Chapter 7
"I Love Being Able to Have my Colleagues Around the World at my Fingertips:"
Connecting Teacher–Librarians in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-librarians are often "lone wolves" in schools. This chapter explores how Canadian teacher-librarians are participating in life-long learning in the 21st century using Web 2.0 technologies. It also explores how one online distance education program implemented changes to help prepare teacher-librarians to participate in local and global personal learning networks. Findings from a Canadian survey on this topic found that teacher-librarians often seek out other teacher-librarians for advice and support, as well as relying on regular interaction (both face-to-face and online) with their colleagues. Other informal professional learning occurs through listservs, online networks, Elluminate sessions, webinars, TED talks, podcasts, Nings, blogs, and Twitter. New and emerging technologies are helping teacher-librarians connect to one another locally and, more importantly, globally. It is this combination of both local and global personal learning networks that helps teacher-librarians move from being lone wolves to members of the pack.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher-librarians (see Key Terms) are often lone wolves in schools, in that they rarely have peers to consult with who do the same work. To continue keeping up to date and learning more about their roles and responsibilities, teacher-librarians are learning to build, building and maintaining professional learning networks.

What do finding a job, finding others who share an interest in quilting, getting medical advice, and improving teaching and learning have in common? All of these actions require individuals to draw on information or expertise through their ties to others in social networks. The study of people's social ties, the resources they obtain from them, and the communication tools - such as the Internet - that facilitate the flow of expertise and resources makes up an evolving science of networks that can help us better understand how to support and promote school change (Penuel & Riel, 2007, para. 1).

This chapter explores how Canadian teacher-librarians are participating in life-long learning in the 21st Century using Web 2.0 (see Key Terms) technologies. It will also explore how one online distance education program implemented changes to help prepare teacher-librarians to participate in local and global personal learning networks (see Key Terms).

For teacher-librarians to be effective educators and active participants in their own professional learning, they need to be familiar and comfortable with Web 2.0. Also known as the *Read-Write Web, Web 2.0* refers to the new web-based tools that are readily available and used to create, communicate and collaborate with others. Blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing sites (*Blogger*, *PBWiki*, *Flickr* and *YouTube*), production tools (*Animoto*, *Voicethread*, *Prezi*) and social networking (e.g., *Facebook* and *Twitter*) are all examples of *Web 2.0* tools.

Our approach in the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning (TLDL) program at the University of Alberta (UA), Edmonton, is to expose teacher-librarians to a variety of Web 2.0 tools in their program and to provide assignments, assessments, and experiences that help them become active participants in online culture. Because this program has been completely taught online since 1997, distance education principles and philosophies are embedded in the way we think about teaching and learning. The *Pew Internet & American Life Project* found that "64% of online teens aged 12-17 have participated in one or more among a wide range of content-creating activities on the Internet, up from 57% of online teens in a similar survey at the end of 2004" (Lenhart, Madden, Rankin, Macgill, & Smith, 2007, para. 2). Helping teacher-librarians understand the digital experiences of young people while also helping them to learn how to be active participants in these new collaborative environments must be a part of graduate education in teacher-librarianship. This is especially true when teacher-librarians are learning completely online and at a distance. They too need to use these online tools to connect with one another, with their instructors and with other professionals in order to reach out from their isolated positions in schools and school districts.

Creating content and sharing it online using a variety of Web 2.0 tools (such as blogs, wikis, cartoons, *Facebook* pages, etc.) are referred to by Jenkins *et al.* (2006) as participatory culture (see Key Terms). In *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Cutlure: Media Education for the 21st Century*, they describe participatory culture as:

A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to the novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with

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