Case Profile: Ellen Hampton Filgo

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Abstract

Ellen Hampton Filgo, an academic librarian at Baylor University, conceptualizes her work as an embedded librarian as improvisational, like jazz, as her instructional help and interaction with students plays off the class discussion in which she participates through Twitter and blogs. This case study outlines how Filgo became a vital resource for class discussions and research on a weekly basis in a first-year university honors course exploring new media studies.

Ellen Hampton Filgo is the e-learning librarian in the reference and instruction department of Baylor University Libraries. Her work as an embedded librarian at Baylor reflects her interests in the instructional uses of social networking media and ways libraries can use and adapt Web 2.0 tools to improve access to online resources.

Filgo's work as an embedded librarian began in Dr. Gardner Campbell's first-year honors seminar, "From Memex to YouTube: Introduction to New Media Studies," a class designed to explore a diverse range of digital media through many different contextual lenses. Filgo and Campbell's collaborative partnership was initially inspired by Filgo's viewing of Dr. Monica Rankin's YouTube video chronicling her experimental use of Twitter as a learning tool in her University of Texas at Dallas history course as well as by Cole Camplese's use of Twitter in his educational technology courses.[1] Filgo, who thought Twitter could provide her with a unique opportunity to be an embedded librarian in a content area course, approached Dr. Campbell, who was the director of Baylor's Academy for Teaching and Learning, with the idea. Campbell wanted his students to construct and experience a **personal cyberinfrastructure**, a learning environment in which they would "acquire crucial technical skills for their digital lives but also would engage in work that provides richly teachable moments ranging from multimodal writing to information science, knowledge management, bibliographic instruction, and social networking. Fascinating and important innovations would emerge as students are able to shape their own cognition, learning, expression, and reflection in a digital age, in a digital medium. Students would frame, curate, share, and direct their own 'engagement streams' throughout the learning environment."[2]

The class blog (see figure 6) was the virtual centerpiece for students in the new media studies course. Because the course blog included RSS feeds for the course hashtag Tweets, student blogs, the course bookmarks via Delicious, and Filgo's course librarian blog, everyone was able to easily access each other's content and interact with that content in a variety of virtual media and applications like Google Reader and TweetDeck to organize and follow the information streams.

Embedded Instruction and Help through Twitter

Because students were using Twitter as a backchannel for class conversation during face-to-face meetings, Filgo needed a way to organize the Twitter communications as she followed and interacted with the class virtually from her office. Filgo's organizational strategy was to create groups that she could easily monitor and follow in TweetDeck, a free application that allows users to organize streams of Twitter users and hashtags. TweetChat is another tool one can use to track and participate in a specific hashtag discussion.
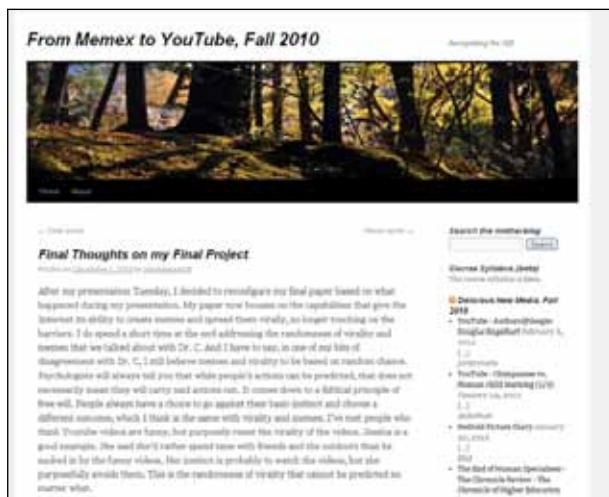
Figure 6
"From Memex to YouTube" Fall 2010 Course Blog

Filgo created groups for course hashtags #nmsf09 and #nms_f10; she also created a group with the user-names of each class member.

TweetDeck
www.tweetdeck.com

TweetChat
http://tweetchat.com

Since students were not accustomed to a librarian being an instructional partner in their college coursework, Campbell would remind students at the beginning of the class of Filgo's virtual presence; this opening Twitter greeting was also a cue to Filgo that discussion was beginning so that she was prepared and focused on interacting with students through the virtual discussion. Filgo's professional skills in multitasking and search strategies were sharpened since she had to be ready to respond to a comment or inquiry on a moment's notice on any topic that came up during the class conversation. How did Filgo contribute to these Twitter conversations? Her interactions took many forms, including providing

- resources related to the author the class was reading or discussing, including articles from the library's databases, *Wikipedia* articles, and YouTube videos
- titles of related books or readings relevant to a topic or author of study
- resources related to comments Tweeted by students that might have seemed off topic but that Filgo tried to relate back to the main class conversation
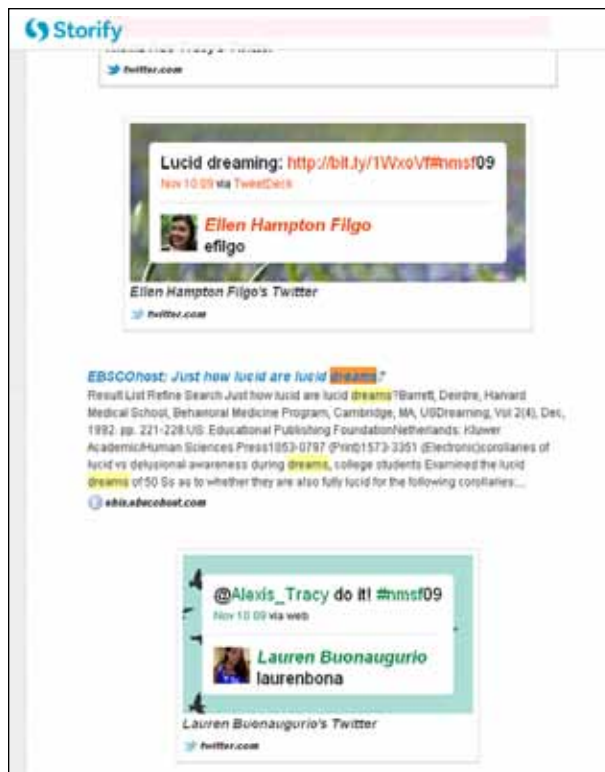

Figure 7
Librarian Jazz on Storify

Filgo came to conceptualize this interaction as **Librarian Jazz** (see figure 7). In reflecting on her experiences, Filgo mused, "The class discussion was the music and the melody was happening in another classroom across campus. Every once in a while, the students would throw out a note or two, or a stray chord, which I would pick up through Twitter. I had to improvise, tossing out my own chords and riffs back into the Twitter stream, hoping that they would add to the music being made."[3] One example of this Librarian Jazz was a class discussion about the Clifford D. Simak short science fiction story "The Immigrant." Filgo had not had an opportunity to read the story prior to the class discussion and experienced difficulty inferring the key ideas about the work from the Twitter conversation, so she did some research on the author; she discovered a collection of Simak's papers through the University of Minnesota. She decided to Tweet the link to the collection as well as a link to the covers of *Astounding Science Fiction* in which "The Immigrant" was published in 1954. Within a few minutes, a student sent a direct message to Filgo wanting to know if she could find any similar articles and resources for another 1950s science fiction writer, Rilke; Filgo responded by starting a new search and within a few minutes, she was able to provide links to the requested materials to a very appreciate student. While the

author material requested by the student was not directly linked to the course discussion that particular day, Filgo's willingness to provide assistance in an immediate and personal manner made an impression and helped to create a rapport between librarian and student while showing the power of improvised search and how one topic can lead to an interest in another.

In another case of improvisation and meeting learners at their point of need, Filgo helped a student discover a career pathway. After watching a clip from the film *Waking Life,* the class was engaging in a discussion about the concept of lucid dreaming; while Filgo was Tweeting resources for this concept, the class began discussing the term *oneirology*, the scientific study of dreams. After a student expressed an interest in exploring oneirology as a career, Filgo searched the library's card catalog and Tweeted information about a three-volume work on the emerging science of the study of dreams. The student, who immediately Tweeted, "I want that book!" was so delighted with the immediate response from Filgo that she nearly jumped out of her chair with excitement. Additionally, the assistance Filgo provided helped cultivate a relationship with this student that would go beyond this particular course; the student sought Filgo's help in subsequent semesters for research projects in other courses.

You can see the curated content of these instances of Librarian Jazz on Filgo's Storify account.

Figure 8
Twitter Conversations for Learning Between Ellen Hampton Filgo and Students

Librarian Jazz on Storify
http://storify.com/efilgo/librarian-jazz

Blogs as a Medium for Help and Student Interaction

Blogs provided Filgo another medium for following the progress of student thinking and content creation. Filgo, who subscribed to a master RSS feed that Campbell had created for all student blog feeds, kept up with student posts through Google Reader. When appropriate, Filgo would provide feedback, commentary, and helpful resources in response to student posts. This medium of interaction took on even greater significance as students began blogging more about the final research projects; consequently, Filgo was able to provide more feedback on blog posts and intervention for students who had questions or who were struggling as part of the formative assessment process. Because she was able to interact with students through the blogs in a one-on-one manner, Filgo was able to help students through the entire research process, which was especially important as students were exploring possible research topics and formulating their strategies for accessing information sources and organizing their findings for their projects. This early and regular intervention resulted in research projects that were of higher quality and less stressful for students since they were receiving personalized and regular feedback from Filgo.

Reflections on Student Learning and Partnerships for Learning

Students came to regard Filgo as the "magical librarian" or "guardian librarian" because of her expertise in providing resources in such a spontaneous and timely manner through the Twitter backchannel and her virtual assistance through their learning blogs (see figure 9). In an informal postcourse survey, students shared extremely positive feedback about having an embedded librarian in their course. According to Filgo, one student remarked, "The librarian's participation was, I think, a critical part of the class because the librarian was able to provide outside resources and spend time looking for those resources that proved relevant to the class, a task which students would be unlikely to do at all, much less during a class."[4]

In addition, students indicated they felt their level of expertise about library resources and search skills improved as a result of Filgo's role as an instructional

Figure 9
Ellen Hampton Filgo Poster Session, "The Hashtag Librarian," ACRL 2011 (used with permission)

partner in the course. Filgo also found that her interaction with students increased outside of class, including an increase in the number of students booking appointment for reference help; many students also sought additional virtual help for the course assignments as well as research project challenges in other courses through e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook. These transactional learning experiences cultivated a sense of trust, and the relationship between the librarian and students transcended just one semester; students regarded Filgo as more than a librarian—they came to see her as a guide, a learning coach, and a teacher who cared about their work and who was genuinely happy to provide assistance and help develop their skills. Because she was naturally integrated into the course as an essential resource, her assistance and instruction were more authentic for students' learning experiences.

Best Practices and Suggestions for Implementation

The two-year partnership for learning between Filgo and Campbell provided them with insights into best steps and practices for establishing this type of embedded instruction from librarians into content area courses:

- The librarian should attend at least one initial class meeting to help students put a face with the librarian's name. Even one face-to-face meeting with students can help establish a bridge in the relationship between the physical class meetings and the librarian's virtual participation. Additional periodic visits during the semester can also enhance the relationship-building process in the learning community.

- Embedded librarianship is a time-intensive endeavor, so plan your schedule thoughtfully. For this particular course, Filgo was committed to participating virtually twice during the week for a total of three hours a week; in addition, she spent time outside of class on reading student Tweets, blog posts, e-mails, and Facebook messages, as well as on one-on-one reference sessions.
- Create and use a course hashtag to focus students' Tweets around a class identity and to provide a common hashtag for organizing the virtual conversations for learning.
- Archive your course Tweets since Twitter's search ability is limited. TwapperKeeper was a popular choice for many, but it was recently purchased by Hootsuite; it is not clear at this time if or how Hootsuite will support the archiving of Tweets.
- Consider media for curating all course social media streams and conversations for learning. Tools like Storify and Summify can pull in feeds from your course social media networks.

Storify
http://storify.com

Summify
www.summify.com

- Use a URL shortener that provides statistics on the number of click-throughs to evaluate the effectiveness and use of librarian-Tweeted resources by participants. Bitly and Google's URL shortener are two possible choices.

Bitly
http://bitly.com

Google URL shortener
http://goo.gl

- Choose your partnerships wisely—teachers who are willing to share the control of content and instructional design and to take risks as instructors and learners themselves are the best candidates for establishing this type of teaching partnership. Filgo believes that "what is important is an understanding that the professor and the students can use new technologies to work and learn together."[5]
- Focus on creating connections with students and the learning community so that you can build a sense of trust and show students you are fully invested in enhancing their learning experiences.

Conclusion

Filgo's experiences represent the possibilities for a librarian to become meaningfully embedded in the lives of students and to enrich the learning experiences in content area courses. Rather than waiting for students to come to us, these forms of embedded librarianship allow librarians to create conversations for learning in the context of real-world information-seeking tasks. By modeling effective information and digital literacy skills and strategies on a regular basis as part of a class discussion and through one-on-one personal interactions, librarians can elevate their roles as teacher and instructional partner with faculty so that students gain confidence not only in themselves as learners but also in librarians as real people who can provide meaningful help throughout the student's academic experience.

Notes

1. Monica Rankin and Kim Smith, "The Twitter Experiment: Twitter in the Classroom," video, YouTube, May 2, 2009, accessed Dec. 29, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WPVWDkF7U8. Cole Camplese, "Connections," http://colecamplese.typepad.com/my_blog/2008/05/connections.html.
2. Gardner Campbell, "A Personal Cyberinfrastructure." *EDUCAUSE Review* 44, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2009): 58–59, accessed Dec. 5, 2011, www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume44/APersonalCyberinfrastructure/178431.
3. Ellen Hampton Filgo, "Hashtag Librarian: Embedded in a Class via Twitter and Blogs," EllenFilgo.net, 2011, accessed Dec. 5, 2011, www.ellenfilgo.net/hashtag-librarian.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.