**Top ten school library game changers of the past twenty-five years**
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> *Know what's weird? Day by day, nothing seems to change, but pretty soon…everything's different. – Bill Watterson, Calvin and Hobbes*

The Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA) 2012 conference program chair had a special request for the banquet keynote address. She asked: "Since ISLMA is celebrating twenty-five years as an association, would it be possible to include how school libraries have changed over the past twenty-five years?"

We've changed? (Just kidding.) What a fun job to take on, reaching back over the last couple of decades to reflect on the big events that have shaped our libraries and our careers. For those teacher-librarians relatively new to the profession, this little trip down memory lane may seem like ancient history. But for readers who have been in practice for not just years, but decades, I hope this is an enjoyable excursion.

Twenty-five years ago I was an elementary teacher-librarian in an oil company school in Saudi Arabia. The yearbook entry for the library in 1987 read:
> *Each elementary class has a scheduled time during the week to use the library. Mr. Johnson, the librarian, reads books to the students and occasionally shows filmstrips to interest children in stories. Time is allowed afterwards to choose books and quietly read them. Older students are taught how to use the card catalogs and reference books. The library is open after school for them to do research and study.*

With about a dozen years of classroom teaching and library experience under my belt, I felt had more or less "mastered" my craft and was a little bored.

Bored! Little did I, or any of us know, the kinds of changes in store for us. From about 1988 onward, being a teacher-librarian has been a pretty wild ride. Those who entered the profession out of a love for books and quiet places were in for a world of hurt. But for many of us, this has been a fantastic time to have a career in teacher-librarianship.

Here are my top ten game changers for school libraries from the past 25 years and why I chose them:

**1. Library automation.** Retrospective conversion. Heard that term lately? It was a big

undertaking for many of us the late 80s and early 90s, converting our paper card catalog records to electronic files stored and accessed in a big, specialized database. Since we paid for each record that was converted, many of us finally weeded those old materials funded from federal funds in the 1960s. The Winnebago stand-alone catalog screen eased us into the change by showing a crude graphic frame that mimicked a physical card including the rod hole at the bottom. Automation made us worthy of computers in the library since we had a practical use for them. Closely following our library terminals came the stand-alone CD-based reference materials like *The New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* that appeared in 1992. Libraries entered the digital information age.

*Lasting impact*: As a result of libraries early and practical adoption of computers, many teacher-librarians became *the* technology expert in their buildings - a role that is an expectation today.

**2. LM_Net.** Not long after e-mail became available, mailing lists (listservs) became popular. In 1993 LM_Net was the granddaddy of these. Almost overnight, the teacher-librarian, often the sole practitioner in his or her building or district, had access to thousands of other fellow teacher-librarians who could answer questions, offer opinions, and, above all, empathize. This was a Personal Learning Network before the term was popularized some ten years later. Sure, blogs, RSS feeds, Nings, and Twitter followed, but LM_Net was the first inkling that learning about new professional practices was no longer done just by reading journals or attending conferences. Indeed, to stay current, a PLN was essential.

*Lasting impact*: LM_Net and the ongoing, digital, social learning/social networking opportunities like it, may well be the one thing that continues to widen the gulf between the progressive and the reactionary people in our field.

**3. The World Wide Web.** For the truly nerdy, Archie and Gopher offered means of searching the line interface Internet. But it wasn't until the release of the Mosaic web browser in 1993 and search tools like WebCrawler in 1994 that the Internet came to the masses. We teacher-librarians had both a huge new resource - *and* a huge new competitor for patron attention. The Web created a new imperative of establishing the veracity of information. No longer were only professionally selected items available on the library shelves to our students, but now teacher-librarians had a mission to teach both students and staff how to self-evaluate the quality of the information found. Remember the spoof sites like the Mankato site, the Tree Octopus, and the Failure of the Velcro crop?

*Lasting impact*: The question "Why do we need a library when everything is available on the Internet?" continues to echo in schools, colleges, and communities. We continue to define and refine our services, programs, and missions realizing the library-as-warehouse is truly no longer a viable strategy.

**4. The Big6™.** While the term "information literacy" first appeared in print in 1974 and a number of models had been created to teach it, Mike Eisenberg's and Bob Berkowitz's popular Big6™ introduced in 1987 gave teacher-librarians a simple and understandable set of skills to teach and a process framework. Separate or embedded in content area research units, an information literacy curriculum became a part of the teacher-librarian's teaching responsibility at all grade levels. Information literacy became a large component of a variety of 21st Century Skill models and the Big6™ remains the articulation of a process that is among the most understandable. By adding technology to the model in a 1996, educational technology's most powerful use became as a research and problem-solving tool - and teacher-librarians taught others how to use it.

*Lasting impact*: No longer just kiddie book pushers or reference librarians, the Big6™ put the "teacher" in "teacher-librarian." Carol Kuhlthau and Ross Todd's Guided Inquiry continues to help redefine what information literacy means. The Common Core Standards reinforce the need of all students to be able to meaningfully process information.

**5. Computer networks.** As buildings ran copper and fiber data networks to every classroom, office, desk, and computer lab in the early to mid-90s, the need for physical spaces, including libraries, started to be called into question. When a teacher or student could find information through a networked computer, librarians had to re-envision the purpose of the physical facility, asking "Why do people need to come to my library, when my library will come to them?" As Joyce Valenza puts it, we needed to start thinking of our spaces as kitchens, not grocery stores.

*Lasting impact*: Re-envisioning library physical facilities remains an exciting topic of discussion among teacher-librarians and between teacher-librarians and administrators. Exciting new models of the library's place in the school building, like the Learning Commons promoted by David Loertscher, are breathing new life into bricks and mortar in a digital world. Today's buzzword "makerspace" - where people can gather to work on projects - is just one more aftershock of the seismic change networks and digital information have created in libraries

**6. Politically-driven school reform.** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 placed new demands on U.S. schools with its overwhelming emphasis on test scores and accountability - an emphasis that presented new challenges to teacher-librarians. "How can we demonstrate that the library program is having a positive impact on student achievement?" was a question everyone seemed to be asking. And "student achievement" was very often synonymous with test scores. Books like *The Power of Reading* by Stephen Krashen and studies done by Keith Curry Lance that tied library programs to improved test scores became an integral part of our library advocacy efforts. Unfortunately, some teacher-librarians started to be replaced by reading specialists and reading software as test scores drove school improvement goals.

*Lasting impact*: Data that demonstrates a direct correlation between the library program and test scores remains difficult, if not impossible, to produce at a local level. But finding means of

empirically demonstrating library program effectiveness has become an important part of the teacher-librarian's job professional responsibilities. And more than ever, school libraries programs will need to determine their place in the often politically-motivated national educational reform movements like today's Common Core.

**7. Internet filtering.** The Childhood Internet Protection Act of 2000 mandated Internet filtering for U.S. schools that wished to continue to receive federal funding. The combination of blocking power placed in the hands of often a single school computer technician, the media reporting sensational Internet "stranger danger", and uneducated school administrators was a recipe for overblocking web resources. And thus began the intellectual freedom battle for student (and often staff) access to Internet materials representing a range of viewpoints and functionalities. The battle over keeping T*he Power of Lucky* on the shelves seemed less critical than the battle over keeping Wikipedia, Facebook, and YouTube unblocked.

*Lasting impact***:** The fight continues. Only eleven short *years* after the CIPA's passage, the American Association of School Librarians has begun a "Blocked Website Awareness Day." It's a start. Librarians also continue to grapple with ethical issues applied to information in digital formats - including copyright, fair use, Creative Commons, and other intellectual property puzzles.

**8. Wikipedia and Web 2.0.** With the availability of Wikipedia in early 2001, crowd-sourced information turned the evaluation of information authority on its head. Almost overnight the "wisdom of the masses" became more credible than the college professor with a string of letters after his or her name. TripAdvisor trumped Fodors. What we as teacher-librarians learned in library school about determining what could be considered "authoritative" information seemed quaint. Teaching students how to evaluate information became more important, but trickier than ever. With a preponderance of Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, and social networking sites coming online, teacher-librarians' responsibilities for teaching "digital citizenship" began to include helping students consider their own online reputations.

*Lasting impact***:** The appropriate use of crowd-sourced information in completing academic tasks remains a topic of discussion and even controversy among teacher-librarians. Help in understanding and using online publishing and social-networking by both students and staff is a growing service offered by the teacher-librarian.

**9. E-books and e-book readers.** After years of conjecture and a variety of failed products, Amazon's Kindle introduced in 2007 was the first popular dedicated e-book reader. School library programs began to question and experiment with making e-books and e-book readers available to their patrons, despite publisher resistance to extending the First Sale doctrine to e-materials. In 2010 Apple's iPad with its multimedia playback capabilities demonstrated that "books" themselves were evolving into creatures that could sing, dance, interact, and evolve -

not just remain static.

*Lasting impact*: How teacher-librarians select, promote, maintain, and evaluate e-book collections, especially in the face of a constantly changing market, waxing and waning publisher restrictions on e-publication use, a staggering number of e-book file formats, and an evolving e-reader market, remains a huge challenge. But most of us see the future of the book is digital and we need to figure this out or get left behind.

**10. Bring Your Own Device.** As an increasing number of schools not only allow, but encourage students to bring their personal laptops, smartphones, and tablets to school in often aggressive B.Y.O.D. programs, the library's role again morphs. How do we provide resources that are usable on multiple platforms - from smartphones to tablets to laptop computers, all running different operating systems? When each student has a ubiquitously accessible computing device, computer labs and library computer terminals become redundant, but wireless bandwidth may be inadequate. New rules and guidelines need to be established for the productive use of student-owned devices.

*Lasting impact*: Again, we need to be asking the question "why do students and staff need to come to the library when resources are increasingly ubiquitous - and personal?" The teacher-librarian's role as the professional who teaches others how to produce information, use information to solve problems, and to communicate effectively will continue to grow, even as the novelty of a portable computing device for every child diminishes. How can librarians remain co-teachers when "classroom" instruction moves online in blended and hybrid classes?

If the past twenty-five years has taught those of us in the profession anything, it's that we need to monitor and adapt to the changing needs of our students, our teachers, and our institutions. Those who cannot or will not accept change have become marginalized in their schools (at best) or have become unemployed (at worst).

I spared the banquet attendees my predictions for the next twenty-five years but if there is one prediction about which I feel confident, it's that we ain't seen nothing yet when it comes to change. It will be those teacher-librarians who see the changes in information, technology, and education as opportunities to increase their value to their schools who will remain relevant - and professionally fulfilled.

The Illinois School Library Association members are holding me accountable for this prediction about change. I have a standing invitation to give the banquet keynote in 2037. I am starting to take notes.