CENSORSHIP

By Tresia Dodson, A. Sue Fleming, and Sharon Sturgis
(written for the AASL Electronic Library, 1995)

The Definition

Censorship is derived from the Latin censere, meaning "to declare formally," "to describe officially," "to evaluate," or "to assess." In the heyday of the Roman Empire, Roman Censors were charged with the responsibility of counting the population. This responsibility eventually evolved into the administration of Roman morality and behavior.

Censorship continues to be an issue of imposing morality and behavior. According to Henry Reichman, a staff member and author for AASA, censorship is "the removal, suppression or restricted circulation of literary, artistic, or educational materials--of images, ideas, and information--on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of standards applied by the censor". In 1966, Ginsburg vs United States, Justice Potter Stewart stated that "censorship reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime..."

These two definitions can reflect an adversarial approach to the issue of censorship, one that polarizes those involved with the censorship issue. Reichman also cautions that "the challenge process itself is a legitimate and very important avenue of communication" between professional educators, parents, citizen/parent groups and school boards.

The Debate

Reichman identifies four primary motivations which underpin the censorship debate: family values, political views, religion, and minority rights. These categories are often based on a profound fear and distrust of pluralism, and an unexpressed desire to homogenize society. Suppression of information may also issue from a misunderstanding of the roles and purposes of education. As motivation moves into action, censorship becomes more than an intellectual debate. Material challenges often lead to litigation, embroiling the issue into the judicial system.

The Law

As a legal issue, censorship is addressed in the first amendment to the United States Constitution. Yet the seemingly clear and concise legal direction of the first amendment is interpreted through the emotional and political views of teachers, administrators, parents, and school library media specialists. Interpretation invariably opens heated debate concerning censorship and access in school media centers, which is then reflected through the court systems.
The large body of judicial opinion concerning censorship and intellectual freedom "is somewhat inconclusive and contradicting." However, three basic principles can be drawn from court records:

* An individual's personal beliefs may not be used to justify the removal of school resources.

* Resources may be removed for reasons of space, obsolescence, lack of educational suitability, or "pervasive vulgarity."

* School board policies and procedures must be followed in all reviews of library and instructional materials.

In light of inconclusive court decisions, many scholars feel that the courts may no longer be the most effective means to ensure intellectual freedom in the school library media center. School library media specialists must be aware of the challenges inherent in censorship litigation and develop policies and procedures which protect the rights of the information user, and yet provide a framework for handling challenges and selection considerations.

The Policy

Intellectual freedom is promoted through a recognition of the value of information in a variety of formats. But even the most carefully chosen materials are subject to question.

School library media centers should have an official board approved policy for the selection of materials. This policy should include: a statement of policy which outlines the objectives of selection and responsibility for selection; a statement of selection procedures which outlines the criteria and procedure for selection; and, importantly, procedures for the reconsideration of challenged materials. This policy, formulated through the efforts of many, should reflect the philosophy of the school district and define the role of selection in supporting this philosophy.

Hopkins states that "as the first library that many children and young adults are introduced to and use on a continuing basis, school library media centers play a vital role in promoting intellectual freedom." The policies and procedures for the selection and evaluation of materials are central to the development of the library media center collection. At the outset, sound policy and defined procedures act as the best defense against censorship.

Notes

3. Reichman, 5.
4. Reichman, 16.
6. Reichman, 89.
7. Foerstel, 96-97.
Books


Discusses the issue of self-censorship and library collections. His article suggests policies and procedures that, if followed, would strengthen collection development practices and guard against self-censorship by information specialists responsible for acquisitions.


The American Library Association provides general reference information and discussion of intellectual freedom and access issues in chapter nine of this practical handbook. This section includes the ALA Library Bill of Rights with related interpretations and proceeds to outline and analyze specific "freedoms" including the freedom to read and the freedom to view. The handbook presents practical information concerning case studies of challenged books, what to do when the censor comes, and coping with law enforcement inquiries.


In the introduction of his book, Foerstel offers a concise history of censorship, reminding the reader that one can find evidence of censorship throughout human history. He surveys this issue by examining some of the major cases involving censorship and legal precedence. The authors of some of the most frequently banned books offer their comments as well. An excellent source for a synopsis of fifty of the most frequently challenged books of the 90’s and the repercussions of retaining them in libraries. Several appendices list the People for the American Way’s most frequently challenged books, materials, and authors as well as states with the highest occurrences of challenges.


An encyclopedic organization to the components of censorship. The encyclopedia includes the history, development, and present day state of censorship issues, and includes some limited international scope. The Encyclopedia of Censorship consists of comprehensive entries about specific trials, legal decisions, and important individuals involved in the censorship debate and general articles on intellectual freedom’s philosophical questions. Many banned or challenged works are also discussed with information about the history and resolution of each challenge. The work also provides a cross-reference index and a bibliography of other censorship resources.

A general discussion of the definition of intellectual freedom and an examination of the philosophical approaches to this issue. The text further provides insight into legislation and case law, and includes sections on relevant biographical sketches and organizations—both for and against censorship restraint. A valuable aspect of this monograph is the extensive bibliography of related resources. This bibliography provides nearly 100 annotated pages of print and nonprint materials relating to censorship and intellectual freedom.


Effective and creative methods to support intellectual freedom. Suggestions enlist readers to take direct action based on knowledge of what censorship and intellectual freedom entails. This resource includes many practical features of interest, including addresses and phone numbers of various music, bookstore, and video retailers; and related bibliographies of organizations specific to certain censorship issues. Each mini-chapter provides a discussion of specific ways to fight censorship and the concrete information necessary to put words into action.


Historical background on the history of book banning and censorship in the United States, as well as how and why it happens. Through anecdotes, interviews, and actual trial transcripts, Noble shows how censorship affects politics, religion, social status, education and publishing. Included is a bibliography, source notes, and lists of books and authors that have been banned or challenged.


Lists the official statements and interpretations concerning intellectual freedom as put forth by the ALA. An essential source for developing policy statements for all types of libraries. A list of organizations that offer assistance to professionals involved in censorship challenges is also included.


A comprehensive examination of censorship in the schools. Topics included in this monograph range from a basic definition of censorship to current issues in censorship and developing selection/reconsideration policies that address this critical issue.


This collection of essays provides an overview of current issues in censorship. The authors included are professionals from universities, public schools, and the American
Library Association. Topics include discussions about the components of the problems, some current challenges and complaints, and how to react to challenges when they occur. Each essay includes references for further reading. This text also provides a comprehensive bibliography, and subject and author index.

Articles


Includes seven articles that discuss censorship and intellectual freedom in junior and senior high schools. Highlights include access to appropriate information; library material selection; dealing with complaints; a list of potentially controversial titles and topics; a history of book burning; the censorship of fiction; weeding versus censorship; and resources on censorship.


Offers practical advice for handling challenges and advises librarians to be prepared, get the community on the side of Intellectual Freedom, and to avoid overreacting. The librarian is advised to seek a win-win solution.


Uses Halloween, magic, and occult books to offer a general discussion about censorship issues. Several recently challenged or banned books are discussed, and the author offers persuasive arguments for libraries to respect different needs and beliefs by standing firm on censorship issues.


A discussion of Internet access provided to students, and covers such topics as access to questionable materials, parental role and involvement, and policies and procedures. Provides an example Code of Conduct, and a list of references which includes Internet addresses.


Discusses the controversy of occult books in the school library. Encourages librarians to require extraordinary evidence, to back extraordinary claims, before removing challenged material.


Discusses the concept of self-censorship, or how librarians resolve conflicts between personal beliefs and intellectual freedom. Written in first person and recounts an
experience which confronted the author with her own self-censorship. A bibliography is included.


Summarizes the results of a national study of library media material challenges in secondary public school libraries that was conducted during the 1989-90 school year. Hopkins also identifies key factors that influence whether challenges to library media materials resulted in retention, restriction, or removal of the materials from the library media center.


This national study identified and discussed the factors that affected the retention, restriction, or removal of library materials in secondary public schools. The author also offers recommendations. Included in the article are extensive statistical tables, charting the results of the study.


Concentrates on the six outcome factors which were found to influence the outcome of challenges to library media center materials. The article specifically focuses on the differences between oral and written challenges, using the national intellectual freedom study. Includes a bibliography.


Presents an example of a censorship attempt in the Detroit Public School System. The titles that were challenged are listed. The role of the book selection committee is discussed. Help from outside organizations, as well as, tips for dealing with censors are discussed.


Two superintendents discuss the challenges that their districts had faced and strategies for dealing with them. The second administrative report deals specifically with a legal challenge to a school-wide reading program. This article provides an administrative view of censorship through a case study approach, offering practical advise and guidance for obtaining community support.

LaRue lists three premises of censorship to further develop his own experiences with censorship issues. He specifically warns against dehumanization in the censorship debate.


Offers a commentary on the dilemma faced by librarians over the controversial book, Sex, by Madonna. Manley offers 20 good reasons for librarians to acquire the book, and suggests that even "timid" librarians should be ready to "fight the good fight".

A list of fifty ways to fight censorship. Provides a beginning point for staff discussion and development.

A personal account of the 1982 landmark Supreme Court Case on censorship of library materials, Pico vs Island Trees. Pico, who was a seventeen year old student at the time of the case, relates his experiences through a speech to the Missouri Association of School Librarians.

Relates a growing success trend in library material challenges as outlined by two primary national organizations that monitor censorship, the People for the American Way and the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom. The article includes a list of most frequently challenged books in schools, 1992-93, and phone numbers for more information.

Stover provides an intellectual debate which stresses the position of the librarian between two important freedoms, the freedom to protest and the freedom from censorship. This article will challenge the reader to reconsider their own censorship and selection approaches, and to consider the validity of social protest through material challenges.

ERIC Reports


Kit


Listservs

Subscribe to ALAOIF. Send and e-mail request to: listserv@uicvm.cc.vic.edu

This listserv provides an ongoing forum for discussion of intellectual freedom questions and challenges. It is organized through the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom.

Subscribe to LM_NET firstname lastname. Send and e-mail request to: listserv@suvm.syr.edu

Open to all school library media specialists and can be used for the sharing of ideas and information, to link programs, to make contacts and to ask for input.

Video


Organizations

American Library Association
Intellectual Freedom Committee
50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611

National Coalition Against Censorship
2 S. 64th St.
New York, NY 10023

Center for Constitutional Rights
666 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10012
People for the American Way  
2000 M. Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, D.C.  20036

National Council of Teacher of English  
1111 Kenyon Rd.  
Urbana, Il  61801

American Federation of Teachers  
555 New Jersey Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C.  20001

First Amendment Lawyer's Association  
c/o Wayne Giampietro  
125 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2700  
Chicago, Il  60606

National Education Association  
1201 16th St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C.  20036

American Association of School Librarians  
50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, Il  60611

Freedom of Information Center  
University of Missouri  
20 Walter Williams Hall  
Columbia, Missouri  65211

National Education Association Commission  
on Professional Rights and Responsibilities  
1201 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.  20036


\[iii\] Reichman 5.

\[iv\] Reichman 16.

vi. Reichman 89.

vii. Foerstel 96-97.

What is the difference between censor, sensor, and censure? Censor means to forbid public distribution of something. A sensor is a detector (e.g., a light detector). A censure is a formal rebuke. To censor means to forbid. For example: We seem okay with violence, but nudity we race to criticize and censor. (Actress Eva Mendes). A sensor is a detector. For example, A censor is a person whose job is to look at all types of media and remove material. There are many reasons to censor something, like protecting military secrets, stopping immoral or anti-religious works, or keeping political power. Censorship is almost always used as an insult, and there is much debate over what censorship is and when it is okay. Moral censorship: It is thought that certain facts may be inappropriate for the audience. There are many countries that limit who may see pornography. Censorship definition: Censorship is the censoring of books, plays, films, or reports, especially by government. The government today announced that press censorship was being lifted. Synonyms: expurgation, blue pencil, purgation, bowdlerization or bowdlerisation More Synonyms of censorship.

COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary. Copyright © HarperCollins Publishers. Video: pronunciation of censorship. You may also like. An LXC-based censorship simulation infrastructure for P2P networks. BSD-3-Clause License. In that censor node you may install the Debian package dnsmasq, make it listen on eth0 and have all IPv4 and IPv6 DNS queries of *.example.com resolved to the censor itself. Just place this in the censor's /etc/dnsmasq.d/local-censor.conf: interface=eth0 address=/example.com/172.17.1.1 address=/example.com/fddb:bd8c:1e4f::f0e1:1. "Censorship" comes from the Latin word censor. In Rome, the censor had two duties: To count the citizens and to supervise their morals. The term "census" is also derived from this word. An early published reference to the term "whitewash" dates back to 1762 in a Boston Evening Post article. Selected global history. Censorship has occurred all over the world, and has been evident since recorded history in numerous societies. As noted, the word "censor" derives from the Roman duty to supervise the morals of the public.