

Multimedia and Internet @ Schools

Pipeline Column:

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Teacher Librarians: Sharing and Taking Care of Themselves

As I troll through the huge range of blogs that I visit daily I learn a lot. I follow about 600 blogs a day. I try to sense what is happening in all types of libraries – academic, college, school, public and special libraries. I see great new ideas being implemented throughout libraryland. I worry a lot that these ideas just don't diffuse quickly enough through our world. I end up wondering:

1. Can school libraries and school boards be truly innovative? Professions? Is the public sector different?
2. What allows good ideas and innovations to diffuse more quickly through our organizations?
3. What are the root causes or barriers to innovation?
4. Are there some solutions to this puzzle?

It seems to come down to understanding theories of *diffusion*. Here are a few definitions:

- dispersion: the act of dispersing or diffusing something; "the dispersion of the troops"; "the diffusion of knowledge."
wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn
- the spread of a cultural pattern from one culture to another, and where no directed change agent is apparent.
oregonstate.edu/instruct/anth370/gloss.html
- The spread of people, ideas, technology and products between places.
www.yumaed.org/kofahigh/Vocabulary/SocialStudies/SocialStudies/glossary
- Technology diffusion is the dissemination of technical information and knowledge and the subsequent adoption of new technologies and techniques by users. Technology diffusion is a component in the broader innovation process.
www.smartstate.qld.gov.au/strategy/strategy05_15/glossary.shtm

So, why does the *diffusion* of ideas and innovations in libraries feel so slow to me? Here are a few theories:

- In order to learn about what's new and working we must develop and share our case studies – the whole thing, warts, errors and missteps and

- all. Do we have the courage to do this or are we too perfectionist to be totally honest?
- Are we limited in many of our environments by worries about confidentiality and privacy issues, to the point that we don't actually do the research as well as we should? Do we obey rules too literally? Are there ways to get the message out safely? Sometimes vendors see an innovation in one school and have to make it generic in order to get the word out. It's sad some teacher-librarian innovators don't get as much credit as they deserve.
 - Are we just too self-effacing? Do we suffer either from feelings that it won't measure up to public scrutiny or we'll be embarrassed? Does the solitary nature of many of our positions leave us without the team support to get out there with confidence? Do we just think someone is going to notice without that all important pointing finger or look-at-me-Mom-on-the-diving-board?
 - Do we lack the budgets to innovate? Are our environments too visionless to try edgier innovations with bigger payoffs? Do we have too weak of a connection to our organizations' social networks, key influencers like IT, hierarchies? Are we positioned strongly inside or outside our communities? Are there virtual walls? Maybe we don't just recognize our actual power.
 - Are our environments too bureaucratic and hierarchical? Does this oh-so-last-century organizational climate militate against innovation? Do we wait too long for higher-ups to catch on or get it?
 - Is our profession too conservative and introverted by its very nature? I don't think so but it needs to be asked. Are we too isolated in our work environments and need the freedom of our associations to learn and experiment? Do we wait for permission instead of asking for it?
 - Do arcane and despotic barriers to technology in school boards (such as filtering of major sites and blocking of many current (and totally normal) technologies like MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, IM and more) damage learners' and our potential for success? Are these rules challenged enough and are the implementers made to justify their actions?

All of the above might be true in degrees or occasionally. Are they reasons or excuses? Are there good workarounds? However, wonderful innovations do happen and ideas do diffuse. How do we get this to happen more, faster, and involve more of us and our ideas and contributions?

Some solutions to the diffusion issue include better communication, better sharing, more publication and strategies to reward innovation. If these are combined with a tearing down of bureaucratic and educratic boundaries then more successful diffusion and improvement of new ideas would happen.

So, back to blogging are there ways to improve communication between practicing teacher librarians? The solutions are right under our noses and many

are already stepping up to the plate. Here's a list, in no particular order, of some of my favourite blogs related to teacher librarianship, school libraries and learning technologies. (Thanks to Chris Harris for pointing me to some of these):

1. Doug Johnson's Blue Skunk Blog <http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog/>
2. Joyce Valenza's NeverEnding Search Blog <http://joycevalenza.edublogs.org/feed/atom/>
3. Sara Kelly Johns' From the Inside Out <http://fromtheinsideout.squarespace.com/>
4. Frances Harris' Gargoyles Loose in the Library <http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/library/blog/>
5. Christopher Harris' Infomancy <http://schoolof.info/infomancy/>
6. Jacquie Henry's Wanderings <http://nlcommunities.com/communities/wanderings/default.aspx>
7. Justin Ashworth's School Library Land <http://ashworth.wordpress.com/>
8. Tim Wilson's The Savvy Technologist (TechnoSavvy) <http://technosavvy.org/>
9. Brenda Hough & Rebecca Richardson & Jeanne Roy's Librarians with Class <http://libswithclass.blogspot.com/>
10. Judy O'Connell's Hey Jude <http://heyjude.wordpress.com/>
11. Book Moot and the great list of links rolling down the left <http://www.bookmoot.com/>
12. Alice Yucht's Alice in Infoland <http://www.aliceinfo.org/> and Alice's special list of Recommended Blog-Reading for Youth Services (school and public) librarians
13. Amy Bowllan's SLJ Blog Bowllan's Blog <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/620000062.html>
14. Chris Harris' SLJ Blog Digital Reshift <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/840000284.html>
15. Diane Chen's SLJ Blog [Practically Paradise](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/830000283.html)
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/830000283.html>
16. Christian Long's "The Future of Learning" Manifesto <http://thinklab.typepad.com/futureoflearningmanifesto/>
17. David Warlick's 2¢ Worth <http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/>
18. AASL Weblog <http://blogs.ala.org/aasl.php>
19. AliceBakerBlog <http://alicebakerblog.typepad.com/alicebakerblog/>
20. Alternative Teen Services <http://www.yalibrarian.com/>
21. Vicki Davis' Cool Cat Teacher Blog <http://coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/>
22. Paul Pival's The Distant Librarian <http://distlib.blogs.com/distlib/>
23. Ed-Tech Insider <http://www.eschoolnews.com/eti/>
24. Scott Leslie's EdTechPost <http://edtechpost.ca/wordpress/>
25. Ann Davis' EduBlog Insights <http://anne.teachesme.com/>
26. Tony Karrer's eLearning Technology <http://elearningtech.blogspot.com/>
27. Fiona Emberton <http://fionaembertonblog.blogspot.com/index.html>
28. Game On: Games in Libraries <http://libgaming.blogspot.com/>

29. Joshua Neff's [The Goblin in the Library](http://www.goblin-cartoons.com/) <http://www.goblin-cartoons.com/>
30. Michael Lorenzen's The Information Literacy Land of Confusion <http://www.information-literacy.net/>
31. Stuart Boon and Sheila Webber's Information Literacy Weblog <http://information-literacy.blogspot.com/>
32. The Learning Circuits Blog <http://learningcircuits.blogspot.com/>
33. PBS's learning.now <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/learning.now/>
34. Iris Jastram's Pegasus Librarian <http://pegasuslibrarian.blogspot.com/>
35. Teacher Librarian <http://librariantoolkit.blogspot.com/>
36. Will Richardson's Weblogg-ed <http://weblogg-ed.com/>
37. ALA's YALSA Blog <http://librariantoolkit.blogspot.com/>
38. Eye4You Alliance Island: sponsored by the Alliance Library System, PLCMC and SirsiDynix Youthtech.info <http://eye4youalliance.youthtech.info/>
39. Anastasia Goodstein's Ypulse <http://ypulse.com/>
47. To link to Chris Harris' SLJ article that inspired this column: <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6330755.html>
41. School Library Blogs (Also by Chris Harris, an aggregated page of top school library blogs) libraryblogs.suprglu.com

It is definitely possible to get our ideas out into the world and to do this faster. My top 5 ideas to share are:

1. Contribute to our literature more – including this periodical, Multimedia & Internet @ Schools.
2. Self publish on the web through sites like Lulu.com (<http://www.lulu.com/>) and your own website.
3. Set up a wiki or contribute to wikis like the Library Success Wiki.
4. Blog (and comment on blogs)
5. Contribute to and participate in the Ning sites like Library 2.0 and School Library 2.0 and Classroom 2.0.
 - a. Library 2.0 <http://library20.ning.com/>
 - b. School 2.0 <http://school20.ning.com/>
 - c. Classroom 2.0 <http://classroom20.ning.com/>
6. And the bonus idea, share your successes and learning at conferences like Internet @ Schools East and West, and staff professional development days.

You have great ideas. You've done great work. Keeping your innovations and learning under a basket like the proverbial candle won't let your light spread. Everyone can find 15 minutes a week to post to a blog something they learned or did that week, comment on an idea in Ning, a wiki or on a blog or start an article, with a partner.

You rock. Share. Your ideas will spread and learning and libraries will improve. To paraphrase the old saw, in times of extreme change the spoils go to the learners no the learned.

Stephen Abram, MLS is Vice President, Innovation, for SirsiDynix, Chief Strategist of the SirsiDynix Institute and the President-elect of SLA. He is an SLA Fellow and the past president of the Ontario Library Association and the immediate past president of the Canadian Library Association. Stephen would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.