

Professional Growth Assignment: VAASL Regional Spring Conference 2024

Constance Padden

Department of STEM Education and Professional Studies, Old Dominion University

LIBS 676: Library Media Services and the Curriculum

Professor Mary Keeling

25 April 2024

An Author's Journey & School Visits: Sparking Curiosity & Engagement with Sylvia Liu

The first session I attended allowed me to get a better look at author visits and realize how valuable they can be for students. Sylvia Liu is the author of middle grade and picture books, as well as an artist. During her school visits she takes the students on her author journey, showing them some of her first writings, all the way back to age 6, and how she has progressed as a writer. Liu shares the three most important aspects of being a good writer: 1) write what you know, 2) make readers feel what the character feels by putting emotion into your stories, and 3) ask, what if? because ideas are everywhere. She also helps students of all ages understand that writing a book and getting it published is not a quick process, which can be eye-opening for them.

During her elementary visits she gives a picture book presentation of the picture books she authored, speaking to the research process and helping students understand what resilience means physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Her school visits promote literacy and encourage students to be authors, no matter the age. One of her points that stuck with me the most was how she lets the students know that even though she is an author and artist, she is still practicing. This is important for students to hear so they realize practicing is not a negative thing, but it is necessary to improve your craft.

I chose this session because I wanted to know more about author visits and what they offer the students. Liu's author visits are very informative, engaging, and well designed, which is inspiring for me when planning library lessons. I realize not all author visits will be like Sylvia Liu's, but she has made me see the importance in hosting author visits.

Keynote Address with Alyssa Colman

Alyssa Colman is an author of middle grade fantasy novels. In her keynote address, she used a quote, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to show the importance for librarians to be the “weather makers of the library” and to set a tone in your library that is inviting and memorable. She also quoted Maya Angelou stating, students “will never forget how you made them feel.” These quotes gave me pause and made me really think about what sort of tone I would like to set for myself and the school library. When Colman asked us to pick the weather we would like to portray, I chose sunny and snowy. Sunny days are warm and inviting while snowy days (I picture early in the morning or late at night when there is hardly anyone outside) are serene and even hopeful (for a snow day). This is the tone I want to portray for myself and for the school library. Colman’s keynote address has helped me think about how important it is to set a tone and work daily to make students feel it.

Like Sylvia Liu, Colman spoke about the process of creating a book and the length of time it can take, which is different for every author and even for every book. I love how Colman makes sure to represent a love for reading in each of her books. It truly proves how the tone set by Mrs. Cooper, her former middle school librarian, and the experiences she provided to the young Colman molded her into who she is today and induced her love of reading and writing.

Arms Wide Open: Supporting the English Language Learners Program at Our School

with Julia Cooley, April Knowles, and Evelyn Whitt

I chose to attend this session about supporting English language learners because most of my career as a teacher has been in Title I schools, which usually have many English learners. The school librarian position I am taking on next school year will be in a Title I school. The librarians and ESOL teacher showed how they used visuals and scaffolds to help their high school English learners, including new comers, better understand and use the research process. First, they helped the students know the difference between formal and informal (used in daily lives) research. The teachers used visual checklists because picture support makes some words easier to understand. Next, they moved into the brainstorm stage and provided a Web Graph as a brainstorm graphic organizer. Before starting the true research part, the teachers taught the students how to cite resources and modeled by having a works cited page for reference. Finally, the students learned how to gather information about their question and use a graphic organizer to keep the process organized. Teachers provided a Bento Box Rubric for students to use as they completed their research journey to make sure they were on the correct path. The teachers also conferenced with the students throughout the process to ensure success.

Even though this session was geared more for middle and high school libraries, the information shared can be useful in any research or collaborative situation, especially with English learners. Making everything visual (like the signage used within the library, etc.) and providing scaffolds will allow all students to be successful with their learning.

Using Smithsonian Learning Labs in Libraries and Classrooms with Tonita Dozier

Tonita Dozier walked the session attendees through the Smithsonian Learning Lab, talking about all the artifacts and information the site has to offer. The Smithsonian Learning Lab is an interactive platform filled with an abundance of authentic digital resources where people, including teachers and students, can discover, create, share, and learn. The Smithsonian is made of 20 museums and the Smithsonian Learning Lab makes the artifacts from those museums easily within reach for all, even the artifacts not on display within the physical museum. Anyone can build a collection with images, audio, video, and/or text or use one of the many collections already created.

I chose this session because I wanted to learn more about this valuable resource and how to use it within the library. The Smithsonian Learning Lab will allow me to access a wide range of museum resources, including primary resources, that I can use across the grade levels. The provided lessons will help me develop critical thinkers through inquiry. Being able to create my own collections will also help me fit materials to specific grade levels.



Certificate of Attendance



Certificate awarded to

Constance Padden

5 Professional Development Points for Attendees
15 Professional Development Points per topic for Presenters

Virginia Association of School Librarians
York Spring Regional Conference
March 8, 2024

York Regional Director:
Kristy Haight

Your conference packet and program will verify your participation