

**A:** I feel like I would be getting flashbacks in like a bad way.

**Janette:** Right? Same. I'm like, do you still have the same furniture? I don't know. Probably not.

**Leah:** Okay, you guys. You know I visit a lot of schools, right? My alma mater, my high school is in our territory. I went to visit my alma mater, which is now a middle school. They've moved it down to a middle school. I went to visit the librarian. She's like, "Are you having flashbacks?" I go, "I have to be 100% honest. I never set foot in this library when I was in high school.”

[laughter]

**Janette:** That's so funny. I'm hoping each of you would be willing to talk a little bit about your connection to equity and diversity work, either your personal experience or professional as a lead into the discussion that we're going to have today. Just wondering, how you got started being more involved and what that experience has been like?

**A:** For me, being an out queer and trans school librarian and educator, that is something for me that is so intertwined. Especially, too, as somebody who really cares for and supports all of my students, I truly believe that you cannot take it apart from school librarianship. I have been involved with a lot of different types of organizing throughout my life, both in school capacities and outside of schools. I think for me, entering into school librarianship, that was something that was already very present and salient to me. I feel like as I've grown as a school librarian, I've just gotten deeper and deeper into that work.

It's something that I am very passionate about because I believe that all students deserve a space at school where they can be celebrated and seen and supported. The library is such a perfect place for that. That's why I really wanted to do this episode and also why I decided to be anonymous for this, because this work is so important, which is why it is currently under attack right now in the political sphere. We see across the US, marginalized teachers, particularly right now, trans educators are being targeted. That is why I chose to be anonymous for this episode for my personal safety, because there's been so many reports of doxxing, and also why I believe it is imperative to speak out and to talk about this.

**Janette:** I completely agree. It's a really difficult time to be someone who doesn't conform to the social constructs that are expected by our society as of late. It sounds like you have a lot of very personal and professional ties to this type of work. It's great that you're willing to be here to tell your story. How about you, Jessica? Do you have anything you'd like to add?

**Jessica:** For me, I grew up on the border of Texas and Mexico. I think that experience, and my dad is white, my mom is Mexican American, I think it lends itself to really understanding really diversity because you're part of a place that's-- they say, *ni de aquí*, *ni de allá*, not from here and not from there. Borders are really liminal, special spaces. I think that's had a lot of impact on my career as a librarian and then serving that community as well when I was back there and working with those students. I also got really involved in my professional organization.

I was the Texas Library Association equity, diversity, and inclusion co-chair. Then I was also the co-chair at Austin Community College as a faculty librarian right when SB 17 got passed in Texas, which meant that no EDI work could be done in higher education, which is crazy because it's college students who are all over 18. Especially in a community college, ACC is also an HSI, so a Hispanic-serving institute. I want to be able to practice critical librarianship. I think that's important for us as librarians and for our students and our patrons to be able to visit a space that is reflective of them and their values and understands them and gives them dignity and respect that they deserve.

**Leah:** I love that, your phrase, not from here and not from there, that's just really evocative to me. I always say when I'm talking about this, my favorite saying is that the librarians make room on the shelf for everyone's story. I feel like that's where you both are coming from, making room on the shelf for everyone's story.

**Janette:** That's one of the questions I wanted to ask, if you don't mind, and you both have spoken about having personal ties to this work. Are you able or willing to share what it's been like for you not seeing yourselves in the library? How that evolution of literature and materials has changed over time, because I think back to when I was growing up, there was definitely not the diversification of collections like we have today, or this awareness or intent towards making sure that we're representing the communities that we serve.

**A:** I think for me, it wasn't until college where I really found literature that described the queer and trans experience. There are plenty of other parts of my identity, especially as a white person that were represented in the literature that I had growing up. Specifically for my gender and sexuality, it really wasn't until college that I found books that described my experience, and they were life-changing. We've seen the Cooperative Center for Children's Book statistics. It's still not great. We still have a long ways to go. Still, there has been so many strides, and I do see so many students now who are finding themselves in literature that simply did not exist when I was growing up.

**Jessica:** I always think about Rudine Sims Bishop's windows, mirrors, and doors. I think only 7% of Latinas hold a graduate degree. The number of those people that are in library spaces is even less. Even in Texas, the leadership in libraries or the representation of the organizations as a whole, predominantly white, predominantly not from the Valley or El Paso, and especially El Paso, because it's a lot further from Central Texas. I would always be like, can we have a meeting in El Paso so that the folks could come to us? Just thinking about representation. I think that's why I decided I wanted to become more involved.

It was nice to be able to show my students like, you can accomplish your goals, you can travel, you can do all this, and you can give back to your community. Because I was hopefully a living example for them of like what you could do. It's really important for students to be able to see the humanity of librarians as well. Libraries are already really gatekept spaces. The more that you can show them that we're human, that we're not hushing everybody, and that we're inclusive, and we welcome them to those spaces, and they're not just-- libraries are not just for one type of person.

**Leah:** There's no requirement for entry to a library.

**Jessica:** Exactly.

**Leah:** So many people believe that there is, or that they can't go in because they're not well educated, or they can't go in because they can't read very well. Nobody should ever feel that they can't go into a library.

**Janette:** One of the things I love about Jessica's answer is that it really drives home how intertwined all of this is, your everyday life, your library experience, the materials, librarianship as a whole. It's very hard to discuss any of this in isolation. It all touches some other aspect or facet of someone's existence. It's very complex.

**A:** This is making me think of that Fobazi Ettarh's concept of vocational awe. Also, the myth of the neutral professional was an article that I read in my MLIS, along with vocational awe. They totally reframed that for me. Libraries for a very long time were segregated spaces. I think that there are people who are really trying to do the work to fulfill the mission of what they purport themselves to be, which is equitable places to access knowledge. I think that there's still a long way to go, and that it is so important because media has such a huge role in our lives.

It shapes who we are. It shapes the possibilities of what we can be and know and do. I take my responsibility very seriously as somebody who can provide that access, and who is in a position to either help or hinder access to knowledge or representation. For me, that's something that I really think a lot about in what am I doing in my space to truly make it a space where students of all different types of identities and intersections of those identities can be welcome.

**Janette:** I think you touched perfectly on one of the main reasons why we're doing this episode and addressing this topic. That's that we want to support school librarians and help them navigate what's happening around this topic right now. It's a difficult time, and we recognize that librarians might be scared to continue championing EDIA in their libraries. You're not really sure what's going on. The other one is just addressing some of the major changes I mentioned before with regard to education and libraries that have been brought about by a flurry of executive orders. I want to mention just a couple of those, just so that we're all on the same page with regard to what we're talking about.

There were two that specifically identified or targeted EDIA in schools. One was the Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, which calls for the Department of Education to find ways to cut funding for programs that support LGBTQ+ issues. It insinuates that there's currently anti-American, subversive, harmful, and false ideologies in the system. The other was the Defending Women from Gender Ideology, Extremism, and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, that's a very long title, sorry about that, which was intended to rescind documents that include guidance around LGBTQ+ issues for education. Those are, like I said, specifically targeting EDIA.

Then there were two also that are intended to reshape schools and libraries, which is the executive order dissolving the Department of Education, which is titled Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities. That divides up the responsibilities of the Department of Education and reassigns them to other government agencies, and then places the primary responsibility for educational standards on each state. The second one is one I know we've all been talking about a lot at RAILS, where I work.

**Leah:** And IHLS.

**Janette:** Yes, which is the reduction of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. That executive order is called Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy. That one was released on March 14. The way that impacts school libraries in Illinois is through its funding for the Illinois State Library. Funding from the IMLS is about 10% of the state library's budget. The Illinois State Library provides grants to schools annually, mostly through the school district library grant program. Those are four executive orders I specifically thought applied to this discussion. I don't know if you all are thinking of anything in addition to that that you would like to mention.

**A:** There is a website launched by the US Department of Education called EndDEI, which is essentially you can put in a school district and just type out whatever you feel is taking place at a school that is related to, in scarequotes, DEI. Essentially a snitch line for people to report schools that they believe are engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion, which when you say it like that, it's just wild.

**Janette:** Crazy.

**A:** Because it is, because that is where we are.

**Janette:** One of the things I'll note about that portal is I went in and looked over it pretty extensively. A lot of the language on there is a bit confusing or misleading to me as a librarian, simply because it points out things that are already against the law, like discrimination based on race and gender. That's already illegal. You would hope that people were reporting school districts that were doing that. That's not something that's new. I guess that also begs the question of what's the difference between the law and an executive order? What's the intent of each?

The goal is an executive order is designed to essentially-- thinking about it if you were a corporation, this would be like a memo from your CEO to the entire organization about how you're going to run your organization. It does not supersede the law, which is going to be really important in the discussion that we're having, because we do have some laws in Illinois that we need to consider in the context of this conversation. I would like to preface this by saying that we recognize there are a lot of sides of this issue, and some have become partisan talking points even, and that we're unlikely to change anyone's mind, but it's important to us to support school librarians as they attempt to navigate this new territory and the way that it intersects with our profession.

**Leah:** I am hearing from school librarians who are just really scared to do their daily job. Like what do I do? Can I do this? Am I going to get in trouble? Am I going to get fired? I find that even the ones who profess to be on the other side of the political spectrum, they support their kids. That's why I find it so hard to believe that this portal even exists, because I think everybody who works in education, a good majority of them, care about the individual kids that they see. They would never do anything to hurt any child, but they don't realize, I guess, that these executive orders and these portals and everything else that's coming down is hurtful, even though they may not think of it that way, but it is very hurtful and very scary, and very sobering, I guess is the word.

**Janette:** I think you'll find even a lot of people in this space who support equity, diversity, and inclusion work are also proponents of educational reform. Most of us would agree that change is not bad. We always embrace change as long as it is with the best of intents, and then it has to be to the benefit of the students. I think that’s where a lot of the questions are coming in here with regards to librarianship.

I would love to hear your feelings on how you think this intersects with the school library space right now, because I think that it's creating a challenge for librarians to make sure that they are serving the needs of all of their students and they are making sure that their identities are represented in the library in a way that is helpful to them and supportive.

**Jessica:** I think sometimes people think, I'm not being exclusive. But are you being inclusive? If you're having conversations about if someone's identity or self even exists, that's violence. That conversation isn't just, I’m not sure if anyone's watched *Adolescence*, but the whole point is all of these things add up to being violence and exclusive. The more that we can as librarians focus on being inclusive, I think for me that meant every single one of my displays included books that were queer or had queer characters. I had a "trans people belong" sticker right on my door in plain view so that it's very obvious.

I got the GLSEN Rainbow Library, which for those school librarians out there, if you just look it up, you can sign up for them to send books to your school, and they send you a whole set of books. All you have to do is say thank you to them for sending them to your school. They're free. Even in my digital spaces as well. Think about that. Think about what your digital space says about your library, as well as your physical space.

For me, that also meant having everything in English and in Spanish. That's a great, easy way that you can be inclusive to people in your library. Those are just a few, obviously actionable steps that you can take. I'd also say we should include justice with the equity, diversity, and inclusion so that giving kids agency to be change makers and thinking about empowering them and giving them agency.

**Janette:** That's a great point.

**A:** To your point earlier, Leah, I feel like in my experience with education, unfortunately, I have not had the same experience because I've had educators that I've either witnessed as a student or as a colleague who have purported themselves to say that they care, but then they go and they discipline their black students more than their white students. They persistently misgender other students. They make negative comments about disability.

I think that it's an ethical imperative for us as people who are charged with protecting young people to be doing that reflection work and to be bringing our colleagues in who maybe are unintentionally or who unfortunately sometimes are intentionally making our institutions more exclusive. Also to be thinking about the ways that exclusivity and injustice are really baked into schools, into our curriculum.

When thinking about navigating all of the executive orders and changes, I'm reminded of the library and its response to the Patriot Act, where people started shredding records so that they could not be used to harm our communities. As school librarians, I've been thinking a lot about, because I've had my catalog weaponized against me before with people making false claims of pornography in the library and being told to search up sex in Destiny and see what comes up. We all know that that's a fraught search, but we've seen Department of Defense school librarians be directed to search their catalogs for gender ideology in scarequotes.

I've been thinking a lot about, in my actual catalog, what is the true benefit of identity-based subject headings right now in this current moment? Is that going to impede access to my students? Is that going to make it easier for titles to get censored? Or is that going to make it easier for students to find and locate those titles? We know the harm of things like stickering LGBTQ books, how that at first glance might seem like it provides access, but in reality, it prevents those books from being checked out. Those are other things that I have been thinking a lot about because we have an ethical imperative to support our students.

Right now, that can look like changing how our policies and procedures that we might've had in place for a long time could ultimately be weaponized against us, be weaponized against our students. In this instance of subject headings, for example, I'm not talking about self-censorship because that is something that I'm strongly against. I'm talking about protecting access to valuable materials because it's life-changing to see a kid-- I've had kids say, I didn't even know gay books existed, and they are 14. I've even had one of my superintendents tell me a book that I recommended to him was the first time he'd ever seen himself represented in a story. He was well into his 40s, and there's such power in that.

I think unfortunately, people recognize the power of access to knowledge. Right now, censorship is drastically on the rise and we're seeing dog whistles of things like, for example, gender ideology is a transphobic dog whistle. It's having exceedingly negative impacts. We have already lost way too many youth, even just in a little way to suicide following these executive orders. I can't tell you even just the countless hours that students have spent crying to me personally about the impacts of this policy. Yeah, how can you hear all of that and not do something.

**Janette:** I recently had someone tell me that the individuals continue to exist whether you acknowledge them or not, and how damaging the lack of acknowledgement could potentially be. I think you're seeing that specifically in what you mentioned with the suicide rates and then the mental health crisis is going to continue to expand and grow in light of all of these things. Belonging is such an essential part of who we are, regardless of who you are. You have your own identity, you have your things that you acknowledge and recognize about yourself that make you belong to specific groups or things that you seek in experiences that you have. I think that's really important.

We can't really make light of the impact that that has on people. Specifically in the library with regard to connecting to materials and resources. I want to touch on something that you said, A, though, about subject headings. This is something that has become a big talking point in library spaces. That is this idea that you would alter your collection records in order to make these items irretrievable or to hide them in a sense from some of these efforts to root out and eliminate those items from collections. There have been a couple of what I keep calling forbidden words lists circulating.

The most recent one I saw was from the National Science Foundation. It was on a website talking about their grant process. It was basically, don't list any of these words in your grant application or it'll get flagged. One of the words was actually “women.” I was like, think about that. Not typically even one of the more controversial parts of this topic, but something as commonplace as the term "women" was on this list. I feel like a lot of librarians are trying to navigate these landmines. I wanted to get your opinion, you and Jessica, as to whether you do feel like this is a form of censorship. If you're going to remove those tags, you are in a sense making items harder to find. Whether that's for good intent or bad, it really depends on the individual.

**A:** I think for sure it is a form of censorship. I change a lot of my subject heading tags already because I find that we-- I do a lot of copy cataloging as many school librarians do, but I find that even the subject headings that arrive, especially that relate to identity, are not how students would describe themselves. Therefore it's not serving that purpose. Something that I already do is try and make them more accurate. I think that right now it is being forced essentially to change them so that they don't get discovered by outside agents. That is censorship.

In our spaces, we can make sure that those materials are still discoverable by our users. I've been wrestling with this a lot because it's like, do you make it easier to find in your physical space and harder in your catalog, or do you make it easy to find in your catalog then it gets censored by a group such as Moms for Liberty, who throughout the United States has been very, very active in censorship efforts?

What's the best alternative? For me, I'm always like, what is going to make it so that my students have access to these materials? In the end, I'm there to serve and support my students. Whatever I can do to make sure that these materials don't get pulled from my shelves, that's what I'm going to end up doing, if that makes sense. It is a really complicated topic.

**Jessica:** I think just our jobs are to connect people to information and meet their information needs. If your information needs are more about your identity, then that's what we're going to help you find. If you want to learn more about whatever subject, that's the goal. I think also, if you have the advantage of knowing your collection really well and knowing your students very well and your patrons, and who you serve, I think the goal should be to be able to do reader's advisory. I know that's hard, but in a way that you can recommend titles to kids.

I use Reddit a lot, to be honest, for a book recommendation. I don't know that I was relying as heavily on subject headings. I know that that's also a controversial thing to say, but also a lot of those are rooted as is the Dewey Decimal System in oppressive library standards. I filled out a survey the other day about the way that Latino people are represented in the LOC. I know this is for a lot of different things that the Gulf of Mexico and a lot of different things that they're changing about the way that we search for things. I think also really knowing who you serve can help you meet their information needs as well.

**Janette:** That's a good point. I want to point out to Jessica's point about the Gulf of Mexico, librarians are not strangers to subject headings changing. Language evolves, terms change over time, things fall out of favor, replaced by something that is more appropriate or more prevalent. It's not we have a problem with change. It's just when it's harmful.

**Leah:** I was just thinking because when I left my library, I had collections, you could create collections. I have a lot of them because I love to do that kind of thing. Like, "If you were interested in this, try this collection." I had an LGBTQ+ collection because those are the ones that kids wouldn't necessarily ask me for or feel comfortable asking. At the time, when I left, there turned out to be a book challenge about Drama by Raina Telgemeier because of the same sex relationship barely depicted in it.

I was thinking at the time, this mom has no idea that there is an entire collection of other books like this. In this day and age, I could see that being like, "Okay, I'm going to print that collection and have it at the desk so they can see it if they want to look it up. Maybe not make it available online where anybody can look at it." It's unfortunate that we have to be thinking like that.

**Jessica:** I also had privacy covers available for my students. Those little stretchy textbook covers. I just had them by the checkout and if somebody wanted to take that. When I would deliver holds to students, I would wrap it in a coloring sheet just to have a little bit of-- I don't know.

**Leah:** A little privacy.

**Jessica:** Yeah. When you go to the public library and the holds are covered, I appreciate that.

**Leah:** I went to pick up a hold once a long time ago, and I was picking up some terrible bodice-ripper romance or something. And the librarian goes, "I didn't know you read books like this." I'm like, "Oh my God." I felt so shamed.

**Janette:** Hold your judgment at the door, ma'am.

**Leah:** That is, it's so important to have privacy.

**Janette:** And to let people read what they want to read.

**Leah:** Exactly.

**A:** Exactly.

**Leah:** And not comment on it.

**A:** Yeah, thinking about our catalogs, I feel like it goes hand in hand with digital privacy, especially with young people. I'm thinking like right now I work in a middle school. That's a time where students are really exploring a lot of topics related to identity or even mental health. I had a student at a previous school who was trying to check out a book about self-harm, but was very, very self-conscious about it, understandably, because it's a very delicate subject and without somebody who is thinking of those considerations or maybe a student is even afraid to search for those topics in the catalog themselves because someone could watch them.

There's a physical record of their search. Those are all things to consider as well when we think about how public catalogs are, and what kind of search functions they have, and whether or not what we're doing is impeding access, whether or not we are aware of it at first.

**Janette:** Yes. I think it's important to remember, too, professionally, our ethics are that we serve our populations in an unbiased, non-discriminatory way, which means access to all information equally. Whatever that access looks like will be different for each student population potentially. Making sure that you protect the privacy of the people who are accessing the materials. I think that's a really great point.

We're not going to really talk about this law today, but I wanted to mention it in the context of what we're talking about with regard to hiding materials in your collection and censorship is Public Act 103-0100, which is the Illinois book banning bill. That really precludes you from removing books from your collection on the basis of religious or political ideology. You really need to think twice before you are limiting access to those materials simply out of fear. Know that the law in Illinois protects you if you want to leave that in your collection. This is, again, where I think the difference between the law and an executive order is a big difference.

**Jessica:** Having a strong collection development policy and things like if a book is challenged, it can't be challenged again for five years. There are a lot of things you can do with a really strong collection, deselection, and reconsideration policy that can really make sure that you're taking care of yourself and your students.

**Leah:** When I get calls right now and people are like, "What do I do?" My recommendation is always have a tight collection development policy and stick to it and follow Illinois law. Illinois law, thankfully, currently is requiring us to have a diverse and representative collection for all students.

**Janette:** The other law that I want to talk about before we really move more into some specifics about libraries is the Inclusive Curriculum Law. This is a law in Illinois that was passed in 2019, took effect in July of 2020. This law mandates that public schools include contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals in the teaching of Illinois and US history. For libraries to continue to align to curriculum, they need materials that would support that inclusive curriculum law.

I wanted to offer that, one, as a discussion point, if anybody has anything to add related to that, but also just to reassure the librarians who are wondering if these materials have a place in their collection or not, are they going to be violating some rule or regulation by including them? I would say, again, ethically, you're trying to serve the community in your school, so the students and their representation, but also make sure that you are not limiting the materials that support that curriculum.

**Leah:** I have to go back to what A said about, unfortunately, you have experienced librarians/teachers who were not doing their best to support individual students. To me, that is even more chilling, I think, than any executive order, that any single individual in the library would ever make somebody feel less than, and I really am sorry to hear that.

**A:** I think, too, when thinking about ethics and the law, I think right now we are rapidly descending into a place where our ethics are going to become further and further from the law, and to be thinking about what will you do to ensure that you hold fast to your ethics? For a long time, like I mentioned earlier, libraries were segregated, that was legal. That's not ethical, but it was the law. We have a moral imperative to resist unjust laws. I think as school librarians, we're all going to have to reckon with, what will we do? How far will we go to enforce our ethics system of being a welcoming place for students? Where is your line? How far are you willing to defend those ethics? How far are you willing to go for your students?

It's not a fun thing to think about, and it's not a fun conversation to have. But unfortunately, right now, especially with some of these executive orders, and even though we have laws in Illinois that protect us right now, who knows what will happen? What about places where people don't have those legal protections? I think that those are things that I have been thinking a lot about.

**Jessica:** I think also, as to your point, Leah, about that happening is really unfortunate. It does, even deadnaming students or not pronouncing students' names correctly if they're in another language, or shortening someone's name, anglicizing their name. Things like that are-- I like to think a lot about micro activism, instead of microaggression. What is something I can do to be a micro activist? Things like sharing-- when I introduce myself, maybe share my pronouns as well. That would make a student feel comfortable. Just having things around your library that represent different students from different identities.

As far as including it in your curriculum, everything that we read for my book club was from Project Lit, which is Project Libraries In The Community. Everything that's on that list is marginalized or own voices stories. I think that's really important. I didn't have to tell all my students like, "Hey, I picked this list of books because these are really important stories about diverse representation." They knew what we were reading. We read things like *Just Mercy* and *Monday's Not Coming*, *All Boys Aren't Blue*. That was one that I skated through, I will say for sure, because that has been one of the more challenged books.

Reading things like that, talking about things like that, promoting books like that on your social media, putting your pronouns in your email, or even on your profile, just little acts of activism that show people-

**Janette:** I love that.

**Jessica:** -that they belong. I can't take credit for it. I stole it from maybe Brené Brown or something.

**Janette:** Micro activism. I love it.

**A:** Yes. Taking that time to affirm our students and to make them feel seen and welcomed, I think really goes a long way. There's so much to these little moments of students feeling accepted, feeling seen, feeling heard, even your behavior management strategies. Are you super punitive? Are you redirecting in positive ways? You have to know your community. If a student isn't making eye contact with you, is that a sign of respect in the culture that they come from? Is that because they just physically cannot hold eye contact?

Little things like that end up going a huge long way, or even take a wheelchair and run it through your library. Can you fit a chair through the space? Are the shelves too high up? Are there hanging signs that are going to potentially be a trigger or distraction from someone whose brain would be activated by something like a hanging sign? At one of my libraries, I had a really high population of emerging bilingual students, a lot of newcomers as well. Students who are coming to the United States for the very first time. I wanted to make it such that they could walk in and they could tell-- they might not be able to read every word, but they could at least tell that there were different sections that had different books.

I put tape around and color-coded it so that they could be like, "Okay, at least this color is one thing and this other color is something different." Even little things like that can really have a huge impact in helping students feel seen and supported. Signage is another one. I have a lot of different types of posters. I've got queer and trans flags. I've also got *Sí Se Puede*, Black Lives Matter. I've got different activists posters. I've got a Fred Hampton poster, Yuri Kochiyama poster, and lots of different positive affirmations around the library.

I think those things are what students comment on. That will be an entry point into a conversation which builds a positive relationship, which then builds a student feeling seen, and that has gotten students into books that haven't touched a book in years. Who have had this door opened to them a possibility because those tiny little things, which might not seem like a big deal for a young person can be everything, can be an entry point into safety.

**Leah:** The best compliment I ever got, and it's not going to sound like one when I say it, but I value it and think about it every day is an African-American girl comes up to me, and she goes, "Hey, for an old white lady, you have a lot of books for Black girls like me." I was just so touched. She's like, "I've never seen a book about somebody like me." I think it was The Hate U Give. I have to admit, I am an old white lady, but I think you have to put yourself out there, and you have to try.

If you're not from a marginalized identity group, you really have never had that experience. It's very hard to imagine, and it's very hard to know how to react, but you have to put yourself out there. I think that's what I would want to say to people who are afraid. You're there, you're asked to protect those kids all day, every day. It's not just from an active shooter, it's not just from bullies, it's from societal ideals and things like that. I just feel very strongly about that.

**Jessica:** Even when you're book talking a book like, "Oh, this author is neurodiverse," and share that. When you're modeling how to use a database, you can look up Stonewall or Marsha P. Johnson, or anything. You can use any opportunity to just teach them more about--

**Janette:** It doesn't have to be Charles Dickens every time.

**Jessica:** Right, yeah. Also, just what A said about cultural relevance, that is a huge motivator. If I feel like I belong in this space, because it's relevant to me and my culture, even as a teenager, there is a such thing as teenage culture. I'm not saying we all have to be on the clock app as much as I am and know all the lingo, but it's just nice if they walk in and see something that's like the way that they talk or the way that they are consuming media or things like that.

**Janette:** This all gets at what I wanted to talk about next, which is identity and representation. Representation matters. I don't think anybody's going to disagree with that. How do you determine which representation matters to your library or what you're going to include? Because representation is things that are beyond race and ethnicity, like neurodivergence, family structure, disability. There's a lot of different things.

I think there are some librarians who think it's a challenge to sometimes know, we rightfully want to respect everyone's privacy. We're not going to force kids to out themselves in any way, shape, or form. That's what you're talking about with regards to making things findable without them having to come to you because there's a vulnerability to that. For you, what would your advice be for librarians who are struggling with what types of representation they need to consider?

**A:** I think we should really be looking at all different types of representation, our collections should reflect our communities, but they should also reflect communities that our students are not a part of. We mentioned earlier, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's article, *Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.* We really should be looking to truly have a breadth and depth of diversity. That would mean taking time, really looking at your collection and sitting with it and seeing like, "Okay, do I have diverse family structures represented? What about different religions? What about neurodiversity?"

Even the different plot structures. Are all of the stories with Jewish characters all revolving around the Holocaust? Jewish students deserve to have a fantasy story or a story where they're just hanging out and having fun, and also deserve to have this particular point in Jewish history talked about. If that's the only representation that you're seeing, that isn't a true diversity of experiences. I think the work that I've done is really sat with my collection and gone through and seeing, "Okay, where are the gaps? What does my school community look like? Where are the different salient identities that my students have that they talk about, that they ask about?"

Then what are the things that they aren't asking about? Why might that be? What's in my collection and what's not in my collection? Why might that be? Starting there, finding a small area to tackle at a time and building it up, and then going on to another one little bits at a time, I think goes a long way. I definitely have to remind myself like, "Okay, I can't just snap my fingers and it's going to be the most well-represented collection to ever collection."

All those little steps go a really long way, and that we really should be looking for the wide expanse of identities and of experiences, and the intersections of those two identities as well. If you're looking at, for example, your books with LGBTQ characters and they're all one genre and they're all white people, that is a really narrow view of what the LGBTQ community is. That is doing our students a disservice.

**Jessica:** Yeah, I always tell school librarians, the library is like a cell. It's constantly going to be changing. You always have to think about it as never finished because if you think of it like that, it's going to disappoint you. You have to just think, "Oh, this is constantly in flux. I'm constantly changing things." Agreed about what A said about changing up even genre, making sure that you have novels in verse and graphic novels and short stories and anthologies and maybe picture books. Different genres. It's a good way to easily diversify your collection.

Also thinking about there's no one way to be "blank". There's no one way to be Latina. There's no one way to be queer, the diaspora that exists in all of these identities. Also, we've been talking a lot about intersectionality today. Definitely thinking about Kimberlé Crenshaw and thinking about intersectionality when you're building your collection. I would do a get-to-know-you form for at least my book club kids. I feel like that was a litmus test for what everyone was into. It would just be questions like, "What are you into? What do you like to do? What's something on your wishlist right now that you want to buy, an object?" It doesn't have to be a book, but that will tell me about my students.

I think getting to know them as well, it helps you build a diverse collection. Also, my nonfiction was genre-fied. That was an easy way that I could really look at like, "Okay, I have this many books about World War II. Do I also have that much representation for Vietnam or whatever other historically significant event?" Titlewave does have a diversity audit tool. Then I know that Kelsey Bogan, who does the blog *Don't Shush Me*, has a lot of posts about diversifying your collection if you're interested in learning more about that.

**Leah:** That's good advice, too.

**Janette:** That's so cool. I love that there's so many resources out there for people to use. Don't reinvent the wheel.

**Leah:** Exactly.

**Janette:** You're not alone in trying to do this work, either. Always reach out to your colleagues and get support where you need it. I have one last question before we begin to wrap things up. That is thinking beyond the collection, what are other ways that your library supports diverse students and supports students across all these different communities and identities?

**A:** I think signage, we've talked about a little bit already. I think signage is one. Putting a bunch of different identities and empowering slogans for your students. Space design. Is it, going beyond ADA accessibility, is it welcoming to students of a variety of different mobilities and neurotypes? Is it easy for students who are newcomers to the U.S. to navigate? Are your signs for genres easy to understand? Do they need to be written in multiple languages? Even the font that we're using, is it difficult for a student with dyslexia to parse?

If you're on a grade-level team advocating for students, I've been the GSA facilitator at every school that I have been in. Getting involved with student clubs and student groups, I also lead four clubs as well. That's another way to make sure that we are serving our students. If students are sharing with you experiences that they have had related to marginalization with oppression, it's our duty to speak up and to help advocate for that student. To be that adult in the room that's saying, "Hey, that's not right that this happened to you." That can include having conversations with your colleagues, having conversations with admin. I think all of those things go to making the library a welcoming place.

I'm sure there's something that I'm leaving out, but those are definitely salient things that I am trying to think about. Even in interactions with students, learning things that they like. I am also, unfortunately, on the clock app. But it really helps me form relationships with students because I, unfortunately, know what they're talking about when they reference some meme.

**Leah:** But then they think you're so cool when you do.

**A:** Well, cool or cringe, but in a wholesome way.

**Leah:** In an affectionate way, yeah. No, I think even if they're cringing at you, it's because-- and they feel affection for you because you are trying.

**Janette:** So true. You're trying to connect. Anyway.

**Jessica:** Also, I tried to make a library space that wasn't just for readers. So games, I had a keyboard where you could plug in your headphones and play. Oftentimes, I'd have kids start playing something, and I'd be like, "Oh, I love that song." Then they're like, "What? You know this song?" That was a really good way. Also thinking about your digital spaces as well. For me, I don't know, social media was a big way that I connected with students. I would do like, "Give me a color and I'll give you a book recommendation." Especially because I was working through peak of pandemic and lockdown. A lot of that.

Even just, I would ask them what they're reading. They answer me, and I would just be like, "Oh, what do you like about it?" Not that I'm looking at their stories or anything like that. Just interacting with them about the library, making sure that I posted everything. I too sponsored Garden club, created that, and a knit and crochet club, both of which you need zero skills of any kind to do. Those were available to students as well. I mostly just wanted them to connect in their brain, library equals good. Librarian equals helpful.

I did a lot of helping students with scholarship stuff as well and college applications. That was a really good way that I connected with students. It's a free space. There's not the expectation of spending money. There's air conditioning or heating. It's a great place to be. You just want students to know that and be there.

**Leah:** I always tried to make the library be like, "No matter what your question is about, it can be answered in the library." I would never be like, "Oh, no, you got to go talk to the office." I'm like, "I don't know the answer to that question, but I will help you find it out." I'm like, "Any question can be answered in the library," so that they're not afraid. Once you've created any fear, that is almost impossible to reverse then.

**A:** Oh, I forgot another thing. Not charging fines. When I was first starting at a place, the fine calculator was automatically set up in Destiny, and I had a child come and try and pay the fine. It was $11. They were like, "I'm so sorry, I only have 5." I was like, "I will just waive the fine." Don't even worry. They started crying, because that was food money for the family. Why would you ever charge a fine when it could be coming out of rent, when it could be coming out of food? That can go a long way to students feeling like they can use the library because there are so many people who even won't use the public library because they're like, "I can't pay a fine if I lose a book."

We just have to budget for that. I would rather spend my time writing grants to replace lost books than for a child to be crying, upset, for a family to be saying, "Okay, we're going to set aside some rent money so that we can pay for this book," or, "I don't want you going to the library anymore, because you lost that book. Now we don't have the money for it." That, I think, is another really powerful way that we can show that the library is for everybody. Yes, it is work to write grants. I've written many thousands of dollars in grants. To me, that is worth it, because the alternative is people aren't using the space and people are being negatively impacted by a fine policy.

**Janette:** Yes, and I think that we aren't always good at thinking through all the ways that we create those barriers to access. We think of fines as like, well, somebody has to pay to replace the materials. It might as well be the person responsible for losing them, but--

**A:** That's the cost of doing business as a library.

**Janette:** Yeah. I think about like, if you were running a store, you have loss prevention, it's part of your budget. You already know some people are probably going to walk away with things either intentionally or unintentionally. You already know that that's part of the cost of doing business. For libraries is very much the same.

**Jessica:** I'd rather lose a book than a library kid.

**Leah:** Exactly.

**Janette:** I totally agree with that. Completely agree. To close out every episode, we to talk a little bit about how we can support ourselves and take care of ourselves. Doing the work of librarianship is stressful at times, can be very difficult. It's important for librarians to prioritize their mental health. If you don't mind, I would love for you to share one way that you're taking care of yourselves right now.

**A:** I think for me, it's been being in community with other trans people, especially right now being there to just support each other. I'm also part of some professional library and professional teacher networks for trans people as well. That has definitely been really helpful right now.

**Jessica:** We got a new couch, so couch rotting. Making what I refer to as passions, which is content from my bookstagram or physical collages. I really to collage.

**Janette:** That's so cool. I would say do not discount couch rotting as shelf care.

**Leah:** Oh, couch rotting is total shelf care.

**Janette:** Because there is a lot of that just recharging your battery you need to do. I think that we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be productive 24/7 and that's not realistic.

**Jessica:** Rest is productive.

**Leah:** I wanted to leave with a little uplifting story. Unfortunately, I was at a school's board meeting because the school and the school board had decided to revoke their compliance with the ALA Library Bill of Rights, which is bad and terrible and very sad. But I was blown away by the amount of moms who got up to say, "I want my kids to know about more than just themselves. I want my kids to know there are people of other culture, identity, religion. I want them to know that. If you are not going to let them, then what are we even here for?" That was a combination upper and downer situation. I just walked away feeling very inspired by those moms who showed up. They're out there and we just have to continue to be them ourselves and to find them where we can to work together.

**Janette:** Yes, that's a great point. I want to thank you both for joining us today. I appreciate this conversation. While it is a very sensitive and heavy topic, I feel you gave librarians a lot of great advice and a good place to start with this type of work and some good tips for how to navigate what we're going through right now. I appreciate that. Is there anything else you'd to add?

**A:** I think something that I might have touched on a little bit, but I think is really important to think about is dog whistles and how they're being used right now. For example, the phrase pornography in the library, there is a legal definition of what pornography is. Unfortunately, people are using the word pornography because it is really activating and they're using that to refer to-- most of the time, it is books with queer and trans characters by queer and trans authors, and that have content in them that if the author was not queer or trans would not be necessarily be being challenged.

It's indicative of a larger moral panic and the homophobia and transphobia, and even things like DEI, that's being used as a dog whistle for anything that isn't white. Anything that doesn't fit that ideal that is created by white supremacy. I think that is really important that when we engage in these conversations that we be realistic about these are currently terms that are being weaponized. They're intended to provoke an emotional response. The data shows that those are the words that are purposely being used. I think in these larger conversations, us all getting educated about what current dog whistles are, and how they're being used, and how they're being weaponized against our communities, I think is really important.

**Janette:** All really great points.

**Leah:** Yes. Thank you both so much.

**Janette:** To our listeners, thank you again for joining us. Let us know if you have any questions or topic ideas you want us to cover. You can leave us a voicemail on our super secret bat phone hotline at 630.734.5015. Until next time, stay legit, don't quit.

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