

ALA and Indian Country: Opportunities to Collaborate to Support Reading

Introduction

Thank you for the kind invitation to speak with you over lunch. I would like to spend my time introducing my primary professional organization, the American Library Association, or ALA. Then I will give a summary of the work we completed during my recent term as ALA's elected President. Finally, I will highlight some of ALA's activities related, logically, to supporting reading, especially services focused on youth services. I will close with an idea of some work to coordinate work in the future.

ALA: History and Organization

Founded in 1876, the American Library Association is the largest and oldest library association in the world. Melvil Dewey drafted ALA's motto, first adopted in 1892: "the best reading, for the largest number, at the least cost." ALA's mission is:

"to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the professional of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

ALA's also has seven key action areas:

- diversity;
- equitable access to information and library services;
- education and lifelong learning;
- intellectual freedom;
- advocacy for libraries and the profession;
- literacy;
- organizational excellence.

The 65,000 members of ALA include librarians working in a wide range of libraries or information settings including academic/college libraries, public libraries, school libraries, and special libraries. ALA's governing body is a Council of nearly 180 members, including 100 members voted by the membership at large. Each year the membership votes on a member to serve as a volunteer President-Elect who continues one year of service into his or her year as President and then one year as the Immediate Past President. The Council has an Executive Board including 8 members elected by Council and the President, President-Elect, and Immediate-Past-President.

ALA organizes its efforts through eleven divisions, 17 round tables, and nearly 60 state or regional chapters. There are also over 30 student chapter groups in the more than 55 schools offering master's degrees in programs accredited by ALA. ALA is also affiliated with over 25 organizations who share similar interests. These include five ethnic library associations: American Indian Library Association, Asian Pacific American Library Association, the Black Caucus of ALA, Chinese American Library Association, and REFORMA: National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to

Latinos and the Spanish Speaking. A salaried Executive Director serves as the secretariat for the Council, Executive Board, and Executive Committee. He or she also manages a staff of some 250 employees at either the ALA Headquarters Office in Chicago or at the ALA Washington Office in the District of Columbia. ALA has an affiliated organization, the ALA-Allied Professional Association that works on issues of concern to librarians such as salaries, unions, workplace wellness, and post-master's certification. The Freedom to Read Foundation is also affiliated with ALA.

10,000 to 14,000 members gather at the ALA Midwinter Meeting where their time is largely spent on conducting the business of governance and hundreds of committees. Conferences. Over 20,000 members gather at the ALA Annual Conference each summer to attend approximately 2,000 programs and events and visit the 800 or more booths in exhibits. You can find out more about ALA at ala.org.

ALA: My Presidential Year

I was fortunate to be elected to serve as ALA's first American Indian President for 2007-2008. My ALA Presidential year was launched with an Honor Dance at the National Museum of the American Indian and an inaugural banquet and dance in Washington, DC, featuring two music groups from Austin, Texas and a Native cuisine.

What were our accomplishments?

- Two education forums, one focusing on doctoral students' work and the other on service engagement of students in their master's programs;
- A book contract for Service Learning, a monograph that two of my students and I completed for ALA Editions;
- The information architecture for a database of Capstone/fieldwork experiences;
- A Gathering of Readers online celebration of indigenous children's reading and culture that took place during National Library Week;
- Web content highlighting selected library services for immigrants and those incarcerated;
- A workplace wellness website that will find its new home with the ALA-APA;
- Wellness document for library workers including a workplace wellness inventory, wellness passport, and a staying healthy at conference plan;
- A Wellness Fair featuring exhibitors, poster sessions, a celebrity chef, and Dance Dance Revolution;
- An Exercise Pavilion with classes on relaxation exercises, and seated yoga, Pilates, and hula;
- Delivery of over 30,000 SURVIVORSHIP Notebooks to public libraries from the Lance Armstrong Foundation;
- Discussions related to library camps for youth;
- Launching of a national oral history project, Capturing Our Stories, with a media rich digital library;
- Meeting effectiveness tip sheets and podcasts;

- Conference events including an Honor Dance, Presidential programs at the Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference, and a Many Voices, Many Nations evening of indigenous readings and performance;
- Podcasts and bilingual tipsheets on meeting effectiveness;
- The first Presidential Citations for Gaming in Libraries;
- The First Presidential Citations on Innovation in International Librarianship;
- And collaborations with WGBH-Boston, Reading is Fundamental, the Indigenous Language Institute, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

ALA Promotes Reading Through Continuing Celebrations

The ALA President is able to highlight initiatives of interest. ALA's divisions and other units have longstanding commitments to highlighting reading, initiatives that also have meaning in Indian country.

ALA celebrates reading through various ongoing events. These include:

- National Library Card Sign-Up Month (September)
 - A reminder to parents that one of the best ways to prepare for the new school year is to get a library card.
 - The 2008 spokesperson is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.
- Banned Books Week (27 Sept – 4 Oct)
 - A week of celebrating how libraries support reading and combat censorship.
- Teen Read Week (12-18 October). The 2008 theme is “Books with Bite@Your Library.
 - This year features PSAs by Nancy Cartwright, the voice of Bart Simpson.
 - Libraries develop programs.
 - Members can enter a contest to win an author visit.
- Read, Learn, Play. National Gaming Day@ Your Library (15 November 2008)
 - Each public library branch will receive a copy of Hasbro's “Pictureka” game to try to set a record for the number of people playing a board game at the same time.
- Annual Youth Media Awards
 - ALA recognizes the best of children's literature through awards including the Caldecott, Newbery, Pura Belpre, Coretta Scott King, Alex, Odyssey, and Schneider Family book awards.
- Teen Tech Week (8-14 March 2009)
 - Highlights use of technology in library services with teens.
 - Teen Tech Week Song Contest.
 - Guides on making music, using blogs and wikis, gaming.
 - Teen Tech Week Mini Grants
 - Annual theme: 2008 was Tune In@Your Library and the focus was music.

- National Library Week (12-18 April 2009)
 - Activities include Operation Teen Book Drop on Support Teen Literature Day. Readergirlz collaborates with ALA and publishers to deliver thousands of books to hospitalized teens. Hospitals will again receive books in 2009. Readergirlz is considering delivering these books to Native teens in 2010.
 - Each year there is a theme and spokesperson for National Library Week. The 2008 theme was Join the Circle of Knowledge@Your Library and the spokesperson was Julie Andrews.
- El Día de Los Niños/El Día de Los Libros
 - Over 400 public libraries celebrate a bilingual reading day for children on or about April 30 each year.
 - ALA's Association of Library Services for Children (ALSC) provides a tool kit, promotional materials, and a way to share Día stories.

Opportunities Through ALA

In addition to these continuing reading celebrations, ALA offers opportunities for libraries to participate in special events and to nominate and receive awards and other recognitions. A sample of these opportunities include the following.

The three ALA divisions involved with youth services include the American Association of School Libraries (AASL), Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). YALSA is the fastest growing ALA Division, reflecting a growing interest in this career path and the emergence of exciting services for teens as more and more libraries create teen areas with the assistance of Teen Advisory Groups (TAGs).

A sampling of activities through the sections include:

1. AASL Innovative Reading Grant, 2006-. \$2,500 grant to “support the planning and implementation of a unique and innovative program for children which motivates and encourages reading, especially with struggling readers.”
2. ALSC's Bookapalooza. ALSC selects three libraries to receive up to \$10,000 in new books, videos, and recordings.
3. ALSC/BWI Summer Reading Grant. A public libraries receives \$3,000 to develop an outstanding summer reading program.
4. YALSA/BWI Collection Development Grant. A \$1,000 award to a YALSA member to spend on their library collection.
5. YALSA MAE Award for Best Literature Program for Teens for \$500.
6. YALSA Great Books Giveaway Competition. The winning library receives one year of free materials for youth that YALSA receives from publishers.

Other opportunities include:

- Let's Talk About It. For over 25 years, ALA's Public Programs Office has offered mini-grants to libraries to organize reading and discussion groups. Recently, 50

libraries received grants of \$2,500 to cover the costs of contracting with scholars to lead public discussions on the topic of “Love & Forgiveness.”

- ALA is in the process of selecting the first recipients of the Carnegie Corporation of New York/New York Times “I Love My Librarian Award.” The public has been invited to nominate a librarian who:
 - A. helped make the library experience a positive one;
 - B. improved the quality of his/her patron’s life;
 - C. made the library a better place.
- Up to ten recipients will each receive \$5,000 and will be recognized at a special awards ceremony at The Times Center in December 2008. Over 900 completed applications have already been received and we expect more to be submitted before the closing nominating dates of 15 October.
- National Advocacy.
 - Part of ALA’s national advocacy efforts include designing a website for the public called ilovelibraries.org.
 - Efforts to Save School Libraries

ALA Offers Content and Products

ALA units have developed content for readers.

- Recommended Reading lists including:
 - Amelia Bloomer Project: Feminist Picture Books, Fiction, and Nonfiction that include strong female characters;
 - Books for the Holidays;
 - Books to Grown On, titles for children up to 3 years;
- Materials to Promote Reading
 - The “Born to Read: How to Raise a Reader” brochure in English and Spanish;
 - Born to Read: advice on reading with the youngest child
 - 750+ best website for children

The ALA Store sells numerous products that libraries purchase to support their reading promotion efforts.

- Celebrity READ posters
- Born to Read materials
- T-shirts
- Other products: cups, mugs, business card holders, buttons.
- Seals to attach to award winning books
- Publications

What’s Next for Us?

My students and I are in the ninth year of our service program, “If I Can Read, I Can Do Anything.” This national library club for Native children is operated through the libraries of nearly 30 tribal schools in twelve states. Each fall we poll librarians at our participating schools, asking for their advice on how they would like us to work with

them. We offer assistance in planning programs such as family reading nights and events tied to ALA's calendar of events. This year, as in past year, the librarians have asked for donations of new books. We try to respond to this request by providing a gift of up to 1000 new books to each school. Librarians have the option of requesting titles that we select, of sending us collection profiles, or of selecting off of a prepared list of selected new book donations. We have worked on special requests from sites to assist in relandscaping a school grounds to prevent flooding the library, to arrange for visits by Native authors, travel support to attend ALA conferences, donations of dictionaries for each child in the school, incentives for family reading nights and Battle of the Books competitions, grantwriting assistance, hosting of graduate students to assist the librarian, and general consulting advice.

From 2003 until this December we were also able to provide financial support for indigenous students to enter our graduate program and complete their master's in information studies. These scholarships were part of the Honoring Generations: Preparing the Next Generation of Native Librarians grants, funded through the Institute of Museum and Library Services as a Laura Bush Librarians for the Twenty-First Century Grant. Our seven recent graduates include the new director of the Pueblo of Laguna's tribal college, an archivist in Pueblo, Colorado, an archivist at the University of Miami, and a diversity intern at the North Carolina State University. These students have completed Capstone or graduating projects with the Smithsonian, National Museum of the American Indian, and at a library in Mexico. They have given presentations at the International Indigenous Librarians Forums in Canada and Australia, the annual Library and Information Association of New Zealand/Aotearoa, the Sequoyah Research Center Symposium, the American Culture Association/Popular Culture Association SW/Texas conference, the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, and the national conference for tribal libraries, museums, and archives.

Other students in our School have also participated in a myriad of service efforts in Indian country. They have created resource lists for tribal school librarians and tribal college faculty. They have created a virtual library of education resources for a tribal college, and worked with Native children, educators, and elders to the creation of virtual museums. They have visited tribal schools to provide story telling, weeding, and onsite project management for reading promotion events.

What is the future of our efforts to promote reading in tribal communities?

In our School of Information we will continue to provide services to tribal libraries. We are exhausting our grant funds so are seeking funds to sustain our efforts. An annual budget of \$25,000 would allow us to retain a Graduate Research Associate during our nine-month school year as well as some funding for shipping materials, purchase of incentives, and two coordinated site visits. An endowment would also allow us to continue to support the graduate education of Native students. Of the other 56 master's programs accredited by ALA, only one other, the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona, has

graduated more Native students. We continue to receive inquiries from promising Native students. A recent inquirer was a student completing an undergraduate degree in screen studies who was directed to our program by his tribe's academic advisor. Given the success of our graduates, we know that our program prepare Native graduates are ready to step into leadership roles in their tribes and nationally.

While we will strive to sustain our initiative, our work is part of an expanding web of literacy based programs that provide services in Indian country. Among these efforts are Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, The BIE's FACE program, Reading is Fundamental, the Hopa Mountain Storymakers, and Dr. Buffy Sainte-Marie's Cradelboard project. Add long term and short term Native language revitalization efforts and you have a range of initiatives. What is needed is an opportunity to learn from each other and to coordinate nationally. The vision of supporting Native reading across the lifespan is possible. What is needed is large scale coordination, incentives, and commitment by funders, researchers, community members, librarians, educators, Native students and their extended families. One possible structure for such coordination would be the selection of a National Native Librarian. Native children need to acquire reading competence in order to fully engage in all subject area studies as well as to develop a life-long love of independent reading. With these skills, Native children can indeed lead tribal communities into the next generation.