Chapter 1

Introduction

Abstract

As more libraries focus on relationships and learning rather than being the warehouses of "things," librarians are exploring how they can more effectively offer instructional services to meet the needs of their learning communities.

As libraries shift their focus from being warehouses of books and materials to being places of learning and participatory sites of culture in their respective communities, librarians are reframing their roles to reflect these changes. As librarians seek to raise their profile as instructional partners and mentors for learning, many are revisiting the model of embedded librarianship, a model that "takes a librarian out of the context of the traditional library and places him or her in an 'on-site' setting or situation that enables close coordination and collaboration with researchers or teaching faculty."[1] When librarians are able to embed themselves in a learning community, they are able to "demonstrate their expertise as information specialists and to apply this expertise in ways that will have a direct and deep impact on the research, teaching, or other work being done. Through embedded librarianship, librarians move from a supporting role into partnerships with their clientele, enabling librarians to develop stronger connections and relationships with those they serve."[2]

I would argue that contemporary and emerging forms of embedded librarianship go beyond demonstrating librarians' expertise and instead seek to "distribute" the library by helping novice learners (students) build expertise and to position the learning community in which they are embedded as a participatory site of culture.[3] Additionally, embedded librarianship should do more than help convey information to students; it should help students master literacies, processes, and skills that are part of what Dr. James Gee calls **passionate affinity-based learning**. What does this kind of learning look like in a physical or virtual learning environment or some combination of the two? According to Gee, passionate affinity-based learning transpires when "people organize themselves in the real world and/or via the Internet (or a virtual world) to learn something connected to a shared endeavor, interest, or passion. The people have an affinity (attraction) to the shared endeavor, interest, or passion first and foremost and then to other people because of their shared affinity."[4] As we'll see in this report's case studies, embedded librarianship provides librarians with the opportunity to support and facilitate the qualities and conditions needed for an affinity group or space for learning:

- The group is formed around a "shared endeavor or interest."
- At least some of the people "must have a deep passion for the common endeavor," and the "passion may be reflected in different ways."
- The emphasis is on production of knowledge, not consumption; there are standards about what counts as "good" production.
- Leadership is flexible and shared, and mentoring is a hallmark.
- "Knowledge in the affinity space is 'distributed' in the sense that different people know different things and can share that knowledge when necessary." Everyone brings different degrees and types of expertise to the community.
- "There may be some requirements for entry," but "the affinity space is not closed" and is organic. Different learning paths are valued and encouraged.

- Lifelong learning is valued as novice and expert learners both strive to seek and produce new knowledge.[5]

As information literacy becomes an essential literacy and form of cultural capital in today's world, embedded librarianship offers exciting possibilities for teaching these processes and skills within content area study over an extended period of time. Virtual means of instruction can supplement, or in some cases replace, face-to-face interaction and instruction. As librarians also take on more ownership of teaching digital and new media literacies, they are experimenting with best practices and tools for harnessing the power of social media and cloud computing to connect, interact, and engage in conversations for learning with people while offering support from afar. Such support can also encourage people to utilize the services of the librarian in a face-to-face setting. In addition, librarians are reconceptualizing ways to use free and subscription-based virtual tools for learning as more libraries and learning communities offer distance learning options.

At the heart of successful partnerships for learning is gaining the confidence and faith of those with whom we collaborate. Building relationships and trust with both instructors and students is essential for the success and sustainability of the embedded librarian model in any setting. By integrating the librarian into projects that meet people at their points of need, librarians and those with whom librarians are collaborating cultivate a more authentic and meaningful relationship, as all stakeholders learn from the transactions occurring in the project, course, or unit of study.

The Scope of This Report

The history and case studies of embedded librarianship in academic and special libraries have been well-documented in journal articles and books in the last decade. Librarians are often formally embedded in clinical medical libraries, among professionals in a specific workplace, in an academic department, and, to varying degrees, in core academic courses in which they support content area standards as well as instructional literacy learning targets.[6] In these environments, the technology used to embed librarians has primarily been virtual reference and course management systems (CMS) like Blackboard and Moodle. In these virtual learning environments, the librarian primarily provides instructional resources; answers questions via chat, discussion boards, or e-mail; and offers links and information on library resources. In many cases, librarians also use social bookmarking to provide links and give citation assistance. More recently, embedded librarians are becoming essential members of research teams in academic institutions.[7]

This report focuses on ways librarians are utilizing free or low-cost social media and cloud computing applications to not only provide services and resources to patrons but to also cultivate learning experiences that spark and sustain conversations that will prove transformative for both the librarians and their learning partners. The technologies mentioned in this report are merely media for the core of embedded librarianship: transactional learning experiences in context and the librarian becoming an essential node[8] in the personal learning environments of nonlibrarians. The technologies used by librarians to embed themselves in a learning community are most effective when librarians can see how "*SICTs* (social, information, and communication technologies) . . . are effectively built on personal and experiential knowledge and best translated into thoughtful targets during instructional design. Understanding the competencies of your audience, the resources available in your environment, and your own comfort zones as an instructor allows you to more seamlessly integrate pedagogy and technology. Developing actionable knowledge of instructional affordances enables you to recognize the potential of a specific tool or approach to 'fit' a teaching moment."[9] In other words, pedagogy and learning targets drive the use and integration of technology to support those experiences.

Embedded Librarianship for Transformative and Situated Learning

In his blog post "Beyond Mindless Progressivism," Gee describes learning ecosystems that embody "post-progressive pedagogy" and a particular thread of this pedagogy he calls "situated learning." In the case studies in this report, readers will see glimpses of these particular characteristics of Gee's vision of situated learning:

1. Multiple routes to full and central participation for all members of a group . . . organized around an interest and a passion to which the interest might lead.
2. Multiple routes to everyone learning to produce the knowledge, dispositions, skills, and tools necessary to sustain, extend, and transform the interest and the passion.
3. Interest kindles motivation and the desire to explore. The interest must then be channeled into a passion so that learners persist towards mastery via a great many hours of practice. Otherwise learners need to find another interest that will lead to a passion. . . .
5. Feedback is copious. . . . [Plentiful data through multiple media] across time is collected and used to [empower] learners, assess their growth and

development over time, and assess, compare, and contrast (for both learners and stakeholders) different possible trajectories to mastery, including ones that lead to innovation and creativity. . . .

8. All learners must be able to pool their [area of expertise] with other people's different specialties and integrate their [expertise] with other people's specialties by seeing the "big picture" to solve problems that no one specialty can solve. [In other words, the crowdsourcing of knowledge and problem solving is vital.]
9. All learners are well mentored by "teachers" and peers at various levels, as well as by the presence of smart tools and well-designed problem solving environments (both real and virtual). All learners must learn to mentor.
10. "Teachers" are designers of learning environments that meet all the above conditions and they resource people's learning in an adaptive and [authentically] responsive way [in the context of real information-seeking needs].
11. Direct instruction and texts are offered "just in time" (when learners can put them to use and see what they really mean) or "on demand" (when learners feel a need for large amounts of instruction or text in their [journey] of problem solving). . . .
14. Learners . . . [utilize] the relationships and connections among different types of skills and knowledge . . . [through multiple resources (human and nonhuman) and develop a better and more nuanced understanding of] the larger social, environmental, and cultural implications of any proposed solution to a problem.[10]

The model of embedded librarianship is a timely and relevant vehicle for librarians to embody and foster this kind of learning environment through their partnerships with other stakeholders in their learning communities. Embedded librarians are uniquely positioned to emphasize people and learning as the essential core of libraries through their work as partners for learning and through positioning passion as the spark for conversations for learning and establishing new communities of learners.

Cultivating Affinity-Based Learning

Through this report's case studies, we'll explore how librarians are using resources—both human and nonhuman—in nontraditional ways and delve into strategies for scaling out traditional best practices through cloud computing and social media. The diversity of the four embedded librarians in this report—a retired school librarian, an elementary school librarian, an academic librarian, and a high school librarian—reflects how flexible and adaptable these teaching technologies are for any learning situation or need. These case studies also demonstrate how embedded librarians can use these teaching technologies to connect with learners of any age, whether young children, teens, young adults, or parents.

These case studies will exemplify unusual and easy-to-replicate methods for positioning the librarian as a linchpin in a variety of contexts. As librarians seek ways to elevate their relevance in their communities in economically challenged times, embedded librarianship is full of possibilities for sharing our skills and knowledge with others in ways that are scalable to any library environment. We hope that this report will energize and inspire your work as practitioner and inform your vision of the possibilities of how learning communities can constructively create the text and narrative known as "library."

Notes

1. Jack Carlson and Ruth Kneale, "Embedded Librarianship in the Research Context: Navigating New Waters," *College & Research Libraries News* 72, no. 3 (March 2011): 167, accessed Dec. 11, 2011, http://crln.acrl.org/content/72/3/167.full.
2. Ibid.
3. Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Chicago: MacArthur Foundation, 2006), 7, accessed Oct. 14, 2010, http://digitallearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF.
4. James Paul Gee, "Society and Higher Education Part 5," *James Paul Gee* (blog), Feb. 12, 2011, accessed Dec. 12, 2011, www.jamespaulgee.com/node/50.
5. Ibid.
6. Matthew Brower, "A Recent History of Embedded Librarianship: Collaboration and Partnership Building with Academics in Learning and Research Environments," in *Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-Shot Instruction,* edited by Cassandra Kvenild and Kaijsa Calkins, 5–12 (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2011).
7. Carlson and Kneale, "Embedded Librarianship."
8. "Nodes are actors in networks . . . that provide information and advice that help people make decisions or cope with problems." "Lee Rainie: Why New Media Are Becoming Your New Neighborhood," Project Information Literacy *Smart Talks, no. 7 (June 8, 2011), http://projectinfolit.org/st/rainie.asp. See also Michelle Boule's comments on this idea on the ALA TechSource blog,* www.alatechsource.org/blog/2011/06/becoming-nodes-of-information.html."
9. Char Booth, *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning: Instructional Literacy for Library Educators* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2011), 72.
10. James Paul Gee, "Beyond Mindless Progressivism," *James Paul Gee* (blog), March 9, 2011, accessed Dec. 12, 2011, www.jamespaulgee.com/node/51.