

Learning without frontiers

School libraries and meta-literacy in action



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Biography

Judy O'Connell lectures in Library and Information Management in the School of Information Studies, Faculty of Education, at Charles Sturt University, Australia. Her professional experience in schools includes head of library in schools K-12 and library and technology services consultant at district level, with a focus on libraries, library design, gaming, virtual worlds, and curriculum and professional development in digital environments. Judy writes online at hejude.wordpress.com

Introduction

Each new academic year brings challenges, change and excitement in ways that might not have been expected or anticipated. While library shelves have been dusted, collections prepared, digital tools sharpened, and motivation is running high, the one point of certainty is that the learning landscape refuses to 'be still'! When it comes to literacy,

YouTube blog 23 January: <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2012/01/holy-nyans-60-hours-per-minute-and-4.html>

Never mind that the 'dawn of YouTube' was February 2005, which was just 10 short years after Larry Page and Sergey Brin first met at Stanford University, and before Google was a twinkle in their eye: <http://www.google.com/about/corporate/company/history.html> We saw the launch of iBooks for education and iBooksAuthor, which promised to challenge the textbook environment in schools by allowing teachers and students to create interactive content for iPads. Following the unveiling of iBooks 2, Apple saw an incredible 350,000 textbook downloads in the first three days after the launch: <http://macedailynews.com/2012/01/23/over-350000-textbooks-were-downloaded-from-apples-ibookstore-in-just-3-days/>



While all schools are now involved in technology integration, laptop programs of some kind, and even iPads for 1:1 programs, it is astounding to think about how the core tools and learning opportunities of the 21st century have indeed become extraordinary.

This is the socially connected era of mobile devices, where interaction is key and where mobile phone cameras are replacing point-and-shoot cameras to provide visual connection to the conversations. Audio and video media are more and more available online and always accessible, in contrast to a disk or separate device designed for single-purpose use. While some schools (or systems) lag in adopting the tools of today, students generally do not; making this is part of the overall challenge for information professionals.

School libraries and teacher librarians can have a vital role to play in today's interactive knowledge environments. The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls from the Israel Museum: <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/> demonstrates how we can connect to the past with the tools of the future. Johann Gutenberg's Bible, the first real book to be printed using the technique of printing which Gutenberg invented in the 1450s, is available online from the British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/gutenberg/homepage.html> Many more examples abound, and in Australia we recognise the outstanding resources



provided by The National Library through Trove: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> and Pandora: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/>

Knowledge building, literacy and communication in action now take many forms, shape-shifting before our eyes. This digital information ecology demands a new knowledge flow between content and digital connections. Now learning is without frontiers because of the available range of pervasive, immersive, information- and communication-rich environments. Since their establishment, school libraries

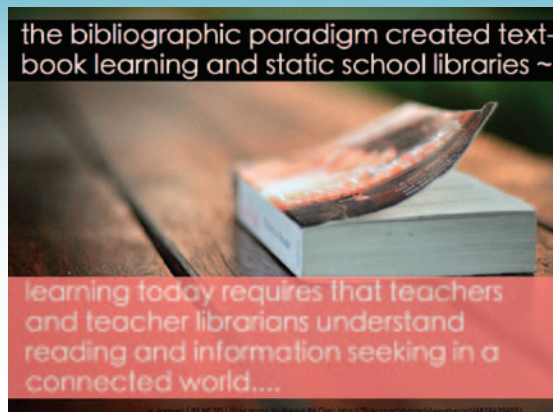
Teaching and learning in school libraries has been shifting from tool-based and skills-based instruction to constructivist user- and learner-centric approaches, and evidence-based practice has become the essential tool for improvement of practice.

information and lifelong learning, the pulsing energy of *change* powers the curriculum of learning innovation throughout the year — now, more than ever, at a breakneck pace.

Before the year had hardly got under way, there were already several indicators that confirmed that education should never be what it was when you and I were at school. For example, YouTube told us:

Since the dawn of YouTube, we've been sharing the hours of video you upload every minute. In 2007 we started at six hours, then in 2010 we were at 24 hours, then 35, then 48, and now ... 60 hours of video every minute, an increase of more than 30 percent in the last eight months.

We also saw the new twist on Google+ (social networking space launched in 2011 providing interesting features such as Google Hangouts) which finally allowed both nicknames and fully fledged pseudonyms to be used: <http://mashable.com/2012/01/23/google-plus-allows-pseudonyms-nicknames/> We got confirmation once again that game-based learning had more to offer than novelty interest. When online gamers topped scientists' efforts to improve a model enzyme using the online game *Foldit* (University of Washington, Seattle) a milestone in crowd-sourced research was achieved: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=victory-for-crowdsourced-biomolecule2&page=2>



have been vital for showcasing the best in good reading and research for immersion in knowledge. While the bibliographic paradigm created textbook learning and static school libraries, learning today requires that teachers and teacher librarians understand reading and information seeking in a connected world.

Meeting readers where they are

Students need rich print and media experiences to prepare them for their digitally enhanced world. Students need a range of reading and information options delivered via all manner of media and digital devices and, as a result, they need to know how to juxtapose text, sound, media and social connections in real time. On top of that, they need to know how to find, filter, then mix and match what they see, hear and experience.

This sounds very much like an environment that is best understood and interpreted by teacher librarians who are passionate about their library's role in the learning culture of their school. It sounds like the perfect space for teacher librarians who are up to date with social media, and who already understand the portable, personal web, focused on the individual, on life-stream, on consolidating content, that is powered by widgets, apps, drag-and-drop, and 'mash-ups' of user engagement. Print materials are no longer at the core of the reference collection, the non-fiction collection, or the information search process. Students use technology to research online, anytime, anywhere. School libraries that adapt to the digital

needs of their students not only continue to build a reading culture in the school, but provide the divergence and convergence in media needed to provide the materials for motivation, differentiation, collaboration and connections necessary for 21st century learning (Lamb & Johnson 2010; Hay & Foley 2009). Teaching and learning in school libraries has been shifting from tool-based and skills-based instruction to constructivist user- and learner-centric approaches, and evidence-based practice has become the essential tool for improvement of practice (Bates, McClure & Spinks 2010).

In talking about school libraries and the essential paradigm shift that is taking place, Stanley (2011) highlights three areas of influence:

1. Information fluency — using search engines effectively; evaluating online information; collaborating in virtual environments, and delivering material resources online.
2. Digital citizenship — understanding responsible and ethical use of information, and maintaining safe online practices.
3. Digital storytelling — reading, writing and listening to books in many formats; creating, collaborating and sharing in a range of mediums.

It is in this context that *transliteracy* has captured the interest of teacher librarians as a term to explain being literate in the 21st century, where the relationship between people, technology and the social meaning of literacy is recognised in past, present and future modalities (Ipr

2010). The emergence of social media and collaborative online communities has also led to the reframing of information literacy as *meta-literacy*, because information takes many forms online and is produced and communicated through multiple modalities (Mackey & Jacobson 2011).

Meta-literacy unifies multiple literacy types and places a particular emphasis on producing and sharing information in participatory digital environments. Meta-literacy action happens wherever our students read and interpret their world. In this way innovations like e-books and the more recent iBooksAuthor tool simply represent the latest developments in what is undoubtedly a growing field for school libraries as teacher librarians in which to

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adopt meta-literacy in action. Put bluntly, the iPad and other mobile and hand-held devices have changed school libraries forever.

In such a context, school libraries must have flexibility and personalisation at the core of services, bringing literacy opportunities and information literacy strategies and activities together by embedding them in multi-modal projects.

Leadership of learning

Leading learning today is no small task and the leadership challenge placed before teacher librarians is both exciting and challenging, encompassing as it does all aspects of literacy, meta-literacy, technology, and professional development in collaborative partnerships with students and teachers (Fontichiaro 2010; Howard 2010; Killeen 2009; Milam Creighton 2009).

The International Society for Technology in Education standards (NETS 2008) for students set the need for the appropriate integration of technology into the literacy and knowledge construction learning needs of the students by supporting:



- creativity and innovation
- communication and collaboration
- research and information fluency
- critical thinking, problem solving and decision making
- digital citizenship
- technology operations and concepts.

In the open publication *School Libraries: What's now, what's next, what comes after*, (released under creative commons at <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/96705>) we find all these requirements clearly met, through discussion and exploration of best practice. The book is produced and circulated in this way, because in some places the future of school libraries and school librarians hangs in the balance. It's an easy publication to dip into and to help nurture the spirit of future school librarianship.

What you will find affirmed as you read this compilation is that the school library will continue to change and will look different physically and will support different media formats. *The Horizon Report K-12 Edition* (2011), issued annually since 2009, has identified and described emerging technologies that are having a significant impact on K-12 education, reiterating the diversity of influences on learning.

The technologies will change and the school library virtual collections will grow. The curriculum will present unique challenges, all the more so as we in Australia work with

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national models. We will continue to work with literature, stories and storytelling, though more and more this will be interactive and via hand-held devices. We will continue to work on information-seeking strategies, and will transform information literacy into information curation by the addition of information organisation tools as diverse as Evernote, Diigo, Zotero, Livebinders, Libguides, Pinterest, QR Codes and more. We will not be able to ignore social media as natural extensions of the Web 2.0 environments that we have already embraced.

In fact, **social media** is driving the creation of new types of online communities, new types

of collaboration, and new types of strategies for gathering and distributing information to build knowledge. Understanding the social web involves understanding how the social web impinges on our communication transactions, and affects our information-gathering activities. By building a future-ready personal learning network, a teacher librarian can engage in new and emerging media to assist in promoting creative and authentic knowledge work in their schools (Cox 2010; Harlan 2009).

The social web (as a place without frontiers) requires teacher librarians and educators to understand and make use of the following:

- Personal learning environments — relying on people we connect with through social networks and collaborative tools; for example, Twitter, Yammer.
- Personal learning networks — knowing where or who to connect with to find professional content; for example, Skype in the Classroom.
- Personal web management tools — used for tracking our life and powering our information organisation; for example, photos to Facebook, pictures to Flickr, e-mail to blog posts.

- Cloud computing — utilising access between sources and devices; for example, Edmodo, Evernote, Diigo.

- Mixed reality environments — adopting e-devices and augmented reality; for example, e-books, QR codes, Layar browser.

- Content curation — utilising web services to filter and disseminate resources, news and knowledge prompts; for example, Scooplt.

It's a golden era for 'working in the cloud' — transacting more and more of our 'work and play' in online spaces with online tools. But



as the tools change, the text and the need for clarity in communication remains — static and active; immersive and multi-modal. Now more than ever, a teacher librarian specialist can take a leadership role in the school community.

In the ASLA biennial national conference keynote *School Libraries and Meta-literacy in Action*, the full range and complexity of areas where leadership action is involved is explored in detail: <http://www.slideshare.net/heyjudeonline/learning-without-frontiers-school-libraries-and-metaliteracy-in-action>

In the video *School Library Leadership: Leading Libraries into the Future*: <http://youtu.be/4RzmrhDmjeQ> the four dimensions of the work of a teacher librarian as leader fall under the headings: collaborate; advocate; educate; innovate. If nothing else, these provide a perfect matrix to examine professional practice in your school, and benchmark the program of activities for the year.

Leadership through meta-literacy actions

Meta-literacy provides the impetus for our transition to *future learning* — a new kind of learning that has adaptability at its core. Becoming a model for lifelong learning has been the goal of every teacher librarian *because* school libraries are in the knowledge business. This is where we find our strength and our call to leadership.

This leadership strategy (O'Connell, 2012) allows a teacher librarian to be proactive within the school community, and participate in many and varied learning conversations such as:

- Curriculum conversation and innovation:
 - > Project-based Learning (Boss & Krauss 2007).
 - > Guided Inquiry (Todd 2010).
 - > Virtual and gaming environments (O'Connell & Groom 2010).

- Digital divide and credibility of online information:
 - > Contemporary media and open online access.
 - > Participatory evaluation of information (Flanagin & Metzger 2008).
 - > Referencing for information organisation with online tools (Taylor 2012).
- Digital citizenship:
 - > Internet safety.
 - > Responsible use of information (Ribble & Bailey 2007).
- Global sharing of leading practice and resources to support the 21st century learner:
 - > Contribution to scholarly research through participatory communication and publications.
- multi-literate and flexible media tools
- curriculum and knowledge engagement through authentic learning experiences
- collaborative and flexible work spaces
- empowered by information fluency skills and strategies
- enhanced by game-based learning and social media
- global in focus through comprehensive projects, activities and media.

Engaging students in opportunities to read and write, explore and explain, think and deduct are all the more interesting in our multi-modal, multi-literate 21st century learning environments, no matter at what age or what stage of primary or secondary schooling.

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- > Australian School Library Association Ning (<http://aslaonline.ning.com/>) Australian School Library Association on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ASLAOnline>).
- > SLANZA Te Whare Puna Matauranga a Kura on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SLANZA/>).
- > The American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) Standards for the 21st-Century Learner Lesson Plan Database (<http://aasl.jesandco.org>).
- > Teacher Librarian Ning (<http://teacherlibrarian.ning.com/>).
- Community entrepreneur:
 - > Bring together conversations and resources to build knowledge.
 - > Staff development to enhance student and staff learning in collaborative environments.
 - > Community outreach, supporting and motivating the evolution of the core learning mission of the school.

Leading learning without frontiers

Teacher librarians have the opportunity to rethink how to support personalised and collaborative information seeking and knowledge conversations. Learning without frontiers is our context. It is empowered by a pedagogical approach to a participatory, digital environment that aims to be:

Teacher librarians are important leaders in the *era of learning without frontiers* — particularly when they understand when and how to move across the ever-expanding social media, meta-literacy environments to empower each member of the school community.

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