

Editor's Message: February 2012

Posted on [February 15, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Sandra Hughes-Hassell

To advance YALSA's [National Research Agenda](#), to celebrate the foundational work that informed the development of the agenda and of the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults (JRLYA)*, and in recognition of their influential contributions to the field, the JRLYA advisory board invited several scholars to contribute short statements of research interest and direction. In this issue, we are pleased to feature essays from Anthony Bernier, Carol C. Kuhlthau, and Virginia A. Walter.

In their essays, which serve as calls to action for the LIS community, Bernier, Kuhlthau, and Walter challenge LIS researchers to investigate problems that really matter, to question how their research informs both theory and practice, and to view teens as research partners, not just as subjects. We hope their essays inspire you in your research-related pursuits.



About Anna Lam

Anna Lam is a Communications Specialist for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

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An Agenda of Praxis for Young Adult Librarianship

Posted on [February 15, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Anthony Bernier, Associate Professor, San Jose State University

Praxis Is Where I'm Headed

All research seeks to impact the world. Library and Information Science (LIS) desires it no less than the “hard” sciences. So I am gratified to see *JRYLA* promoting young adult (YA) research, and appreciate YALSA Research Committee’s efforts in articulating a list of research needs. The new [National Research Agenda](#) represents a welcome, if qualified, addition to YALSA’s portfolio of service.

I am frequently puzzled by not seeing more consistent connections between research and daily practice. Because beyond the tired clichés about library school being “too theoretical,” there nevertheless exists a need for researchers, and the YA practitioners who influence them, to better link the theoretical/conceptual with daily practice. Theory calls this linkage “praxis.” Continually studying obscure topics does not, in my estimation, help librarians improve service. Nor does it tend to attract new YA library school students to become scholars or even to participate in research. My last research grant required hiring four graduate students not interested in YA work because (after fifty-two interviews) those who are do not qualify for or value contributing to new scholarship. That speaks volumes.

My recent research publications were influenced by work I know librarians do and information they need. Since joining the faculty at San Jose State University, I have surveyed how libraries support YA professionalism. I demonstrated the negative media misrepresentations about youth and assessed their implications for library service. I studied library YA volunteers—a perennial concern for practice—to discover that we have yet to think systematically about this experience and what it holds for young people and their communities. I intended to give beleaguered librarians data and analysis for their advocacy efforts, and to give students a sense of the field’s growth and dynamism. I continue to research the still-budding topic of YA space equity. And way back in 2007, I published the lead essay in *Youth Information-Seeking Behavior II* in which I argue not only that LIS had largely ignored YA research but that a forward-looking research agenda should start asking its own questions about young people rather than relying on paradigms emanating from other disciplines.¹

The Research Challenge

A key research challenge remains LIS’s allergy to social theory. Predictably, the National Research Agenda avoids social theory. Today, if libraries take YA service data seriously at all, they do so still almost entirely rooted in institutionally-defined output measures: How many YAs came to a program? How many joined the club? At least

two consequences for LIS issue from this lack of praxis. The first consequence yields a conceptually banal approach encouraging and reproducing success bias: “Success” □ occurred simply because something happened.

The same holds true for “best practices.” □ Mere accomplishment does not necessarily qualify as a model. Simply counting heads or circulation statistics (though useful) is not a persuasive value proposition during the present neo-conservative onslaught on the very notion of public service itself.

Success bias and unsubstantiated best practice claims persist, however, despite our colleague Eliza Dresang’s urgings to systematically evaluate by measuring outcomes—things that actually change as a consequence of service interventions—not simply what we report doing.² Granted, we have done a good job of incorporating technology into YA service discourse. But technology offers a delivery system, not a service vision. LIS discourse concentrates chiefly on youth in the life of the library. Thus, we continue on, blind to the more urgent and theoretically challenging questions of praxis about the library’s vision and role in the life of youth.³

My 2007 YA information seeking article highlights a second consequence of our LIS allergy to praxis. As apparent in YALSA’s new research agenda, as in practically every book, article, essay, conference talk, course syllabus, and in-service training workshops and webinars, LIS remains devoted to the notion of “youth development” □ as a congregation to a liturgy. Space and time do not allow a thorough unpacking of this observation here. But suffice it to say that LIS institutionally participates in what I have coined the “Youth Development-Industrial Complex.” □ It has done so without careful study or examination of neither its legacy nor its relationship to our mission. Apparently we simply walked over to the psychology department one day, picked up the youth development paradigm, and stapled it to our curricula, research, and practice.

Critical social theory terms this response “normalization” □—a process by which certain ideas become concretized and exist beyond question, context, or alternative. And we continue to reproduce it not as a particular approach among other possibilities, not noting its historical contexts within youth studies, not even evaluating its all-encompassing and universal conceits about social class, individualism, or racial and gender biases (including reproductive rights).⁴

Psychological insights might well belong in our work. Psychology’s influence on the apparatus of youth development certainly helped cohere a degree of YA practice since at least the mid-1980s.⁵ As a discipline, however, psychology has propounded a deficit-driven view of youth since its invention in the late nineteenth century. Youth are constructed as sub-par “others,” □ manchurian subjects liable to snap at a moment’s notice, and compared only to mythic self-actualized uber-adults who presumably benefitted from all forty so-called “developmental assets.” □ This is not a discussion about youth at all; it is a debate about what adults should be. LIS accepted it as gospel.

Furthermore, this deficit legacy purports to hold true for all “youth” □ in all cultures, all nations, and all historical periods. What discipline gets away with arguing that its foundational concepts of universal applicability remain unchanged for over a century? That legacy remains with us today no matter what we call it.⁶ Thus, LIS adopted a definition of its YA users by what they lack. Psychology produces youth as patients and research subjects. Education envisions youth as students and pupils. Criminal justice imagines youth as suspects and perpetrators. Even the Physical Education department envisions youth as athletes. Yet, uninformed by more recent critical

social theory, LIS allows others to perform our intellectual labor and define our users. We need our own vision of what libraries should be in the life of YAs, not what needy YAs are in the life of libraries.

A New Trajectory

My most current research, a Federal National Leadership Grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), explores praxis through the notion of YA space equity in libraries. This project employs quantitative data gathering methods, innovative approaches in virtual environments, and ethnographic data (narrated video footage) in seeking to establish verifiable best practice.⁷

My future research will continue along the praxis trajectory in pursuing the causes and implications of our LIS allergy to critical social theory. I plan a return to my role as a historian (from my Ph.D. training) and begin a project I feel YA librarianship needs desperately: a history of itself.⁸ Neither researchers, practitioners, nor our LIS students can grasp the changing dynamics of our views of YAs, our profession, or institutional interventions without an identity of who we have been, the roles we played, the challenges we faced, and the meanings YAs have made of it all. Our recently departed Dorothy M. Broderick (1929–2011), for instance, did not argue for YA services in the same way Margaret Alexander Edwards (1902–1988) did before her.⁹ Neither of them advocated entirely in ways we need today. Thus, while YA librarians have always cared about young people, we have done so differently throughout history. These differences come freighted with reasons and implications. Professionals need to know them.

Both of these projects engage critical youth studies and post-modern theory and thus produce more modest truth claims.¹⁰ This is a modesty that hegemonic youth development, and its universal truth claims, lack. We design YA spaces one way when we view youth as “at-risk,” □ for instance, slightly another way when we view them through “youth development,” □ and yet another way if we envision them as citizens. The same maintains for all components in our professional profile. YA service truths percolate up from the local and situated, under particular circumstances, in specific places, and at specific times. Grand truths do not simply flow down wholly conceived from on high.

The confluence of these intellectual paradigms brings LIS to a conceptual, and, yes, a theoretical crossroads. But the crossroads we approach now cannot sustain being ignored, a gentle evolution, or a simple adaptation. What is required now is reimagining the library in today’s diverse and postmodern world. Unlike our research and practice for well over the past quarter century (rooted in privileging collections), today’s LIS challenge is broader and more urgent. YA service must expand beyond current national and historical conceits if we are to thrive professionally. We can’t do that stuck in the nineteenth century. In particular, LIS must drive toward a more LIS-specific vision of young adults, rooted in praxis, while simultaneously facing the existing challenges of content creation, curation, social context, and the meanings that young people can make of libraries and information.

References and Notes

1. Anthony Bernier, “Not Broken by Someone Else’s Schedule: On Joy and Young Adult Information-Seeking,” □ in Mary K. Chelton and Coleen Cool (eds.), *Youth Information-Seeking Behavior: Theories, Models, and Issues* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007, pages xiii-xxvii); the still-seminal assessment of youth services

- research remains Christine A. Jenkins, "The History of Youth Services Librarianship: A Review of the Research Literature," □ *Libraries and Culture* 35 (2001): 103-139.
2. Eliza T. Dresang, Melissa Gross, and Leslie Edmonds Hold, *Dynamic Youth Services through Outcome-Based Planning and Evaluation* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006).
 3. And thus we continually read about how our putative patrons find our service lacking: Vivian Howard, "What Do Young Teens Think About the Public Library?" □ *Library Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2011): 321-344; Sherry J. Cook, Stephen, Parker, and Charles E. Pettijohn, "The Public Library: An Early Teen's Perspective," □ *Public Libraries* 44, no. 3 (2005): 157-161; Heather Fisher, "A Teenage View of the Public Library: What Are the Students Saying?" □ *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services* 16, no. 1 (2003): 4-16; Linda Hill and Helen Pain, "Young People and Public Libraries: Use, Attitudes, and Reading Habits: A Survey of 13-16 Year-Olds in Nottinghamshire," □ *International Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 3, no. 1 (1988): 26-40.
 4. Here I might recommend several important monographs demonstrating how youth studies is advancing theoretical interventions and leaving LIS research behind: Jessica K. Taft, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Mary E. Thomas, *Multicultural Girlhood: Racism, Sexuality, and the Conflicted Spaces of American Education* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2011).
 5. Julie Spielberger, Carol Horton, and Lisa Michels, *New on the Shelf: Teens in the Library; Summary of Key Findings from the Evaluation of Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development, a Wallace Foundation Initiative* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2004); Virginia Walter, "Public Library Service to Children and Teens: A Research Agenda," □ *Library Trends* 51 (2003): 571-589.
 6. The most recent "positive youth development" □ is reminiscent of the manufacturing process called "gold plating" □ in which slight modification of a standardized form is marketed as "new," □ such as the small body or performance changes made to the latest model car or computer. Further, if we are to accept "positive" □ youth development now, what have we been practicing for the past quarter century or more? See William Damon, "What is Positive Youth Development?" □ *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 591 (2004): 13-24.
 7. I would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the research team supported by an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership grant: Research assistants Antonia Krupicka-Smith, Pam Okosun, Joy Rodriguez, Collin Rickman, Julia Whitehead, and Jonathan Pacheco Bell; and researchers Dr. Mike Males, Dr. Jeremy Kemp, and Dr. Denise Agosto.
 8. The first and only attempt at this to date is thirty-three years old: Miriam Braverman, [*Youth, Society and the Public Library*](#) (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979).
 9. Broderick is most widely known as cofounder (along with Dr. Mary K. Chelton, Queens College) of the magazine *Voice of Youth Advocates* in 1978.
 10. I have just completed editing a collection of essays addressing this very topic with publisher Neal-Schuman that is due out in spring 2012.

Dr. Anthony Bernier served as a professional field practitioner for 18 years (Director of Young Adult Services for Oakland Public Library; 10 years as YA Specialist for L.A. Public Library). He has designed a variety of innovative outreach and programming models, including the original service and space plan for the first purpose-built library YA space: LAPL's acclaimed TeenS'cape. He has received IMLS National Leadership Grants to

advance research on developmentally-appropriate YA spaces and he continues to speak on and consult with architects and public agencies on library space design.



About Anna Lam

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One Response to *An Agenda of Praxis for Young Adult Librarianship*



[Katy Jean Vance](#) says:

February 17, 2012 at 5:53 pm

Dr. Bernier (& JRLYA),

Thank you for sharing this. It has given me a lot to think about, especially in terms of the choices I am making in the design of the learning commons space at my school and how am I designing and evaluating our programs. I look forward to reading a detailed history of our profession.

Thanks,

Katy

[Reply](#)

The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults

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Research Matters: The Long Reach of the Model of the Information Search Process (ISP)

Posted on [February 15, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



**By Carol C. Kuhlthau, Professor Emerita, Library and Information Science, Rutgers University,
The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL)**

Youth services in public and school libraries are grounded in a long tradition of best practice and the continuing innovation of experienced practitioners, but research matters. Research provides insight into problems that are not apparent through the lens of tradition or experience. The triad of tradition, experience, and research work together to build, sustain, and deepen the field. Where research has been combined with tradition and experience, services for youth have benefited significantly. The model of the information search process is an example of how research can impact practice in important and long-lasting ways. Through this research, I discovered five steps to conducting research that matters.

- Start with a real problem.
- Stay with the problem to verify and test the findings in a variety of contexts.
- Develop concepts from the findings.
- Design applications for implementation.
- Look to the future

Start With a Real Problem

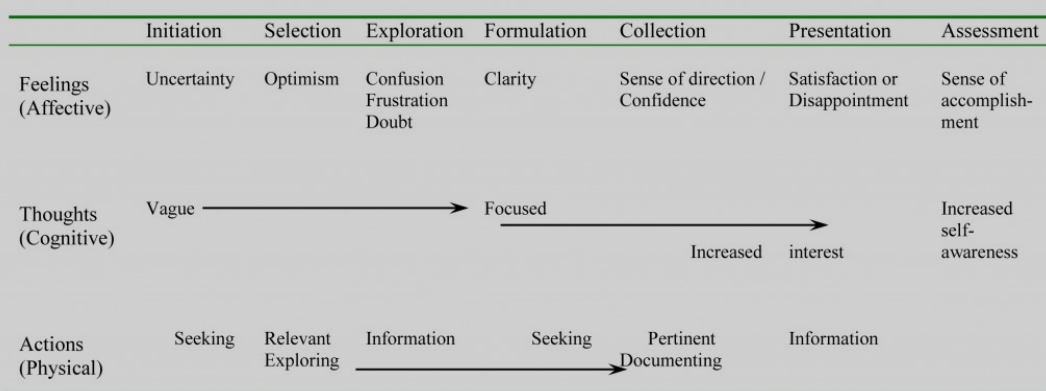
It all began a number of years ago when I was the library director in a large high school in central New Jersey that was an active, vital part of everyday life of the school. The library was a gathering place before and after school with a good mix of social and academic activity. During the school day, teachers brought their classes in for research sessions and students came in to look for information on class assignments, read, and do homework. I was busily involved with assisting teachers coordinating their research assignments with the curriculum, and with teaching students to locate sources and helping them find information. I should have felt pretty good about it all. But I had a lingering sense that something was missing. After students found some information, the real learning was ahead of them. How could they manage that on their own? How could I help? I didn't really know what went on between the time they left the library with some sources of information and the time they handed in the research paper, except for the few that came in for extra help. Even when a class was scheduled for several days in the library, I didn't seem to get much beyond information location and into the ideas they needed to grapple with to actually learn something.

My research on the information search process was grounded in this lingering sense that something important was going on that I just couldn't get at in my everyday library practice. The qualitative ethnographic study that

opened up the students' thoughts, actions, and feelings in the process of learning from a variety of sources of information changed my approach to librarianship. Many other librarians and teachers were also able to see that information seeking and use is a complex, constructive process of learning that requires guidance and support.

In that initial study, I found that I could chart students' thoughts, feelings, and actions in a series of six stages. One of my data collection methods was a timeline in which students described their thoughts, actions, and feelings. I adopted the timeline to display three layers of experience, with thoughts shifting from vagueness to clarity, and feelings changing from anxiety to increasing confidence as the action of the search progresses. The stages were named for the main tasks undertaken to move on to the next stage: task initiation, topic selection, focus exploration, focus formulation, information collection, and search closure. These were later simplified to initiation, selection, exploration, formulation, collection, and presentation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Information Search Process¹



Stay With the Problem to Verify and Test the Findings in a Variety of Contexts

I had found something important and interesting about my group of students. There was more research to be done to see if the model applied to other students or even to these students at another time and in different context. I decided to stay with the problem to verify and test the model with these same students at a later time and with a variety of other students. I was able to verify the model in longitudinal case studies of this group of students and in large-scale studies of diverse samples of students. I ended up staying with the problem for over two decades and I am still working on it. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been an important component of this research, further amplified by incorporating a longitudinal perspective. Initially, I had used qualitative methods to open the process for examination. When quantitative methods enabled verification of the initial model in a large sample of diverse users, I realized the power of using the combination of methodologies.

Develop Concepts from the Findings

The next important part of my research journey was to draw out the main ideas in the findings and to develop concepts from the results. What are the most important core ideas? One important core idea that came from the ISP studies is that students' thoughts are charged with emotions that influence their actions. Feelings are important and indicate when students are having difficulty and when they are doing well on their own. Students often expected to be able to simply collect information and complete their task. This simplified view of the research process sets up stumbling blocks in the Exploration and Formulation stages. When their expectations do

not match what they are experiencing, they become confused, anxious, and frustrated. Students commonly experience a dip in confidence and an increase in uncertainty in the Exploration stage when they least expect it, and a turning point of increased confidence in the Formulation stage. Based on the model of the ISP, I developed the concept of a zone of intervention for applying a process approach in youth services. The core idea in the zone of intervention is that increased uncertainty indicates a need for assistance and guidance. The zone of intervention is that area in which a student can do with advice and assistance what he or she cannot do alone or can do only with difficulty. Intervention within this zone enables students to progress in their learning. Intervention outside this zone is inefficient and unnecessary, experienced by students as intrusive on the one hand or overwhelming on the other. These concepts formed the foundation for implementing a process approach to youth services for guiding students through the stages of inquiry learning.

Design Application for Implementation

My research is based in youth services that enable students to seek meaning in complex information environments and to continue to learn throughout their lives. Application for implementation of the ISP can be tracked in my publications and is particularly obvious in the books I have written. The findings of the initial study and application with middle and secondary school students were developed in my book *Teaching the Library Research Process*, first published in 1985 with the second edition still in print.² My book *Seeking Meaning: A Process Approach to Library and Information Services*, first edition in 1993 and second edition in 2004, focused on explaining the research underlying the ISP and recommending strategies for implementation in practice.³ My latest work on Guided Inquiry applies the model of the ISP to rethink youth services for improving learning in the information intensive environment. The foundational text in this series is *Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century*, written with Leslie Maniotes and Ann Caspari and published in 2007.⁴ A new book, *Guided Inquiry Design: A Framework for Inquiry in Your School*⁵, explains a collaborative team approach to design and implement Guided Inquiry in youth services grounded in the ISP research.

Look to the Future

These studies were among the first to investigate either the affective aspects or the feelings of students in the process of learning from a variety of sources of information, along with the cognitive and physical aspects. Advances in information technology that opened access to a vast assortment of sources have not eased the student's dilemma and may have intensified the sense of confusion and uncertainty until a focus is formed to provide a path for seeking meaning. Information systems may intensify the problem particularly in the early stages by overwhelming the user with everything all at once.

Recent developments in brain science have confirmed the close relation between emotion and cognition. The future holds interesting prospects for research into the student's experience in the process of learning from multiple sources of information. The work on the ISP has opened paths to understanding learning and creativity in rich information environments. This is only the beginning of our research journey into the challenging field of library and information services for youth in the twenty-first century. In order to continue to provide the most relevant, meaningful service for young people, research will need to be fully recognized and established as an essential component. Research matters.

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Carol Collier Kuhlthau is Professor Emerita of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University where she directed the graduate program in school librarianship that has been rated number one in the country by U.S. News.' She achieved the rank of Professor II, a special rank at Rutgers requiring additional review beyond that for full professor. She also chaired the Department of Library and Information Science and was the founding director of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL). She is internationally known for her groundbreaking research on the Information Search Process and for the ISP model of affective, cognitive and physical aspects in six stages of information seeking and use.' She has authored *Seeking Meaning: A Process Approach to Library and Information Services* and *Teaching the Library Research Process* and published widely in referred journals and edited volumes. A new book, *Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century*, authored with her daughters Leslie K. Maniotes and Ann K. Caspari is now available through Libraries Unlimited.



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Anna Lam is a Communications Specialist for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

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The YALSA Research Agenda: Getting It Done

Posted on [February 15, 2012](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



By Virginia A. Walter, Professor Emerita, University of California, Los Angeles

[The YALSA National Research Agenda on Libraries, Teens, and Young Adults](#) is an informative and inspirational document: informative because it succeeds in mapping the landscape of research in this broadly defined, expansive field; and inspirational because it teases any intellectually curious researcher with gaps in the research terrain that beg to be filled.

As an academic who has done research that could fit into all four priority areas identified in the research agenda, I found myself looking for ways that I might do some crossover work that integrated issues from one or more of these. Two approaches occurred to me, both with implications for methodology. First, feeling a little like the woman with a hammer for whom the whole world is a nail, I returned again and again to outcome evaluation as my preferred tool for tackling these questions. Second, I was reminded again of the value of involving young adults directly in the research process as participants and not just as subjects. I will discuss each of these issues briefly and then conclude by speculating about who might implement this research agenda most productively.

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation seeks to determine the change in skill, attitude, behavior, or status as a result on the participants as a result of a particular library program or service. We owe a big debt of gratitude to Eliza Dresang, Melissa Gross, and Leslie Edmonds Holt for their handbook, *Dynamic Youth Services through Outcome-Based Planning and Evaluation*, that explains so clearly how and why to use this tool in developing and assessing library services for young people.¹

Let's take a moment and look at each of the four priority areas from the research agenda and see how outcome evaluation might be applied.

The very title for Priority Area 1, "Impact of Libraries on Young Adults," □ signals the need for better understanding of the outcomes of our work with teens. Research questions 2 and 4 in this priority area are particularly suitable for outcome evaluation. These questions ask us to identify and then document the ways that individual libraries and national initiatives such as YALSA's Teen Read Week positively affect adolescent development, including literacy, work readiness, and twenty-first century learning skills.

An outcome-based approach to such a task would require that we first gather information that would enable us to do a kind of needs assessment. Call it market research. What are the gaps in adolescent development that libraries

might reasonably address? What is an individual library or YALSA's capacity for meeting the gap? My own experience working as a consultant is that the more time and effort spent on this phase of the process, the better the final result. However, any effort to do this kind of advance work pays off.

The second stage of the process is to use what has been learned in the information-gathering process to identify the desired outcomes for teens of some potential program or service. It is helpful to have some benchmark data as a starting point. Say we've decided, based on the high school's current college admission rates and input from our Young Adult Advisory Council, that the desired outcome of a public library program would be something related to helping local teens prepare for college. We identify as a desired output that at least fifty students will participate in a college-readiness program and that at least forty of them (80%) will be admitted to one or more colleges.

Now we need to design the program that will achieve our outcome objective. We may have learned from talking to guidance counselors at the high school and to teens themselves that a big barrier for students in our community is knowing what financial aid is available. A second obstacle is the need to write a good application essay. To try to address these two issues, we create a pathfinder that leads students to both print and online resources about financial aid. The Youth Advisory Council helps us recruit several teens to be peer counselors, and the school's guidance counselor gives them some training in using the various resources. We arrange times for the peer counselors to be available to work with high school juniors or beginning seniors. If we have funding, we hire tutors to work with students one-on-one with their admission essays. If we have no money, we beat the bushes of local colleges for work-study students or those wanting to do community service and do a little screening and training to be sure they can be helpful.

Evaluating a program such as the one I described would be straightforward. Keep track of the students who take part, set up a mechanism to learn whether or not they have been admitted to college, and then tabulate the results. If forty students are admitted, we have achieved our objectives. If the program did not result in forty students being admitted to college, we need to ask ourselves if that target was reasonable or if our program design needs to be retooled.

The same process can be followed for each of the other three priority areas. For Priority Area 2, "Young Adult Reading and Resources," □ research question 3 addresses the need to identify best practices in developing collections, promoting reading, and defending teens' access to a wide range of information. Outcome evaluation would enable librarians to measure the impact of their actions on their young adult users. Outcome evaluation could help to determine how book talks or graphic novel collections promote teen reading, for example.

Many of the research questions in Priority Area 3, "Information-Seeking Behaviors and Needs of Young Adults," □ are already framed as quests for outcomes with their use of terms such as information needs, behaviors, and barriers. Many academics have already found this to be fertile ground for their research, and the results have been well-documented in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, as well as the two volumes on youth information-seeking behavior edited by Mary K. Chelton and Colleen Cool.² The YALSA research agenda suggests many ways that this existing work can be expanded.

Priority Area 4 looks at the informal and formal learning environments in which young adults base their reading and information-seeking experiences. As with Priority Area 3, some good foundational scholarship has already been done. Twenty-first century learning skills have already been well-documented as desirable outcomes for

young adults. The work that remains to be done is to identify the library services and programs that will help teens acquire those skills, and an outcome-based planning and evaluation process could begin to accomplish this.

Teens as Research Partners

Robin Moeller, Amy Pattee, and Angela Leeper posted a provocative response to the YALSA Research Agenda 2012–2016 in *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*.³ They ask researchers to consider the role that teens can play in the research process. A similar issue is raised by Kafi D. Kumasi in her response in the same issue of *JRLYA*. She encourages scholars to frame their research within the context of critical theory, engaging teens as participants in critical inquiry.⁴ She suggests that teens, librarians, and scholars engage in action research, a kind of collaborative effort to uncover knowledge that is meaningful to all parties.

A book that I have found useful in addressing the concerns of Moeller, Pattee, Leeper, and Kumasi is *Representing Youth: Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies*, edited by Amy L. Best.⁵ The contributors to this volume represent a variety of academic disciplines, but they all share a commitment to understanding the social construction of adolescence, to respecting the competency of young people, and to seeing them as active participants in their own lives. It is a perspective that could positively inform young adult librarianship as well as the scholarship that the YALSA research agenda seeks to encourage.

Who Will Do the Research?

My final words address the question of who will do this research. Even if every graduate program in library and information science harbored a professor devoted to the kind of work described in the YALSA research agenda, there would still be too few scholars to accomplish it all. Partnerships between academics and practitioners are essential. If nothing else, academics need practitioners to open the doors to those formal and informal learning environments in which they could conduct their research. Hopefully, some practitioners will take up the research cause and conduct their own studies, motivated by intellectual curiosity and the desire to improve their own services through approaches like outcome-based planning and evaluation.

Even as we increase the ranks of those engaged in research about young adults and libraries, we must also encourage those who do this work to publish their results. The findings from an outcome evaluation study that determined that teen book talkers were effective in promoting reading among their peers could be relevant to many other libraries. We tend to share these stories of “how we did it good” □ in conference programs or electronic discussion lists. Let’s think about how we can be more proactive about disseminating our good research stories in print (electronic and paper-based) as well.

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