

**Transcript: Creating a Culture of Reading with Leslie Preddy**

[Brianna Hoffman] So now what I would love to do, I’m super excited about, is introduce our subject matter expert for this session: Leslie Preddy. Leslie is a school library and media specialist and a former AASL president and Leslie’s going to chat with us about creating a culture of reading. So, Leslie, welcome. Thank you for joining us. I’m going to stop sharing and let you take it away.

[Leslie Preddy] So today we’re going to talk about an origin story, how you get started and where ideas come from for creating a culture of reading. And that’s what I think the toughest part is, the origin story. Where do these ideas come from? And how do you generate them? And then how do you customize them and make them your own?

And part of it is developing that culture. And Webster’s Dictionary defines culture as “a way of thinking or behaving or work that exists in a place or organization.” And that’s where we’re critical as school librarians, is developing that culture. We are the cornerstone and the anchor for developing a culture in our school. Every time I have a teacher leave my building and go someplace else, the first thing they say is, “Well, things are different here. Why aren’t they like they were at our old school with you?” And it’s because you’re there, and you’re making a difference in your school, and you’re understanding your culture, and you’re developing a strong sense of culture within that school. And it’s very powerful, the role that we have, because we touch everybody: adults, students, staff, parents. And today it, as we’re working through this, it’s kind of interesting.

Last week, I had an author visit and Laura Martin had done some research about ideas and how quickly, especially we, as adults, ideas come into our mind and then zip right out. And I’m with middle school, and she said, “Well, middle school, they have so many hundreds of ideas a day that go into their heads. And we as adults, we’re lucky if we get a dozen. So also, what adults have trouble with, is that we forget them as soon as you like leave the room, that you had the idea, you roll back over and go to bed. You completely forget the idea. So, I want you to try and get on to this Jamboard, and as we’re talking and as we’re working out, if anything pops into your head, I want you to throw it on that Jamboard either for yourself or to share with others, whether it makes sense right now or not. Because if you don’t, by the time I go on to the next slide or we start thinking about the next thing, you’re gonna completely forget it and then you’re gonna go, “Oh, what was that thing I was thinking of?” And if you’re like me, literally all it takes is setting something down and then I’m like, where did I put my Coke? I need my caffeine. It’s the same kind of thing with all these great ideas that you have. So, I think, did you guys copy and paste that on there?

[Brianna] I am doing it right now.

[Leslie] Awesome.

Okay, Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress, this is my favorite quote of hers. I mean she’s a brilliant person. But we’re all struggling, especially right now with COVID, and recovering from all of those changes, and our students, our kiddos recovering from those changes, and she said, “Books open the world to us, fuel our imaginations and show us our common humanity, especially as we confront huge changes in society.” And a lot of the changes I’m making or the way I’m thinking is connected to this quote. And as I dream of making new opportunities for my students, I continually come back to this quote, and it has really altered my sense of being in the library.

So that’s what we’re going to start with is, where do ideas come from, or what are the five critical categories to consider with those ideas? But along with my boring slide here, over to the right is an idea for you and these are sort of one-offs, one-hit wonders, where it doesn’t take a lot to get this sort of activity or event started. And we’ll also talk about some more complicated ones that take more time. But these are things that are a little bit easier to get started. And here are reading tips for parents, and it’s really important. A lot of, I found a lot of my parents, you know, they want to be good parents. They want to promote reading, but they don’t know how, they don’t know what to do. They either didn’t have role models when they were younger or they’re busy. And so, you know, how do they make good use of their time? What is the right thing to do? And that’s a lot of what my parents worry about is, what is the right thing I should be doing? So think about you know, communicating some reading tips to parents about what they could do and how they could do and it could be easy as having the principal—I don’t know if a lot of you guys, my principal does like a Sunday update every Sunday, and sometimes I can get him to throw one of these sort of messages in with his update. Just where do your parents go to get their information? And that’s where you want to go.

And we want to know the research. That was our first idea here: where do ideas come from? We need to know the research. And I'm sure you’ve heard of Stephen Krashen, and you’ve probably even seen this. He has looked at three years’ worth of research, and poverty and socioeconomic status is a strongest predictor of poor reading achievement. And a lot of people say, well, we need to teach reading, we need to teach more reading, and guess what: what they really need is they need an effective school librarian and somebody who promotes reading, who celebrates reading, who makes reading part of the school culture, and makes it an event, an experience. And that’s what makes a difference in these kids who have low socioeconomic status or poverty.

Okay. So, what have other studies told us? That the presence of a school librarian has positive significant effects. And if you’ve ever done any action research, you know, to be able to say the word significant is significant, you can only say it if the data says certain things, right? So, for two of the three to be able to say significant, and then for the third one to be falling just shy of being able to say significant, this is powerful. So, we need to keep these kinds of things in mind as we’re trying to develop that relationship and build our programs. We are a significant impactor on our students’ achievements and our community. And we also need to think about, as you’re developing as a school librarian, your life, your professional life is ever evolving and things are going to, things are going to fail. Not just you know, and you know, we always talk to the kids about how failure is an option, but we need to remember that failure is an option as well, and that working and practicing with our brain is important and that we need to develop for kids those authentic purposeful tasks and the ability to use information and construct meaning.

Have any of you guys used *The Most Magnificent Thing*? You need to get a copy of this book. It is great. In the story, she wants to create something. She wants to do something significant, and she keeps failing and keeps failing and keeps failing and makes mistake after mistake. And she wants to give up. And it’s important for us to remember professionally and for us to help the kids remember that those failures are part of our development for doing greater things or for doing things better. And so, it’s a beautiful book to use with our kiddos, but it’s also beautiful for us to use as well. And in professional development, as we think of, how do we make these moments and experiences with our students, it also helps me understand that I need to be constructive, hands-on with the kids and allow them to create while they are also thinking and reading. Sorry our computer tech’s working. All right.

Number two is, we need to think about our librarian situational awareness. And situational awareness is being always present wherever you are and remembering that you’re a librarian. And part of remembering that you’re a librarian is, when you are out in the community, or you’re having experiences, or you’re going to the movies, you’re doing something, always be that librarian and be ready for those epiphany moments, where something’s going to startle you, and you’re going to be like, I could do this. And it could have absolutely nothing to do with what you are watching or reading or doing, but somehow it just made those connections in your brain and those synapses started going. And that is where you get those ideas.

And then our one-off idea here is a reading tree. A lot of people take, like their old encyclopedias, and they make a tree out of it. But I sort of leveled it out and I invite my teachers in for some homemade Wassail and they have to fill out a decoration—to put on the decoration what their favorite book is that our library has. And so, as the kids come up and look at the tree, they can look and see what staff are recommending for great books to read. And so, the tree becomes a little bit more interactive instead of just static. All right.

So where do those ideas come from? I did an experience over COVID, where my family did with the Greenwood Public Library, “A Muppets’ Christmas Carol.” It’s called a family friendly interactive movie experience. Has anybody done those with their public library? They’re really big in the public libraries right now. So, when you do it, you get this packet of materials, and you get this booklet that tells you what to do. And as you’re watching the movie, you like do things related to the movie. You throw popcorn at the screen, you make this thing, you sing out at the movie, or shout at certain moments. So, if you follow any of these QR codes, this will show you what the Greenwood Public Library blog and the librarian Emily Ellis, who does theirs. And then there’s also, I did a PD after this to try to better understand what they’re doing, and there is this resource that is great for, what kinds of things are they creating for these interactive movie experiences? And so again, you don’t have to do it on your own, you can see for yourself.

And then I was reading about the movie coming out, “Dune,” and the director said, “I want people who love books to feel like we put a camera in their minds.” And I thought, Wait a minute. Okay, so I did this interactive movie experience, and he’s saying exactly what I want to have happen to my kids. I want them to understand and get that experience where that movie is playing in their minds. And that’s what a lot of my kids struggle with, is they don’t get that visual in their heads. And so, they don’t, they can’t understand it. It’s sort of like, I can’t read “Harry Potter” until I’ve watched the first movie, because then it makes sense to me. Which was me as an adult. I’m sorry. It was. I love them now, but that’s what it took for me. And so, I had to think about this. And this really connected the dots for me.

And then be inspired to be original. So how do you take these pieces and make something original, original for your community, that matters to your community?

And then our one-off, and this one is READ Ribbon Week and just taking a week and on READ Ribbon Week at my school. We just celebrate, and people dress up—staff and students—dress up for certain days to celebrate reading and just trying to get that community spirit going. All right.

So, *What Do You Do With an Idea*? If you don’t have this picture book, no matter what level you are, I’d suggest you get this one as well. And so how do we nurture that idea? How do we make it something? And hopefully we’ll be able to get the sound working on this.

[Video begins] “Hear the lady out, sir. There’s another elevator. You’re on.” “See, this is Forbes. It’s just your basic article about how you were looking to expand in the broadcasting, right? Now the same day, I’ll never forget this. I’m reading page six of the Post. And there’s this item on Bobby Stein, the radio talk show guy who does all those gross jokes about Ethiopia and the Betty Ford Center. Well, anyway, he’s hosting this charity auction that night, real blue bloods, and won’t that be funny? Now I turn the page to Susie, who does the society stuff, and there’s this picture of your daughter, see? Yeah, nice picture. And she’s helping to organize the charity ball. So, I started to think: Trask. Radio. Trask. Radio. And then I hooked up with Jack and he came on board with Metro. And, and so now here we are.” “Oren, we really don’t have any more time for fairy tales.” “Miss Parker, let me ask you a question. How did you come up with the idea for Trask to buy up Metro?” “How did I? Well, let’s see.” “The impulse. What led you to put the two together?” [Video ends.]

So that’s what we have to start making our minds do: we have to start helping our minds put those little pieces together so that we can be original and creative and meet the needs of that community. And we’ve got to nurture those ideas within ourselves as well as our students. Know your community. Very important, you know, the way things work for my community are gonna be completely different for how they work for yours, or they might just need a little, a few little tweaks, so that it is what your students need.

And another one-off, READ Bingo we have. In February, we do reading-madness month. We have a very competitive READ Bingo, and all it is, is on announcements every morning, we call out some Bingo numbers, and then the classroom that wins Bingo either gets pencils or a free book. And so, we just try to encourage again a sense of community and camaraderie, because everybody’s doing that and try and get books on our kiddos’ hands. All right.

So, what happened during COVID? During COVID, I found, and maybe you guys did, too, there was a silent majority in my school. Then we went hybrid, right? So, the classes are split in half. We only have half the kids, and all of the sudden there were these kids that came out of the walls, and I’d never been able to work with them because, when you’re working with a class of 36, and I’ve got 1400 students in my school. It’s a little overwhelming, right? But then all of the sudden I had classes of 10 and 12, and I’m able to have these conversations with them, and they can’t just disappear and fold back into the wall. They actually have to engage with me. And I find these kids, and I realize that there are these kids I have never provided services for, like I should have. And what should I be doing? And then I started thinking about my supervising student teacher, which was 20 some years ago, right, and she had this thing called No Club Book Club. And this was for the kids who wanted to be in a book club, wanted to be in a club, but they didn't want to be face-to-face. They were not comfortable with that. And I thought okay. We’ve got something going on here. How do, what do I do?

And then I had to think about my action research that I had done. And I found that, what are the three critical things that we need to make a difference: reading, relationships, and role models. So, everything I do, I have to think about, how does it connect to reading? How does it connect to building relationships? And how am I developing role models? And those are the three critical areas. And what we found was that in kids who received these three critical areas, they had better test scores. And it didn’t matter if they were struggling socioeconomically, if they were poor students, or if they were in the gifted and talented and advanced classes. All of them did better with these three critical areas. So, what’s the final thing we need? We need to steal from others, take their ideas, but make it our own.

And our one-off idea: here is a memory game. This is something that I can do. I can just make a memory game, you know, like the little kids play all the time and leave them out on a game table. And so, the kids can play memory with the book covers of, like, our state reading list, that kind of thing. All right.

So, what did I do with all of these things coming together? Most recently a bento box and a book. A book taking you on an interactive reading experience, hands-on experiences, just like the movie did. Where they get a guidebook, they have activities to do in the bento box, and they read, and as they're reading, they get to do these activities.

So how do we do this ourselves? We have to think about leveling up: first, we have to be inspired and then we have to adapt, and then we refine. So being inspired. I started a gift of reading, and you guys have probably seen this on social media, where we wrap a book for Christmas or the holidays or Valentine’s Day and then we label it, and the kids check it out. And I first started doing this because my kids, a lot of my kids don’t get gifts at the holidays. There just isn’t money at home. And so, this is a way that they could have a gift, and have that experience of the suspense, of wondering what it is, and unwrapping something, and then being able to open it up and see what book is inside. Then COVID happened and we had, we needed to work on other ways that we could help kids. And one of the things we did was a personal book box. And so, we would have classes fill out these surveys, and every student would fill out a survey, and then we would package up this book box. And every kid would get like three books based on their survey and a bookmark to help guide them while they read as well. And then they’d look through those three books and they decide, “Which one really fits me best?” And that’s the one that they would keep and check out. But what does that mean for me today? Well, the gift wrapping became a little bit overwhelming, the book box is a very time-consuming thing as well.

So, how did we adapt it this year this year? We did a secret Santa borrowed book wish, so a kid could fill out a Google form, tell us about themselves, all about themselves, describe themselves, what they like to do, and then challenge us to find a book that matches their interests and what they asked for. Wrap up the book, and then we would deliver it to their classroom. And so then again, they would have that experience of unwrapping a book and seeing if we met their needs, and seeing maybe if they could find something new and different to read.

So going again, about being inspired. Can’t be everywhere all the time, so we started doing like these book talks signs so that the posters could book talk for me. But then I also need to book talk as well. And I was at a conference once, and somebody said, oh book talks are so out. You don’t do book talks. Well, yeah you do, you just have to remember who your audience is. And book talks are very important and powerful. I know I’ve done my job right, when I see out in the stacks, I’m helping some kids, and there’s some other kid book talking another kid: “You gotta read this man. This is so awesome.” Then I know I’ve done a good job with the book talking. But there’s basically like five different styles of book talking, and each book sort of needs a different kind of style. And I don’t know what you were taught. But remember that you can hate a book and still book talk it. And they, actually a lot of the kids love it when I say I really didn’t like this book, but I think you might, and you might be able to talk me into why it’s a good book, and I need to get back with you to tell me that. Or I’ll tell them I’m not good with scary books. I get scared easily. So, they think it’s hysterical. And they’re like, okay Mrs. Preddy, tell me which book you read that you had to keep the lights on in your closet. Because it’s true, and I get so scared, I actually have to keep my closet light on for a couple days. Even the middle school book *Small Spaces* creeped me out. So, you know, tell those little personal anecdotes. They love it, right?

So how do I adapt that? And one way that I have adapted it is a holiday reading and gift guide. And we have the paper version, and we also have the online version and this is not just for the kids. This is for the parents and the families as well. So, talk about reaching out to the community, so that they understand that you’re engaged and involved, and they matter to you. We have an infant through adult holiday reading gift guide. It includes books and games and ed-tech toys for each reading level. And then through COVID, I learned that there are other ways that I can absentee promote a book. One of them is my interactive young Hoosier website. I’m sure you guys have state book lists as well. And so, I do face-to-face promoting of it. But that didn’t always translate for when a kid was wanted to know right at that moment. So, I also have a virtual library, and each book they click on sends them to a page that has all sorts of resources. They can listen to the author. They can look at the book talk. They can go to the library and order the book. They can listen to an audiobook sample. They can read a sample—all sorts of things that they can do; teachingbooks.net, If you guys have access to that, they have a game: putting the book cover together. And so, they think that’s fun as well. So, think about how can you make it interactive, but also independent so they can do this on their own?

All right, so be inspired. Makerspaces. Do you guys have makerspaces? Some of you, okay. So, I was one of the first Makerspace in school libraries in the country, and I had no idea what I was doing. I was making it up as I went. And then I had all these resources that I’d written grants for, I mean, all the stuff. And then it was just sitting there. So, what did I realize I needed to do? I needed to adapt and have like a makerspace or a creativity club and start showing the kids how to engage in things, and having events for teachers to engage in things. So, we started doing the directed activities so that they could learn about those, and have a positive experience at school, and then they’d have these neat things that they could take home and would be theirs. And then I refined it because sometimes kids can’t stay, their schedules are really busy.

So, what else can I do? And that’s when I created the take-make-return kits. And so, a public library was getting rid of their old filmstrip round-a-racks. I took that. And then others were getting rid of actually the bags, and so I got those, and inside those bags are activities and some of them are tech related. Some of them are games or puzzles. Just all sorts of different experiences that they can have. And inside the pack is not just those things, but also how to engage in those things, guidance, and part of the guidance sends them to a website where they can expand what they’re doing and try more things related to what that experience was.

Getting back to being inspired. You guys have scheduled book clubs, like at a scheduled time, or you did before COVID, maybe? No? Okay. So those are fun, to do scheduled book clubs, but I found that I couldn’t just have a conversation with the kids. We had to be doing something. If I could get them to do something with their hands, they actually got more comfortable and they started actually talking more and engaging more in their personal life and making connections with the book and talking about the book. So, there’s all sorts of ideas about what things you could do, whether it’s reading the same book or choosing like a genre and everybody coming together about that genre. But I found that if I did if we did some sort of simple and inexpensive craft while we talked, they would talk more.

How do I adapt that? Then we started doing family readings, and so families would sign up to read the same book. So, they’d read the same book before the party. And then at the party we would all come together, and we would have book discussion. We do crafts and activities and have snacks, and everything we did was related to that book. So again, I’ve got the families in, I got the kids in, and it was a very much a public thing, so that the community realized how engaged and committed I was to their kiddos. How did I refine that? Over COVID, I couldn’t do these face-to-face things. So, what could I do? And it became very popular and I’m still building more of these sensory kits, and we talked earlier about the bento book club kits. You see a picture there, and so in a bento box, there are these three different activities that all connect to the story. They have a booklet that also connects to the story, and they have activities that go along as they’re reading, so that they can become part of that story.

Going back to being inspired. So, I was inspired to do Community Think and Makes. And these were workshops where families would sign up to come in, and we’d have a community expert in whatever field come in, and we would do these events that were inspired by the Makerspace but also getting community experts to come in and share their expertise. And we did, we would do these workshop activities where everybody could do something related to that. And I think my favorite one was the game design, because we actually had a game designer, that was an international game designer who’s just about to hit it big, and we got them right before that. So fun.

And how did I adapt that to just one thing? Maker breaks. And here again, they go to the Google form. They request a certain activity. The activity is full of, is just to be able to make one thing like a tangram puzzle, but not just, not just do a tangram, but how can they make their own? So, they make their own tangram puzzle, and then it sends them to a website where they can understand what to do. Like the one you see here is a video of me showing them how to make their square into the tangram and some extension group ideas and resources.

All right, how we doing guys? Everyone okay? All right. So, how did I refine that? I refined that with a seasonal one. So, before every big break or at the end of every grading quarter, it’s sort of right before a season’s going to transition, and it would just be a simple activity that they could sign up for that would relate to that. So, the example you see here, one was in October, and they could make a Dracula book corner. Another one was a Mother’s Day card. And so, inside a little Ziplock bag are all the guidance and instructions for it. And again, this was to help students who wanted to do things at home. They wanted activities for home, but they don’t have a lot of money at home, or they don’t have a lot of experiences available to them at home, or they’re just really busy and they want to engage, but they don’t have time to engage. All right.

So, how can we be inspired? There’s School Library Month, and there’s a lot of great stuff that you can do during School Library Month. And if you go to the AASL website, there’s resources from this year and past years that you can use to do those things. But how can I adapt that? I can adapt that to reading madness month. So, at my school, School Library Month is March but in February, we do reading madness month. And reading madness month, we take that month, and we totally bombard the kids with everything we can think of to just have fun and build community and promote reading and get everybody thinking and talking and experiencing together. So, you see there a calendar, and there’s choice boards where they can do activities every week and earn points for their team—all sorts of ways that they can engage.

So, going on to reading madness month, how could we refine it? We refined it this, most recently this current year, by actually developing lessons. So, during our, we call it advisory, but I'm guessing you call it like homeroom, and your kids have time at homeroom. So, we would, for reading madness month, Home Room would be SSR time. But along with SSR time, we want to give them some resources and guidance and help promote all these other ways they can do things. And so there were these little mini lessons to get them pumped up before the SSR time and get them ready for the day, and then they would have that SSR time.

So, a lot of people ask me like, how do I, how do I do this? And one way is just to make the most use of your time, and that means reading with a purpose. So, we often talk to the kids about reading with a purpose or the research shows us that a lot of our struggling readers struggle because they don't have a purpose for reading. And so, a lot of things that we do as school librarians and with these activities and events is help get the kids reading with a purpose. And so, our purpose for reading is that we want to be looking for things while we read, and so this is a picture of what the books look like when I’m reading them because I write notes. The research says that you can read online, you can take notes online. But if you really want your brain to remember, your brain remembers better if you actually read in print, and if you actually take notes by hand, by writing them out, and so that’s what I do, so that I can better recall and my brain actually sort of adapts and gets inspired more if I handwrite things. I can make all those connections like we talked about, that librarian situation awareness seems to be more effective when I do that. But you can do it however you want, and if you are more productive reading online, that’s great, you know, there’s ways to highlight and make notes that way.

So, I look for anticipation statements. Do you guys know what those are? Okay. So, it looks like half and half. Anticipation statements are again giving a purpose for reading, and so they’re like true- false statements often, and they can be done with fiction or nonfiction, and with fiction a lot. They’re morality statements, and they can either be direct quotes from the book or inspired by some experience in the book. Like maybe you could say it’s okay to lie if you really have to, or you really need to. And before the kids read, they go through these five or six anticipation statements, and they would say yes or no. And then after they read, they see, did this book influence who they are or what they’re thinking, and did those statements change? Did their yes and no change? And so those are the anticipation statements. Quotes: powerful quotes from the book, information about the characters, and the setting. I also do foods, what foods are they eating? And when we want to document the story action, of course, think about what could be done for hands-on making, activities, events, crafts, hobbies—all those things that might just lead to something.

We were working on *The Running Dream* today by Wendelin van Draanene, and if you haven't read that, phenomenal book. And I stupidly put on my note, gin rummy, but I couldn't remember what page she played gin rummy on, and it was driving us crazy. And it turned out that it was just in one little paragraph on one little page, and it was never brought up again. But those are the little, it doesn’t matter. Now one of the activities for the next bento club, that we’re gonna do with that, is gin rummy, and the kids are gonna get a little teeny tiny deck of cards and learn how to play gin rummy, which is a hard game. I, that hurts, blows my mind. But so even if it’s a little thing, you just never know if you can use it, take a note on it. You’ll regret it if you don’t.

So, what are you going to do then? You're gonna document all of that in the “You Never Know” Policy. You never know when you’re going to want to go back and use that book again for whatever purpose: for a family event, for a club, just for a book talking, even any kind of a teaser activity where you're just doing like the first chapter kind of thing, but they’re also doing something hands-on with it, they’re having a snack related to it. You just never know when you’re going to need it. So, it's sort of that. You don’t know what you don’t know. So make sure to document the chapter and the page number, and all those activities that we just talked about could even be discussion questions, and all those notes then I actually, you can make fun of me because I just said I do it by hand, but then I put it in a Google sheet so that I can keep it forever, and I can repurpose it and keep track of it. Because like right now *The Running Dream* was a family read-in book about four years ago. And now I’m like, oh, this would make a wonderful bento book club kit. And so that’s where I’m going through my notes and repurposing that. You just never know when you can reuse your ideas.

And the book selection, how do you decide what books to use? And there are all sorts of places that you can get those. They can be student recommendations, repurposing those past experiences, like I just talked about. Maybe the book that’s used for a family book event can be used for another thing or you can be doing a one book, one school, state Choice nominees, author visits, student book clubs, and I'm guessing there’s some other areas that you guys have done activities. So, their book selections are for all sorts of purposes, but then they can also be repurposed for a new experience. One we had a great time with was *Wink*. If you haven’t read *Wink*, it’s a middle grade, and it is really good. It’s funny but it’s about a serious event. The boy is based on the real author’s experience of losing an eye to cancer. Ruta Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*. Oh my gosh, such a beautiful story and I worked with, after using it for breakfast book club, I went to the art teacher, and I said, hey, I think this would make a great project for us and she read it and was gung-ho, and so we did this awesome unit with *Between Shades of Gray*.

*\*Small edits have been made for clarity.*