Heather McTavish

Loud Style, (Not So) Quiet Library

From left to right: Holly Armstrong - Library Technician (floral top), Christina Niro - Teacher-Librarian (red pants), Jonelle St. Aubyn - Lead Teacher-Librarian (dress) of Louise Arbor Secondary School, Peel District School Board.

Vibrant clothing, "loud" sneakers, and colourful hair sometimes donned by elementary and secondary library staff send unspoken messages. They are a conversation without words–a visual welcoming, inviting students to come into the library space. They have the power to convey ideas of positivity, about self-expression and inclusivity, and the ability to make us more approachable, mitigating some of the library anxiety often felt by learners in our libraries, quiet or loud.
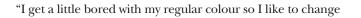
Teacher-Librarians and library technicians shared what it means to dress "loudly" in their library spaces, illuminating what they hope their style conveys to students at their respective libraries.

The staff at the library learning commons at Louise Arbor Secondary School, part of the Peel District School Board, couple their fearless fashion with fun colours that match their body language. Lead teacher-librarian Jonelle St. Aubyn shares that by dressing the way they do, the library team communicates that they "are not afraid to have fun with fashion." Importantly, their "bright colours and big smiles make [them] approachable to students and staff alike." She also connects fashion to the space itself. "Our library space isn't typically quiet, so our vibrant style compliments our vibrant space!"

Connie Scott, Library Technician at Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School, Halton District School Board

Connie Scott, library technician at Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School in the Halton District School board, and Diana Maliszewski, teacher-librarian at Agnes Macphail Public School in the Toronto District School Board, said that although they work in different school boards and in different settings, they both enjoy transforming their hair into loud, vibrant or uncommon shades. Between them, their hair has been blue, pink, purple, red, yellow, black and silver.

"I get a little bored with my regular colour so I like to change

it up," said Diana. "It also makes a great teaching opportunity. I can talk with the students about stereotypes that surround hairstyles and shades. Just because someone has silver hair, that doesn't mean they are grandparents! Just because someone has purple hair, that doesn't mean they cannot be in a leadership position or position of authority!

"Last year, I even dyed my hair in front of the students as part of our media unit. They were shocked by how long the process is and asked many questions!"

Connie said she is always asked why she dyes her hair so many colours. "I'm going to be real – I started to dye my hair because I felt I was invisible in my personal life. I thought colouring my hair a different colour might make people notice me and I wouldn't feel as alone as I was.

"First, I cut my hair short and dyed it red. Turns out, I'm not a redhead, but I started to notice that I was a little more outgoing. Over the years I tried different colours – they didn't always feel right. I even let all the colour go and went grey!! Grey really didn't suit my personality!

"I dye my hair blue-black and colour a front patch either teal or a vibrant blue now. With every colour change, I began to become more me, or more the person I wanted to be," said Connie.

"I still feel invisible at times, but my coloured hair has helped me become the gregarious, outgoing and friendly person I wanted to be. I now get be a role model for teenagers. I get to show the students in my school that no matter how old you are – I'm 55 – no matter your size, shape, colour or what your job is, create who you want to be on the outside to show who you are on the inside! Am I the person I truly want to be, not 100%, but every day I get to hang out with amazing teenagers, who show me courage and strength to keep going!

"Plus, I love my blue hair. It matches the Doctor Who or Marvel T-Shirts I wear to work!"