Things That Keep Us Up at Night

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The 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 history to be a librarian.

The future of the 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, resources, services, and instruction. But formats, technologies, learning needs, and our schools are evolving. And so are students themselves. Our entire information and communication landscapes have shifted—and this shift will only continue.

We worry about our field and our practice. We worry that as a profession we aren't shifting fast enough to seize new opportunities to create valuable, dynamic programs.

So, let's break it down. What issues keep us up at night?

Economic shifts. We face a major change in the economic rationale for libraries. Libraries were created under an economic model where it was more cost-effective 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 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?

Illustration by Brian Ajhar

Libraries need to change from places just to get stuff to places to make stuff, do stuff, and share stuff. 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 (see Joyce Valenza's "Library as Domestic Metaphor," **NeverEndingSearch blog**. 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.

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 repurpose or add value to copyrighted work (see "**Copyright and Fair Use in Teaching Resources: Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Media Literacy Education**,"

It is also time to share with teachers and learners the rationale for **Creative Commons** 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? Librarians need to help students assign rights to their own creative works. They share information about a new world of sharing while respecting intellectual property.

The challenge of 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 not only to keep up, but also be on the cutting edge of changes in the search and information landscapes.

Good searching is not just about using Google, accessing databases, or teaching Boolean logic. It's about teaching how 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 how to aggregate RSS feeds, to gather useful widgets, and to create personal information portals. Librarians must be able to retool and 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...

Failing 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? (see Laura Barack's "Social Media Specialists?: The use—or nonuse—of social tools sparks Twitterstorm," in the June 2009 issue of *SLJ*). How do we reach, wake up, and retool the profession for changes that need to be made today and impact us all? We need to prepare young people for a highly connected world. Librarians who don't have PLNs, don't attend conferences, don't read cutting-edge professional literature—from 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.

Advocacy by nonlibrarians. 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 mind-set 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. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students must demand the essential services we provide.

Our 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 toward more authentic assessment? In other words, how do we move from test-driven, low-level, skills-based curricula that do not 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.

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 and involve students and teachers in sharing and celebrating favorite reads in new, media-rich ways? 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 society (See Doug Johnson's "Libraries for a Post-Literate Society" in Multimedia & Internet @ Schools, July/August 2009), 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, interpret, and create all types of writing and scripting: YouTube video, Tweets, blog posts, digital stories.

Realizing that Internet access is an intellectual freedom issue. Enough with the "yeah, buts," opting out of the intellectual freedom battle by saying things like: but my IT people block that, the principal will never approve that, the board has a policy, or the parents will get upset. 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 many of the new communication tools (see American Association of School Librarians' "Best Web Sites for Teaching and Learning"), which are 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 for in the past (see the American Library Association's "Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights") for access to materials in written form? Are we helping develop good Internet filtering policies? Are we demonstrating and showing models of the effective use of online tools to our policymakers? And are we bringing the technology department onboard with the concept of intellectual freedom? It is time for librarians who get intellectual freedom to be heroes and fight.

Recognize that modern practice is directly connected to equity. Look through the 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 narrative with exciting digital storytelling tools. Another school library program may look like it is still the 1960s. But both programs are called school libraries. And the professionals running both 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 so that all learners have access to new tools and resources?

It may begin with uneven professional preparation. While one university preservice 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 the library.

These differences in what a child experiences in her school library may soon present a new digital divide. On the one hand, there are students who can effectively access, appreciate, understand, and create quality information in all media formats; on the other hand, there are those who cannot.

We are bigger than databases. We need to stop fighting against Wikipedia and 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, let's prepare learners to triangulate and 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, pushing relevant information to them through personal information portals using aggregating tools like iGoogle, PageFlakes, and 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?

Define the brand. What is the school library brand? What makes a librarian different from other teaching specialists in the building? 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 is required. Do most school principals know whom to look for? We doubt it. And we worry. This article describes our view of the brand. Also check out Joyce's Manifesto ("**Manifesto for 21st Century School Librarians**," and please add to it!

Plan for one-to-one computing or ubiquitous computing. Ubiquity changes everything. In one-to-one schools, students may visit the library less frequently. In such environments, in all modern, truly relevant environments, the library must also be ubiquitous. The 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, and screencasts. Though the laptops may live on carts in classrooms, they are not tethered to those rooms. Often it makes sense for students to carry their laptops to the library for more project-friendly space and additional equipment and resources. 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 rethinking what our physical library spaces look like and feel like, and how they function. Bookstores have changed (think coffee shops and comfortable chairs). Can our libraries become places where kids want to be when they are no longer places where they have to be?

Become an 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 and less frustrating? Do our virtual libraries, pathfinders, online presentations, screencast lessons, and customized search tools represent school libraries as dynamic and powerful and media-rich online spaces?

See obstacles rather than opportunities. We said it at the beginning: no more "yeah, buts." It is the best time in history to be a librarian. We have rich opportunities to teach and guide in new information and communication landscapes. These roles, described above, can be critical to our schools and to learners if we seize the opportunities to lead.

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. 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.

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