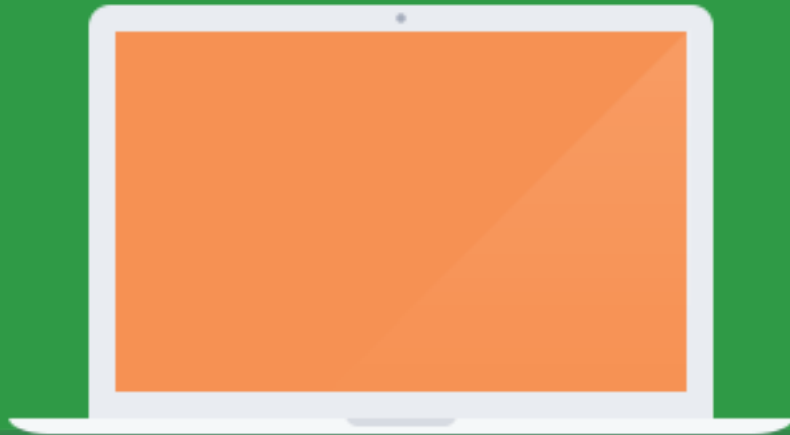


Instructional Partners in Digital Library Learning Spaces



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ASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (2007) call on school librarians to provide students with opportunities to develop essential learning skills for the twenty-first century. These standards are addressed in the school librarian's role as instructional partner. In this role, the school librarian collaborates with teachers to plan, develop, deliver, and assess instruction that infuses technology, inquiry, and information-literacy skills into the subject curriculum. For the most part, school librarians have a clear understanding of how to implement this role in the physical library space.

However, we still do not fully understand how to serve as an instructional partner in the digital library space. Digital library spaces come in many different forms. Virtual libraries, for example, have been a part of school library programs for quite some time. More recently, the flipped classroom movement was adapted for school library instruction. In this article, we differentiate between virtual and flipped library learning spaces and introduce a third digital library learning space: fully online course offerings.

Virtual Libraries

Virtual libraries commonly refer to digital collections and repositories that libraries offer to users. These are "multipage online resources devoted to the needs of their specific learning communities" (Valenza 2005, 54). Virtual libraries provide 24–7 access to a broad collection of resources including online databases, focused pathfinders, links to vetted Web resources, e-books, curated resources, as well as space for hosting student-created projects.

Virtual libraries encourage student exploration and individualized searches. In contrast, flipped libraries are used to scaffold and guide exploration and research in preparation for class assignments.

Flipped Libraries

In the flipped classroom model, the teacher assigns instructional material for students to access outside of class. This material differs from assigned reading or website exploration. Instead, students view tutorial videos, listen to podcast or watch vidcast lectures, or access screencasts. Class time is then used to "work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning" (Roehl, Reddy, and Shannon 2013, 45).

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The flipped library operates in much the same way. Accessing a library-created tutorial on available search tools and library databases, completing a webquest that helps to develop an inquiry plan, reviewing the steps for creating and safely operating a blog—all of these are activities students can complete at home so that when they are in the physical library, the face-to-face time is used for deep exploration,

collaboration, and creation (Jones and Green 2012).

Fully Online Course Offerings

Online learning is defined as "education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet [and] does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component" (Int'l Assoc. for Online Learning 2011).

Online courses designed and developed by school librarians differ from flipped library or virtual library resources in that online courses are fully online learning experiences spanning multiple modules and weeks. Many are hosted in learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Google Sites. These courses contain readings, video and audio resources, discussion forums, spaces for uploading student work, and online grading features. Fully online courses developed by school librarians can address digital literacy, information literacy, and ethics, among many other topics (Lincoln 2009).

Which Roles?

When school librarians develop resources for the flipped library or virtual library space, they are operating under the roles of program administrator and information specialist. They are developing and curating resources for students and teachers. They do not become instructional partners until those resources are

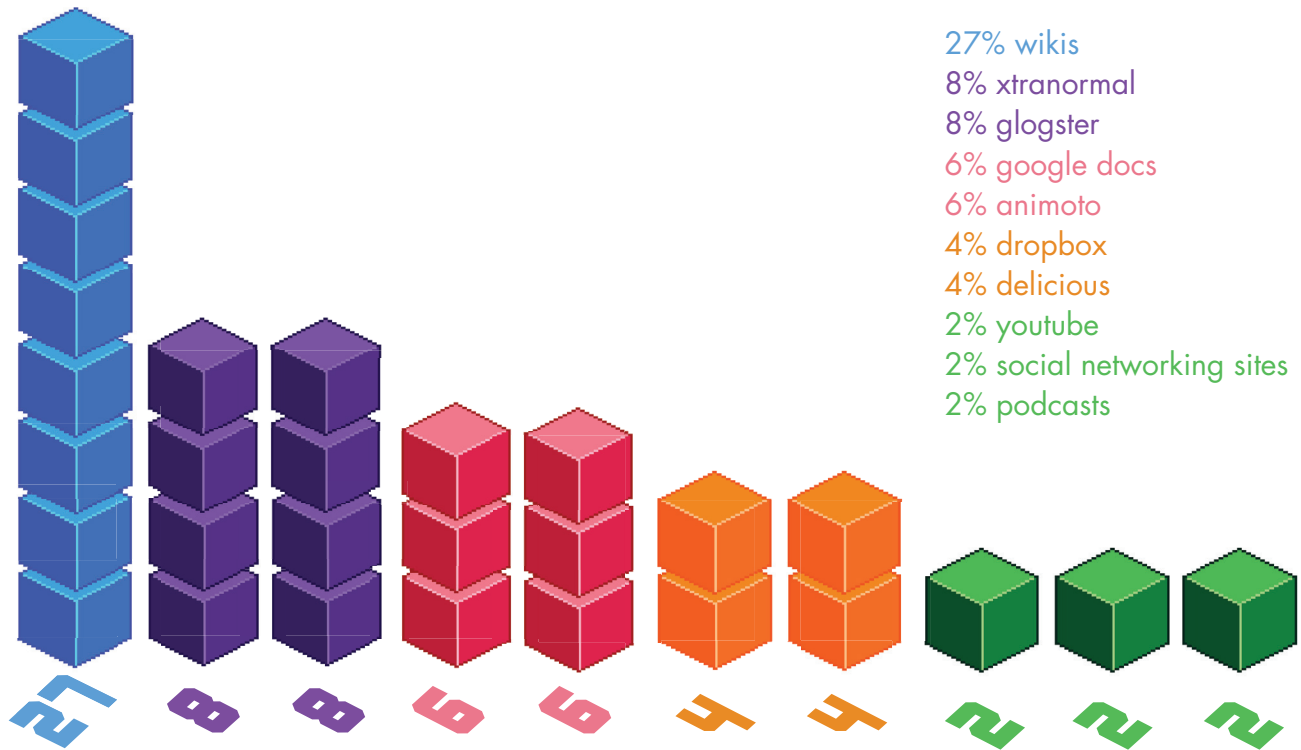


Figure 1. Web 2.0 tool respondents used most often in their library programs.

used collaboratively with students and teachers, often in the physical space of the library. When putting up resources, a librarian hopes that these will be accessed and used to promote collaborative library/classroom activities.

In contrast, when a school librarian plans, develops, and delivers an online course, he or she is an instructional partner and a teacher from the very beginning of the process to the very end.

As an instructional partner, the school librarian is in the best and strongest position to affect student learning. This is why we argue that it is important to include online courses as part of the digital library learning space.

Are We Ready?

Considering the growing popularity and expectation for digital library learning spaces, are we ready to fulfill our role as instructional partners within this framework? To explore these questions, we surveyed approximately one hundred librarians in two contrasting environments: a small rural county in South Georgia and a large urban school district in North Texas. We purposely selected these participants because we wanted to give a voice to school librarians in a variety of instructional, economic, legislative, and demographic areas. We ended up with a mixed and experienced cohort. Elementary librarians made up 64 percent

of the survey respondents; secondary librarians made up 36 percent. Over 72 percent of those surveyed had more than ten years of experience as educators. The findings are described below.

Through collaborative projects, school librarians hope to impact student learning. In fact, 97 percent of the respondents listed an increase in student achievement as their primary motivation for collaborating. Despite the obvious importance the group placed on collaborative and instructional partnerships, their frustration at time as a barrier to collaboration came across clearly. One school librarian told us, "We are all short on time. Librarians are stretched thin in terms of manpower and

often get bogged down in their administrative and day-to-day clerical obligations that make them less available to be involved instructionally.”

We then asked if this group would consider digital learning spaces such as online courses as a way to collaborate. Out of the one hundred school librarians surveyed, 16 percent told us they had no experience with online learning. The majority of the group (80 percent) described their online experience as online graduate students or as participants in online professional development. Although a large portion of this group experienced online learning from the perspective of a student, we contend that this experience does not translate into preparation for teaching online.

extensive knowledge of Web 2.0 tools as shown in figure 1.

Online course design experts encourage online instructors to use Web 2.0 technologies to make course materials available outside of a formal course management system (CMS). Building online learning outside of a CMS moves the school librarian’s focus from administrative tasks to designing activities that are “collaborative, authentic opportunities for students to engage in meaningful experiences related to the curriculum” (Nelson, Christopher, and Mims 2009, 85). In other words, an expertise in systems such as Blackboard or Moodle is not necessary. When asked about access to free Web 2.0 online learning delivery options, 61 percent of school librarians surveyed

online courses as a powerful option for school librarians to meet that challenge.

Designing an Online Course for Your Library: Where to Begin?

We will not address ways to teach information literacy or other content items because you, the school librarian, have the expertise to teach information-literacy skills, while your instructional partners, classroom teachers, are subject matter experts in their respective fields. Instead, we will focus on the teaching choices that make for a successful online learning experience. The process of designing for online learning can be organized into four P’s: Plan, Prepare, Present, and Perfect (see figure 2).

Plan for Online Learning

If this is the first time that you are planning to teach online, we strongly encourage you to build upon a series of lessons or professional development that you have already presented face-to-face. You may also need to decide if you are designing with a classroom teacher or for an independent library course. Teaching online is different from teaching face-to-face. However, in both instances, detailed planning is a must! During this phase it is important that you take the time to determine procedures, break down tasks, and develop a timeline for your course. Start with your basic lesson plans, including learning objectives, and expand on the following items:

- **Learner Analysis**—Who are members of the intended audience for your course? What preconceived notions or ideas might they bring to the course?

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The fact that more librarians in this survey were not involved in teaching online is not surprising given that 69 percent of the respondents said they had no formal preparation to do so. Terms formally associated with online learning, such as “course management system,” seemed unfamiliar to a large portion of the school librarians we surveyed. Although school librarians in our survey had little experience with formal online learning tools and services, they had

identified Google Sites and wikis as viable options for teaching online.

We recognize this sample is a snapshot of “the typical school librarian.” Nevertheless, these results support our belief that the desire to fulfill the role of instructional partner is stronger than ever and that many school librarians seek innovative ways to provide students with 21st-century knowledge and skills. We propose the design and delivery of fully

Would your audience feel most comfortable using specific tools and activities? Can the classroom teacher provide any student data (for example, information about learning needs, adaptive needs, prerequisite knowledge, content areas students have struggled with previously that need to be emphasized)?

- **Prerequisite Skills**—In addition to content, consider the technology skills the audience must possess ahead of time to successfully complete your course. If preparing for younger students, what scaffolding or parental support will you put in place?
- **Instructional Strategies**—Some activities and tools are unique to online learning: discussion boards, webquests, virtual

tours, and podcasts. How will you use these tools to engage your audience with the course material?

- **Media**—Selecting high-quality media resources is an important component of online course design. Where will you obtain these materials? Will you create your own? How will the audience access these materials? Are there password and security considerations?
- **Time**—How much time will it take to complete your course? Will you have due dates? Will the course operate on a rotating basis? Will you have time-sensitive experiences such as meetings using Skype or Google Hangout?

- **Support Documents and Additional Resources**—Create a collection of online and print resources that your course audience can refer to for clarification and further information. This is your opportunity to draw from those pathfinder-building skills!

Once this information has been captured, consider the procedures for tasks such as turning in assignments, using discussion boards, communicating with the instructor, contacting tech support, and, if work is graded, grade dissemination. If designing with a classroom teacher, determine who will be in charge of which procedures.

Figure 2. Process of designing for online learning.



• THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ONLINE •

Afterwards, go through these items and break down tasks, considering the skills the course audience might need to be able to complete each one. Determine if an instructional strategy or approach might take too much time or force the course audience to focus on an area of the content for longer than necessary. In the process, you are also developing the timeline for your course.

Decide how long the course should take. Think about whether the content you are addressing would best be presented with due dates, or as a flexible, rotating course that can be started at any time. When collaborating with a teacher, the timeline of the course will be dependent upon the course curriculum and how long the classroom teacher plans to teach this topic.

Prepare for Online Learning

Several free and open-source tools are available for hosting online courses. Each offers advantages and disadvantages. Explore and determine which tool best serves the needs of your school. Some, such as Edmodo, offer a high level of privacy and security. Others, such as Google Site, work well with a suite of Web 2.0 tools (many of which are in the Google apps family).

Consider what the school system allows, what is or isn't filtered by a firewall, and if the course will be accessed after school. In addition to Edmodo and Google Site, school librarians can build courses using Weebly, Zoho Sites, SnapPages, or Schoology. Some of these tools can also be combined to create even more powerful resources. Please note that, as is the case with many Web 2.0 tools, some of these sites have features that are only available

for a small fee. Make sure you determine which of these features you need before making a choice.

Look at your planning guide and timeline. Depending on how much content you are covering, you may need to chunk some of the topics or ideas together. For example, in a semester-long course, many online instructors divide content into weekly "modules" complete with a checklist, breakdown of activities, and resources for that week.

Give yourself feedback. Keep notes on what works and what needs to be adjusted. Discuss these notes with any co-designers or collaborators.

The most important thing to remember is to be consistent in your design and approach. Organize information in the same way each and every time. Consider your favorite website. How frustrating would it be to navigate a site where the menu changed location on each page!

Now that the content is divided and organized, go through each activity and build a collection of resources for the course's audience. You may want to add small groups of resources to each chunk, or you may choose to create a pathfinder or a list using a social-bookmarking tool such as Sqworl or Diigo.

Finally, go through your course with a fine-tooth comb. Edit, edit, edit! Clean up grammar, spelling, make sure terms are consistent throughout, documents follow a naming pattern, links work properly, and resources are easy to find. Consider having a friend or colleague test the course for you.

Present the Online Course

The course has begun. Now you are teaching online. Make a habit of monitoring and checking in with your course at least once a day. If you are collaborating with a teacher, this is a responsibility that can be shared. You can help students develop a sense of community by including activities that encourage students to share interesting personal facts, additional resources, and peer-review one another's work. Students are sure to have questions that must be answered.

During the implementation of the course, give consistent feedback on student assignments, discussion posts, and contributions. Providing this feedback creates a cycle of learning and gives you an opportunity to model your own learning strategies to the course audience.

Finally, give yourself feedback. Keep notes on what works and what needs to be adjusted. Discuss these notes with any co-designers or collaborators.

Perfect the Online Course

At the end of the course, collect evaluations from your course's audience and the collaborating classroom teacher. Be specific in the questions you ask so that learners and the teacher understand they are evaluating

the course content and structure. SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, and Polldaddy are tools that can be used to collect evaluations anonymously.

Use these evaluations to revisit design and structural choices that were made during creation of the course. Educators understand the importance of reflection and how reflection leads to excellence. Make any changes you feel are necessary before implementing the course again.



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Green has been a classroom teacher and school librarian in both large urban

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Conclusion

Digital library learning spaces offer a dizzying array of options for school librarians to partner and collaborate with students and teachers, promoting student learning across the curriculum like never before. Although creating these spaces can be time-consuming and challenging, including virtual libraries, flipped libraries, and fully online library courses into the school library program will pay off in increased student engagement and achievement.



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The potential of these spaces for use in fostering lifelong reading habits, developing digital and information literacy, encouraging independent research, highlighting student-generated digital artifacts—all while advocating for the library program—is exciting! By investing in the development of digital library learning spaces, the school librarian supports students' lifelong curiosity and pursuit of knowledge, whether at home, at school, or at play.

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