The whole-school library is open

By Pru Mitchell

At a recent conference *Celebrate change: let's make the whole school a library* (SLAV, 2010)*, participants were invited to explore opportunities that exist to extend library services and influence beyond the physical space of the library, to identify the benefits to learning and teaching (and student engagement) that could flow from such an approach, and to identify the implications for policy development, planning, digital citizenship, and transformation of practice. This paper addresses some of these ideas and issues, with particular emphasis on the power of openness.

Whole-school library

The concept of 'whole-school library' evokes images of an inclusive, comprehensive and outward-looking organism. It could perhaps share some elements of philosophy with the whole-food movement – valuing freshness, promoting a diet of local, natural, raw ingredients over pre-packaged, highly-branded commercialised options, and striving towards a goal of healthy communities. One could also draw inspiration for the whole-school library from the *Whole Earth Catalog*, an iconic US pre-web publication that had an analogous function "as an evaluation and access device. With it, the user should know better what is worth getting and where and how to do the getting" (Brand, 1968). Reading the online archive of this publication that became a social movement provides uncanny insights into how a whole-school library philosophy could benefit learning, such as facilitating:

> *. . . the power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested* (Brand, 1968a).

Educational mission statements from St Ignatius in the 1500s to the International Baccalaureate of today have acknowledged a concept of educating 'the whole-person', using this to refer to an interest in their students' physical, intellectual, social, emotional, creative, moral and spiritual development. This links readily to the concept of holistic education where the approach to learning is less about transactions and transmission, and more about transformation, connections, flexibility and community.

Developing a holistic view of the school library demands that, rather than dropping any of the traditional priorities of the school library, it is important to strengthen the interconnection of teaching and learning, information literacy, information management, resourcing the curriculum, literature, literacy and technology. Integrating these elements into a coherent, whole-school focussed service is a challenge and there are a number of ways to attack the transition to becoming a whole-school library.

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Looking to the corporate world for lessons on how to (or how not to) effect a takeover could be salutary, or perhaps looking to history for examples of successful colonisation is better strategy? It does seem that often those who embark on the path of school library advocacy approach it with missionary-like zeal – passionate about converting others to a way of life by taking the line that 'we have something really good, we know what is best for you; come to us, do it our way and all will be well'. Information and communication technologies have been 'sold' or marketed to education in a similar way (and met with similar resistance) with messages such as 'if you just adopt this tool . . ., this netbook, this software . . . learning will be improved'. A third strategy for achieving the goal of whole-school engagement lies in a bribery, incentives or carrot approach. 'Change in this way and we will reward you – save you time, give you money or resources, or solve this problem for you.'

It is unlikely, based on previous experience, that any of these models will go very far in making the whole school a library. Rather than claiming to hold all the answers, school libraries could do better to position themselves in terms of others' needs and to express their benefit statements in terms of the school, the teacher, and the student; seeking to find their pain points, their issues and goals. Openness is one philosophy that libraries can adopt that is more likely to serve this purpose. Being open in relationships, open to new partnerships, open in dealing with and promoting knowledge, learning and resources, and open to change sets the foundation for an outward-looking and inclusive service.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2009) lists many nuances of the word 'open', but these can be summed up by the phrase "affording unrestricted access or entry to all". This paper considers a variety of initiatives described as 'open' that might contribute to making the whole-school library a reality.

Open collaboration

The concept of openness should not be a new one for school library staff. Library professionals have long been advocates for the open and free flow of information. The ALIA Core Values statement (2002) puts this as the number one tenet of library and information services professionals:

> Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works.

While it is to be expected that every school library mission statement and collection policy will encompass this value, it is worth noting that libraries are not alone in this endeavour and can learn from other projects that have taken up the mantra of open access. Exemplars include the Open Education movement creating a world where "each and every person on earth can access and contribute to the sum of all human knowledge" (Cape Town Open Education Declaration, 2007) and *Wikipedia*, "imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge" (Wales, 2004).

In her review of what makes for successful collaboration, Coffin (2006) reports on lessons learned from an analysis of three collaborative communities. These lessons include the value of establishing and asserting mores, protocol and ethos; a community-wide sense of ownership that rewards participants for their personal investment; and transparency, particularly open, recorded dialogue and peer review of materials. She concludes that discussion and shared decisions lead to trust among members. Herein lie some major challenges for school libraries seeking to engage the whole school as partners in the open library. Questions often asked include: How to develop a sense of ownership by students? What to do if the Principal doesn't value the library? When will that teacher stop using textbooks and bring their class to the library?
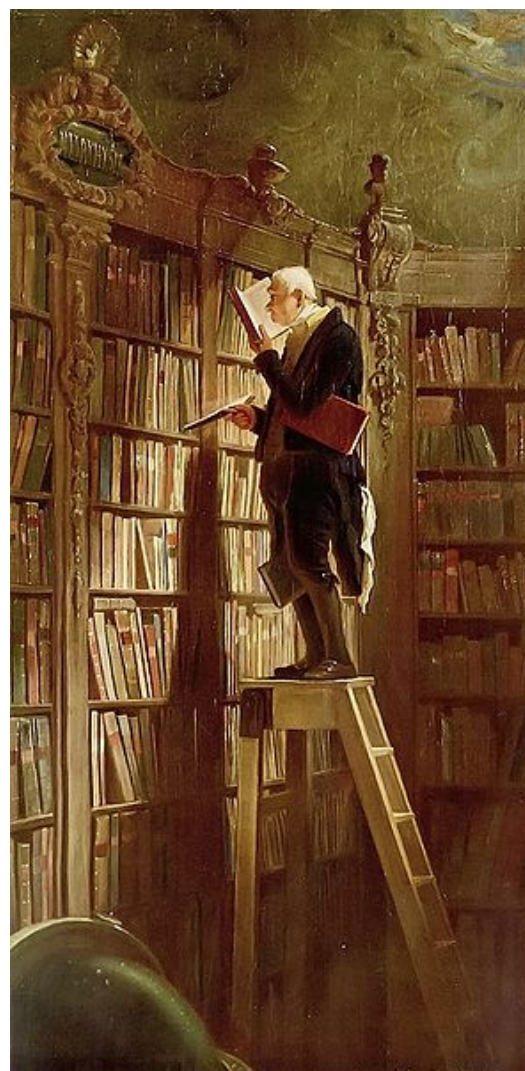
Lehmann (2010) provides a timely perspective on this, reminding that in business "no-one owns the customer" – as a service, we need to earn them.

> If you kill their problems, find ways to save them time and help them get what they want, then you are deserving of their trust. Then your grip will be firm. Quite often customers have faced intellectual deception . . . So they become careful with their trust . . . you are only as good as your product, advice and possibly the most recent dealing you had with them.

Saint-Onge (1998) reiterates "the customer will go where they perceive greater value as they define it". In libraries as in business, relevance and value is in the eye of the beholder. Hay and Todd (2010) put this in terms of an imperative of moving from "teacher-librarian actions to student outcomes", ensuring "a learning-centred vision not a library-centred vision" (p. 37). This requires constant vigilance against policies and procedures that come from a library perspective rather than a user perspective.

In recent years, school libraries have spent considerable effort 'warning' students and staff against the use of open, collaborative information projects involving user-contributed content. If only libraries had harnessed that effort towards promoting community collaboration for learning! If we accept that educational institutions have an obligation to help their students develop the skills they need to work in this environment, then we

Carl Spitzweg (1808-1885) Der Bücherwurm
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carl_Spitzweg_021.jpg

must also accept the imperative that educational institutions will employ the tools and principles that underpin them. In helping students learn about wikis and collaborative learning, it is impossible to ignore the power and potential benefit of collaborative projects such as *Wikipedia* and the other Wikimedia projects, and we do our students a disservice if we fail to address the specifics of these projects in our information literacy programmes. Wikipedia provides significant ready-made resources for teachers and students about how it works, such as *Researching with Wikipedia* (2010), and more importantly about how students can get involved in such projects, *Contributing to Wikipedia* (2010).

Developing stronger partnerships is a key element of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) "to ensure schools engage young Australians, parents, carers, families, other education and training providers, business and the broader community to support students' progress through schooling, and to provide them with

rich learning, personal development and citizenship opportunities" (p. 10). For school libraries collaborative partnerships are essential. We cannot ignore the world and try to stand alone. Nor do we need to, being by default a node in one of the strongest, most effective global networks. It is a matter of using and contributing to that network and working with each other's libraries, with education and university libraries; with state services like FUSE and Ultranet, with national services like SCIS and Education Network Australia, as well as with national and international libraries.

Open educational resource

In a 21st century learning environment the flexibility to publish, communicate and share openly in digital formats is assumed in policy documents like *Learning in an online world: Pedagogy strategy* (MCEETYA, 2005), with goals including:

- make learning activities, information, courses and feedback available online anywhere – anytime
- support students using online resources to share with other students and experts
- increase parent access to student work (p. 5).

This emphasis on publication and access to student work beyond the classroom is a key element in most Learning Management Systems, including the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Ultranet project.

> *The Ultranet is designed to enable parents to become full partners in their child's education, giving them online access to their child's homework, attendance, assessment, curriculum and teacher feedback at any time* (Ultranet FAQ 2009).

Is it also a priority that parents have online access to their child's school library and its carefully selected and catalogued education resources?

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Before online publication of teacher and student work increases dramatically, becoming the norm in Ultranet and other systems, there is a significant issue that requires immediate information leadership in schools. Every person who uploads content (that is, who publishes and communicates content) needs to recognise, understand and label the intellectual property and copyright status of that content. The online world is significantly changing the rules on copyright, but schools have continued to reinforce a view that 'paid for' resources represent value, whereas free resources are not worth the effort of collecting and cataloguing. Commercial content has high value for corporate education suppliers and perhaps for risk-averse education administrators, but there are other models of digital content, such as teacher-generated materials and open educational resources, that better suit learners and teachers in the read/write era.

The Cape Town Declaration (2008) defines open educational resources as "openly-licensed course materials, lesson plans, textbooks, games, software and other materials that support teaching and learning". It goes on to state that these resources should be "licensed to facilitate use, revision, translation, improvement and sharing by anyone". Why is such licensing important? It enables educators to republish material in new formats, enables them to publish online, to reuse material, promotes innovation and addresses issues of equity and accessibility.

What proportion of school time is spent teaching about copyright law designed in 1968 compared to time spent teaching about open licensing and attribution of 21st century digital content? In the 21st century classroom or library, for every lesson on traditional copyright, citation styles and bibliography formats, there should be equivalent attention given to Creative Commons' attribution principles and formatting to ensure staff and students are well educated about their responsibilities when using openly licensed material. The Creative Commons section of the Smartcopying website (2009) contains detailed teaching notes on attribution, but in short, these can be summarised as:

- Credit the creator
- Provide the title of the work
- Provide the URL where the work is hosted
- Indicate the type of licence it is available under and provide a link to the licence (so others can find out the licence terms), and
- Keep intact any copyright notice associated with the work

It is significant to note that the Australian Curriculum consultation portal (2010) is publishing most of its content under a Creative Commons licence (Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike), perhaps indicating that educational resources published to support the Australian curriculum will themselves be openly licensed and shareable. The Victorian FUSE search (2010) and the Education Network Australia search (2010) both highlight digital education resources that are available to copy and modify.

Open catalogues

Hopefully most school libraries have given up pretending that even in an ideal world they could collect and catalogue everything that their community may require to support learning. Systems that were designed for physical content in physical containers do not scale to deal with digital content in virtual containers. There is no question that discovery and access will continue to be major challenges for physical and digital content, but there is a big question about who is going to address these challenges, and how? The program guidelines for the Digital Education Revolution (2010, p. 4) include as a key outcome "high-quality digital learning resources that can be readily discovered, accessed, used and shared by schools". Discovery, access, use and sharing of high quality learning resources looks suspiciously like the role of the library. So where is the evidence of school library initiatives and leadership in the collecting, cataloguing and sharing of digital learning resources?

If the whole-school library is to be open, then the library catalogue will need to be open for the whole school to contribute. "We are smarter than me" (Libert & Spector 2007) and the power of the people are key concepts in Web 2.0 services. Here is an opportunity to get teachers and students engaged in the key activities of discovering, describing, accessing, using and sharing high quality resources. Shirky (2005) observes that "the only group that can categorise everything is everybody" and social bookmarking (CMIS, 2010) is one of the most accessible tools for demonstrating this through the power of personal influence and social networks. Helping teachers and students make good use of personalised knowledge management tools such as open online bookmarking and annotation services is an area of natural fit for library staff.

Library catalogue of the Institute of Historical Research in London, 2010
NotFromUtrecht
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IHR_Library_Catalogue.jpg

Perhaps it is not possible to know yet what the optimum resource discovery infrastructure of the future will be, but it is not too soon to start opening up new options, looking at current user behaviour and investigating what works. In a report for the Library of Congress, Calhoun (2006, p. 15) predicts that, based on studies that found over three-quarters of library users starting with a search engine and not the online catalogue, library users will continue to bypass catalogues in favour of search engines. One of the issues for school libraries is that our discovery and access tools don't serve at all well for this changed landscape. If the only search engine that provides access to the school's high quality learning resources is the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) that came as part of a first generation Library Management System, there is a real chance this OPAC was designed at least 20 years ago. Consider how technology, particularly search technology, has changed in that time. While the OPAC may still be 'working', the functionality that people expect 20 years later is not there. It seems that accepting the technology that we are given by system vendors is easier than designing or demanding the technology that 21st century learners need. It is important that libraries don't let industry just sell them solutions to the easy problems like stock control and circulating physical items. The priority should be to tackle the hard questions, like sharing the right resource (whether digital or physical) with the right user at the right time. If we are to make the whole-school library a reality, then library systems and processes have to address the pain points for library users and be quicker, easier, richer, more personal, and more user-friendly than other systems.

School libraries can look to other non-school libraries for ways to open their catalogues. The first priority should be to ensure that the catalogue is available online any time, from anywhere. No library user should have to come to the library to find out that the resource they want is not there. Opening up the catalogue by connecting with other organisations is common in other sectors, whether as networked libraries or as additional access points. Question the need for every school to pay the cost of hosting and managing stand-alone systems, and question why students and teachers are faced with multiple search boxes each time they look for learning resources - whether that be library resources, videos on a video server, learning objects, websites or curriculum documents. Within school or education systems there is an urgent need to address the integration of access to library resources, subscription services, and digital learning resources held in learning management systems or intranets. This does not mean all resources have to be forced into the same software package. A video management system does well at managing video; a learning management system may be the best option for managing learning objects and a library management system best for managing library-related metadata. However, a search engine or new discovery layer interface (Breeding, 2008) is required that trawls across all these diverse platforms and

indexes and aggregates search results to provide searchers with single, open access to the broadest range of relevant and available learning resources.

Open standards

Car designers and petrol distributors meet and agree to implement common standards, and as a result drivers can pull up to any Australian petrol station in any brand of Australian car and fit the nozzle for the correct type of fuel into their tank. Likewise, because library automation system designers and library cataloguers continue to meet and agree to implement common standards, library catalogue records can be moved between most library management systems. The Australian and New Zealand school library environment is fortunate that for 25 years the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS, 2010) has taken on this role on behalf of school libraries, ensuring that catalogue data for over 1.1 million learning resources is created to international standards and preserved in future-friendly format, not to mention the time and cost saved across 10,000 school libraries who are downloading rather than creating original records.

Open standards recognise that it is the content and the data about that content (metadata) that are of most value. Systems, hardware and software will come and go, but the content these tools are designed to manage needs to continue - it continues to have value beyond its container. Open libraries will maintain an interest in every new technology used in schools with a view to minimising potential waste and redundancy and being locked in to non-standard technology and content formats. Interoperability is a stated priority for the Digital Education Revolution (2010, p. 5):

> *The development of policies, protocols, standards and infrastructure, including broadband, required to enable schools to safely and seamlessly communicate, collaborate and access and use digital learning resources across school, system and jurisdictional boundaries.*

There is no question that the importance of open standards will continue to grow, and it is easy to demonstrate the power of these in relation to the social and semantic web where mashups enable new information services to be developed more rapidly by building on existing standards-based products. Sherbow (2010) advocates this iterative form of action in innovation:

> *While new ideas, people, energy, resources are obviously needed, we should be careful to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts by – whenever possible – replicating, learning from and partnering with successful efforts that already exist.*

Open walls

Librarians are often referred to as 'gatekeepers', a descriptor that holds both positive and negative implication. Sturges (2001, p. 62) holds that there is a "fundamental human preference for information mediated by human interaction". Others use 'gatekeeper' in conjunction with the term 'walled garden' to describe the act of protecting a closed space ruled over by those trying to restrict the flow of information.

If the goal is for libraries to become embedded in schools (in much the same way as journalist might be embedded with troops on location) there is a need to find ways to open the library doors, and perhaps also the library walls - and keep them open. Even this may not be enough to enable all learners to come in, and it may not help libraries to get out into the school. In some cases it may need influence from the outside - someone to let the gatekeepers out, or escape. Strategic partners should include principals, school or sector leaders, but there are situations and settings where instead of opening doors, this may result in teachers going into lock down rather than simply closing the classroom door as they did before.

Do school library staff still need formal structured interaction where learners come to the library, usually in class groups? Or is there a way to move towards just-in-time interaction, from anywhere, with anyone as the need arises? New priorities include implementation speed, flexibility, connecting people, operating across virtual and physical space and promoting mobile technology. Across the workforce there is demand for new types of spaces and new ways of working.

Poole (2005) questions whether we need to be location-specific any more, or how much we need physical branding. The digital form sets us free so there is less need to 'own' space or to be so highly territorial. There is a challenge to get out of the walled garden and move learning to wherever learners are using a variety of delivery mechanisms. Perhaps in some cases the mobile

Biblioburro, traveling library in Colombia Howcheng, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Biblioburro.jpg

library has the edge, extending library services and resources to those for whom the physical library space is irrelevant. The biblioburro travelling library by donkey in Colombia (Romero, 2008) is a great example of a program to extend the library services and influence beyond the physical space of the library.

Open assessment

Twenty-first century travellers use open assessment technologies to improve their experience of travel and accommodation through hotel and tourism sites that provide rating, reviewing, accessing and booking services. In the library and information world there are many equivalents in both commercial and community sites. Providing students with opportunities to review others' work helps build a culture of openness and transparency, as does allowing them to publish their work online for an authentic audience both within the school and beyond to the wider education community, to family and to potential employers. Libraries can also engage in this process by finding opportunities to promote and share their own locally created material online, and also to re-use other libraries' policies, content and ideas, with acknowledgement, in their own information products.

If we are going to make or be a whole-school library, what will be the indicators of success? If someone walks into the school next year, how will they know if it has become a whole-school library? After developing criteria in conjunction with the school community, it should then be possible to collect and publish some open, transparent quantitative statistics using appealing visual data analysis formats. Hay and Todd (2010) expressed concern that responses to their discussion questions about the future of school libraries generated many descriptions of what teacher-librarians did and how important this was, but very limited material about measuring student outcomes as a result of library services. Promoting open communication and feedback tools that include reviewing, rating and commenting simplifies the process of collecting and celebrating evidence of how the school library is helping (or hindering) learning.

The development of national professional standards and ongoing discussion about what constitutes an effective teacher-librarian raises questions about whether it is time to open up the profession. There are many factors influencing recruitment and development of school library staff, but there does seem to be angst about the state of the profession in terms of credibility, retention and succession planning. Unfortunately a qualification in librarianship does not automatically produce a teacher-librarian with a disposition for openness and skills in building and maintaining whole-school relationships. Is it time to consider a future where demonstrating an open attitude is at least as important as displaying a qualification, so that we ensure we are recruiting those who can open up the new whole-school library?

Open reading

In a school which values openness there will surely be an emphasis on wide reading, and an aversion to restricted reading schemes that narrow young people's choices of reading material based on artificial categories of age level, reading ability, publisher or other pigeonhole. There should also be recognition that it is the reading not the format that is important to the reader, that it is the content not the container that they are consuming. As e-books become available in Australia it is good to be reminded that, "whether it comes in hardcover, paperback or an LCD screen framed by high-grade plastic, you still can't judge a book by its cover" (McCaney, 2010).
For those responsible for managing the discovery, accessing, using and sharing of reading material for readers, there is still a need to understand how a particular format or technology helps or hinders the reader, and how to best balance issues of budget, demand and diversity. For example, if budgets allowed it, the school that values openness could decide to allow teachers and students to purchase and download resources from external collections on demand if the school does not already have an equivalent item – such is the convenience and instant nature of the digital content supply chain.

The open library will also need to consider the various access devices that their community is using and find the most open and cost-effective way to deliver content to individuals and class groups. In new markets and for new formats the importance of standards becomes marked. At this stage it is probably impossible to predict which e-book formats will evolve and become the preferred platform, but it is to be hoped that sharing will eventually become available in the same way that interactive whiteboard suppliers in the UK (Becta, 2009) have agreed to a common file format that can be opened, edited, saved and used across many interactive whiteboard applications, so that teachers do not have to recreate digital whiteboard resources each time they change schools or brand of whiteboard.

Open to change

Probably everything discussed above could have been summed up in this imperative: open to change. There will be some who look at the theme of making the whole school the library, and see it as a defence mechanism from a profession they see as being on the verge of extinction - people madly reinventing themselves for survival. Faced with what some people see as the sole purpose or raison d'être of libraries - the storage of books – this may be understandable, as they look at the technologies here now, and on the horizon that are seen to threaten the future of book.

The future of the book may still be open to debate, but as a colleague is fond of saying, we should decide soon whether we want to be like the blacksmith who vowed that the feel, the convenience, the smell of the horse would never be replaced by the motor car. Regardless of most people's love of their horse and appreciation of it as a superior mode of transport over walking, once they could afford a car they changed their practice. Eventually a tipping point was reached where to travel by horse became less convenient, less 'normal' than travel by car. At what point does the blacksmith make the decision to add skills as an auto mechanic to his portfolio?

There is no question that most library staff *are* coping well with transition. We would regard as quaint (or perhaps pitiful) anyone who given the opportunity to automate their library catalogue, chose not to; or who chose to go it alone in cataloguing of resources rather than make use of centralised, shared catalogue services. Where there is an efficiency, effectiveness or service benefit to a new way of working, and particularly when there is a positive learning outcome, school libraries are often amongst the early adopters. Concepts and tried and true processes learned through years of working with books can be applied to digital content, and probably to future content and technologies as yet undreamt of. Our not so distant ancestors coped with dramatic transitions in transport, electricity and telecommunications. There should be little to fear – unless we resist learning new skills, and the only future we are prepared to contemplate is a lifetime as a blacksmith.

The Blacksmiths Inn, Westow village pub August 2009
Tracer.smart
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blacksmiths_Inn.jpg

Continuing the transport services analogy, there is another institution that was affected by the horse to motor car transition which fits the library. The inn arose out of a need to provide services for travellers, allowing them to change horses, and to find refreshment and accommodation. When the inn no longer had to give priority to storing and managing the supply of horses, it retained and built on its related role serving the needs of travellers and of their community. This is an illustration of the school library's role in supporting and serving the needs of the learner and their community.

Like the inn, the library is a physical meeting place, a place of support and source of advice for the journey. It is valued as a safe and trusted service, where the client arrives to find everything they expect and require ready for them and easily located because of adherence to standards. It accommodates those who prefer to be alone and need to avoid distraction, but also has zones for those who want to meet with others to share ideas and debate. Our services revolve around the people and their purpose, not primarily around the tools and skills we have been trained in. So bring on the opening of the whole-school library.

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