

Continuing Education

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You Know You're a Librarian in 2008 when...you know more librarians in Texas than you do in your home state because of LM_Net.

Peter Milbury and Mike Eisenberg, the founders and moderators par excellence of LM_Net for the past 15 years, announced last November that they are passing the torch.

For the one or two of you reading this who don't know about LM_Net, it has been the mainstay electronic mailing list for an estimated 100 million school librarians in 2 million countries, on a dozen other planets, and at least two identified alternative universes. It produces in excess of a billion e-mail messages each day - 10 billion on "recipe day." (These numbers are rough estimates.)

I was an early subscriber and participant on LM_Net using my university "vax" account back in 1992 when I first joined. This was 1200 baud modem dial-up, line interface, pre-WWW, uphill-both-directions-in-the-snow Internet days. Not soft and cushy like young'uns have it today with your graphical interfaces and wirelessness. The computer screen was hard to read by lamplight, too.

Anyway, LM_Net became my first Internet "continuing education" experience. And the learning began early.

It was my second year as library media supervisor and I was getting lots of push-back from the district librarians I had inherited. I was determined to make them tech integration specialists and they seemed just as determined to remain print-only librarians. After one particularly frustrating day, I turned on my computer, opened my e-mail, and just let rip about the reactionary, troglodytic, myopic, nature of school librarians, concluding that they had better damn well wake-up and smell the coffee or they would all be replaced with techs and not to let the door hit 'm where the good lord split'm on the way out. And off the rant went to LM_Net.

Let me put it this way - I got some reaction. I knew librarians had good vocabularies, but even *I* learned some new words. I believe after that other LM_Netters opened my e-mails simply wondering what idiotic thing I might say next. In LM_Net I found my voice.

But more importantly, I found colleagues who offered information, encouragement, and support. It was my first true "continuous learning" experience not because I was the one doing the teaching, but because we were all learning together – as we do to this day. The virtual community built by LM_Net (a professional learning community before they were so named) was a lifeline and sanity-keeper for many of us.

Continuing education prior to LM_Net consisted of reading professional journals, attending library conferences, and taking college classes. These activities are still available and important. But given the pace and amount of change, they alone are insufficient to keep most of us current with the happenings in librarianship and information technology. Thank goodness for these online continuing education options:

- Electronic mailing lists (aka listservs) continue to be a valuable means of locating of "primary source" information – human expertise. While LM_Net is the granddaddy of such resources, you might also be reading AASLForum, ISTE SIGMS, WWWedu, and your own state's mailing list. A simple query to such lists often results in not just recommended published information, but in shared experiences and wisdom as well. Don't forget that some mailing lists like LM_Net archive their messages for later retrieval.
- Smaller "professional networks" such as Joyce Valenza's *TeacherLibrarian Ning* <<http://teacherlibrarian.ning.com>> are complimenting listservs by providing a forum along with a means of

sharing photos, videos and other resources with fellow network members. Aimed at creating links for professionals, these operate much like the larger social networking sites Facebook and MySpace.

- Blogs and their aural cousins, podcasts, let library media specialists read or hear, react and converse on the latest thinking by leaders in the school library field. (You can find my personal list of influential blog writers here: < <http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blogsiread/>>). Information on blogs tends to be timely, short and often opinionated. Pick the ones that are fun to read and you, like me, will become addicted.
- Webcasts, presentations and workshops done via an Internet website like GoToMeeting or Elluminate qare becoming increasingly popular. Watch your e-mail for these “web seminars.”
- Finally, Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVES) such as Second Life are offering a growing number of opportunities to interact and learn with colleagues. Your Second Life avatar can attend a presentation, communicate with fellow professionals in real time, and even build virtual learning resources using this new but powerful information and communication interface. Watch for SIGMS offerings on ISTE Island. These are just a few of the growing number of “continuous learning” opportunities the Internet is making available to those of us engaged in the rapidly evolving field of school librarianship.

Does your school’s mission statement include the words “life-long learning?” It should. And the sentiment should also apply to us as well.