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Moving Ahead: The New Information Age

Jane Lofton, President, California School Library Association

As CSLA President, I am delighted to be writing this column for an issue on the theme of evaluating digital resources.

Please don’t get me wrong … I am a true book lover and I enjoy every aspect of printed books, from flipping through the pages, inhaling the fragrance, arranging them on my library shelves and those in my home, viewing and touching the special covers and bindings, and more. One of my most treasured possessions is an elegant leather-bound volume of Jane Austen’s novels, a college graduation gift from my father. And, one of the most memorable spontaneous splurges I ever made was the purchase of a rare 1799 two-volume edition of Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary one afternoon in London years ago.

All that said, I am also a tech geek, and not only do I really enjoy using technology and digital resources myself, I also love sharing these resources with my students and teachers. Further, I am very aware that being a tech geek, teaching about technology and digital literacy, and offering my students a robust selection of digital resources are essential requirements for every teacher librarian today.

Once upon a time, being “into technology” and the digital world was optional for those in our field. Those days are long gone. Anyone in the school library field failing to fully embrace digital resources and become an expert user and teacher, is, frankly, not doing his or her job.

No matter how much we try to learn about all the latest options in digital literacy and digital resources, there is always something new we missed. Keeping up is an overwhelming task. But, being the intrepid lifelong learners that we are, we do our very, very best. The articles in this issue will help us all in this never-ending effort to stay abreast of the available resources and select the very best for our students and teachers.

As you read, please also note our advertisers and the list of CSLA’s sustaining members on page 25. Join me in supporting these organizations that support our work and our students.

And, enjoy reading!

Jane Lofton
CSLA President

JANE LOFTON

is President of California School Library Association. She has been an active volunteer on the CSLA State Board, Southern Region Board, and Conference and Curriculum Committees since 2002. She is the Teacher Librarian at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach. Prior to that, she was the Teacher Librarian at Lindero Canyon Middle School in Agoura Hills.
Teacher librarians truly are on the cutting edge—some say bleeding edge—as the education community continues to change in response to budget issues, changing standards, increased testing, and continually evolving digital tools and resources. Digital resources are becoming increasingly important. In this issue of the CSLA Journal, we have asked some experts to write about how to best evaluate digital resources from several points of view.

At the site level, teacher librarian Connie Williams talks about conundrums, how to select the right tools to deliver needed information to a target audience in an educational setting. Students face this same decision. We help them locate and use information in many formats, but they also need help to decide what format to use in sharing what they have learned.

At the district level, what can be done to support the site library staff and provide the digital resources their students need? Dr. Esther Sinofsky shares how LAUSD has evaluated, selected, distributed, and maintained digital resources for its diverse student population.

You have heard the term “curator,” but what are the differences—and similarities—between the role of curator and that of teacher librarian? Dr. Lesley Farmer, who happens to be both, provides an interesting point of view.

Dr. Cindy Mediavilla, Library Programs Consultant for the California State Library, provides information on the resources the library offers. Interestingly, to qualify for a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant, one of the requirements is “at least one onsite paid staff member who has a California library media teacher credential.” The State Library has other resources available—important information to share with your patrons.

As digital resources change, so do the technical skills and interests of the students we serve. Dr. Mary Ann Harlan shares thoughts on what “digital native” now means, and how the role of the teacher librarian is changing to meet the needs of these tech savvy youth.

A technology resource that is becoming more widely used is the app, which now includes literature titles. Elementary librarian Mary Ann Scheuer describes the kinds of apps that support literature appreciation and comprehension, and how to evaluate them.

The tool many teacher librarians are turning to in their efforts to make information and resources available to students is LibGuides. Teacher librarians Sue Smith and Lauri Vaughan use LibGuides extensively with their students, and share how they do so.

This issue is packed with information you can use, both personally and professionally. I learned something reading each article and working with this delightful group of authors, and know you will get a take-away from this issue—perhaps several!
Recently a student came to see me with a conundrum. She wanted to create an online presence, but didn't know how to start. She loves to talk about celebrities and teen culture and thought that doing 'something' online would be fun. She already had a Facebook page, but wanted something that would give her more exposure as well as more space to chat about things as she thought of them.

What Are the Options?
Over several days, we debated the pros and cons of different social media possibilities. We talked about blogs, wikis, podcasting, video, and other options like Tumblr and Pinterest. My thought was that she needed a blog, which seemed to me to be the perfect venue for the sort of wandering 'free-spirited' content she was envisioning. But she wanted to talk. So I gave her a fabulous workbook I have from the folks at the Tool Factory on how to create a podcasting show. She had been in touch with a local radio station about working there over the summer, and podcasting really appealed to her.

Later that day I was rummaging through a wiki I made for the teachers and students at my school: Primary Docs 4 School. This is a compilation of all the places I have looked so far for primary documents for the upcoming implementation of Common Core Standards. I discovered I too have a conundrum. The wiki is not exactly the platform I want. It's too 'static,' too limiting. But I am not sure yet what would be better.

These sorts of conundrums could only happen in our fabulous, but challenging, 21st Century. The opportunities to talk to anyone, anywhere, anyhow are endless and ever-changing. Whether anyone wants to listen and/or watch us is almost a moot point- there is an audience out there somewhere for just about everything and everybody.

Notwithstanding the necessity to keep in mind all the imperatives of good digital citizenship and privacy protection, more and more of us are entering the world of digital communication to wider and more public audiences. In education, the field is steadily growing and the applications we have available are seemingly endless, limited only by our imagination.

How to Choose the Best Tool?
But that leaves us with the same conundrum both my student and I had: what venue is the most appropriate to use to communicate what it is we want others to know?

I asked several librarians on LM_NET to share what factors they think about as they decide on whether to make a wiki, create a blog, join Pinterest, or select another option. Susan Grigsby, Library Media Specialist from Georgia, responded, “My criteria for selecting a site are ease of use, account required/not required, readability (I teach in middle school and that’s an important issue), and appropriateness to curriculum objectives.”

Gwen Lehman, Tech Integration Specialist in Larned, KS said, “Recently, I was thinking about creating a site for my presentations. I have been using wikis a lot and I thought it might be nice to create a Google Site. However, I upload my presentations to Slideshare and those cannot be embedded into Google Sites.”

Both Susan and Gwen touch on important things that impact our choices. Will my students be able to view my content at school? Will the application I choose accept all my content in the way I want it to? And probably most importantly, are my goals for posting this information or creating assignments with students appropriate for the curricular goals we have laid out for them?

Asking the Right Questions
So what is a teacher librarian to do? After the conversation with my student, where we worked through many of these questions, I started thinking about the process of opening up to 'big idea' online projects and the goals for making them. How do we this seems to rely on how we respond to a variety of questions. The standard who, what, when, where, why, and how gets us started, but it’s the next level of questions that helps us determine which steps to take:

Who is the intended audience for your information?
Are you making a site for your students to access so that they can obtain information useful to them for their classes? Are you posting for teachers, administrators and/or parents?

If your audience is students, then ease of use, using the fewest steps possible to get to the required information, and an easy-to-read design are important.
What kind of information are you sharing?

Are you making “hot” lists of links to sites of use for particular assignments, posting class assignment sheets, or other informative yet “static” information?

If you want students to return regularly to this same kind of information, then a website might be of more use than a blog. This way, students will always know to look at your website when they need certain kind of links - e.g., your class links, or database access points. Many librarians use wikis as websites by hiding the ability for students to comment.

On the other hand, a library blog is an excellent “draw” into your website – you can post “hot news” like new books and upcoming contests, and it allows you to highlight student readers and writers. Blog posts move up the chain of information so that all previous posts are pushed to the bottom and may get lost as time goes by. Creating tags for each post helps to locate older information but the emphasis with this application is still on the most current news, posted regularly.

When/how often will you post?

Will you update information regularly? Does the kind of information you’re posting require you to update daily? Weekly? Monthly?

While blogs are great for short posts about what is happening each day, there are many new applications for truly quick “I want you to know this right now” information, including Twitter, Instagram, Vine, and other similar applications.

Where do you want this information to reside?

Will this information be a part of a larger site such as a page on a website or is it a stand-alone item?

Are you creating an Animoto video? If you post it only on Animoto, no one will see it unless you’ve linked to it. Embedding it into a larger venue such as a blog, website or wiki will assure that it is seen. Embedding smaller applications into your website or blog will make it accessible to your audience in a single click. Book-talk videos are popular uses of these kinds of tools.

Why do you want to post this information?

Are you posting it so that students can get extra help? Are your links going to direct students to content they might not otherwise find?

Will what you post include information that is desired and/or needed? Asking yourself “why would someone want to come to this page to see this information?” can help you determine what to make.

How will you make it happen?

Do you need permission to create this item? Will you create it during school hours? Do you have access to the hosting site and/or the hardware/software you need to make this item?

Some Additional Questions to Ask

While these questions apply to creating larger applications like wikis, websites and blogs, they are general design-related questions we ask every time we start to create with any application. Because we work within a somewhat closed education environment, we must ask a few more questions including:

What kind of filters are “on” at your school? Can your site be seen by students at school?

This is most important – be sure to check this before you spend a lot of time building a site or creating a lovely presentation. Work with your IT department to unblock the site you wish to use.

If you need privacy spaces, how will you create them (e.g., you are working with students under the age of 13)?

Many applications have a more private platform for younger students using the application. Look for the ‘education’ link or contact the owners of the site. Email or filling out their “contact us” info poll can reap excellent results for creating private blogs, wiki spaces or other educational tools.

What are your district rules/guidelines for online activity?

Again, work with your IT Department to correct any miscalculations with the filtering software. Get like-minded teachers to help you advocate for appropriate site availability for all students.
Sharing E-Resources: A View from the District Level

Esther R. Sinofsky

Working in the central office at Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) offers a unique perspective on sharing e-resources. The e-resources provided by Integrated Library & Textbook Support Services (ILTSS) are shared with all students and staff. The corollary, of course, is once provided, how to encourage everyone to use the resources? Just publicizing the availability of the resources does not translate into usage. Do you focus on using each specific resource? Do you focus on the concept of doing research and incorporate the resources into the discussion? Do you provide overviews of the resources?

Providing E-Resources District-wide

LAUSD’s Digital Library (http://www.iltss.org/; link is on the left) began with a four-month preview of various e-reference resources in Fall 1999. Those were the heady days of state funding for school libraries. While almost all the per-pupil funding was allocated to each school library, a small amount was set aside to fund district-wide library endeavors including licenses for e-reference. Based on the preview usage statistics, K-12 curricular needs, library reference evaluation criteria, pricing, and available funds, resources from four vendors were chosen to inaugurate the District’s Digital Library.

At the same time, links to free e-reference websites were identified, grouped by Dewey (to parallel print materials on the same topic), and posted on the Digital Library to expand the e-reference materials available. Two more preview periods saw the paid district-wide subscriptions jump to 15 vendors and over 70 databases. The current fiscal crisis has forced cuts over the last four years. The cuts, coupled with consolidations, mergers, and revisions of the databases themselves still finds LAUSD with 13 vendors and 65 databases.

Even without the current budget crunch, explaining the importance of district-wide subscriptions to senior staff seems ingrained in the renewal process. One senior staff member once asked: “Why can’t the students just use Wikipedia? That’s how I do all my research.” Key points supporting district-wide e-resource subscriptions shared with senior staff include:

- Bridges the “digital divide” by providing all students equal access to up-to-date online reference materials via LAUSDnet. All students have access to a rich reference collection.
- Builds students’ information literacy skills, needed in today’s world.
- Supports Common Core Standards and California frameworks and standards.
- Provides primary and secondary documents and information at reading levels to meet the needs of all students.
- Integrates technology and instructional materials into the curriculum.
- Keeps the ultimate cost of these resources low versus school-by-school subscriptions (economies of scale).
- Allows more students to use an expensive “one-volume reference book” at the same time.

Access at school sites is based on IP authentication so no log-in is necessary. However, remote access from home has proven less easy to arrange. Currently, district-wide remote access using student and staff LAUSD single-sign-ons is under development. Destiny’s One Search (federated search capability) does allow for a remote access search that includes the subscription sites to which it is linked.

In answer to the senior staff member mentioned earlier, links to public discussions about whether or not Wikipedia is an authoritative source were also shared (including actor/writer Stephen Colbert’s spot http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/72347/july-31-2006/the-wor--wikiality).

Promoting E-Resource Usage

Subscribing to various e-resources is only the beginning of the “sharing” journey. Over the course of the past thirteen years, different approaches were tested to find “best practices” for encouraging Digital Library usage. The same years also saw extraordinary changes in World Wide Web (remember when we used that term?) searching capabilities and strategies (e.g., Gopher to Google) and in instructional technologies (e.g., overhead projector to Elluminate). Some of the changes were free and readily available to all while others required licenses and/or some training. And, the Internet continues to evolve, providing still more possible ways to share.

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As mentioned earlier, the same period saw the “feast” years of funding for school libraries turn into “famine” years. Just as funding for instructional resources slowly evaporated, so did funding for the human resources needed to promote e-resource usage. At one point, LAUSD’s Library Services unit included eight Coordinating Field Librarians (CFLs) and a Library Services Specialist (the latter an administrative position). The CFLs provided professional development (PD) trainings to staff at the schools with which they worked. Since LAUSD secondary school libraries were staffed by Teacher Librarians (TLs), the CFLs focused on the elementary school staff while the TLs were able to work with their colleagues. However, the time allotted for PD at any level was usually the Tuesday afternoon PD slot of approximately 60-90 minutes, hardly time to provide any in-depth training.

Training District-wide

This still left unanswered the question of how to really train staff on all the e-resources so they could incorporate them into their lessons. Over the years, several different approaches were implemented, influenced by the circumstances of the school year and time constraints on PD. Among the approaches:

- E-resource vendors were given 20 minutes each at TL PDs to present information on upgrades to their products.
- CFLs focused on an elementary curriculum topic and walked the teachers through structured hands-on training on a select number of resources.
- CFLs provided a hands-on overview of the e-resources and encouraged further exploration of the materials.
- Special pilot PD offered a 3-hour in-depth training on a single day about particular e-resources from a single vendor.
- DL articles in the monthly Instructional Communiqué issued by the Office of Curriculum & Instructional Support Services focused on a germane topic, e.g., Black History Month, with instructions for finding appropriate information and documents via the DL

Training In-depth vs. Empowering

The usage statistics showed that these various approaches did work. There was always an upward tick in the number of hits after a presentation. Despite this validation, the debate over hands-on/in-depth versus overview training continues.

There are those who want in-depth training on each resource while others want an overview of the key components of the resources so they can “kick the tiers” on their own. This also transfers to how one teaches students to use resources, regardless of the format. There are those who provide in-depth lessons on using particular resources, while others prefer to introduce students to new resources and let them explore them on their own or introduce only the resource’s features that match the assignment at hand.

As technology continues to be integrated into instruction through programs using digital devices, as instructional materials become incorporated for all students, and as students and staff become more attuned to instructional e-searching, teaching the concept of how to use e-resources becomes as intuitive as learning to use textbooks was in times past.

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She reviews books, media, and web sites for two professional journals with a focus on young adult resources (LMC [Library Media Connection] and the Reference Books Bulletin section of Booklist). She has published and presented on various topics, especially copyright, which was the focus of her doctoral work (USC). She can be contacted at esther.sinofsky@lausd.net
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Museum and Library Curation: What’s the Difference

Lesley Farmer

Curation has become a hot topic in recent years. People “curate” Pinterest images, and students curate rather than conduct research. Sounds cool, doesn’t it? But do these activities really constitute curation?

The origin of the word curation, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is Latin, with the meaning of having a cure or charge. Curation, thus, is the action of curing. The modern sense of a curator is a person who has a charge, someone who is a manager and steward. In that respect, the librarian is a curator or steward of the library collection.

However, the role and actions differ from the more well known position of the museum curator. As a person who has taken a curation course, and worked as a historical museum assistant, I have a different perspective on the word “curation,” and think it has been used too freely and inaccurately. Let’s look at the the job of the museum curator.

Different Missions

First, though, we need to differentiate between the mission of the museum and the mission of the school library. The school library’s mission is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of information and ideas. The American Library Association's motto is “the best reading, for the largest number, at the least cost” (American Library Association, 1988, p. 1). In contrast, “a museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment” (International Council of Museums, 2001, p. 1). These missions impact how these institutions organize and curate information.

Libraries

Libraries are thought to have the longest tradition of collecting and organizing information for the purpose of retrieval for future civilizations. The central role of collection development is based on librarian knowledge of materials, user requests, relationships with book vendors, and donations. The collection is then physically (and digitally) arranged and classified. The classification process includes the description of the item, assigning access points to retrieve the item, authority work, subject analysis, and classification numbers.

Museums

Museum collections are usually kept in closed stacks. Most museum collections consist of two- and three-dimensional objects. Items are usually accessioned (singly or as a group of related objects) to facilitate staff retrieval. After accession numbers are assigned, the items are registered, which is a process similar to library cataloging. The register serves as the catalog, and establishes the organizational control of the artifacts. Curation of individual objects, which may not happen for some time, become departmental level catalog records, having their own numerical sequence.

The collections are less standardized, especially since less text is usually associated with these works, and less likely to be retrieved electronically. Provenance is very important; it consists of the originator (individual or corporate body) who created, gathered, and maintained the item(s) before the museum acquired them. Museums also try to show the ownership history of an item or collection; original order is the order in which the original of a collection created or kept that collection.

Curation Activities

A curator is a content specialist responsible for a collection, including its physical condition which may now include digital data objects. Curators tend to work with cultural specimens (e.g., art or coins). A curator decides what items to collect, documents the acquisition process as well its provenance and description, and determines how the item is cared for. A museum curator conducts research based on the collection, such as its context and significance. The curator might investigate how an item was produced and preserved, a creator’s influences, or the development of a school of thought. The curator shares that research with peers and the public through publications and exhibits.

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Increasingly, curators interpret selected items and develop supporting documentation and workshops for those exhibits, along with displaying the chosen items (including their sequencing and layout). The curator may also be responsible for the careful loaning of items in the collection, including packaging and insurance matters. In larger institutions, the museum registrar may handle administrative details.

A recent trend in museums is the role of the artist curator, who is invited to curate one exhibit. That person does the background research, and may organize the exhibit. Gathering items from a variety of sources is likely done by the permanent curator or registrar than by the visiting artist curator.

Curating digital assets is another recent development. Besides collecting these assets and certifying them for their trustworthiness and integrity, curators need to develop searchable long-term repositories for them. They also need to relate these sets of digital assets semantically and ontologically, which may be done through metadata and the semantic web. Businesses may use digital asset curators to optimize customer experience of their online brand (Watry, 2007).

Just as librarians have professional training, so do museum curators, often as a post-bachelor’s degree. Some museums train curators from within their own staff. The University of Southern California and the California College of the Arts offer curating courses as part of their professional programs. Curators usually have an additional master’s or doctorate degree in their specialty field, such as archeology or art history. Library science offers a strong foundation for curation, but it does not always detail preservation techniques at the level needed for curators. Nor does library science deal substantially with provenance or exhibiting.

Curating for Teacher Librarians and Students

While information curation has a more glamorous sound than researching, it consists of much more than research. It is true that a significant research-based project should add interpretation, organization, and communication skills; these processes are all part of curation. However, students seldom examine a document’s provenance (maybe its origin but not all the people who have maintained that resource throughout its life), nor is it typically important. Additionally, students seldom preserve or have a long-term sense of stewardship of the resources that they consult. In sum, that long-term commitment to the resource differentiates between most researchers and curators.

Likewise, while teacher librarians may display parts of the library collection, they tend to be more interested in teaching their school community how to do research than doing research themselves to provide context to the items displayed, or to feature the collection as an entity unto itself. Unlike curators, teacher librarians see the value of the library collection in hands-on use rather than its appearance and existence per se. Perhaps that attitude should also be conveyed to students and teachers as well: information and knowledge have value in themselves, but they gain value in their application, not lying forgotten in a closed vault of the mind.

References


International Council of Museums.

Although the California State Library was established in 1850 to primarily serve the legislature and governor, the world has changed, as has the Library, adding materials and programming to meet the evolving needs of its constituents statewide. These include students of all ages as well as their teachers and school librarians.

**LSTA Grants**

Besides meeting information needs, the California State Library administers federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds distributed to each state through the Institute of Library and Museum Services. With budget cuts that continue to occur statewide in both the public library and education sectors, these funds are increasingly important. They are used to fund competitive grants as well as statewide initiatives that help libraries support their communities through programs and information services. Over the years, many public libraries and their communities have benefitted from LSTA funding. Most recently the State Library has begun targeting programs to meet the specific needs of students and their teachers.

**Online Homework Help**

In 2001, California became the first state to offer online homework assistance through public libraries statewide. Since then, some 121 public libraries have received LSTA funds through the State Library’s Out-of-School-Time Online Homework Help program, which helps pay for online tutoring, in English and Spanish, seven days a week. As a result of this program, students have engaged in more than 700,000 online tutoring sessions, providing the assistance they need to complete their homework.

The service is popular because it’s free, easy and, best of all, anonymous, so students don’t feel stupid asking questions about homework they don’t understand. All they need to do is click on the appropriate “homework help” button on their library’s webpage and indicate their grade level and the subject for which they need help. Once the tutor logs on, a chat session begins via an interactive whiteboard.

Tutoring sessions typically last 20 minutes or shorter, but can go as long as an hour depending on the number of students needing help. The tutors, who are from various professional backgrounds, all undergo stringent security checks. Teachers and school librarians are encouraged to refer their students to their local public library’s online tutoring service. For a complete list of public libraries currently offering online homework help, please see the State Library’s webpage at http://www.library.ca.gov/Tutor/libraries.html.

**21st Century Skills**

A major emphasis of the State Library’s five-year LSTA plan (available at http://www.library.ca.gov/grants/lsta/docs/LSTA5YearPlan2013-2017.pdf) is helping Californians develop 21st-century skills. Two recent State-Library-supported projects have provided digital literacy training to students and teachers through their local public libraries. In Monterey, librarians, school administrators and teachers worked together to create a yearlong project that integrated public library resources into a nearby high school’s curriculum. At the end of the project, 64% of the students demonstrated awareness of how to evaluate a website for content, while 38% showed they understood the difference between searching a database and using a search engine.

In southern California, the librarians at the Palos Verdes Library District are currently developing workshops to train area middle-school faculty how to maximize use of the library’s extensive collection of electronic resources. Library staff are hoping the teachers will promote these tools to their students through homework assignments and other coursework.

**Letters About Literature**

Creating a literate California is also a State Library priority. No wonder then that, since 2000, LSTA funds have been used to support the California Center for the Book (http://www.calbook.org/) which provides packaged reading programs to libraries and schools. Free book-clubs-in-a-box are available through the Center, including “Caught in the Crossfire: Young People and War” (http://www.calbook.org/bcb/crossfire.html ) and Comix.@$#! (http://www.calbook.org/bcb/comix.html ), both appropriate for teen readers.
True to its promise to “help librarians and teachers get Californians reading,” the Center also coordinates the annual statewide “Letters About Literature” competition, where students in grades four through ten are invited to write a letter to an author, living or dead, explaining how that author’s work has impacted the reader. Thousands of young people participate in this program every year, expressing—often in very moving terms—how reading has changed their lives. For more information, please see the “Letters About Literature” webpage at http://www.lettersaboutliterature.org.

Focus on Students

In another example of the State Library’s commitment to improving young people’s literacy, last summer LSTA funds were used to support two programs that helped elementary-school-aged children improve their reading skills. In Richmond, the public library provided free skills-building sessions to students who scored low in literacy on the STAR test. Eighty-five percent of the participants increased their reading skills by at least 80% by the end of the program.

Similar results were achieved in Benicia, where the public library hired two local teachers to conduct tutoring sessions throughout the summer. By the time school started again in the fall, all participants had improved their reading skills at least slightly, with 71% of the students making significant progress. The superintendent of the school district publicly praised the library for working with the district to help boost student reading scores.

All public elementary and secondary school libraries are eligible to apply for LSTA funds as long as they have:

- a written mission statement and service objectives;
- a fixed location in California;
- established service hours;
- an organized collection of information and materials accessible for use by their primary clientele;
- at least one onsite paid staff member who has a California library media teacher credential; and
- an established funding base.

The State Library is looking to the future to provide support and resources for members of the K-12 education community, supplementing and supporting the resources and programming teachers and teacher librarians are providing. For more information on these programs or how to apply for grant funding, please check out the State Library’s website at http://www.library.ca.gov/grants/lsta/apply.html or contact me directly at Cindy.Mediavilla@library.ca.gov. When it comes to educating California’s youth, more is definitely better!

CINDY MEDIAVILLA

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Deconstructing Digital Natives: An Argument for Abandoning the Metaphor

Mary Ann Harlan

When the term digital native first emerged it seemed a useful metaphor (Prensky, 2001). After all, the youth we saw everyday seemed to be eternally connected. They sent thousands of text messages, navigated browsers with ease, they were googling and spending hours on MySpace (remember, it was 2001).

Librarians, however, knew there were problems with the metaphor. In our schools students often defaulted to a Google search for academic papers. They typed into the address bar or search box entire questions rather than using strategic search terms, often wondering why their search did not work. They settled for the first entries they found, despite the fact that the source might have limited relevance, be of poor quality and/or even inaccurate.

Digital natives proved to be uncritical consumers of online information and content. And so we struggled to teach information and digital literacy skills to a generation of students being told by the media and adults around them that they were digital natives, comfortable and capable in online environments, despite evidence to the contrary.

We have come a long way in a short time. Prensky has acknowledged the limitation of the digital native metaphor, although he still argues its usefulness (Prensky, 2011). The youth we see in our libraries have a wider variety of skills and knowledge than the word “native” suggests. Despite having never experienced a time before the World Wide Web, or even the ease of participation and content creation, they do not enter school as critical consumers or capable producers of information. They may be able to locate the web site of their favorite entertainer, or play online games but they may not be able to access and evaluate information to support academic subjects, much less evaluate the point of view and bias of that information.

Matt Williams, Educational Technologist at KQED, recently provided me with a different framing, an interesting way of understanding the role school librarians might have in a digital age. He suggested that youth today are tech savvy, not digitally literate. A look at the research into the skills and interests of youth in a digital way will shed some light on this difference.

Tech Savvy Youth

It is undeniable that youth have access and are accessing digital technologies. In 2010, 84 percent of 8-18 years olds reported having home access to the Internet (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), and this does not take into account school and after school environments. Furthermore, 66 percent of youth had mobile phones (Rideout, et al., 2010). As youth age, the numbers increase. Ninety-three percent of teens have home access to the Internet and 78 percent report having a cell phone with an increasing number of these phones being smart phones (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). What these numbers suggest is that the majority of American youth are engaged in using both at-home online technologies and mobile technologies. However, the numbers do not reflect the quality of their access; for instance, the number of teens with access to broadband is much lower.

Furthermore, the numbers are not reflective of the quality of their engagement with digital information. In a follow up to the Digital Native article, Prensky indicates we should be encouraging “digital wisdom” and maintains that the digital native metaphor was indicative of “young people’s comfort with digital technology”. This is a tech savvy youth construction. However, even as a metaphor there are some concerns with this generalization and it is time to retire the concept of a digital native, and recognize that tech savvy doesn’t mean digitally literate (and perhaps not ALL youth are tech savvy).

Digitally Literate Youth

As stated above, being a technically savvy student does not mean one is a digitally literate student. Literacy suggests a capacity to be competent in a particular context (Erstad, 2011; Gee, 1996). Digital literacy suggests that one has both the basic skills to navigate an online environment but can also communicate, collaborate, and produce in online communities (Erstad, 2011; Harlan, 2012).

However, research indicates a lack of competence in being critical consumers, and a lack of involvement in collaborative production (Head & Eisenberg, 2009; Kennedy & Judd, 2011). We must recognize that competence goes beyond access, that in order to be digitally literate we have roles as critical consumers, and producers of information. Schools, and libraries, have an opportunity to contribute to developing this literacy.

It isn’t just consuming and producing information that youth must consider in regard to digital literacy. There are issues of safety and privacy that relate to the role of circulator or the sharing of information in online environments. For example, reports on cyberbullying indicate that while a majority of youth have seen cyberbullying, 66 percent report that teens are mostly nice to each other in online environments (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, & Rainie, 2011). 

continued on next page
As youth participate in spreading information they need to understand the responsibility implicit in sharing, particularly since it is so easy. This has implications not just in safety and responsibility to others but issues of copyright and fair use as well. Teacher librarians are positioned to help youth understand legal and ethical consequences in circulating information.

Today’s youth need to understand the opportunities of the online environment (Livingstone, 2008); however, they also need to understand the risks (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). They need instruction in identity management. They need support in managing a network that supports learning and personal interests. They need to understand how the content they share represents them. They need to understand how personal information is gathered and used for corporate interests so they can make informed choices. They need to be digitally literate, not just technologically savvy.

Dispelling the Myth, Breaking Down the Metaphor

I respect Prensky’s defense of the digital native as a metaphor, his emphasis that he was trying to indicate the comfort youth have with technology. However, the metaphor has its limitations, and has become shorthand for moral panic and rose-colored optimism. We need to embrace the nuance the metaphor lacks, and we need to promote a critical vision of youth’s skills in online and mobile environments. Teacher librarians are particularly well located to challenge the myth and help youth become digitally literate. But first we must retire the digital native.

References


More Questions than Answers….It’s a Process

It seems as if there are more questions than there are answers as we create our information sharing platforms. But having the wealth of applications to choose from, and picking the right questions to answer can help us clarify our goals so that we can choose the venue that will allow us to reach those goals.

BTW: My student and her family ultimately decided that they are going to create a series of video “chats.” After reviewing the questions I sent home with her, they were able to determine their own goals and how to best achieve them. Sometime in the near future I may be able to provide links to her videos on YouTube, each one a unique statement on a particular topic.

This process of answering questions helped her to decide to whom she wanted to speak and how to best let her voice be heard. As for my wiki, I’m still pondering, but that’s what summer is for!

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Her children claim that she has replaced them with her two incredibly brilliant and cute dachshunds... and they may be right. She can be contacted at cwilliams@petk12.org.
Perhaps it is my perspective as a children's librarian that draws me to the story aspect of book apps more than the interactive features, but I firmly believe that it is this sense of story, along with the interactive features, that draws children back to apps again and again. After all, if children just wanted interactive features, they would choose games like Angry Birds. Children really do love stories and the magical world that stories create for us in our minds, and this is just as true for book apps as it is for printed books. To paraphrase Martha Parravano, a book app might be an intangible piece of computer software, but at its heart a book app is an experience that unfolds for a child as they are reading it (Sutton and Parravano, 2010).

Defining our Terms: What is a Book App?

Book apps (short for “application”) are interactive computer programs based on books, available for tablet computers.

Applications designed for this hybrid niche typically offer visual content that is more interactive than on a cell phone screen, while allowing navigation with taps, finger swipes, and pinch zooms not feasible on a typical laptop or desktop. (Educause Learning Initiative, 2011)

These book apps are not ebooks, which are essentially a reprinting of the text and pictures, much like a PDF file. Instead, book apps are interactive books, which means that by poking or pressing different parts, they respond to your actions.

Apps are developing at an astonishingly fast rate. They are being produced by specialized companies, by independent authors and collaborators, and by large publishing houses. When one app uses a technique that is successful and captures attention, others start using it too. Programmers use software to write software, and when a new development tool comes out - for example the Chipmunk physics engine that makes objects seem to obey gravity in an app like Pop-Out Peter Rabbit (Loud Crow Interactive, 2010) - all of a sudden many apps incorporate this virtual gravity into their moving objects (Scheuer, Bird and Willey, 2011). In addition, apps are not a static format like books. Developers often update apps, providing new interactive features, smoothing out technology, or improving the interface.

Evaluating Book Apps - What Elements Should We Consider?

How can we apply what we know already to evaluating this new media? Because book apps combine so many different elements, we need to draw on our knowledge of children's books, learning theories, and online or multimedia teaching to understand how we as librarians can review book apps, what features we might consider, and why.

Aspects of book apps that reviewers should consider include these:

- Audience and purpose
- Story, plot, information
- Navigation
- Narration and audio options
- Pacing and chunking
- Interactive features

Some of these are specific to content, while others relate to the technology features. Let's take a closer look at each aspect.

Audience and Purpose

Apps have been developed for a wide range of books for children, ranging from early baby books to picture books for older readers and nonfiction books. With each, the most important aspect to consider is the audience and the purpose of the app. An app like The Going to Bed Book (Loud Crow Interactive, 2011) is designed specifically for the youngest children interacting on the iPad. This app keeps the look and feel of the board book, reinforcing the book nature of the app-reading experience. Young children and their parents can play with making characters beep or move, but just a little. This imitates the reading experience that parents and babies can have when reading a board book, making sounds when touching an element on the screen.
On the other hand, *Journey into the Deep* (Lerner Publishing Group, 2011) is a nonfiction title written for children in middle or high school. This app needs to be judged on the clarity and accuracy of the information it provides, the sources cited, and whether the overall design is appropriate for the nonfiction content.

How is a consumer to know what ages a book is best suited for? You can tell some things by looking at the screenshots included in the app store. Sometimes the publisher’s summary provides this information, but usually it does not (perhaps they fear limiting their audience?). Hopefully, the industry will develop standards like the book publishing industry indicating the intended audience.

**Story, Plot, Information**

After considering the intended audience, teacher librarians and students are most concerned with whether a book is interesting. To truly work, a book app must have a rich story experience or rich nonfiction material that is interesting enough to draw the reader in again and again.

Some of the most well-regarded apps (for example, those with starred reviews in Kirkus and School Library Journal) have been created by experienced children’s authors and illustrators. *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* (Moonbot Studios, 2012), *The Monster at the End of this Book* (Sesame Workshop Apps., 2012), and *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 1957) are examples of successful apps, where narration and interactive features enhance these wonderfully imaginative, absorbing stories.

**Navigation**

How do users figure out how to read this book app? Is there a “how to” introduction, or do users intuitively discover this? How easy is it to go from section to section? If you stop part-way through, do you have the option to begin where you left off or to start at the beginning? “Transparency, or ease of use, is clearly one of the key components to making technology successful within an educational setting” (Baule, 2007) and this applies to apps as well.

*The Magic School Bus: Oceans* (Scholastic, 2011) app has a slide-out menu at the bottom of every page that allows users to go directly to the section or chapter they want to. Users soon discover that tapping the named elements with floating air bubbles will lead to photos and videos. This user-directed flexibility allows users to construct their own learning experience, as Tempelman-Kluit (2006) describes, much more so than watching one of the Magic School Bus videos.

In another example, when users come to a screen in *Dragon Brush* (Small Planet, 2012) where they need to reveal a hidden painting, a hand directs them to draw on the blank page. Young readers love revealing these paintings and seeing them come to life. *Lil’ Red* (Main, 2012), on the other hand, encourages readers to experiment with their actions, providing a small piece of music, and then responding with an action in the story when readers touch different parts of the screen. Part of the joy of reading this wordless app is the joy of discovery, seeing how the story unfolds with musical accompaniment.

What if a young listener wasn’t paying attention to a read-aloud picture book for a moment? How easy is it to press the “replay” button, as it were? What if you want to listen to a song again? Can you do this easily, or do you have to go back a page and then forward again? Two apps developed by Callaway Digital Arts (2011), *Angelina Ballerina’s New Ballet Teacher* and *Miss Spider’s Tea Party*, do a particularly good job of letting young readers navigate in an intuitive but clear way, letting them listen to a page repeatedly if they wish to. This is important, especially if apps have quite a bit of text on one page.

**Narration and Audio Options**

Does the narration help users interact with the content? Is the narration appropriate for the content? As Tempelman-Kluit (2006) explains, appropriate audio narration can help reduce the cognitive load for learners by providing two ways for them to access the information. While Tempelman-Kluit was discussing online instruction, this comment applies to book apps as well. This is a key component to why book apps can help young readers connect with stories that they may not be able to read on their own. They can also tap individual words and the narrator will read aloud just those words.

While audio narration is quite standard in apps, it is interesting to consider how apps take this idea further and incorporate interactive features to trigger narration. The *Magic School Bus: Oceans* app (Scholastic, 2011) has narration that plays automatically when you swipe a page, as is quite standard with apps. But there are also speech bubbles from the different characters that you tap on to hear them. *Cinderella* and *The Three Little Pigs*, both developed by Nosy Crow (2011), take this one step further. When you tap a character, a speech dialogue bubble pops up that wasn’t there before along with narration in that character’s voice. When you tap that character again, still on the same page, the character says something new. These interactive features help new readers develop essential literacy skills.
Pacing and Chunking - the Magic of the Page Turn

Successful apps do not simply take what is on one written page, add narration, and put it all on one screen. Apps have much more flexibility, and have taken different approaches to chunking and pacing their books. The Dr. Seuss apps from Oceanhouse Media such as *The Cat in the Hat* (Oceanhouse Media, 2010) show just a few lines from a page and zoom in on one part of the artwork. This is often how we read stories - reading a few lines and looking at the pictures that go with those words. When you swipe to the next page of the app, you zoom to another part of the same page in the print book and read another chunk. By doing this, the readers actually control the pacing of the story, going only as quickly through the story as they are ready to absorb. As Baule (2007) notes, this allows users to manage their own cognitive load. It is part of why a book app is an even richer experience than watching an animated movie of the same book. The interactive features allow users to control the pacing of their experience.

Interactive Features

Developers must balance interactive features so they engage readers but do not distract them from the narrative flow or focus of the learning experience. In *The Magic School Bus: Ocean* (Scholastic, 2010) app if you touch a sea star, a screen slides down and you see a photograph of a sea star. Other screens slide down to reveal videos of animals in the ocean. Each interactive feature directly builds on the information Mrs. Frizzle and her students are discussing.

In contrast, *Teddy’s Day* (Auryn, 2010) interrupts the flow of the story for readers to put together jigsaw puzzles, paint pictures, or play music. I found this interrupted my reading comprehension, and I think this is because of what Tempel-Kluit (2006) describes as temporal continuity. You can only hold so much information in your working memory at one time. Readers come across the jigsaw puzzle in *Teddy’s Day* and start focusing on solving this puzzle, and stop thinking about the flow of the story. While most readers can reconnect with a simple story like *Teddy’s Day*, this disrupted flow is more problematic in stories for older readers. *Cinderella*, by Nosy Crow (2011), is an example of an app whose interactive features engage children without distracting them from the story.

Conclusion

Librarians in schools and public libraries need to become involved in evaluating apps - both for the sake of parents and children, and for the sake of stimulating the development of high quality apps. We need to be involved in evaluating apps for our local patrons and in the broader world of social media.

In the end, by considering how what we know from evaluating books and working with children can apply to this new media, we can consider what is at the very heart of stories. We can stretch ourselves, perhaps create new vocabulary, and think about these apps that are like books, and yet so unlike anything we’ve ever experienced before.

References


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K-12 LibGuides: A Flexible Platform For Integrating Info Lit and Promoting Your Library

Lauri Vaughan and Sue Smith

Teachers are considered to be among the most resourceful of professionals, and teaching librarians are the trailblazers. No surprise, then, that teacher librarians have enthusiastically adopted LibGuides, a software tool designed originally for the academic environment, and maximized its features for K-12 classrooms.

Who Uses LibGuides?

At the university level LibGuides have long provided robust platforms for academic librarians to guide subject searching through the myriad of resources available at their institutions. In the K-12 environment, however, LibGuides are driven less by sources than by students’ information literacy needs and their corresponding skills. LibGuides can be used to support a wide range of information needs, from the pursuit of a single source type to scaffolding a wide range of search and evaluation skills. Designed collaboratively with subject area teachers, they enable students to learn the process of effective research. Add in the expertise of instructional technologists and they become launch pads for dynamic, media-rich projects that empower multiple learning styles and are addictive fun for kids.

Using LibGuides with Students


...they enable students to learn the process of effective research.
A quick look at the home page for a freshman World History project LibGuide on Ancient Civilizations proves the point. The landing page provides students with project guidelines (ask any teen what their most pressing information need is on an assignment and they’ll tell you the page length!), immediate goals and objectives, a link to the assignment and a graphic outlining a basic information literacy skill. Represent Your Best Possible Sources, RBPS, is an acronym reminding students to start with broad reference sources before moving to more in-depth information found in books. Building context with background information better enables them to dissect the worthiness of primary sources before finally hitting up the niche information found in scholarly articles.

The LibGuide asks students to consider the “how” before offering up the “what” of research. The subsequent tabs sort linked sources by reference, books and primary sources mirroring the RBPS sequence.

A LibGuide designed for AP Literature students gets even more specific, making use of a Moodle discussion forum and walking students through the collection of scholarly sources on James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist. Not only is the discussion forum linked, the embedded screen shots on the LibGuide facilitate student evaluation, citation and summarization of found sources.

http://harker.libguides.com/content.php?pid=290800&sid=2388874

Even when a simple guide to sources is needed, LibGuides enable the creation of a visually appealing palate that’s easy to navigate and allows the teacher librarian and the classroom teacher to feature strong choices. An 8th grade American Decades project guide provides an example:
A single-page guide places online reference sources -- via clearly identifiable images -- front and center. The page screams “Start here!” Featured prominently in the left column are four eBooks, linked with cover art to their title pages. This format discourages unnecessary wandering around.

**Supporting Resources**

Finally, the convenience of the citation software NoodleTools and Britannica’s image database, Image Quest, are also provided. In case students wonder -- no doubt they will -- an example image with its citation is provided. A short scroll down provides students the opportunity to search an eBook collection and the catalog.

It is worthwhile to mention that a comparison of the content of the above LibGuides demonstrates K-12 librarians’ ability to match a specific information literacy skill with students’ developmental level in the LibGuide environment.

Pushing harder on LibGuide’s features, source collection can become an interactive and powerful endorsement of solid student work. Alongside a list of excellent websites to check out on coral reef ecology, a LibGuide can invite students to suggest a new online resource. Submissions need approval before becoming visible to others, but their ultimate inclusion pushes teens to look hard to find a website worthy of making the cut.
Common Core and “Flipped” Assignments

Guides can further provide a convenient course platform for hosting digital resources curated for a course or unit. Whether to post challenging supplemental texts for new Common Core requirements or “flipping” an assignment by having students watch an embedded video or read a short excerpt, teacher librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to provide the very best digital resources which can be watched, viewed, or listened to online from home.

LibGuides enable teacher librarians working individually or collaboratively to maintain a consistent message regarding information literacy skills and objectives, while building a library of LibGuides that by their nature support the cyclical nature of research. The cumulative effect may very well be the sweet spot that exists between handing students a list of pre-selected sources and bringing them to the precipice of an overwhelming list of source silos without a map.

According to Harker School Language Arts teacher Ann Smitherman, the LibGuide created by librarians Kathy Clark and Sue Smith offers her fifth graders, “the intimacy of the library in a virtual environment. It feels like a nice middle ground for my students. I don't want us to spoon feed them all things, but I also don’t want to set them loose in the wilderness of the web.”

Creating Your Own Brand

That virtual intimacy is an opportunity to create branding. LibGuides are impressive platforms for teaching, but also work powerfully for launching library programs (think reading promotion, research opportunities and materials on censorship and privacy) and organizing professional development materials and activities for fellow teachers (think assessment tools, deep web instruction, database applications).

After years of scrambling for time and space in a teacher’s physical or virtual classroom -- and forsaking the ability to control content, its presentation and prioritization among other teacher-provided sources -- LibGuides provide teacher librarians a tool so compelling that teachers beg for their creation and students seek them out. The result is a fine information literacy lesson that habituates users to seek out the nearest information specialist either physically or virtually. Oh, and for those students worried about how they'll manage college without LibGuides, most colleges use them too.

References


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Who we are and what we do

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The association encourages professional growth, provides avenues for sharing common concerns, represents the interests of school libraries to the Legislature and the California Department of Education, and enables members to serve the educational needs of the multiculturally diverse students of California.

What are the benefits of membership?

- You acquire a network of colleagues across California who share your interests and enthusiasm.
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