Learning without frontiers
School libraries and meta-literacy in action
Judy O’Connell

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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 heyjude.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,

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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 the same. 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.sciencemag.org/content/338/6118/1196.full.html

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 accessible 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
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search process. Students use technology
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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
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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 (Ipri 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
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:

Meta-literacy unifies multiple literacy types
and places a particular emphasis on producing
and sharing information in participatory
digital environments.
• 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 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.

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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, Scoopit.

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/heyyjudeonline/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).

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• 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 deduce 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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• 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:

References


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