

Intellectual Freedom In Canadian Libraries

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Is the sky falling?

No, but change is happening.

Where we are: CFLA-FCAB's Statement

- The Canadian Federation of Library Associations supports and promotes the universal principles of intellectual freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which include the *interlocking freedoms to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media* and regardless of frontiers.

(Emphasis added)

Based on the Charter of Rights

- In accordance with these principles, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations affirms that *all persons in Canada have a fundamental right, subject only to the Constitution and the law, to have access to the full range of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, and to express their thoughts publicly.* Only the courts may abridge free expression rights in Canada.

- *(Emphasis added)*

We all remember the good old days

E.g. 2014-2020

- Objects of challenges

Year	Books	Movies	Other	Programs/Speakers	Other
2020	19	7		1 Drag Story Hour (DSH)	1 Read Woke
2019	55	12		4 DSH, 3 speakers	5 room rentals, 8 Misc
2018	27	9		1	1
2017	36	14		2 DSH, 3 speakers, 3 displays/exhibits	3 room rentals, 4 Misc.
2016	55	9	1	2	4
2015	26	8			1
2014	36	23			

In Those Good Old Days (2014-2020)

- Individuals challenged in person
- At the service point
- Problems were resolved within the library
- A few went to the library's board
- Governing policy:
 - The library's collection policy
 - The profession's statement on intellectual freedom
 - Professional practice

But Change Happens (2020-2023)

- Movies are no longer a major issue
- Drag story hours become a focus

Year	Books	Movies/DVDs	Other M	Programs	Other
2023	85	5		24 DSH, 1 other	3 displays
2022	81	5		18 DSH	7 displays, 4 Misc.
2021	96	4		2 DSH	1 covid Info
2020	19	7		1 DSH	1 Read Woke

Really Happens (2020-2023)

- Drag Story hours are public events
- The vaccine skeptics begin organizing around schools and libraries
- Some book titles become social media lightning rods
- The issues are taken outside the libraries into school boards and town councils.
- Governing policy:
 - Community relations
 - Professional practice
 - The CFLA Statement (sometimes)

Lest we forget: Books

- Sexuality and Gender
- Inoffensive collections
- Web Queens

The Complex Situation in Schools

Curriculums deal with child development and attempt to protect the child from predation.

Conservative groups reserve sexuality and gender to the family in order to protect the child from predation (grooming).

Blanket statements about the needs of children K-12 are bound to be misleading.

Curriculums promote critical thinking.

Conservative groups value status quo.

The breadth of collections in Library Learning Commons is also contested.

For Further Enlightenment

Take a screen shot

- **Banning books in schools: What does it mean for students?**
 - <https://cfe.torontomu.ca/events/banning-books-schools-what-does-it-mean-students> (November 9)

School Libraries and Curriculum Under Attack: Why? and What to Do?

- <https://cfe.torontomu.ca/events/school-libraries-and-curriculum-under-attack-why-and-what-do> (November 29)

Changing Parameters

- What is contested
- Who contests it
- Where is it resolved
- The profession's stance

The New Reality – Part the First

- Municipal/Regional Politics
 - Dynamics differ between large and small communities
 - Toronto Public Library:
 - 10 Board Members
 - Population ~3,000,000
 - One funding body
 - South Central Regional Library(Manitoba):
 - 14 Board members
 - Population ~50,000
 - Seven funding bodies
 - But watch for elections
 - 2022 municipal and board elections did not favour “populist” candidates
 - Will the defeated candidates try again in 2024?
 - Will more liberal groups organize support for more liberal candidates?

The New Reality – Part the Worst

- Conflicting values in Professional Politics:
 - Harm vs. Erasure
 - Do we agree not to talk about Huckleberry Finn? Indian residential schools?
 - The problem of published falsehoods
 - Not in every collection, but not in *any* collection? In *this* collection?
 - Do we support access?
 - Intellectual Freedom as Oppression
 - The Library as an arm of the neo-liberal capitalist state
 - Do academics have no sense of irony?
 - The focus of our services: individuals or groups?
 - User needs or politics?
- The uncertain nexus:
 - Intellectual freedom and professional practice
 - Are they inevitably aligned?

And the Really Worst Thing?

The lack of rational tolerance.

Remember: absolute truth is the death of intellectual freedom.

We are all trying to make sense of the situation.

An Intellectual Freedom Agenda

- Engage all
- Build comprehensively
- Reject exclusion
- Cultivate the curious user
- Forego parades
- Have faith

Thank you for your patience

Further reading

- Kobabi, Maia; *Gender Queer* (Lion Forge Comics/Oni-Lion, 2019)
- Silverberg, Cory; *Sex is a Funny Word* (Triangle square, 2015)
- Shrier, Abigail; *Irreversible Damage* (Regnery. 2019)
- Popowich, Sam; *Confronting the Democratic Discourse of Librarianship: A Marxist Approach*(Library Juice, 2019)
- Pateman, Joe & Pateman, John; *Public Libraries and Marxism* (2021)
- Dudley, Michael; *Library Neutrality and Pluralism: A Manifesto*
 - <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/library-neutrality-and-pluralism>

