Online Ready: Digital School Librarianship for the Pandemic and Beyond
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Statement of Broad Need: In this **Research in Service to Practice** exploratory project, The Universities of South Carolina, Michigan, and West Georgia request **$495,300** from LB21 for a three-year empirical study to examine, assess, and address school librarianship knowledge gaps in the design and delivery of targeted and inclusive online learning. The ability to design and deliver fully online instruction to K-12 students is not an integral component of school library preparation programs despite pre-pandemic growth in online K-12 education (Green, Jones, & Burke, 2017). The nation's abrupt pivot to remote schooling due to COVID-19 highlighted this knowledge gap. Online efforts by school librarians were deployed with little understanding of effective practices for culturally competent and inclusive online instruction (e.g. differently abled learners; limited English proficiency), digital environment development, or consideration of sociotechnical equity (e.g. broadband availability and adoption rates; device ownership) (Einhorn, 2020). **Challenge:** A rolling wave of pandemic outbreaks may mark the next decade (Roberts, 2020); school librarians must be ready with effective, inclusive online design that addresses their students' unique needs. School librarians need a strategic toolkit that synthesizes thoughtful community needs analysis, impactful instructional planning, and inclusive online teaching strategies, accessible in one location.

Research Proposal: While there is significant research exploring the school librarian's role in technology integration (Everhart & Johnston, 2016), as well as K-12 online teacher preparation (Archambault, Debruler, & Freidhofff, 2014); there is a paucity of research examining the link between school librarian preparation and online pedagogical training, beliefs, and practices as informed by community demographics and needs analysis. Building on recent IMLS funded efforts to improve school librarian professional practice, the proposed project will examine, assess, and address the school librarianship knowledge gap on the design and delivery of targeted and inclusive online learning. Findings will inform the development and testing of a professional development (PD) on culturally competent online learning for K-12. **Research Questions:** How do school librarians define and actualize their role in virtual learning? What are the characteristics of school librarianship knowledge gap on culturally competent online pedagogy and community needs analysis? How does completion of professional development affect school librarian mastery of culturally competent online learning design?

Theoretical Framework: Research will be conducted through the sociocultural perspective of transformative learning, "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Transformative learning categorizes knowledge in two ways: *schemes*, explicit knowledge, skills, beliefs, and articulated values (Hodge, 2014), and *meaning perspectives*, "the structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within which our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 109). Transformative learning is an effective lens for examining the unique learning process of adult learning, particularly useful in capturing negotiation of large paradigmatic shifts (Taylor, 2007).

Methodology: Both qualitative and quantitative data highlighting complex and interdisciplinary phenomena present in educational settings will be collected using mixed methods so that results further inform each type of data set (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative data: statistical models for pre-post testing. Qualitative data: context-dependent and inductive data analysis of focus groups, participant interviews, participant work product. **Participants:** 60 school librarians recruited nationally through a competitive process designed to diversify the participant pool as well as school demographics.

Project Design: Over 3 years, the Co-PIs will use mixed-method data collection and analysis to develop a detailed picture of school librarians' culturally competent online pedagogy knowledge gap. Results will be used to design and deliver **three** fully online PD courses (model here) for 60 school librarians (Year 1: 1 cohort of 20, Year 2: 2 cohorts of 20) addressing the design of targeted and inclusive online learning products informed by community needs assessment and analysis (IMLS Goal 1: Lifelong Learning). Cohort size was determined by research on best practices for project-based online instruction (Veletsianos, 2020). The research team will collect data in **three phases**: 1) examination of knowledge gap through national data collection; 2) participant data collected throughout delivery of Online Ready PD; and 3) data collected during the school years immediately following PD as participants deploy their designs and apply what they learned.

Project Goals: 1) Examine and describe school librarianship's knowledge gap on the design and delivery of targeted, inclusive online learning; 2) design and offer 3 online PD courses to establish a critical mass of geographically diverse Online Ready librarians; 3) assess implementation of PD participant developed K-12 online learning products; 4) develop a Creative Commons-licensed Design Planning Guide to scaffold users through community analysis, instructional design, and

inclusive online design and development; 5) Post-grant, provide **Online Ready** as a free, open source stand-alone training on knowledge, skills, and dispositions for connecting community needs to digital learning environments.

Proposed Work Plan: <u>Year 1(Fall 2021- Spring 2022)</u>: Research team develops, tests, validates data collection instruments; collects national data on school librarian online competency via online fora; designs Online Ready PD using analyzed data on knowledge gaps and individual expertise. By May, 20 participants recruited using professional organization contacts and listservs. Advisory Council (AC) reviews applications via rubric to ensure diverse representation. Baseline participant data collected prior to PD launch. <u>(Summer 2022)</u>: 1st iteration of Online Ready PD; data collected on school librarian understanding of PD content pre- and post-training. <u>Year 2 (Fall 2022-Spring 2023)</u>: PD tweaked based on Year 1 participant feedback. UofSC LMS utilized as a feedback mechanism for participants evaluating their online products during the 2022-2023 school year. By May 2023, 40 new participants recruited. <u>(Summer 2023)</u>: 2nd and 3rd iteration of Online Ready PD; pre- and post- data collected on participants' understanding of PD content. UofSC LMS utilized as a feedback mechanism for participants evaluating their online products during the 2023-2024 school year. <u>Year 3 (Fall 2023-2024)</u>: Data collection and analysis completed; Online Ready, including Design Planning Guide, developed as a stand-alone, revolving, open-source product for post-grant use, promoted to district leaders and LILEAD alumni and via online conference led by project personnel and participants. Website with project data and materials finalized.

Diversity Plan: Grant-funded scholarships support PD completion by school librarians from varying grade bands and diverse populations, with priority given to rural, economically disadvantaged, marginalized, or other underserved communities. AC members, chosen for diverse professional representation, viewpoints, experiences, geographies, and service populations, oversee participant applications to ensure both diverse participants and communities are represented. The AC provides continued feedback on content, quality, applicability, and cultural competency of Online Ready PD.

Dissemination Plan: In addition to submission of findings to peer-reviewed and practitioner journals and conference presentations, project data (e.g. case studies, sample lesson plans) will be made available for future researchers through the UofSC open-access data repository. A website with accompanying materials, including the Design Planning Guide, for both researchers and practitioners will be developed. Online Ready PD will be offered post-grant both as a free and open-source option, and as a low-cost certificate through UofSC. Webinars on how to use the data repository and website, including guidance on accessing and applying the Online Ready PD, will be presented in a virtual conference during Year 3.

Impact: This project aligns with IMLS Agency-Level Goal 2: Build Capacity through innovative application of research findings toward design of PD that supports school librarians in "their ability to implement best practices." Online Ready will establish **foundational research** on school librarianship in K-12 online settings, while educating 60 school librarians from diverse areas across the U. S. to support the design and implementation of **culturally competent K-12 online pedagogy.** The project concludes with a wide dissemination of research findings and instructional materials. It will contribute to the body of research on **embedded librarianship**, further defining the **instructional role of the school librarian**, and the profession's **impact on student learning outcomes in virtual learning settings** (ALA/AASL, 2019).

Estimated Budget: $495,300 is requested from IMLS for Project Personnel: 1) Co-PIs $259,980: (fringe/insurance/salary): data collection, analysis, evaluation, and dissemination, co-design and co-teach Online Ready PD products and resources 2) Instructional Specialist $20,000: co-develops/co-teaches Online Ready PD products and resources 3) Project Manager $33,306: oversees project logistics, registration, manages virtual conference 4) Advisory Council $15,000: review participant applications and PD design 5) Participant Support $42,000: assist in recruitment, ensuring inclusive and diverse representation 6) Project Infrastructure $15,500: (website, registration, certificate, transcript processing, PD tech support, additional instructors for Year 2 cohort expansion) 7) Total indirect costs $109,514 (rate of 49%; no IDC on student support).

Personnel: Dr. Green (Co-PI): Associate Professor of Information Science with expertise in school librarianship, instructional design, online pedagogy. K. Fontichiaro (Co-PI): Clinical Associate Professor of Information with expertise in public and school libraries in diverse communities, online PD, community needs analysis. Dr. Johnston (Co-PI): Associate Professor of Education with expertise in school library STEM, rural school libraries, LIS research methods, and research grant project evaluation. Dr. Romero-Hall (Instructional Specialist): Associate Professor of Instructional Technology with expertise in instructional design, culturally competent online pedagogy, social justice in education. Dr. Liz Hartnett (Project Manager): South Carolina Center for Community Literacy. **Confirmed Advisory Council:** Erika Long, Becky Calzada, Carolyn Kirio, Rachel Altobelli, Amanda Jones.