That's my content. That's my creativity. That's my curriculum! Do you want copyright and cataloguing with that?

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Abstract

What are libraries doing about collecting and managing user-generated content?

In an era of globalisation we increasingly value the unique and the locally grown over the mass-produced, high food miles equivalent. At the grower’s market we carefully select ingredients despite the odd shapes, unpredictable quantities and without accompanying metadata about ingredients, nutritional value and use by dates.

However, it seems that we are slow to apply the same philosophy when we select resources for our libraries. Instead of relishing the variety, freshness and freedom of open, user-generated content, we are restricting library users to a diet of commercial content and subscription services. Is this perhaps because it’s safer and easier to use content that comes in neat packages with strict instructions on how to use it?

Libraries are no strangers to the ideals of sharing and collaboration, so perhaps it is 20th century copyright and cataloguing practices that stop us embracing the full range of learning resources available in the 21st century?

This presentation considers the benefits and challenges of user-generated content, and the philosophical shift of ‘mass innovation not mass production’ (Leadbeater, 2008). Using examples such as open access, creative commons, and wikis the session will look at what education can learn from projects that support collaboration, personalisation and creativity in learning.

At a practical level, we will look at tools libraries can use to help their school communities to identify open education resources, collaboratively tag resources to match curriculum goals and create and share new open education resources.

By constantly asking ‘is there an open way of accessing and organising this content?’ library staff can reduce duplication of effort and ‘content miles’ - even in an era of national curriculum.
Introduction

One popular description of Web 2.0 is the ‘read/write web’ (Gillmor 2004, p.3). Libraries have fantastic processes for managing physical resources, and many have applied these processes to dealing with the ‘read’ part of the web. However, it is more difficult to find evidence of libraries that deal effectively with digital content that makes use of the ‘write’ capabilities of Web 2.0 or user-generated content. The Horizon Report (2007, p.9) identified user created content as the technology that is most likely to have an immediate impact on teaching and learning, with the people formerly known as the users now very much in control of everything ‘from classifying and tagging to creating and uploading.’ As organisations that declare the users (or the learners) to be at the centre of their service, libraries seem particularly slow to trust their users and give them any of this control.

This paper considers three elements of Web 2.0 philosophy and practice which represent a starting point for library staff seeking to optimise the learning potential of the read/write web. Social bookmarking invites users into the process of collecting and helps them develop concepts and practices around collaboration, collective intelligence and social tagging. User-generated content recognises that contribution from the community builds authenticity, creativity and innovation and raises issues of digital archiving, personalisation and point of view. Open licensing maximises the value of content by facilitating free flow of information, media, data and ideas, and enables users to remix these to create new content.

Social bookmarking

‘The only group that can categorize everything is everybody.’ (Shirky 2005)

There are a number of catch phrases that sum up the power of people in Web 2.0. ‘We are smarter than me’ (Libert and Spector 2007), ‘harnessing collective intelligence’ and ‘network effect’ (O’Reilly 2006) are integral to applications of Web 2.0. Social bookmarking (CMIS 2009) is one of the most accessible tools for demonstrating the power of personal influence and social networks. Helping teachers and students make good use of personalised knowledge management tools such as online bookmarking and annotation services is an area of natural fit for library staff. Social bookmarking has been mainstream for five years and the benefits and issues of this way of collecting and describing resources have been well documented. (Lomas 2005; Gazan 2008; Churchill 2009) Why then does the suggestion that students might contribute to the library catalogue or update an encyclopedia come as a surprise (and shock) to many library staff?

Reference and marketing literature has long referred to the power of personal influence and informal research networks in how people make choices about resources. According to a Nielsen survey (2009) recommendations from personal acquaintances or opinions posted online are now the most trusted forms of advertising. Vuorikari and Koper (2009) researching techniques that assist users in obtaining information to meet their information needs by harnessing the knowledge or experience of other users, found that ‘search taking advantage of Social Information
Retrieval (SIR) methods yields more relevant resources with less effort from the user. If part of a library’s mission is to help patrons find resources, then surely techniques that yield more relevant resources more effectively would be readily adopted and promoted?

Unfortunately for many libraries the technology available for resource discovery is part of an integrated library management system, designed over 20 years ago which functions primarily as a stock control system. With digital content Shirky (2005) reminds us ‘there is no shelf’ and it is the content not the container that concerns us. Voss (2007, p.7) compares today’s tagging websites with ‘stone age’ traditional knowledge organization systems which he describes as ‘effective but just too uncomfortable.’ Coyle (2007, p. 290) stresses that most library catalogues are ‘un-social’ and Furner (2007, p.3) describes ‘OPAC 2.0’ a model for the redesigned ‘social OPAC’. The challenge for library staff is to redesign systems that use the best of traditional library models and the best of the social web philosophy and practices. Sokvitne (2006) describes how the State Library of Tasmania started with the idea of unhooking the OPAC by exporting bibliographic data to a separate search facility, and also considered ways to share evaluative and usage data about resources. Another model is for libraries to integrate their services with social web services such as Amazon, Facebook or LibraryThing. LibraryThing for Libraries (Sparling 2008) is a service that displays user-generated metadata from the LibraryThing social-cataloguing site in an individual library’s catalogue. The data consists of tags, recommendations, and links to other editions and translations of works, and the critical mass of user-generated metadata available from such a service exceeds what an individual library would be able to generate.

We don’t yet know what the optimum resource discovery infrastructure of the future will be, but we can start trialling options and investigating what works. Some things can be predicted from current user behaviour. For example, stand alone databases are often underused (Kim 2006, p. 1715) unless access to them is seamless from wherever the user is. This will no doubt be the same with user generated content and social bookmarking. To be useful the search interface has to be wherever the user is, whether that be the learning management system, the library catalogue or a search engine. There is also a strong indication that connections with other people will become as important in resource discovery as resource collections, and while the role of the library in this new scenario is still evolving. Farmer (2007, p. xi) provides a simple way to judge the impact of the library in supporting this world of connections.

If the librarian impedes the connection then a disservice has been done. If however, the librarian facilitates the connection, then a value-added service has occurred.

User-generated content

‘Web 2.0 users are contributors, not consumers.’ (Dodds 2006, p.230)

User generated content is a key concept of Web 2.0 and one which fits perfectly with constructivist education philosophies. In its definition of user contributed content, the OECD (2007, p.4) includes an expectation that ‘a certain amount of creative effort was put into creating the work or adapting existing works to construct a new one; i.e.

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users must add their own value to the work’. Resnick (2007, p.3) states ‘if we want children to develop as creative thinkers, we need to provide them with more opportunities to create’. His message is that consuming and interacting with content alone is not enough, we need to be involved in creating, constructing, designing, and reflecting about what we create. As a member of the team that developed the graphical programming language Scratch Resnick is talking about more than just creation of text and media based on other people’s tools. He includes designing, building and coding interactive objects, ie programming. Prensky (2008) affirms this message asserting that ‘power will soon belong to those who can master a variety of expressive human-machine interactions’.

Teacher librarians spend lots of time educating about third party content and issues such as locating information, note taking, plagiarism, attribution and presentation of others’ ideas. The challenge is to balance this with teaching about the more demanding issues of personalised content, addressing elements such as planning, deep thinking, reflection, writing for an audience, plus creation and presentation of original ideas in both text and media rich contexts. Learning about social tools and their use is important for students, but learning about this in Web 1.0 style information literacy programmes is not helpful. McCrindle’s (2007, p.5) research on attitudes of 21st century students counsels that ‘they are looking for relating, mentoring and guidance’. If we accept that educational institutions have an obligation to help their students develop the skills they may need to work in this environment, then we must also accept the imperative that educational institutions will employ the tools and principles that underpin the read/write web.

There is a potential disconnect between those who are teaching about user-generated content but are not themselves experiencing or modelling active contribution in online communities. Experience is the best way to learn about the online safety, identity management and digital footprint issues (Madden 2007) which arise because the very personalisation which delivers the power of Web 2.0 requires users to publish information and opinion which would traditionally have had a much smaller, more controlled audience. While there are plenty of cyber safety education resources available, many of these come from a negative, worst case scenario perspective rather than helping users take a positive, proactive approach to developing their online identity. Collaborative learning and publishing and online community building require new skills and plenty of practice in goal setting, sharing, considering viewpoints, negotiation and responsible citizenship. There are benefits for teachers and students in developing such skills, and teachers who have gone down this path highlight the power of writing for a real audience, of the reputation building that happens as those with special skills and interests can connect with a wider community of learners and of the self-esteem boost for writers, bloggers and media producers when others comment favourably on their work.

What content do ‘users’ generate in educational institutions? Teachers create curriculum, lesson plans, teaching activities and presentations, they design assessment rubrics, tests, and examinations and increasingly they develop online courses. Leaders create policies, reports, promotional material, speeches, building specifications, strategic plans and professional learning programmes. Students create artworks, models, stories, essays, oral presentations, games and research projects. Library staff

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create displays, reading lists, procedures, user guides, answers to reference questions, teaching programmes, promotional material, presentations and catalogue records. Many people take photographs, videorecordings, take part in sport, drama, dance and music performances and write reports on school activities. How much of the content created by the people in your organisation is collected, organised and curated in the organisation? How accessible is it to other members of the school community, and how is it shared with the wider education community?

What if this content was published openly? If staff were to post their reading lists, procedures manual, teaching programmes and photos of their displays online, would this negatively impact on their reputation, their job or their ability to do their job? Would anyone else be harmed by publishing this content online? If not, then the question is whether there could be any benefit from this change in practice? Staff and leadership within the school might have a better idea of what library staff are doing and offering. Staff in other schools might be able to save time and produce better informed policy and learning activities. Students of school librarianship might see what was happening in schools and better appreciate the demands and value of school libraries. Parents might be more aware, and perhaps more engaged in what is happening in their child’s school. The staff member who is sharing their material might enhance their reputation in the education community.

Part of the challenge presented by user-generated content is to stop and rethink what it is that we value in education by considering what we give lesson time, resources and recognition to? Do we promote anything other than commercially published content, subscription services and safe, non-controversial viewpoints? Do we give awards for creativity, innovation and original thought, or just for the ability to retrieve or recite existing knowledge? Hawtin (2008) notes that ‘the opportunity space for innovation has a strong relationship to the kinds of value propositions which exist within a school context and beyond to the education sector, communities of parents and potential employers’. Nevertheless we owe it to our students to question the current consumer-culture in which they are caught.

What incentives can we provide for students, teachers, leaders and library staff to share their content? It is important to make the process easy and also to ensure contributors receive feedback on who or how many people are accessing their content. Provide access for other users to comment and provide feedback, and take opportunities to promote and re-use locally grown material with acknowledgement in your own bibliographies and information packages. However, if we are to assist our community to move from being merely consumers of information to contributors and creators, one of the areas that requires urgent attention is our community’s understanding of 21st century copyright.

Open licensing

‘There is one word that sums up everything web 2.0: ‘openness’.’ (Helge 2006)

This response to a definition of Web 2.0 is a great starting point in considering the fundamental shift in thinking between traditional models of publishing, licensing and
education and the models that are represented in open access, open source and open education initiatives as defined in the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (2008). Traditional school resourcing has reinforced 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 is not necessarily the best model for learners in the read/write era.

The advent of open licensing initiatives such as Creative Commons (2008) has radically changed this environment in favour of increased openness and sharing of content online. It is not only the high cost of current education copyright licence regimes that makes use of commons resources attractive. The ability for teachers to adapt, build upon, remix and re-share learning resources licensed this way has the potential to greatly enhance efficiency and creativity of teaching and learning. Allowing teachers and students to find resources that are licensed in a way that encourages them to use, share and modify content will assist educators to more easily develop relevant learning materials for their students, and encourage them to build on the work of others and to share their own work with other educators. There is an emerging view that eventually any information or learning resource that is not OPEN will be ignored by teachers and students because of the associated limitations on use, reuse and remixing.

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

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

What is particularly exciting is to see openness becoming an issue in policy platforms such as the Seoul Declaration for the future of the Internet economy (2008, p.7) which commits signatories to ‘maintain an open environment that supports the free flow of information, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and business transformation’. The recent paper Australia’s Digital Economy (DBCDE 2009, p.3) reports a growing volume of support for the notion that the Australian Government should provide access to public sector information (PSI) on terms that clearly permit the use and re-use of that information. Open government advocates such as Senator Lundy (2009) are working actively for this, and there is a growing cry that research funded by public money should be in the public domain. As we see government policy start to reflect this shift with respect to open access to information (Coates 2008) it is interesting to consider how education might change if we were to adopt such policies.

School libraries can support creative educators and students by providing and promoting efficient access to sources of open learning resources. The Wikimedia (2009) philosophy of bringing free content to the world is being picked up by other projects such as WikiEducator (2009), which is working to develop free content for e-learning. Ensuring the availability of licence-based search is an important strategy for
increasing access to this material. How does your school library policy reflect the values of openness? What proportion of your time is spent teaching about copyright as opposed to time is spent teaching about open licensing and attribution of digital content? Does your school library catalogue include or promote open licensed resources and media?

_The Horizon report_ (2009, p.20-21) refers to the personalisation of learning resources enabled by Web 2.0. ‘Many online texts allow professors to edit, add to, or otherwise customize material for their own purposes, so that their students receive a tailored copy that exactly suits the style and pace of the course’. This provides a challenge for schools and libraries that have systems set up around cataloguing and managing resources and textbooks as static physical objects instead of as flexible, digital content that can be repackaged according to individual needs. Creator of the Web 2.0 term, Tim O’Reilly (2006a) makes the point that Web 2.0 saves users re-inventing the wheel continuously, and admonishes data and service providers to ‘open your data and services for re-use by others, and re-use the data and services of others whenever possible.’ We all learn faster when we piggyback on the learning of colleagues. The web builds faster when we build on the back of those who have similar requirements.

**Conclusion**

Leadbeater (2008, p.14) sums up the importance of these major shifts in thinking.

In the 20th century you were identified by what you owned: your car, your house. In the 21st century we will also be defined by how we share and what we give away. That is why the web matters so much. It will allow us to share and so to be creative in new ways.

There are many tools and services that can assist students, teachers and library staff to share and be creative in new ways. Implementing some form of social bookmarking that aggregates user-generated interest indicators such as ratings, bookmarks and tags is an excellent starting point, and one that can quickly provide diversity of viewpoints and formats compared to traditional collections. Wikis represent one of the most accessible and flexible platforms for building knowledge and collaborative learning. Todd (2008) describes the power of wikis in terms such as ‘open, contributory, living documents that facilitate social construction of knowledge, negotiation of meaning, and group’s best effort, not an individual’. 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. The ease of publishing online through a blog or an e-portfolio means everyone can have a place to voice opinions, ideas, and research and to house their online contributions. _Edublogs_ provides blogs for students and teachers while the _me.edu.au_ service provides an online professional profile and blog for every Australian educator.

Amongst all these opportunities to be creative Godwin and Parker (2008, p.178) remind us that information literacy remains the most important of the patchwork of capabilities which will help make sense of the world. As information specialists it is our responsibility to show leadership in the shift from traditional educational content
to the read/write web. By constantly asking ‘is there an open way of accessing and
organising educational content?’ library staff can reduce duplication of effort and cost
of content. By inviting the people formerly known as the users into the collection, we
can reduce the ‘content miles’ of that educational content and showcase the variety,
freshness and freedom of open, user-generated content that has local interest and
context.

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