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# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations-GPS

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book chapters such as “The Problem of Getting Markedly Better Schools” (1983) in **Kappa Delta Pi’s** *Bad Times, Good Schools* or his 1994 monograph *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools*.<sup>6-7</sup> His message is one of hope for educational reform tempered by the reality of political, legal, social, and economic constraints.

In 1991, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools* further highlighted disparities in America’s educational system.<sup>8</sup> Author **Jonathan Kozol** shares his findings about segregation in schools based on economics and geographic indicators rather than racial segregation, which was supposedly eliminated through federal legislation in the 1960s. Focusing on the 1980s, **Kozol** reports that impoverished urban schools were primarily populated by children of color, while more affluent suburban schools were predominantly white. This sobering account of the local economic impact on schooling for children resonates today when the same issues are discussed in terms of social justice. Twenty years later, this indictment of U.S. education still offers a rationale to address inequities across school systems and improve schooling as a benefit to future growth.

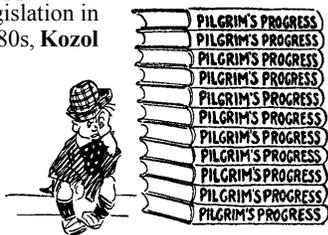
American education has been profoundly influenced in the past few decades by the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher **Paulo Freire**. Just as the civil rights movement in the 1960s created an environment that encouraged social change, **Paulo Freire’s** work on social justice issues within the Brazilian

education system became a rallying point for many around the world, and especially in the United States. Since the 1970 publication in English of the revolutionary *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it has become critical that libraries make his books available.<sup>9</sup> Focused on the power and politics of education and the possibilities for social transformation through education, **Freire’s** monograph addresses the same concerns that American educators were discussing in the late twentieth century. A call for justice, equity, dignity, and compassion for students of all ages is interwoven with recommendations for how to accomplish these goals. **Freire’s** work emphasizes student engagement and educational awareness, enabling students to actively transform society. **Freire’s** books are so popular that it is typical for libraries to

hold multiple copies since they are used by educators, sociologists, and philosophers. His seminal work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains foundational to his later publications.

From a landmark national report commissioned by the **U.S. Department of Education** to the pedagogical

theories of a Brazilian educator, these works exemplify the ongoing role of education in providing equal opportunities to citizens. The late twentieth-century focus on educational reform mirrors other contemporaneous social issues and illustrates the intertwined and often interdisciplinary nature of education texts. This list of essential education reform titles provides a basis for understanding current issues in education, and for researchers interested in earlier reform movements, these works echo and inform previous cycles of education reform. 🌱



#### Endnotes

1. United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform: A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. Washington, DC: National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983. \* <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED226006.pdf>
2. **Dougherty, Richard M.** “Stemming the Tide’ of Mediocrity: The Academic Library Response [to] ‘A Nation at Risk.’” Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1983. (ERIC Document Number ED243888).
3. **Yecke, Cheri Pierson.** *The War Against Excellence: The Rising Tide of Mediocrity in America’s Middle Schools*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.
4. **Spring, Joel H.** *American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects*. New York: Longman, 1978.\*
5. **Goodlad, John I.** *What Schools Are For.* Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1979.\*
6. **Goodlad, John I.** “The Problem of Getting Markedly Better Schools.” In *Bad Times, Good Schools*, edited by Jack Frymier, 59-80. West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi, 1983.
7. **Goodlad, John I.** *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.\*
8. **Kozol, Jonathan.** *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*. New York: Crown Pub., 1991.\*
9. **Freire, Paulo.** *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by **Myra Bergman Ramos**. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.\*

\*Editor’s note: An asterisk (\*) denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.

## Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — GPS

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One Sunday afternoon this past month a new colleague flew to Buffalo, New York from company headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee. The purpose of her trip was to visit our office in Niagara Falls, Ontario, which is about a 30-mile drive on the New York State Thruway and Queen Elizabeth Way, two highways connected by the Peace Bridge, which joins Buffalo to Fort Erie, Ontario across the Niagara River.

Monday morning at the office, I asked how her trip had gone. Not so well, in fact. Because this was her first trip to the area, arriving after dark, she brought her own GPS along so as not to get lost. She punched in the office address and let the GPS take over. “I was in Springville, New York before realizing,” she told me, “that I was driving in the wrong direction.”

Springville, for those readers unfamiliar with the area, which must be nearly everyone,

is some 35 miles due south of Buffalo on US Route 219, a pleasant village in the heart of the Buffalo area’s snow belt. While due south is not the direct opposite of the shortest route to Canada, since Fort Erie is actually due west of Buffalo, my colleague had indeed been right about her direction being wrong.

It’s a good thing she stopped and turned around. Otherwise, she’d have had a long night ahead. Actually, a long night and more ahead, since she realized something was off when the GPS indicated that her arrival time was the following afternoon. But the GPS hadn’t been wrong on that, since it was set to find routes without tolls, thanks to a recent vacation trip to Florida my colleague had taken with her husband and their GPS. The Peace Bridge is a tollway, \$3.00, and the GPS knew that.

So, south to Springville was the first leg of a toll-free and thankfully speculative journey

that could have veered west at some point to outflank Lakes Erie, Michigan, and Superior, then a northward turn toward Duluth with an eye on some remote border crossing in northern Minnesota leading into Ontario west of Thunder Bay, and then all free highways from there, east through Sault Ste. Marie, to Sudbury, then south to Toronto, east again at Hamilton, and then the home stretch, finally on the QEW, and Niagara Falls.

On the other hand, the GPS might have chosen to head east past Springville along the southern tier of New York State, and then north on Route 81 through Syracuse to the Canadian border, which is the St. Lawrence River there. To avoid a bridge toll, she’d drive east past Ogdensburg until the international border became a free land crossing on the other side of Massena, and turn north probably

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at Trout River, then drive on secondary highways northeast to the outskirts of Montreal and across the St. Lawrence somewhere on a toll-free bridge, if there is one, to get onto Highway 401 to Toronto, driving west, with a final southeasterly dogleg turn leading to Niagara Falls.

All toll-free, and all also absurd, of course. It would be easy to blame the GPS here, but really, it performed exactly the task it was supposed to, which was no easy thing. How smart do we want our machines to be, anyway? Just how bad would we want a toll-free route to be before that inflectionless voice spoke up to say, "You cheapskate, pay the toll!" Hard to pin a lot of blame on my straying colleague, either, since she was new to the area, just off a flight, tired, it was past sunset, and what's the point of having a GPS in the first place if you're inclined to challenge it? She did well to stop at Springville, and not instead to find herself in Ohio or Quebec before realizing she'd blown off course. Myself, many times I've proven able to get spectacularly lost using only a map, or lost with the help of no directional device at all.

Driving is the least of it, in any case. The real issue is that we all rely on an inner GPS we've programmed to get us to the various destinations of our day, our week, and our year, saving us from having to think too hard about decisions we'd make the same way all the time anyhow. Think of the times you've driven to work when your mind has drifted and you suddenly come to with a start and ask yourself, at some intersection or other, "How'd I get here?" You don't remember, and can't tell that morning apart from hundreds or even thousands of other mornings. You were totally unconscious, an unsettling thought as soon as you're conscious of it. On the more comforting side of things, you were in good hands. Your GPS got you where you needed to go.

When you need to reprogram, though, that can be disorienting. For many readers of *Against the Grain*, our GPS has been set to attend ALA, twice a year, January and June, not much thought involved. That can be especially true for vendors, those of us at the point where we've notched quite a few ALAs. We're somewhat less subject to the ebb and flow of conference funding than has become

the case for so many librarian-attendees. After awhile you become the face of the company, or one of its faces, and to a degree it's important in an industry as small as ours to seem familiar to customers and potential customers. I've worked with people who have attended an astonishing number of consecutive ALAs

— dozens. But the most astonishing thing is that they could tell you exactly where their streak stood, as if they were **Lou Gehrig** or **Cal Ripken**.

It wouldn't be easy to explain, say to a Martian, why shortly after each solstice we travel long distances to rotating destinations to sit in rooms and stand in halls that look the same each time, mostly to have brief interactions with a few people you know and no interaction with thousands you don't. For the past few years the sequence has been Denver and home, Anaheim and home, Boston and home, Washington and home, San Diego and home, New Orleans and home, Dallas and home, and now Anaheim coming again. Is our GPS on the wrong setting?

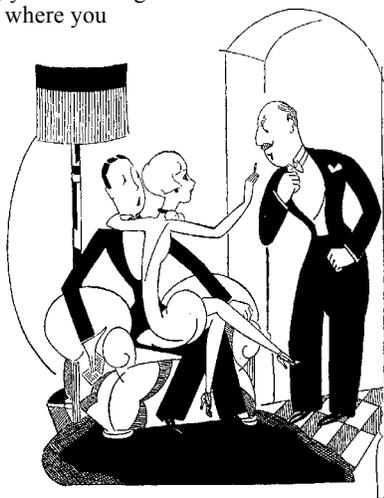
To a sympathetic Martian, you could probably get across the idea that there's a reason behind all this. That you usually learn a few things. That some business gets done. That sometimes it's fun. That getting out of your home office routines periodically is a good thing. And that you validate your place in the wider library community, and your company's place, simply by showing up enough times.

So does that mean that by not showing up, you lose some of that standing? My own streak is going to end with Anaheim, when I'll be recuperating from some scheduled surgery. I can tell you how long my streak was, not because I've kept track, but because I can look it up. The **National Hockey League** draft was held in Buffalo in 1998 — I just checked — when the **ALA Annual Conference** was being held in Washington. That was the last time I missed. A colleague at the time told me she got a kick from telling people who asked, "**Bob's** not here. He's at the **NHL Draft**." Not your everyday excuse.

Now these years later it's hard not to feel a little anxious about skipping another ALA (not to mention about the surgery). Will I miss something? Will people miss me? Or worse, what if they don't?

Our Martian could probably help to put things into perspective. The view from his planet, he might say, is that he detects no consequence at all. And of course he'd be right. This is about a setting on my GPS. We all have our own settings. They work, exactly as programmed, from the moment we switch on our computer in the morning, probably to launch a start-of-day routine we've long perfected, through the moments of our day large and

small, to the hour in the PM when we call it quits. The GPS helps get us there, week in and week out. What would we do without it? It's probably smart, though, to check our settings once in awhile, as my colleague would tell you. 🍌



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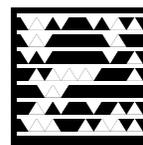
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