Sociologist C. Wright Mills called it “making the familiar strange” (quoted in Conley 2011).

Reflection is necessary, but hard to come by, in today’s “do more with less” environment. This issue of Knowledge Quest is meant as a pause to reflect. It is a pause to look at new trends, as well as tried-and-true foundations of our profession, in ways that may make some of us uncomfortable. Certainly, we know that it can be uncomfortable to stop and look, to step off the conveyor belt, and question its direction, and yet the effort must be made.

We invited authors to write about topics and trends in our profession that are either overlooked or need to be revisited. Many of these topics include concerns related to the tension between private rights and corporate interests, highlighting the need to take action to defend our users’ access, privacy, and freedom to choose. Some views expressed in this issue may make you mad or spark disagreement. We don’t expect everyone to agree with every point made in this issue. We hope, though, that readers will experience the kind of discomfort that raises questions, invites a dialogue, and provokes new thinking.

In This Issue

The term “grit” has turned up in many publishing and media venues. In Kevin Hodgson’s online exclusive on local advocacy, he tells how views on grit in the context of education sparked high school teacher Michele Turner Bernhard’s need to communicate her thoughts on the topic; she used a unique publishing partnership with a local newspaper, the Daily Hampshire Gazette. His article highlights ways in which the “write a letter to the editor” impulse can be extended to inform and advocate.

Ira Socol extends the discussion of grit with questions like these: Who is primarily responsible for change of the kind needed to support individual success? Shouldn’t we first look at our systems (of education, of social support, of privilege and access)? Is what children really need abundance?

Chad Sansing, discussing net neutrality, points to key issues at the intersection of ed-tech, bandwidth, and schools. If we cannot count on open and equitable access to content and bandwidth, how can we do the kind of work students deserve? Sansing is a leader in the arena of working openly and in a connected fashion with his students.

Via his Infodocket column for the Digital Shift, Gary Price writes about library and information issues for a large audience. In his online exclusive, Price takes a closer look at the recent newsworthy “right to be forgotten” law and puts it in the larger context of our obligation to teach students to use social media and Web 2.0 tools responsibly.

Ed-tech expert and writer Audrey Watters examines the business and politics of educational products that purport to meet administrative and curricular needs. She also looks at ways implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is reshaping reading and takes a much-needed closer look at Lexile levels.
Susan Grigsby's article extends this discussion of the problems with levels and reading. She offers an antidote to the impulse to categorize and restrict certain texts by reminding us where our focus should begin and end: with the readers themselves.

The many costs of online testing—especially in the context of CCSS implementation—are critically addressed by Wendy Stephens. Her analysis and stories from the trenches bring into sharp focus what testing means for those with limited access to technology. Stephens reminds us that the testing push takes a toll on funding for other programs and reduces availability and time for authentic and productive use of technology in schools.

Lucy Santos Green's article analyzes popular technology models SAMR and TPACK, explaining some of her research and concerns about them. Green cautions us to remember our standard evaluative questions and encourages us to ask them of these models. (We'd add "Who profits?" to her checklist.) Her analysis is part of a bigger discussion about our roles as leaders and professional development providers.

In their article "Update on Ebooks: Changes and Challenges," Shannon Acedo and Cathy Leverkus give us a helpful look at changes in the ebook publishing terrain and how libraries are dealing with critical issues of access and rights. They compare vendors’ histories and practices and show us that, although ebooks acquisition and management are not always straightforward, school librarians can move forward on making ebooks available to their students.

In an honest look at some hard topics around the essence of our profession, Kristin Fontichiaro and Buffy Hamilton ask questions that should trouble all of us. How do we navigate collaborative relationships when schedules work against us and when “in many schools, the vision is not unfolding”? How do we work with harried teachers who just don’t have time for inquiry learning? The key question: What do school librarians do that classroom teachers cannot? They invite us to bring these concerns into open and honest dialogue with colleagues.

Finally, in a piece that reflects recent calls for more diversity in texts, Amy Price Azano encourages us to consider what she calls a “neglected R” in education: rurality. Azano provides helpful suggestions for making the school library an environment where students can actively interrogate the idea of place, no matter where they live.

This issue represents a diverse selection of ideas, which only touches on the many roles we fulfill and communities we serve. We hope these pieces encourage you to reflect on aspects of your own practice that may have fallen by the wayside in times of rapid change. We also hope that these pieces will spark conversations with colleagues inside and outside the school library sphere.

We invite you to join the conversation! If you aren’t already a participant, please consider joining the online discussion at AASLForum <www.ala.org/aasl/about/community/lists/forum>. And speaking of forums, please read Steven Yates’s description of this year’s AASL Fall Forum, “School Librarians in the Anytime Anywhere Learning Landscape,” scheduled for October 17–18 in St. Louis and other locations. Registration is still open!

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Works Cited: