

SHARED FOUNDATIONS

Explore

SARAH CULP SEARLES

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AASL

American Association
of School Librarians
TRANSFORMING LEARNING

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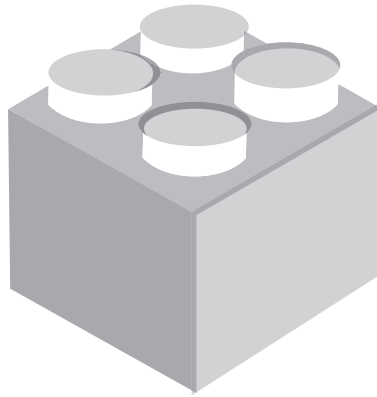
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SHARED FOUNDATION V

Explore



KEY COMMITMENT

Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.

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Series Introduction

The Shared Foundations series from the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) examines the six Shared Foundations that anchor the comprehensive approach to teaching and learning in the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. The Shared Foundations—Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage—represent the core concepts that all learners, school librarians, and school libraries develop and promote in their K-12 learning environment.

Each of the six books in this series is dedicated to the deep exploration of a single Shared Foundation. Although each of the Shared Foundations supports its own inherent priorities, it cannot be implemented in isolation. The writing process used by the authors created a series of books that, like the AASL Standards Frameworks, are unique and yet parallel each other. Common elements are found throughout the series:

- A balance between theoretical discussion, practical strategies, and implementation examples, promoting reflection and creativity
- Development of the Competencies and Alignments for the Learner, School Librarian, and School Library in all four Domains—Think, Create, Share, and Grow
- Differences in application and assessment across grades K-12, promoting a growth mindset and envisioning outcomes for all learners, whether student learners, school librarians, or other educators
- An emphasis on personalized learning experiences, project-based learning, and authenticity of learning and projects
- Challenges addressed, illustrating ways to implement the Shared Foundations in various environments and levels of support

Questions for the Reflective Practitioner conclude each chapter, allowing readers to consider the application of concepts specific to their own learning communities and stimulate nuanced professional conversations. For ease of reference, readers also will find the AASL Standards Integrated Framework for the relevant Shared Foundation included in this work.

AASL and its series authors hope that this immersive and dedicated examination of the Shared Foundations will help school library professionals deepen their understandings, broaden their perspectives, make connections for personal relevance, and innovate and reflect on their practice with a professional community.

For more information about the *National School Library Standards*, and to access the latest implementation assistance resources, visit standards.aasl.org.

Explore

Domain	LEARNER DOMAINS AND COMPETENCIES	SCHOOL LIBRARIAN DOMAINS AND COMPETENCIES
A. Think	<p>Learners develop and satisfy personal curiosity by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reading widely and deeply in multiple formats and write and create for a variety of purposes. 2. Reflecting and questioning assumptions and possible misconceptions. 3. Engaging in inquiry-based processes for personal growth. 	<p>School librarians foster learners' personal curiosity by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encouraging learners to read widely and deeply in multiple formats and write and create for a variety of purposes. 2. Challenging learners to reflect and question assumptions and possible misconceptions. 3. Enabling learners by helping them develop inquiry-based processes for personal growth.
B. Create	<p>Learners construct new knowledge by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem solving through cycles of design, implementation, and reflection. 2. Persisting through self-directed pursuits by tinkering and making. 	<p>School librarians stimulate learners to construct new knowledge by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching problem solving through cycles of design, implementation, and reflection. 2. Providing opportunities for tinkering and making. 3. Modeling persistence through self-directed tinkering and making.
C. Share	<p>Learners engage with the learning community by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expressing curiosity about a topic of personal interest or curricular relevance. 2. Co-constructing innovative means of investigation. 3. Collaboratively identifying innovative solutions to a challenge or problem. 	<p>School librarians prepare learners to engage with the learning community by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing strategies for acting on curiosity about a topic of personal interest or curricular relevance. 2. Assisting learners to co-construct innovative means of investigation. 3. Structuring activities for learners to collaboratively identify innovative solutions to a challenge or problem.
D. Grow	<p>Learners develop through experience and reflection by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Iteratively responding to challenges. 2. Recognizing capabilities and skills that can be developed, improved, and expanded. 3. Open-mindedly accepting feedback for positive and constructive growth. 	<p>School librarians help learners develop through experience and reflection by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scaffolding iterative challenge-response processes. 2. Helping learners to recognize capabilities and skills that can be developed, improved, and expanded. 3. Fostering an atmosphere in which constructive feedback is openly accepted for positive growth.

KEY COMMITMENT

Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.



SCHOOL LIBRARY DOMAINS AND ALIGNMENTS	The school library facilitates the Key Commitment to and Competencies of EXPLORE	Domain
The school library supports learners' personal curiosity by:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing resources and strategies for inquiry-based processes. 2. Fostering opportunities for learners to demonstrate personal curiosity and creation of knowledge through engaging with a wide variety of resources and technology. 	A. Think
The school library facilitates construction of new knowledge by:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementing technology as a tool or resource for learning. 2. Ensuring that multiple learning activities can occur in both physical and virtual spaces. 3. Establishing and maintaining a learning environment conducive to independent and collaborative exploration and problem solving. 	B. Create
The school library prepares learners to engage with a larger learning community by:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Modeling and promoting the use of personal and professional learning networks. 2. Encouraging families and other members of the community to participate in school library activities. 3. Building and advocating for strong relationships with stakeholders who recognize and support an effective school library. 	C. Share
The school library assists in the growth and development of learners by:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leading other educators and learners to embrace a growth mindset through lifelong learning. 2. Anticipating learners' needs and adapting the learning environment in accordance with evidence-based best practices. 3. Embracing new skills, knowledge, and standards in the profession as they relate to teaching, learning, technology, and innovation. 	D. Grow

Preface: The Spirit of Librarianship

For me, Explore epitomizes the spirit of librarianship. My personal understanding of this started with my own elementary school librarian, Anne Banks Kitchens. Some librarians remember the libraries of their childhood as stereotypical quiet “shushing” places, against which they’re determined to rebel—but I don’t. Mrs. Kitchens had both a megaphone and a karaoke machine in her school library for daily use! She expected and empowered us to engage thoughtfully with the world and make our voices heard.

In Mrs. Kitchens’s school library, there was never any doubt that there was a huge, wide world out there for us to explore, using all the means available to us. The world of technology was smaller in those days, of course. However, Mrs. Kitchens used print materials to bring far-flung parts of the world within our reach. My earliest memory from her classes, as a first grader, is of a nonfiction read-aloud. I don’t remember the title of what she read, but I do remember very clearly the way she finished reading and then told us, “And then something *wonderful* happened—the Berlin Wall came down!” In a single stroke, she shared important recent knowledge with us, taught us how to think critically about how information sources may go out of date (the book she was holding was a few years old, from before the wall fell), and modeled a passionate interest in history and geography and how they change the context we live in.

The school library was full of ways to feel immersed in anything we wanted to know and explore. Maps and globes were regular fixtures in Mrs. Kitchens’s lessons. So were a variety of hands-on science demonstration tools, including human anatomy models, insect specimens under glass, and a wooden lever device you could hit on one end with a rubber hammer to send a plastic frog flying from the other

end. (Obviously, you would then measure how far the frog flew, and collect multiple rounds of data to analyze and interpret.) Once a year she would bring in the Star-Lab, a portable planetarium, and transform the school library into a place where we could crawl directly into outer space. There among the stars, she would share information about astronomy and meteorology with us, as well as stories of the constellations and how the ancient Greeks and Romans understood the cosmos. And of course, in Mrs. Kitchens's school library I could access anything and everything I wanted to read. To top it all off, she had a terrific old ball-and-clawfoot bathtub painted like an American flag that I could snuggle into with my books.

When I was in the fourth grade, my class participated in a schoolwide activity in which we had to select our "True Colors." I identified as Green, which my classmates were ready to let me know was the nerdy color. However, Mrs. Kitchens (also a Green) showed me that it really meant I was eager to know anything and everything, and that the school library was exactly the right place for curious learners like me to thrive. Because of her influence, I will always believe that the support for curiosity and broad personal interests embodied in the Shared Foundation of Explore is one of the most important aspects of a school library and its potential to impact the lives of learners.¹

Flash Forward

As a high school librarian at the start of my career, Explore was a major part of the ethos of my school library program. I was blessed to work in a school with a truly diverse student population, a faculty that believed in collaboration, a principal and parent stakeholders who were committed to seeing that we had the resources we needed to serve our learners, and a wonderful co-librarian and library secretary as partners. Many of the educators in our building had less than ten years' experience. We had a strong relationship with our local university, which knew we were eager to accept interns, which meant that we had a constant influx of new ideas and innovations. Our student learners came from every ethnic and socioeconomic background, including English language learners from more than fifty countries. That mix of diversity, innovation, and support was the perfect setting to "discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection" (AASL 2018, 104).

At first, I had an experience that I suspect many new school librarians have. After learning in graduate school about ideal visions for school libraries, I went into that wonderful school, with those wonderful conditions, and was completely mystified when other educators weren't lining up to collaborate with me! What quickly grew our program and services, however, was gradually building relationships with other educators through an Explore lens. We made a regular practice of encouraging curiosity among these educators, and then seeking to provide resources and find

solutions to satisfy it. Exploring technology options was particularly helpful; whenever I needed to win over another educator who'd never collaborated with a school librarian before, I introduced a new tech tool or format that we could tinker with together and to see how it might improve their assignments. This gave us a means of consistently embracing new skills and learning for ourselves as well as our colleagues, thus situating the school library as a central professional learning network within our school.

Explore also emerged as a means of handling the bulk of student learners who visited our school library (400+, about a third of our school, every day) and the huge variety of questions they had and problems they needed to solve. At first, I wondered if I needed to be an expert in everything learners might need to know. But soon enough, after it became clear that that would *never* happen, I learned to be extremely comfortable with modeling my own transparent learning to them in response to their questions. "I don't know, let's ask Google!" became something of a catchphrase in our school library. We couldn't possibly teach every learner about all of the technologies they would need to know, so instead we taught them to iteratively "poke buttons and see what happens!" And whenever they found a solution, either by searching it out or by stumbling upon it, we encouraged them to engage with their community of fellow learners by sharing their solutions around the room.

Gradually, we built our school library environment so that exploration was a central value in how both educators and learners interacted with our space. We took pride in becoming the go-to people for all manner of "this might sound crazy, but is there a way to. . ." questions. We built strong relationships with other educators so that they would feel safe taking instructional risks and trying new things with us. We thought aloud through problems and challenges together with learners, partly to model our thinking processes and approaches to them, and partly because their learning work frequently informed and stretched our own learning. Explore embodied the way I approached layering, deepening, and extending my professional practice as a school librarian.

Learning beyond the Library

After serving as a high school librarian, I had the opportunity to move into school library supervision at the district level. Those who know me well realize that I don't make any bones about how steep my learning curve was during that transition—I had a *lot* to figure out, and all of it in a hurry, while people depended on me to lead! I'll confess that it was a heavy emotional lift, as well as a heavy learning lift; I felt incompetent, frankly, and I wasn't used to that lack of confidence. Fortunately, however, I was able to turn the full weight of my experience as a school librarian onto my own learning curve. I was going through the same kinds of struggles that my learners had felt during challenging assignments and the same kinds of creative

risks that my educator partners had felt while collaborating on new ideas and methods with me. So, I did exactly what I had always helped them to do: I worked hard to deliberately adopt “a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection” (AASL 2018, 104) and I dove into exploring my new role.

One of the major lessons I’ve learned in the last seven years, as a district supervisor and advocate for school libraries, is that the Competencies and Alignments delineated in the *National School Library Standards Explore* Framework represent exactly what stakeholders love about their school libraries. School libraries are centers of learner-directed choices driven by individual interests and curiosity—which is *exactly* what the movement for personalized learning environments is about. By teaching learners to discover, innovate, inquire, persist, and iterate, school librarians are helping learners become truly ready for college, career, and community, with boundless possibilities for their futures. Administrators, parents, and community members all want to see their school libraries function as the heart of the school, where learners’ diverse interests intersect and turn learning from something academic into something that changes lives. And when they see a student learner participate in the kinds of school library programming *Explore* describes, those stakeholders’ simple “oh, cool!” reactions can turn them into advocates working to ensure all learners have access to effective school libraries and school librarians.

When districts engage in strategic planning and think “why school libraries?” the *Explore* standards are exactly what I hope they’ll think about. If a school library needs funding for physical renovations and flexible furnishings, I hope the conversation will be around “ensuring that multiple learning activities can occur” and creating “a learning environment conducive to independent and collaborative exploration and problem solving” (AASL 2018, School Library V.B.2–3.). If a school is considering installing a makerspace, I hope their plan includes the school librarian “modeling persistence through self-directed tinkering and making” (AASL 2018, School Librarian V.B.3.). If educators are concerned about how to ensure they’re raising student learners who can navigate their online worlds critically and responsibly, I hope these educators plan to partner with school librarians to get learners “reflecting and questioning assumptions and possible misconceptions” (AASL 2018, Learner V.A.2.) and “open-mindedly accepting feedback for positive and constructive growth” (AASL 2018, Learner V.D.3.). And as each district strives for better outcomes for their kids, in their conversations about professional learning as well as student learning, I hope they will focus on “enabling learners by helping them develop inquiry-based processes for personal growth” (AASL 2018, School Librarian V.A.3.). With *Explore* as the center, all members of the school community have a clear “why” for supporting effective school libraries.

NOTE

1. Readers may enjoy knowing that Anne Kitchens and I are still friends. I returned to her library several times in middle and high school to volunteer, which helped inform my career choice. We connect occasionally on social media, and several years ago I was honored when she attended my wedding!

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