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Intellectual freedom in an age of change

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OLA QUARTERLY

Intellectual Freedom in an Age of Change

Challenges to intellectual freedom in libraries rage like brush fires throughout Oregon and the country. Two hot-button issues have seized the imagination of a considerable segment of library users and non-users alike.

The first concerns kids and librarians: Do librarians have an obligation to monitor what kids see on the Internet and place out of their reach books and magazines that someone somewhere feels they should not read?

The second concerns diversity in our collections: Are we obligated to provide materials representing all sides of controversial issues, even if doing so violates someone's standard of decency?

Our traditional argument that we do not act *in loco parentis* does not play well in an environment where parents perceive dangers everywhere. Indeed, many parents are no longer willing to assume total responsibility for their children's welfare.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a kid and that all villagers must play a responsible role in the kid's upbringing. In our opinion and—we believe—that of most librarians, our responsible role is to supply materials that enable villagers to play their roles in an informed manner. Few librarians believe their role is to side with one faction.

In this issue of the *OLA Quarterly*, Deborah Jacobs suggests that librarians have not done a good job of assuring a diverse collection. They have self-censored in some areas and ignored others. Clearly, however, we have not failed entirely when not only the Oregon Citizens Alliance, but newly formed groups of librarians themselves, challenge our right to make certain books freely available or even buy them for our collections.

To allow some villagers to dictate the contents of our collections and decide how and to whom our books circulate violates our professional standards and flies in the face of our obligation to serve all segments of our increasingly diverse population. Further, it risks starting us down a slippery slope from which there may be no return.

We hope that this issue of the *OLA Quarterly* will shed some light on these issues.

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