

Things that keep us up at night

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Library, as we once knew it, may no longer be relevant. School *librarians*, as we once knew them, may no longer be relevant. And yet, this is undoubtedly the most exciting time in the history of time to be a librarian.

The future of *school library* as a relevant and viable institution is largely dependent on us, and how quickly we respond to change.

We hope that libraries will always exist as places for learners to find information and resources and services and instruction. But formats, technologies, learning needs, and our schools are evolving - as are our students themselves. Our entire information and communication landscapes have shifted. They will continue to do so.

We worry about our field and our practice and whether we as a profession are shifting fast enough to seize new opportunities to create valuable, dynamic programs.

So, let's break it down. What is it exactly that keeps us up at night?

1. Economic shifts. We face a major change in the economic rationale for libraries. Libraries were created under the economic model that it's more economical to buy something (a book, a video, a magazine) and share it, than to buy a copy for everyone. And for centuries this model has given libraries their value. But today, for the first time in history, we are moving from a time of information scarcity to one of information abundance. Can we define why libraries are necessary when information is ubiquitous, more scalable, far more convenient, and often "free" online?

If libraries change from places just to *get* stuff to places to *make* stuff, *do* stuff, and *share* stuff, we'll sleep better:¹

Our libraries should not be grocery stores. We need to use those groceries, to open the boxes, pour the milk, mix the batter, make a mess. We need production space. We need to serve up our creations in presentation or story space. We need to inspire masterpieces of all sorts. And we need to guide members of our communities through new library metaphors.

2. Intellectual property shifts. It is time for us to stop being the *copyright heavy*. We can no longer afford to be seen as old fuddy-duddy bad guys in today's thrilling "remix" culture. That doesn't mean abandoning the need to teach ethics relating to intellectual property, especially attribution. But it does mean adopting a new role and a new attitude. It means becoming an expert in the new rules. Those new rules include helping teachers and learners take full advantage of fair use provisions. Repeat after us: We don't need to ask permission to use copyrighted material when we re-purpose or add value to copyrighted work.²

It is also time to share with teachers and learners the rationale and use of Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org>) and other emerging concepts that are less restrictive than traditional copyright licensing. Are we helping our students understand the issue of intellectual property from the point of view of the creator, not just the consumer? The librarians who help us sleep well at nights help students assign rights to their own

creative works. They share information about a new world of sharing while respecting intellectual property.

3. Keeping up; keeping ahead: Look around your state conferences. How many of your colleagues graduated from library school more than 20 years ago? Remember what the landscape looked like in 1989? How do we stay one step ahead of our staff and students in information accessing, evaluation, use and communication in order to be seen as experts and collaborators? Do we know more about current information strategies than our school's technology coach? No excuses. We must! If we are truly information professionals, we need to not just keep up with, but be on the cutting edge of changes in the search and information landscapes.

Good searching is not just about Google or accessing databases or teaching Boolean logic. It's about being able to teach others to search and evaluate information coming from wikis, blogs, twitter -- and whatever comes next. It's about understanding and using tags, about sharing and harnessing the power of a wide variety of information feeds. It's about teaching others to aggregate RSS feeds, to gather useful widgets, to create personal information portals that *push* meaningful information to them. Librarians must be able to continue to retool, to stay ahead of teachers and students. We believe that librarians cannot adequately retool if they do not develop PLNs (personal or professional learning networks). Which leads us to . . .

4. Failure to embrace networked media. Is there a place for media specialists who are not networked? On Twitter, @karlfisch asked: *What's the point of having a media specialist if they aren't specialists in the media forms of the day?*³ How do we reach and wake up and retool the profession for changes that need to be made today and impact us all? We need to be prepared to prepare young people for a highly connected world. Librarians who don't have PLNs, don't attend conferences, don't read cutting edge current professional literature of both the library and the education worlds are dragging our profession down - and good people are going with them. Professionals who lack an understanding of the power of professional networking disturb our slumbers.

5. Developing relationships that lead to advocacy by non-librarians. Rather than creating a perfect library, we need to reshape our thinking and create the perfect library *for our individual institution*. We can do this by changing our mindset from adopting best practices as defined by our own professional organization to adopting a "customer service/support" orientation by crafting goals that support the larger goals of the organization. In times of budget cuts, it cannot be only librarians who speak on behalf of libraries, but teachers, administrators, parents, and students who demand the essential services we provide.

6. National expectations that ignore critical learning skills. Our national educational expectations do not include holding schools accountable for teaching 21st Century skills. When will our national standards recognize the importance of information problem-based learning? When will we begin to move towards more authentic assessment? In other words, how do we move from test-driven, low-level skills-based curricula that don't really require learners to effectively and creatively find, evaluate, analyze, use, and communicate information? Until what librarians teach is viewed as sufficiently important to assess, librarians will not be viewed as sufficiently important enough to keep.

7. Missing the potential of Reading 2.0. Are we moving fast enough to embrace shifts in how and what folks read? In what reading *is*? Are we promoting traditional books in ways that reach young readers where they live and play? What do literature circles look like when we add powerful new tools for discussion? Can we promote new titles and award-winners,

can we involve students and teachers in sharing and celebrating favorite reads in new, media-rich ways? And how can we successfully integrate new book formats--Playaways, ebooks, audiobooks, interactive web books--into our programs? Are we making the connection between increased voluntary free reading and increased performance on reading test scores emphatically enough?

Are we preparing our libraries to serve a post-literate society⁴ - one in which people can read, but prefer to meet their information, communication and recreational needs in formats other than print? How do we begin to understand that literacy is no longer restricted to print? Learners must be able to construct and deconstruct messages in a multitude of media. They need to read, and interpret, and create writing all types of writing and scripting -- YouTube video, Tweets, blog posts, digital stories.

8. Not getting that Internet access is an intellectual freedom issue. Enough with the "yeah buts" about censorship thinly disguised as Internet filtering. Intellectual freedom is our banner to wave and to wave *now*. If a parent or an administrator tells us to remove a book from our collections, we fight. But we know that many of the new communication tools⁵ used effectively in some schools and libraries, are blocked in too many others. Are we willing to take the fight for open access to information and tools to the same level that we've fought in the past for access to materials in written form?⁶ Are we helping develop good Internet filtering policies? Are we demonstrating and show models of the effective use of online tools to our policy makers? And are we bringing the technology department on board with the concept of intellectual freedom?

It is time for librarians who *get* intellectual freedom to be heroes and fight.

9. Recognizing that modern practice is directly connected to equity. Stepping back and looking through a big picture lens, our practice resembles "The Blind Men and the Elephant." One school library program might eagerly engage learners with its interactive and dynamic web presence, Skyped author visits, global information exchanges with other students and experts, opportunities to write and share using the exploding number of collaborative writing, scripting and presentation tools, as well as opportunities to share new narrative with exciting digital storytelling tools. Another school library program may look like it is still operating in the 1960s. Both programs are called *school libraries*. And both professionals who are running them are called *school librarians*. We're tired of hearing school administrators tell us, "But my librarian doesn't do that."

In terms of modern information and media skills, our practice demonstrates small, uneven pockets of best practice. We have no textbook for what 21st century school library practice looks like. So how do we scale these examples out so that all learners have access to new tools and resources?

It may begin with uneven professional preparation. While one university pre-service program prepares its graduate students for modern practice, another may not have a clue what modern practice looks like. All this makes a difference for learners, the way they see and experience *library*.

These differences in what a child sees when she sees her school library may soon present a new digital divide: those who can effectively access, appreciate, understand, and create quality information in all media formats, and those who cannot.

10. We're bigger than databases. We need to stop fighting against Wikipedia or Twitter. It's not ONLY about databases. Demonizing any particular information source that the world values makes us look clueless. Each may have a place in the current, big, fuzzy, glorious

information puzzle. Each one presents a different information lens. Instead of demonizing, let's prepare learners to triangulate and to evaluate. When do Twitter, blogs, and wikis make sense for a particular information task? Which voices are most reliable and relevant? Can we help learners manage the information flow and push relevant information to them by preparing personal information portals using aggregating tools like iGoogle, PageFlakes, Netvibes, as well as RSS feeds?

The definition of "authoritative" seems to be undergoing a societal change. Are we helping make this an intelligent transition or just living in denial?

11. Defining the brand. What is the school library brand? What makes a librarian different from other teaching specialists in the building? And why is that brand critical to learning, to the operation of a school learning culture? When a principal interviews a school librarian candidate, he or she should be clear about what type of professional he is looking for. Do most school principals know who to look for? We doubt it. And we worry.

(This list describes our view of the brand. Also check out Joyce's Manifesto⁷ and please add to it!)

12. Planning for one-to-one computing or ubiquity. Ubiquity changes everything. In one-to-one schools, students may visit the library less frequently. In such environments, in all modern, truly relevant environments, library must also be ubiquitous. Library **MUST** be everywhere. Librarians must teach everywhere, in and outside of the library. One-to-one classrooms change the school librarian's teaching logistics. We will have to leave our own facilities to partner and teach in classroom teachers' classrooms. We will have to teach virtually--through our web pages, pathfinders, presentations, screencasts. And sometimes we may encourage laptops to walk back to the library for projects that make far more sense happening in our own spaces. At this point in time, we must rethink our strategies regarding traditional reference and readers' advisory and plan to be available across our schools via email and chat and text.

Ubiquitous information access also means re-thinking what our physical library spaces look like, feel like, and function as. Bookstores have changed (think coffee shops and comfortable chairs). Can our libraries become place where kids *want* to be when they are no longer places kids *have* to be?

13. Online presence. Ubiquity also means that we have no choice about an online presence. It is both essential and urgent. What type of online presence should school libraries share with teachers and learners? We must be available as a 24/7 learning experience, a hybrid of virtual practice that supports our face-to-face instruction and services. How are we helping the student who is working on research at all hours at home? How can we guide the process from afar, intervene, make the process more transparent, less frustrating? Do our virtual libraries and pathfinders and online presentations and screencast lessons and customized search tools represent school libraries as dynamic and powerful and media-rich online spaces?

14. Seeing obstacles rather than opportunities: A summary of leadership opportunities. We said it at the beginning. No more "yeah buts." *It is the best time in the history of time to be a librarian.* It is a time for us to *lead*. We have rich opportunities to teach and guide in new information and communication landscapes. As school CIOs, what are our roles in organizing information for and sharing information and communication skills with our learning communities? These roles can be critical to our schools and to learners if we seize opportunities to *lead* in such areas as:

- creating new media (like digital storytelling) using an array of online communication tools and archiving student work as *collection*
- promoting reading using new media tools and encouraging reading in all media formats
- rethinking collection to include new tools and resources for learning, both physical and online
- bringing experts and authors into our facilities using inexpensive/free new technologies
- embracing opportunities to teach students about their own positive and negative digital footprints
- teaching students about norms for appropriate behavior in new and emerging online spaces, about information ethics
- rethinking our online presence to make it more dynamic, collaborative, and relevant with polls, widgets, feeds, calendars, bookmarks, slideshows, media, and more!
- helping teachers and students learn to search in new ways, to automatically push relevant real-time information, to create their own customized information portals
- using new strategies for managing, organizing, analyzing, evaluating, triangulating, and communicating information
- considering just-in-time, just-for-me learning as a responsibility and having significant presence on our learners' desktops 24/7.
- creating physical spaces--libratories(?)--that promote investigation, creation, and presentation
- fighting the good fight relating to new issues of equity and intellectual freedom

Finally, perhaps our biggest nightmare is the lack of urgency in our profession. Educational change, technological change, and funding reductions are pressing in on all sides of our profession. Our best librarians will evolve, adapt, and thrive in effective schools. But will they be called librarians? And will they be in sufficient numbers for the profession as a whole to survive?

Sleep on it. If you can.

Notes:

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