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Daren A. Graves  
*Simmons College*

Doris Ann Sweet  
*Assumption College*

Mary McGowan  
*Simmons College*

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# "I feel like *I* could do it too": A Paradigm Shift in an Urban Library Internship Program

Daren A. Graves, Doris Ann Sweet, & Mary McGowan

Dr. Daren Graves is the Director of the Urban Master's Program at Simmons College. As a teacher educator, he is committed to preparing teachers who see urban youth as assets in the teaching and learning process. His research interest involves the interplay of school culture and racial identity on the academic performance of Black adolescents. Daren earned his doctoral degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Doris Ann Sweet is currently Director of Library Services at Assumption College. Previously she was Associate Director for Research Services at the Simmons College Library and Project Director for MassBLAST (Building Library Awareness and Staff for Tomorrow). MassBLAST [www.simmons.edu/massblast](http://www.simmons.edu/massblast) was a state-wide project, based at Simmons College and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the H. W. Wilson Foundation, to develop and implement library internships for teens.

Mary McGowan was the Coordinator of the MassBLAST program at Simmons College. She has a Masters of Science in Library and Information Science from Simmons College and a Masters of Science in Film from Boston University.

## Abstract

In the 2007/2008 academic year Simmons College Library put the life experiences of eight Boston high school students at the heart of an already established, IMLS-funded forty-hour library internship. The internship's long standing goal was to create lifelong library ambassadors and future librarians, by teaching the students information literacy skills, introducing them to how a complex organization (the library) is organized and run, and imparting college and career skills. The learning paradigm conceived of the librarians as reciprocal learning and research partners, positioning the lived experiences and authentic interests of the students as central to the internship. The article describes how, through the cultivation of meaningful and non-traditional student-librarian relationships, librarians partnering with a faculty member from the department of education created an environment where students learned both library skills and lessons about how to more effectively navigate the everyday challenges they face.

**Keywords:** urban students, critical pedagogy, student/librarian relationship, school/university partnership

## Introduction

Access to digital information has become more important yet more difficult for urban youth as we have entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Jackson et al. (2006) found that youth who used the Internet more tended to have higher grade point averages and scored higher on standardized tests. At the same time, many cities, including Boston, are struggling to provide high-speed Internet access to their working class communities of color (Boston Indicators Project). Lack of high-speed Internet access puts more pressure on public libraries to serve as the primary source of digital information (The Report of the Knight Commission). This holds especially true for urban youth in the Boston area where there are plans in place to scale back services and shut down many local library branches in response to impending budget constraints during the current economic downturn, (Ryan, 2010). As access to electronic information becomes more important to success in school and work, neighborhoods in Boston populated primarily by working class people of color have less access to the Internet. As libraries become their most dependable source for Internet access, urban youths' relationships with libraries, whether local branches or large central facilities, are becoming more important to their future success. With the goal of increasing urban youths' access to the resources in libraries and the skills necessary to successfully navigate libraries, this paper will examine how university-based librarians and faculty partnered with urban high school youth to develop a program that builds on the principles of critical pedagogy to help students develop better relationships with libraries and librarians, develop the skills to successfully navigate libraries' repositories of digital information, and to affirm and further develop students' understandings of issues that were of direct concern and importance to the students.

## Literature Review

Research seems to bolster the notion of both the importance and the challenges of library use for urban youth. Liu and Wnuk (2009) found that of the participants in their study (which consisted of 146 urban residents who utilize urban libraries in the New England area) 56% of the participants relied on public library branches as their sole location or crucial supplement for access to digital information. This research also found that many of the participants faced challenges in their attempt to use these digital resources. Specifically, they asked for "more computers in general, more computers with Internet access specifically, longer computer usage time allotments, longer hours of library operation, and access to computers without any personal identification required (such as a library card)," (Liu and Wnuk, 2009, p. 18). Elteto et al. (2008) even found that urban students of color at the university level relied on public libraries while navigating challenges to fully access all the resources available at an academic library. Students of color tended to use the

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library with greater frequency than their white counterparts, but "it was puzzling to find that though students of color visit the library on a daily basis with the intent to do research, they are less likely to avail themselves of reference assistance." (Elteto et al., 2008, p. 333). Students of color cited feeling unwelcomed by reference staff, as well as a lack of diversity in the reference staff, as reasons for their relative lack of engagement with reference assistance. These students' concerns about the lack of diversity at libraries reflects the reality of lack of diversity in the library profession across the nation. An American Library Association study found that there was a stark lack of diversity in their membership ranks. The study found that 86.5% of ALA members are white. (ALA, 2009).

Recognizing the need for more cultural diversity in urban library staff, Wagner and Willms (2008) implemented the Urban Library Program, a collaboration between a university and an urban library system to "recruit and train a diverse workforce for the public library system." (p. 3). Adeyemon (2009) described a program for teens, where the library at Case Western University formed a partnership with local public schools in Cleveland as a means to give urban students more access to digital information and to increase their digital literacy. In this model, university librarians and faculty, public middle/high school teachers, and public middle/high school students formed "learning communities" to help the students develop digital literacy skills. Three key components of the program according to Adeyemon, were the student-centered learning environment, partnering students with librarian mentors, and bringing the urban students to the university campus to participate in the program. The student-centered learning environment allowed for students' interests and needs to be addressed by the program. Partnering the students with mentors allowed them to "discuss technology trends at home, school, and in the community [and]...how lessons or skills learned in previous classes had or had not helped with [students'] school or personal projects," (Adeyemon, 2009, p. 92). Also, bringing the students to the university library gave students "convenient and immediate access to a high-speed, networked information and technology environment," as well as giving the students "experience learning in a university setting," (p. 92).

Based on the aforementioned literature (Elteto et al., 2008, Liu and Wnuk, 2009), while students of color heavily rely on libraries as conduits to digital information that is essential to their academic well-being, it is clear that students of color find libraries to be un-welcome spaces where they tend to see a lack of diversity represented in the staff. To remedy this situation, the aforementioned research (Adeyemon, 2009, Wagner and Willms, 2008) indicates that urban student-centered university/school partnerships aimed at increasing urban students' access to libraries and the literacies associated with navigating and leveraging libraries' resources seem to make libraries more welcome spaces that empower this population.

## Paradigm Shift

In the vein of the Urban Library Program (Wagner and Willms, 2008) and the university/school partnership established by Case Western University (Adeyemon 2009) the Simmons College Library, in 2004, developed an internship program for high school students, aiming to introduce a diverse population of young people to librarianship as a possible career choice. MassBLAST (Building Library Awareness and Staff for Tomorrow), with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the H. W. Wilson Foundation, became a collaborative venture with the Healey Library of the University of Massachusetts Boston and eight other public and academic libraries in Massachusetts<sup>1</sup>. Librarians designed a curriculum to teach interns about library operations, the roles of libraries, and how to do library research, as well as to impart college and career skills. Four to six interns at a time participated in the 40-hour program.

The initial internship model was fairly traditional, with hands-on activities, discussions, role-playing and job shadowing. Students were taught how to use the online catalog, and then went to the stacks to find books on the shelves. They were shown how to use the Internet and scholarly databases to find articles. In the Interlibrary Loan Department the students processed requests and in Circulation they checked out books and loaded returned library materials on book trucks in call number order. They learned how books are selected, acquired, and cataloged, and what reference librarians do. They learned about challenged books and how libraries respond to challenges. The Simmons College Career Resource Librarian helped the interns explore careers and find colleges with programs that fit their interests. In the summer of 2007, MassBLAST librarians at Simmons collaborated on a short project with a summer Upward Bound program at Simmons College. Librarians were intrigued by the techniques of critical pedagogy that Simmons Professor Daren Graves used in the summer program. Although the existing MassBLAST program was working well, librarians were excited by the techniques of critical pedagogy that Dr. Graves was using, and hoped to use them to add additional depth to the program.

In the spring of 2007, MassBLAST staff invited Dr. Graves to conduct a workshop on the concept of critical pedagogy for a group of MassBLAST librarians. According to McLaren (1989):

Critical pedagogy challenges the assumption that schools function as major sites of social and economic mobility. Proponents of this pedagogical theory suggest that schooling must be analyzed as a cultural and historical process, in which select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power

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<sup>1</sup> Athol Public Library, Boston Public Library, Cambridge Public Library, Holyoke Community College Library, Springfield City Library, Springfield College Library, West Springfield Public Library, Worcester Public Library

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on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groupings. (p. 166)

Furthermore, in order to combat the "asymmetrical relations of power" that McClaren describes, critical pedagogues pose a reciprocal relationship between student and teacher whereby students are empowered to bring their lived experiences as valued and valid texts in the teaching and learning process. Dr. Graves is an assistant professor in Urban Education at Simmons College and had been Assistant Director of the Simmons College Upward Bound program, which sought to develop students' academic skills and prepare them for college. He described the ways in which traditional pedagogical approaches often fail to address the needs of urban students.

The librarians were enthusiastic about using critical pedagogy as a guiding principle in MassBLAST internships and the librarians at Simmons College decided to use this new learning paradigm beginning in the fall of 2007. Their plan was to continue the goals of imparting information literacy, college, and career skills and teaching students about library roles and operations. The focus, however, would be on the interns creating short research papers and media projects on topics of importance to them. Engaged with their stories, the students would identify for the librarians what they (the students) needed to know about research and the library. Privileging the life experiences and expertise of the students, the librarians and Dr. Graves sought to transform the way they approached teaching and learning with these urban youth.

Simmons had significant advantages at the start of this new process. The library director gave her enthusiastic support. Because of a prior relationship with a local Boston high school, librarians were in touch with a teacher who suggested students for the program and a headmaster who completely supported the project. Since MassBLAST had been in operation for two years, staff had experience working with teens and had developed a curriculum from which to draw (MassBLAST, 2008).

## Planning

Staff also had concerns as they embarked on this new program. How could staff do all they wanted to do with the internship in the 40 hours available to them? Librarians had some concerns about their own skills. They wanted, for example, to help the interns write a short research paper and yet none of them had been trained to teach writing. Librarians also struggled with how to shed their traditional roles as gatekeepers in the process of giving students access to relevant information (Graves et al., 2010).

Librarians held a series of meetings before they started to re-frame the nature of the relationships they would establish with students. Initially, librarians were

concerned that age and experience would create an inherent power imbalance that would reify the traditional hierarchical relationship that librarians have with students and other patrons. The librarians felt it was necessary to construct relationships where students' lived experiences were considered valid, welcome, and equal to the lived experiences of the librarians. Consequently, during early meetings with the students, while encouraging students to share life stories, librarians shared aspects of their lives to establish trust and reciprocity. Librarians understood that this practice needed to be a consistent part of the program.

In order to assure structured times to talk, librarians and students met each session as a group, around food, as a dedicated time for casual discussions about each others' lived experiences. In a more formal environment, the schedule included a meeting each week where all the librarians and students involved in the program met together to talk about what they had learned and what they still needed to learn to further inform their research endeavors. These interactions between the students and librarians were also intended to build students' confidence and efficacy around communicating with adults as equals, a skill deemed as important for success in post-secondary life. Librarians then met separately to brainstorm ways of making sure the interns got what they needed from staff. To facilitate further communication with the students, librarians created interactive blogs.

Additionally, librarians planned small group and one-on-one librarian/student "research partner" sessions to teach those research skills the interns actually needed to complete their projects. Librarians decided to dedicate one day of the twice weekly meetings to introducing the interns to library operations and issues and the other to the small group research classes and meetings with the research partners.

### The Plan in Action

Given that the goal for the students was to create a short research paper and a media project about something important in their lives, librarians first had the interns generate ideas about the story they wanted to tell. In order to show the types of expression that would be welcomed in the program, librarians presented the web sites [Stories for Change](#) and [Teaching to Change LA](#) (Stories for Change, 2008; Teaching to Change LA, 2004-2005). These include stories by and about urban youth which mirrored the students' experiences. Staff chose six short videos to show and asked students to consider the following questions as they watched:

- What are some of the concerns of the filmmakers?
- What do the filmmakers want to tell us?
- How might libraries and librarians help them tell their stories?
- What resources do you think they needed to tell their stories?

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After that discussion the interns brainstormed answers to questions;

- What interests you?
- What story would you like to tell about your life or your community?

As the interns were thinking of ways to expand their ideas to create a story, staff showed them the videos *Betty Tells Her Story* and *Confession* to encourage the students to think about an author's ethical responsibilities (Brandon, 1972; Petrovskaja, 2001). In *Betty Tells Her Story*, a woman tells a story twice, once in a lighthearted way and then in a serious tone that lets the audience know how important the event in the story was to her. The students talked about what the two versions meant to Betty and realized they must always treat a story they are telling with respect since it may be very important to someone involved. In the video *Confession*, the filmmaker recounts how strongly she encouraged an elderly relative to tell about her past as a displaced person in Europe during and after World War II. The filmmaker then worries that she has hurt her relative in pressing her to tell the story. So our interns talked about boundaries and their obligation as storytellers to their subjects.

In particular, students saw that in this media-saturated world they must be concerned about the privacy of their subject, as well as about copyright, and plagiarism. Interns were creative in thinking of means of dealing with these concerns. They obtained personal and location releases for their projects. They brainstormed ways of telling their stories visually without using copyrighted material. Two interns decided to draw pictures to illustrate their stories rather than use the images they had wanted to download from the web. One intern who was interviewing a friend at school about becoming a teen father, decided to use his voice in her video, but to protect his privacy and that of his baby and partner, not show his face or use his name. The intern got permission to take pictures at school to illustrate her story but again did not show faces. Other interns, who wanted to tell stories that included family pictures, decided that they would not show the stories outside of the program's closing ceremony and their own homes.

As the stories emerged, staff members focused on listening to the students tell them what they needed to help research and tell their stories. The interns spent an hour each week meeting with their librarian research partners. Librarians helped the interns formulate questions, identify reference books with relevant information, and find related articles utilizing appropriate databases.

Previous interns had also learned about the operations and management of the library, but this time staff used the students' own interests to show them how the library works. A librarian, for example, explained the workings of the Interlibrary Loan Department by guiding the interns in processing their own interlibrary loan



requests for a book or article about their topic. Interns then learned how a book is chosen, ordered, and processed by choosing a book about their research interest for the library collection and following its progress from ordering through cataloging and processing. A note crediting the intern with choosing the book was added to the record for the book in the online catalog. The interns had transformed this college library's space. A book they had chosen was in the library and their name was in the online catalog.

## Challenges

One important dilemma librarians faced during the program was the short amount of time allotted and the complexity of the materials that needed to be covered in the program. The struggle with lack of time was exacerbated by the amount of time interns needed to finish their media projects, since the students had little experience with PowerPoint and none with iMovie and other aspects of digital storytelling. Before the interns started putting together their final projects they needed to practice interviewing each other as subjects, and learn how to use a digital recorder. They had to create storyboards to organize their images and words, and record their voices for narration.

Because of their school and family commitments, librarians had not wanted the students to come to the library outside of the scheduled forty hours. But the interns were eager to work on their media projects, so staff set up workshops during the students' school vacation and interns also came to the library by themselves in their free time to work on the library computers.

## Program Outcomes

Several months after the completion of the program, we assessed the program through interviews with the interns and librarians. Written pre- and post- surveys completed by the interns had shown a more favorable view and more solid understanding of libraries after the internship, which was the case with all previous interns in MassBLAST. But, after the critical pedagogy approach was used in 2007-2008, interviews were used as a way to obtain a more in-depth view of the effects of critical pedagogy on the program.

### *Students' Relationships with the Library and Librarians pre-MassBLAST*

To better understand the impact the MassBLAST program had on the students it served, it is important to illuminate the relationships and perceptions the MassBLAST students had with libraries and librarians before participating in the program. In terms of students' relationships with and perceptions of libraries, most of the students felt they could safely say that they used their school and

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neighborhood library branches, sparingly, if at all. There were many reasons students relayed for their relative lack of use of their school and neighborhood libraries. Many students said they used their school libraries primarily to quickly use the functions of the computers located there. For example, Sandy, when asked about her use of her school library said,

I honestly don't go in [the school library] after school or before school. I get my work done beforehand. But if I have a class, and during lunch, usually go in there to use the computer to print something. That's pretty much all I'd use it for...After school the other kids in [the school library] are pretty loud. And I like my environment quiet when I'm working.

In her response, Sandy indicates that she normally uses the library during school hours, and usually for short amounts of time to use the computer printers. While Sandy and others weren't satisfied with their libraries as useful study places and primarily saw the library as a computer depot, other students found the traditional policy of book borrowing as inadequate to their needs. Tina characterized her relationship with libraries by stating,

[Before MassBLAST] I really didn't like going in libraries because it's like, OK I get to borrow a book, but it takes me a long time to read a book, especially if I'm not interested in it. And then I have to bring it back in a certain amount of time. And I'm just like, "Ugghh, I'd rather just buy my books."

Some students' aversion to libraries revolved around their perceptions, usually ambivalent at best, with librarians themselves. Nur, a recent immigrant to the U.S. was initially not impressed with librarians' roles in the school or neighborhood branches. This sentiment was conveyed in her saying, "Before [MassBLAST] I didn't know that a library job was really hard, how librarians work. I thought they just sit here and do nothing."

Nur's and her sister, Halimah's, sense of what librarians do in the U.S. context is particularly telling given that they both immigrated to the U.S. only two and a half years ago, seemingly indicating that there are strong and consistent messages being relayed to students in Boston about what librarians do or don't do. Even more astounding about Halimah and Nur's perceptions of librarians, is the fact that they both had little or no experiences with libraries whatsoever, before emigrating from Bangladesh. Halimah describes this by reflecting, "In Bangladesh, there is no computer. Maybe in the university library but not in school. We didn't have any library in our school. When I was there, there wasn't any library in two miles or three miles. So I never [went] there." (Graves et al. 2010)

The statement that Halimah makes shows both the promise of the MassBLAST program while simultaneously showing the challenges the program faced. MassBLAST invited students who had anywhere from little to no real engagement with libraries. Despite this, as reflected in Halimah's words above, these students had a desire to better understand what librarians do.

### *Learning About the Library*

In discussing their experiences during their involvement with the MassBLAST program, students expressed a new understanding of how libraries function. Some students said that they came away with a better understanding of the daily logistics of librarianship. Nur conveyed this by saying,

I didn't know there were so many librarians in the library. I thought there was only one librarian who check[s] every single thing. But here, when I came here, there were too many (i.e., so many) librarians. Like [a] science librarian, technology, and every single thing has a different librarian. That was amazing me.

Nur's statement about the multiple types of librarians is particularly fascinating given her initial perceptions of librarians as people "who just sit there and do nothing." While some focused on the logistical aspects of the functions and processes of libraries, others focused on the skills associated with doing research and writing, using libraries and librarians as resources in these endeavors. Tina, in reflecting on what she learned as a result of the program, described new strategies for conducting research as a result of the program, and that she put these strategies to work in the pursuit of academic excellence outside the program and, more directly, in her studies at school. Tina indicated that she discovered new dimensions of libraries' research functions by leveraging the use of books, as well as computer databases and the Internet. Lily, continuing with the theme of the Internet as a research resource, talks about the importance of using the Internet wisely and legally, by saying she learned, "many things we didn't know. Like I didn't know you couldn't take a picture from the Internet. That it was illegal and need permission."

These words reveal another type of learning that emerged from the program: the formation of new literacies. Tina talked about a literacy associated with using research databases as she talked about "choosing the right keyword," while Lily talked about a form of literacy associated with the proper use of information gathered in the process.

Halimah, like Lily, also spoke about the learning she cultivated around the proper use of sources used in the research project. Halimah stated that she learned about, "citations, especially the references. I didn't know that you had to give credit to the writers. And you have to write all those sources that you used in the article. So I needed to learn how to use it in the right format and what will happen if I don't do

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it." For a student who came from a different country, which likely has different rules and norms around scholarly writing, learning how to properly cite authors and sources seems a particularly useful skill given the repercussions if one does not "do it" correctly.

The creation of media projects was another window to literacies to which the students gained access. Tina expressed her appreciation for her new-found media literacy in talking about the video she created,

They showed us how to do it on the Mac laptops, and I caught on real quick, because I'm a fast learner. Just editing it all together and how I wanted it to look, because I didn't know that I was that creative with videos....it showed my creativity through pictures and [my friend] talking instead of me just doing it with words.

Here, Tina clearly states that the process of creating the video brought to light her skills in working with media. Tina's expressing that she "caught on real quick" and that the process "showed [her] creativity" seems to be indicative of a growing sense of efficacy.

The opportunity to build media literacies also illuminated another very important skill that the MassBLAST program fostered through its deliberate adherence to some of the principles in critical pedagogy and critical information literacy (McClaren, 1989; Morrell, 2004). Students expressed how the MassBLAST staff taught them that students' lived experiences are valid texts to be brought into the research process. Students' lives-as-texts in the research often were manifested in the deliberate use of media products that brought their lived experiences to the center of their research projects. Tina talked about how she brought her life experiences-as-text when she said,

Mine was a video slide show where I interviewed my friend who was having a baby. And I took different pictures in my school. I took a picture of my baby cousin. Like the back of her head. And baby carriages and condoms and just had it slide through the [pictures] while he [her friend] was talking...The pictures matched with what he was talking about.

Students displayed burgeoning recognition of, and efficacy with, multiple literacies as a result of the program.

#### *Life Lessons*

In reflecting on their research projects, students expressed that not only did they learn about their chosen topics, they learned more about themselves as individuals. The students also talked about how they appreciated the opportunity to share their lives and interests with others.

Each student interviewed talked about the research topic they chose and why they chose it. In talking about this process, the students' stories clearly illustrate how MassBLAST made their lived experiences central texts from which to build. Lily, a recent immigrant from Ecuador, with the help of her good friend Lucilia, explained her project by saying,

Lily: I did a movie...about my mom.

Lucilia: She loves her mom.

Lily: I think it could be a good story to tell people...I learned about immigration. And many people come from Mexico to here. And how people come...how much they suffer. I learned that [my mother] is a good mother. Because when I was little I was [in Ecuador] she came [to the United States]. But she didn't forget me. She was a good person because she didn't forget me. Because many parents forget their child. And they forget and they have other children. And my mother didn't. She came...

Lucilia: Her mother went for her.

In this case, Lily states that she wanted to use this opportunity to tell the story of her and her mother's emigration to the United States. Lily sagaciously points out, that often such stories do not end happily for parent or child, and that much "suffer[ing]" is involved. But in her case, Lily got to research how immigration to the U.S. works, while simultaneously telling the story of her and her mother's resilience. Like Lily, Nur utilized this experience to build bridges between the culture and world that she knew previous to immigrating to the United States, and the new culture and circumstances she now found herself in as recent immigrant. In talking about the research venture that she embarked upon, Nur stated:

...I choose to [research] about my holiday. Because in this country, most of the people are Christian, and so they don't have a Muslim holiday. So [I thought] it would be interesting if they know how we do it. And mostly I am from a different country and in our country we do differently our holiday than this country. So I think they would find it interesting. So I did work on my holiday.

Nur's project concerned the two major Muslim holidays, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, which she and her family celebrated in their native nation of Bangladesh. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, where students are empowered to teach as well as learn, Nur sagaciously took this opportunity to research the meanings of and ways of celebrating the Eid holidays as a way to better inform the predominately non-Muslim staff, students, and future MassBLAST presentation audiences about this important and celebratory aspect of her culture.

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Students indicated that they took away lessons that had personal implications for them, beyond the walls of the library. Sandy, who did a project on affirmative action and the racial incidents in Jena, Mississippi, explained how her completion and presentation of the project gave her new insight into the roles that youth can have in educating others. As such, Sandy stated:

Well...doing the project and the slide show...after doing that, I thought that, as people came up to me and complimented me, that they learned more about Jena 6. So I guess I completed my goal...informing others about it...It made me feel glad that I actually did the MassBLAST program...I learned something too. Everybody learned something...I learned that teenagers can make a difference. They can persuade and inform even adults.

Halimah expressed a sense that the knowledge she cultivated via the MassBLAST program would have large implications for her academic career and life trajectory beyond high school. Halimah explains:

I feel like I am strong enough to go to college. I could do it. I could read anything I want...And it really helped me to read. Like when I came to the library I saw so many people. They went to college, they worked hard, and now they have good jobs and people like them, and I feel like I could do it too.

Halimah's statement is particularly compelling given that she had only come to the United States less than three years before, not having spoken any English prior to her arrival. After the program had given her the opportunity to teach and learn, she seemed to have a sense of boundless optimism as she looked forward to her future, academic and otherwise. Indeed, all the students in the program seemed to have walked away from their experiences with new ways of seeing themselves, their communities, and their futures.

#### *Student/Librarian Relationships*

The lessons and skills that the students learned from their experiences in the program are clear. Students also seemed to indicate that the new and strong relationships they formed were both a means to helping them get the most of out the MassBLAST program, as well as a result of the program. Some students said that the aspect that underpinned the strength of their relationship with their partner librarian was the technical support the students received from the librarian. Sandy expressed this by saying:

I went to him for guidance...about how to write my essay. And which books I should use. He taught me about which books would be best to use based upon like who wrote them and what time they wrote them. Like one of the copies of the articles he made for me from one book...the vocabulary and the language went right over my head. So we found another one...another book that was down at my level.

In this case, Sandy really appreciated the help she received in making the work accessible and useful to her. Other students grounded their relationship with their partner librarians outside the realms of library work. Tina also described the way her partner librarian equipped her with important academic and research skills in the process of studying the issue of teenage pregnancy:

[Alyssa] referred me to books in the library and helped me copy out the pages and highlight what I wanted and just helped me build my paper to what I wanted...It felt like a challenge...you had to find all the *right* information, not just all the ones written by somebody else. You have to find all the right stuff. Things that were recent, or less recent, or in the past. How this issue changed over time...They taught us how to research our projects, so that helped me a lot...We had a class where they taught us how to research things like Google or Google Advanced, Ask Jeeves, or other websites that would help us research topics.

Lucilia described how the relationship she formed with her partner librarian continued beyond her involvement in the program, as she needed help with the college application process. As Lucilia describes, “The day that Jean called me to come for the interview, I told her that I’m a senior and I haven’t applied for college. And she told me if I want to come so she can help me to apply and look for colleges, and to see which colleges don’t have a deadline.” Lucilia went beyond calling her partner librarian a friend by explaining, “Our relationship is great I think. I always told her that she is one of my mothers. I always told her ‘Oh, I got a lot of mothers and you are one of them.’” (Graves et al. 2010)

The new relationships that students formed with libraries and librarians were evident to all those involved in the program. It was most evident in the lives of Nur and Halimah, both of whom had never used a library before coming to the U.S. and who had quickly accommodated to the notion that librarians do not do much. After completing the program, both Nur and Halimah were hired at a local public library branch to help students with their homework. Nur, in describing her relationship with her partner librarian indicated that she appreciated both the skills that the librarian helped to impart as well as the sharing of information that went beyond the realm of research:

I got help. My librarian really helped me. I had a good relationship with her. When I came we’d talk about, “How was your weekend?” and “What you did?” Kind of like we’d talk about our personal life. And sometimes I would like need help...Like I’m not good at English that much and so I don’t know some vocabulary words and she would tell me to look it up in the dictionary. I’d find it and [ask] her if is OK. And she would say, “It is OK. But if you do it another way it would be better.” So she was really helpful.

## **Graves, Sweet & McGowan "I feel like I could do it too": A Paradigm Shift in an Urban Library Internship Program**

Finally, notice the contrast in Nur's perception of librarians before and after the program. Previous to the program, we know that Nur thought librarians, "just sit here and do nothing." When asked how she felt about librarians after the program, Nur gave the following answer:

But now in this library I saw how librarians work. They are responsible for their work. They have to help other people...So I feel like librarians really do some work. I feel confident using my neighborhood and school libraries because I can ask the librarian, "I need that book" or "Can you tell me where I can find it?"

### **Programmatic Lessons Learned**

After completing the program, librarians met to reflect on the experience and propose changes for the future, as well as offer suggestions to those who wish to adapt the program for other settings and for different staffing situations.

1. A relationship with the college writing center could help with questions librarians have about how to teach writing. "I knew there must be a better way to correct problems with grammar or the English language than just to tell my research partner how I would write the sentences myself. But I didn't know what it was," commented one librarian.
2. Forming a collaborative relationship with a school (in our case a local high school) or a department in a college, such as a School of Education is a way to bring in help for strengthening students' skills. Teachers outside the library could be ready to follow up with the interns, focusing on skills for which they have specialized teaching knowledge, and providing the students with guidance outside the limited time of the program. For example, a faculty member from the Simmons Communications Department consulted with a student who had difficulties with editing her story using iMovie.
3. Take advantage of what others have done by using materials already created rather than trying to start from scratch. The library skills curriculum created by MassBLAST is just one example of available resources. (MassBLAST, 2008)

### **Conclusion**

The traditional internship program was enhanced for urban students with the implementation of a critical pedagogy framework. Given the lack of diversity in urban libraries (Wagner & Willms, 2008) as well as the perceptions of libraries as



unwelcoming places for students of color (Elteto et al., 2008.) utilizing a pedagogy that embraces the lived experiences of these students as a means to increase engagement with the library cannot be understated. In this case, the MassBLAST program both enhanced students' mastery of library and research skills and fostered a greater understanding of their own lives/experiences.

**Graves, Sweet & McGowan "I feel like I could do it too": A Paradigm Shift in an Urban Library Internship Program**

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