

Disciplinary Exclusion Policies that Impact Library Access

By Jenna Kammer



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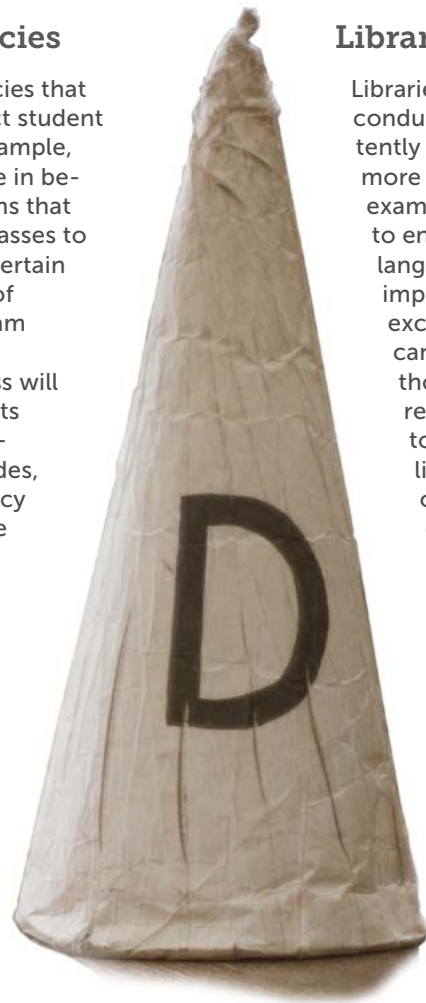
When applied to discipline, the concept of *exclusion* in high schools often involves the process of removing a student from a school activity or setting. In its most extreme case, disciplinary exclusion refers to expulsion, suspension, removal from class, or being prohibited from attending a school event. High school librarians may recognize this circumstance: a student may be temporarily or permanently excluded from school library use for breaking a school rule, like violence, theft, or disruption. Other students may choose to avoid the library if they have been in trouble there before, self-excluding to avoid more trouble. Some may avoid the library if they have fines or overdue materials related to circumstances outside of their control (McLeod, Sigle, and Valentine 2019).

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in the school or school library that are actually restricting or excluding certain students from using the library; below, we'll consider how school and library policies may be affecting use of the library by certain students. There is little data available about who is excluded from use of library facilities for disciplinary reasons. More research should be conducted to understand who and what types of behaviors or activities impact a student's right to use library facilities and services. However, it is well-established that students who receive exclusionary punishments, like expulsion or suspension, are often males from minority backgrounds, have low socioeconomic status, have a disability, or have demonstrated low academic performance (Christie, Nelson and Jolivet 2004). In addition, the decision to provide a student with an exclusionary punishment is often arbitrary and biased towards students who are deemed troublesome by teachers and administrators (Welch and Payne 2012).

School-Wide Policies

Some schools have policies that may inadvertently impact student use of the library. For example, some schools participate in behavior incentive programs that allow students to earn passes to the library if they meet certain expectations. This type of positive incentive program offers library access as a reward but in the process will restrict access to students who can't meet expectations of attendance, grades, or behavior. Equity literacy scholars suggest that the reasons students may not meet these expectations could be related to situations directly or indirectly outside of their control, like illness, stressors at home, disabilities, or learning differences (Dubose and Gorski 2020) and that these students could benefit personally and academically from study time in the library.



Library Policies

Libraries may also have code of conduct policies that inadvertently exclude some students more than others. Librarians can examine their codes of conduct to ensure that the rules and language used are free from implicit bias and to remove exclusionary language. They can also look for and limit those violations that will remove a student's access to library spaces or use of library resources. As part of this process, librarians can determine if there are trends that can be addressed in other ways. For example, some libraries restrict privileges if students share their access to library resources with others. Students denied library access for trying to access the library *more* should perhaps face other consequences than exclusion.

Critical reflection related to the language and message hidden within library policies may be the first steps towards developing a more inclusive practice.

The Library Environment

Libraries often include a variety of spaces to accommodate active learning and independent study. Some students will want to meet their study group in the library or will join a table with friends. Others will want to come work independently to catch up or finish work that they were unable to do at home. Some will want to read on their own or recharge their phones. Others may want to sit by the window for sunlight that they may not have in their other classrooms. All of these experiences are part of using the library. Librarians should aim to offer spaces for these activities and plan the library space to ensure that both groups and individuals have places to sit and work. In addition, policies should grant all members of a study group opportunity to visit the library, so that students are not left out of a study group due to school or library policies.

Tips for Including Excluded Students

Identify those who have been excluded from library use.

Librarians can identify who has had their library privileges revoked, permanently or temporarily, to determine if there are disproportionate representations of race, social, or economic groups among these students.

Consider who might feel like an outsider. Students who don't visit the library may have various reasons for not visiting, including not feeling comfortable in the library space, lacking a social group to work with, or lack of awareness of the library.

Reconsider exclusions. Banning a student from library use, temporarily or permanently, should be saved for the worst offenses. Behavior expectations should be established in advance so these decisions are not made arbitrarily.

Identify rules that punish a student for using library resources. Many libraries still have policies that revoke library privileges for not returning materials, sharing library access, or visiting the library during unapproved times. These cases are all examples of students' wanting to use the library. Some librarians use creative alternatives in these cases, like requiring students to read as a payment for fines or submitting a research paper to earn back library privileges.

Seek out feedback. Student library advisory groups should include wide representation of the study body, including non-library users. Consider including exemplary library users on advisory groups as well as those who have lost library privileges.

Is Your Library Including or Excluding Students?

School libraries never intend to exclude, as it goes against one of the Shared Foundations and Key Commitments of school librarianship, which is to ensure that libraries provide equitable physical access to the library (AASL 2018). There are a few strategies for school librarians to investigate which students may be excluded from library use. AASL provides a "School Library Evaluation Checklist" that school librarians can use as a guide to start thinking about how their policies include or exclude students (2018). For example, the building level checklist for the Include foundation recommends that librarians ensure barrier-free access to facilities and resources. Librarians can ask themselves, what barriers are there for students in accessing the library space at

an individual level? At school? At home? Understanding these barriers can help librarians be more empathetic towards challenging situations experienced by students.

Librarians often focus on those who visit the library, but assessing a library for exclusion involves understanding more about who is *not* visiting the library and why. Another way to examine exclusion is through a policy analysis. A policy analysis includes a line-by-line analysis of existing policies that looks for hidden bias in the language used, as well as exclusion and equity concerns that may show that certain students are more negatively affected by a policy than others (see Table 1). Critical reflection related to the language and message hidden within library policies may be the first steps towards developing a more inclusive practice.

Works Cited

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Table 1. Examples of policies that restrict library privileges

Policy	Examples	Potential to Exclude
Incentive Programs	Students can <i>earn</i> passes to visit the school library through <i>good</i> attendance, grades and behavior.	Some students will be unable to meet the expectations to earn the pass. These students may not feel comfortable visiting the library if they haven't earned it.
School Code of Conduct	Students are <i>responsible</i> for paying any library fines incurred for overdue, lost, or damaged materials charged to their library account.	Some students are unable to pay fines or replace the lost items due to moving, changing homes, foster care, or homelessness.
Library Code of Conduct	Students are <i>not permitted</i> to use their ID card to download or share information on library computers <i>with others</i> .	Students who do this may be trying to help friends who have lost their card, have trouble using their card, or who are not able to visit the library.
Library Rules	Please do not move the furniture including chairs; five chairs per table.	The sixth student in a study or friend group is socially excluded and risks loss of library privileges in joining the study group.

Understanding these barriers can help librarians be more empathetic towards challenging situations experienced by students.



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