

Collection Development and Collaborative Connection Development: Or, Curation²

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Just prior to the AASL National Convention in Columbus, Ohio (November, 2015)¹ and as a part of the Year of the Learning Commons,² Carol Koechlin and I sent out a short questionnaire across North America and received 900 responses from teacher librarians.



The data gathered from participants provides a valuable touch point for the progress of Learning Commons and we are pleased to share the survey data and our analysis. This column is part 1 of several reports that we will publish in *Teacher Librarian*.

For several years, Joyce Valenza has been urging teacher librarians to adopt the practice of curation or gathering of digital resources to support students as they encounter projects and assignments that require exposure to a wide range of perspectives and ideas. Her current article in *School Library Journal* is a must read before proceeding through this column.³

Joyce brings to our attention a new curtain rising on OER (Open Educational Resources) as a national initiative and the need for teacher librarians to not only sit at the table but also sit at the head of the table in curating free resources that everyone can use in schools whether they have ample budgets or tiny budgets for instructional resources.

To extend her ideas, we will focus on two questions asked in our survey. First question:

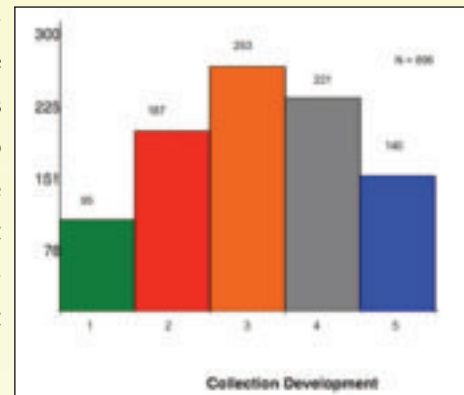
Collection Development: Curate resources and materials far beyond book collections and databases, to collaboratively develop collections that embrace major online

resources, opportunities, digital collections of museums, web 2.0 tools. (i.e. Lib of Congress, primary sources).

Not a part of collection development 1 2 3 4 5 A normal part of my collection development

The results are displayed in the following histogram that is worth a few minutes of study and discussion:

Collection development of “owned” resources is in the DNA of every teacher librarian and has been over many decades. But when the question asks about extending traditional collection development toward connection development, we can readily see that there has been progress but much room to grow toward the OER concept. Let me offer some suggestions that might push the idea along.



COLLABORATIVE CONNECTION DEVELOPMENT

Suppose we turn the idea around from “It’s my job as a teacher librarian to develop the collection” to: “It’s OUR job as teacher librarians, classroom teachers, and students to curate the very best educational resources for the topic at hand.” If you agree with this expanded approach then the next question is, “How can teacher librarians mentor collaborative curation?” Using the various tools Joyce recommends plus others at our disposal such as Google Docs, Sheets, and Forms, consider the following example:

Realizing that every fourth grader in California (your state) studies history, everyone concerned pitches in:

At the building level: The teacher librarian sets up a collaborative bibliography where a few starter resources are listed and then as a part of the learning unit, teachers and students dive in to learn how to search out and find the best resources to add to the list. We might end up with:

- Resources from the state library and state department of education
- Connections to museums and public library digital collections
- Resources from university libraries whether in our state or elsewhere.
- The best of the Internet including multimedia.

- Connections to historians.
- Connections to projects done by elementary school students or home schoolers
- Connections to resources created by upper grade students targeted at fourth graders
- Tools that would help all of us curate resources, and use them to create our own artifacts to share out across the networks.
- Sample success school projects that have been done across the state.

At the District Level: District teacher library supervisors could set up the sharing mechanism that could be used across the district schools, so that ideas stream in from the entire community including public librarians who are located in the area. Professional development sessions bring building level folks in contact with others who can help build the bank of resources on a variety of topics taught across the district. For teacher librarians in multiple schools, such an effort would produce a multi-school benefit.

At the regional or state level: Resources could be developed that are free and available to all students, and professional development sessions could be conducted at state conferences where groups of conference attendees could get started on, improve, or totally reinvent resource lists to share across the area or state.

At the national level: Organizations, businesses, and the national government could provide free tools and resources that are shared widely such as those listed by Joyce.

On every level: Perhaps there could be crowd sourced projects such as “The Year of STEM,” The year of social studies, The year of the fine arts, etc. Perhaps each teacher librarian,

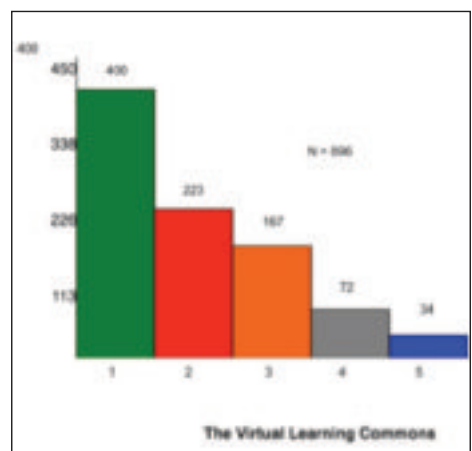
whether active or retired, might adopt a topic to keep current over time.

We asked another question in our survey that casts light on the idea of OER:

Virtual space: The library learning commons website turns from a one-way information space into a participatory community of learners and creators. Much more than links to OPACs and databases, it includes student and teacher contributions to reading, collaborative learning experiences, virtual makerspaces, school culture.

Planning or beginning stage 1 2 3 4 5 Substantial progress

The following histogram shows the results:



For whatever reason, teacher librarians have not made significant strides in replacing their one-way library websites with a more participatory virtual learning commons. We believe that the idea of connection development and the virtual learning commons (VLC) concept go hand in hand in the construction of learning communities that compete directly with Google and Wikipedia. Our motto has always been, “if you build it, they will ignore it for the most part. If they build it, they will use it.” Thus we have created numerous resources and templates to help

jump start the building of a VLC that provides a participatory environment where collaborative connection development is a natural component.⁴

In conclusion, we could not agree more with Joyce Valenza that now is the time to step out and lead the OER movement as it develops nationally, but more importantly, in each school. The thought of including everyone in the search for and use of the best of the best OER materials and making them ubiquitous, affordable, and emphasizing equity and opportunity is an exciting prospect. Let’s do it!

NOTES

1 The survey was used at the Treasure Mountain Research Retreat at: <https://sites.google.com/site/treasuremtresearchretreat/>

2 See the Year of the Learning Commons at: <https://sites.google.com/site/yearofthelearningcommons/home>

3 Valenza, J. (2016, Feb. 28). OER and you: The curation mandate. *Neverending search*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch/2016/02/28/oer-and-you-the-curation-mandate/> or at: <http://tinyurl.com/ha4hnjj>

4 We have created a number of resources to support efforts in creating the virtual learning commons and its contents: Loertscher, David V. and Carol Koechlin: *The Virtual Learning Commons*. Learning Commons Press, 2012, ISBN 978-1-933170-70-1. In addition, take a look at our workbooks on the creation of the learning commons: Loertscher, David V. and Carol Koechlin: *The Elementary School Learning Commons: A Manual*, Learning Commons Press, 2015, ISBN: 1-933170-79-4; and, Loertscher, David V. and Carol Koechlin. *The Secondary School Learning Commons: A Manual*. Learning Commons Press, 2016, ISBN: 1-933170-80-8. (All these books are available at <http://lmcsources.com>) Also, check out the free templates created by San Jose State University graduate students: Elementary School <https://sites.google.com/site/templatevlcelementary> ; Middle School: <https://sites.google.com/site/templatevlcmiddle> ; and High Schools: <https://sites.google.com/site/templatevlchigh>