

Learning to Speak Your Value: An Evidence-based Practice Curriculum for School Librarians

Introduction: The University of North Texas (UNT) College of Information, in collaboration with the University of Kentucky and Towson University, request \$249,999 in funding from IMLS to conduct a three-year project focused on school librarians' evidence-based practice (EBP), resulting in a freely accessible professional development (PD) curriculum that will equip school librarians to collect, analyze, integrate, and share evidence of practice in practical and sustainable ways. This nationwide project will lead to improved school library practice and has the potential to impact countless P-12 students and teachers. This project addresses Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Goal 3, Objective 3.3: Create and/or refine training programs to build library and archival workforce skills and expertise.

Project Justification: EBP is an “approach to information science that promotes the collection, interpretation and integration of valid... user-reported, librarian observed, and research derived evidence... applied to improve the quality of professional judgments” (Booth, 2002, 53). EBP has been identified as a strategy that librarians can use to reflect on, measure, and share libraries' impacts on the communities they serve (American Library Association, 2021; Adams, Gaffney & Lynn, 2016; Todd, 2015). Todd explains EBP in school libraries as a process that involves a) drawing upon existing evidence (foundational), b) calling upon professional knowledge as evidence (process), and c) collecting data as a means to measure evidence (outcomes) (Todd, 2001; 2015).

Both the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) School Library Guidelines (Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2015) and the American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) National School Library Standards (2018) guide librarians to engage in EBP as a means of formatively assessing and improving their work, and AASL re-affirmed the necessity of EBP in its strategic plan, positioning it as one of three overarching goals for the organization. Yet, prior studies of evidence-based librarianship suggest that some school librarians are completely unfamiliar with the practice (Dowell, 2019; Subramaniam, 2015) while others find it to be nuanced (Gillespie et al., 2017) and difficult to apply (Boulden, Pellegrino, & Gerakios, 2019; Richey & Cahill, 2014). Our own recent investigation (Moore & Cahill, 2022) found that while most school librarians receive at least some instruction on data collection and analysis in their preparation coursework, many report that additional PD is necessary. As one participant noted “I wish I'd had more instruction in this area. A few assignments weren't enough.”

Both the public and academic library communities have taken active steps to equip their librarians to apply EBP principles into their work (Click, Wiley, & Houlihan, 2022; Public Library Association, 2019). However, limited research and resources exist for school librarians to effectively implement EBP. This circumstance coupled with findings of a recent study indicating that school librarians are not collecting evidence of their practice nor are they sharing the evidence they do collect with their peers and stakeholders (Moore, Cahill, DiScala, & Wang, in press) point to the necessity for additional tools to support school librarians' EBP knowledge and skills.

The Learning to Speak Your Value project goals are as follows: (1) pinpoint current EBP knowledge and EBP activities implemented by school librarians; (2) expose the challenges school librarians face when attempting to engage in EBP; (2) identify EBP best practices from others in the field of librarianship and translate that into what could work in school library settings; (3) design a PD curriculum for school librarians that addresses their unique situations and challenges with incorporating EBP into their professional practice; (4) test the efficacy of an EBP curriculum with practicing school librarians; and (5) provide a freely-accessible online learning tool that will advance school librarians' EBP, thereby supporting their professional growth and value to their school communities. The International Association of School Librarians (IASL) recognizes this need and fully supports this project. The formal letter of support can be provided.

Project Work Plan: Partners and advisory board: [Dr. Jennifer Moore](#) will oversee the project in collaboration with Drs. [Christie Kodama](#) and [Maria Cahill](#). The project leads each serve as school librarian educators and have expertise in EBP within the school library context, school librarian professional learning, and curriculum and online course development.

The project team will convene a strategic advisory board comprised of one state education agency school librarian lead, one school district librarian supervisor, one [Public Library Association Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee](#) member, one [AASL Chapter Assembly](#) representative, and one school administrator. **Project overview:** The project team will engage diverse groups of practicing school librarians, school librarian educators and supervisors, and school administrators in focus group interviews aimed at identifying school librarians' existing knowledge, practices, and challenges within the context of EBP. Based on the foundational evidence gathered through the focus groups, we will develop a curriculum for school library professionals designed to empower them with knowledge and strategies to gather, analyze, and share evidence of their practice and, ultimately, their impact and value to their school communities. The curriculum will be integrated into an online learning tool and pilot tested with a purposive sample of in-service librarians. Using performance indicators and feedback from these librarians, in addition to collaboration with the advisory board, we will revise and refine the curriculum and online learning tool. We will then widely publicize the freely accessible curriculum and professional learning tool. **Year 1** (August 2023-July 2024) will focus on planning for and conducting in-person and virtual focus groups with up to 60 EBP thought leaders and school library professionals and analyzing focus group data to develop a virtual asynchronous PD curriculum centered on practical and sustainable ways that school librarians can incorporate EBP into their professional practice. During **Year 2** (August 2024-July 2025) we will pilot our curriculum with three diverse cohorts of 10 school librarians each (30 librarians total) and, based on participant feedback and evaluation, revise and refine the curriculum for wide dissemination. Pre- and post-tests will be conducted with cohort members to measure their change in understanding of and ability to use EBP. In **Year 3** (August 2025-July 2026) we will analyze cohort member feedback to refine, package, and publish the curriculum online as an open-source resource for individual school librarians, school districts, and other school library organizations to use in their PD activities and publicize and promote the availability of the tool. In addition to communicating project activities through standard online tools such as school librarian discussion lists and social media, each year of the project, the project leads will organize webinars and lead conference presentations to convey project activities, disseminate findings from analyses, and promote the online curriculum.

Diversity Plan: Obtaining a diversity of perspectives and experiences with EBP is necessary to ensure that any PD curriculum or program is broadly applicable to a variety of school libraries and communities. To achieve national diversity, we will recruit focus group members and cohort members from all [U.S. Census regions and divisions](#), paying careful attention to recruit them based on their own diverse identities as well as the types of schools and communities they serve (e.g. ELLs/bilingual, urban/suburban/rural, tribal, border communities, public/private school, etc.). With these diversity indices in mind, we will also identify those in the Co-PIs and Advisory Group's networks as well as [ALA Spectrum Scholars](#), state-level library organization recommendations, and/or members of the five organizations of the [Joint Council of Librarians of Color](#) who are school librarians and invite them directly to participate.

Project Results: The resulting EBP curriculum will be freely available online. School districts and state organizations will have the ability to import the curriculum into their own learning management systems for their librarians to complete or to use the existing online tool. Project information, successes, and findings from analyses will be shared via multiple professional outlets. Possible venues include the AASL [Knowledge Quest Blog](#), UNT's [Multiple Literacies Lab "Living Multiliteracies" Series](#) (a monthly webinar, free of charge, and open to the public), the IASL Conference, and the AASL National Conference, among others.

Budget Summary: Anticipated project costs are \$249,999. This request includes \$29,256 for faculty salary support, \$1,500 to support one hourly graduate student assistant, \$7,178 for fringe benefits \$5,000 for travel, \$500 for focus group room rental, \$3,000 for focus group member remuneration, \$15,000 for curriculum group member remuneration, \$7,500 honorarium for advisory board members, \$7,065 for an instructional design consultant, \$39,690 in indirect costs, \$60,181 for a subaward to the University of Kentucky, and \$74,129 for a subaward to Towson University.

[References](#)