RE-18-19-0007-19 - Kent State University

**Project VOICE (Value-sensitive design of Outcomes Informing Community Engagement) for Libraries**

**Project Abstract**: A research team from Kent State University and University of Washington is applying for a three-year LB21 Research in Service to Practice grant of $407,300. This project will research and develop a social justice, outcomes-based planning and assessment tool that provides hands-on assistance for library staff who want to better support young children (ages zero to eight) and their families from underserved communities through outreach programs and services that nurture children's early learning and development with an emphasis on equity, engagement, and empowerment.

**Statement of National Need**: Research shows that access to early learning opportunities impacts later school success. Libraries are already well suited to meet the early learning and developmental needs of young children from underserved communities through free programs and services, such as storytime, that are offered in the library. However, some families experience significant barriers with accessing these programs, as we found in our NLG Planning Grant, Project LOCAL. Through focus groups, interviews, and a nationwide survey we learned about a variety of programs offered by librarians in community locations to meet families in underserved communities where they are and support their children's learning and development. The participating librarians identified many underserved communities that they support, including individuals with low income, those with low literacy, immigrants and New Americans, and those experiencing homelessness as well as some in African American and Latinx communities who have experienced marginalization. Similarly, we learned about the ways in which librarians reach out to these communities to gather community data to learn what they would like from the library. While these libraries have indicated a strong interest in expanding their outreach programming, not all libraries know how to translate this community data into impactful program development, perhaps due to a reported lack of knowledge about how to approach outcomes-based planning and assessment of their outreach programs. Moreover, research has underscored that libraries should promote social justice through their programs and services for their communities.[i] "'Social justice is about giving voice to communities who have been forced into silence; social justice is about equity and equal access.'"[ii] By using a social justice model to inform outcomes-based program development and delivery, libraries could approach their work with families from underserved communities with a strengths-based, family-focused perspective that uplifts, supports, and emphasizes an assets-based model. To do this, our study seeks to holistically examine: 1) these outreach programs; 2) stakeholders' perceptions and experiences of these programs through a triangulation of the voices of the librarians, families, and community partners; 3) affordances and challenges of a social justice, outcomes-based planning and assessment tool; and 4) how these programs can promote aspects of social justice including equity, engagement, and empowerment while also supporting learning for the young children (ages zero to eight) and families who attend.

**Research Questions and Project Design:** This study is guided by this overarching research question: *How might a social justice approach to outcomes-based planning and assessment of outreach programs enable librarians to better support young children and their families from underserved communities?* To do this, the study is comprised of three phases, which are outlined below:

**Phase 1: (RQ1)** How, if at all, are libraries offering outreach programs and services to reach and serve young children and their families in underserved communities? **(RQ2)** What are the experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders (families, community partners) who participate in and/or facilitate these outreach programs and services? **(RQ3)** How, if at all, are librarians planning and assessing their outreach programs and services to promote equity, engagement, and empowerment for families in underserved communities?

| Data Collection | Purpose |
|---|---|
| 16 embedded multi-site case studies in rural/urban libraries in four states: Ohio, Washington, Colorado, and South Carolina (interviews, observations, document analysis, environmental scans, etc). | To study the phenomenon of outreach programs for families in underserved communities in a holistic way, giving voice to the involved stakeholders, enabling researchers to dig deeper than was possible in the initial planning grant. |

**Phase 2: (RQ1)** How might value-sensitive, participatory design workshops enable librarians to embed a social justice, outcomes-based approach in the development, assessment, and sustainability of their outreach programs and services?

| Data Collection | Purpose |
|---|---|
| • Participatory design workshops for researchers and librarians to collaborate on developing a hands-on tool.<br>• Independent tool testing time for librarians.<br>• Periodic, online webinars for librarians to share their experiences with using the tool. | • To enable librarians to participate in 1) the process of developing a hands-on tool that supports social justice, outcomes-based planning and assessment and 2) the testing of the tool in order to support iteration and refinement of the tool.<br>• To provide an online peer community of practice to assess tool affordances and challenges, and to build community. |

**Phase 3: (RQ1)** What are the affordances and challenges of planning, delivering and assessing outreach programs and services using a social justice, outcomes-based tool? **(RQ1a)** What impact do these programs and services have on the experiences and perceptions of the families who participate?

| Data Collection | Purpose |
|---|---|
| A second round of case studies at selected Phase 1 sites, as well as interviews and surveys with the participant librarians and families who attend their programs. | To understand how the tool is impacting librarians' planning and assessment process as well as stakeholders' perceptions of and experiences in these programs in terms of access and equity. |

**Data Analysis:** The data from all phases will be analyzed using thematic analysis as well as inductive and deductive coding of transcripts, field notes, and documents. In addition, Phase 2 will incorporate visual analysis of artifacts generated in workshops and discourse analysis of conversations in online webinars.

**Project Team:** Dr. Kathleen Campana, Assistant Professor, Kent State University School of Information; Dr. Michelle H. Martin, Beverly Cleary Professor of Children and Youth Services, University of Washington Information School; and J. Elizabeth Mills, doctoral candidate, University of Washington Information School. In Project LOCAL, we collaborated with state libraries for survey dissemination and in an advisory capacity; we relied on existing partnerships with library staff and administrators for recruitment and data collection locations; we consulted with our advisory board (who have all committed to continuing as part of the advisory board for this grant); and we leveraged our existing relationship with ALSC to share our findings with the field in an ALSC-sponsored, practitioner-focused white paper scheduled for publication in 2019. We plan to use these existing relationships in this proposed research to extend and deepen the impact for the field.

**National Impact:** This project will have national impact through the development of a social justice, outcomes-based tool that can 1) help librarians to be more effective in the development, planning, and assessment of their outreach work with young children and families in underserved communities, and 2) help librarians to advocate for programs and services that promote equity, engagement, and empowerment for these families across the nation.

**Projected Performance Goals and Outcomes:** This research will holistically portray how outreach programming is taking place in four different states across the US; develop a social justice, outcomes-based tool for outreach program planning and assessment that seeks to meet families where they are and support their needs and aspirations; enable librarians to effectively implement the findings from their community data collection into the development of their programs; and provide a template for social justice-based, participatory design workshops for practitioners to address current challenges using design theories and techniques in a reflective, iterative way. We plan to disseminate our research through conferences (ALA, PLA, NAEYC, ALSC Institute, ARSL, and others) and publish our findings in both academic and practitioner journals. We will pursue continuing education venues where we can share the tool and the workshops with practitioners.

**Relevance to Libraries as Community Catalysts:** This project supports the Community Catalyst project category in three ways. Our case studies and participatory design workshops will *explore and develop improved and/or potentially replicable participatory library programming models that engage communities and individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds;* our social justice, outcomes-based tool will *focus on enhancing opportunities and well-being in communities and increase equity and access*; and our partnerships with practitioners will *investigate widespread community challenges that are informed by current library practice, and feature mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and practitioners*.

**Plan for Diversity:** This project is committed to helping libraries be more effective in their work with young children and families from underserved communities who face numerous barriers to coming into the library. We are employing a social justice lens to understand how these programs can promote equity, engagement, and empowerment for these families, underscoring the importance of diversity in this research and ultimately in how libraries support families in underserved communities. Furthermore, the research team represents diversity in terms of racial and ethnic makeup as well as academic discipline, thereby providing a variety of perspectives and life experiences that enable thoughtful data collection and analysis.

**Estimated Budget:** Total project costs $407,300 ($321,770 KSU; $85,530 UW). KSU direct costs $206,180, F&A $115,590. UW Subaward direct costs $55,003, F&A $30,527. Costs including salaries & benefits ($190,683), Travel ($40,500), Materials ($6000), Transcription ($8000), and Participant travel funds ($16,000).

[i] Rankin, C. (2016). Library Services for the Early Years: Policy, Practice, and the Politics of the Age. *Library Trends 65*(1), 5-18.

[ii] Cooke, N.A., Sweeney, M.E., & Noble, S.U. (2016). Social justice as a topic and tool: An attempt to transform an LIS curriculum and culture. *The Library Quarterly, 86*(1), pp. 107-124.