



SHARING OUR VALUE

3 Things Happening in the Library and Information Studies Field

Shannon Bettles

Libraries, archives, galleries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations have many things in common. All are places of learning and knowledge where information is collected, preserved, organized, accessed, shared, interpreted and presented in some form or another. These cultural organizations engage audiences virtually and in person, preserve community memory and promote access while representing values such as democracy and human rights.

This article highlights three points of interest in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS) that museum, archive, gallery and cultural heritage professionals can participate in and learn from.

Top: Fraser Valley Regional Library, Sardis Branch, Chilliwack.
Photo credit: Shannon Bettles

1. Community-Led Service

In 2004, the Vancouver Public Library (VPL) initiated a project entitled the *Working Together Project*. The goal of the demonstration project was to develop ways in which libraries could “work with low-income communities through a community development approach” (Campbell et al.). Since 2008, the concept of community-led library service has grown to become a philosophy adopted by many library systems and professionals across Canada.

But what is community-led? In the VPL publication **Connecting the Dots: A Guidebook for Working with Community**, community-led is defined as “a particular kind of community engagement, where the library works collaboratively with communi-

ty members so that we can understand the needs of the community, and use this understanding to inform the direction of the library work and policies.” In community-led philosophy, the community is the expert of its own needs and informs the direction of the library. The goal is not to only engage with current library users, but to reverse the model and prioritize members of the community who are not engaging with the library. According to **John Pateman** if libraries are meeting the needs of the non-users, then the needs of the passive and active users will also be met. With community-led, everyone wins.

But community-led approaches are not easy to do. Pateman suggests that in fact, community-led is actually equal to “the unknown.” Identifying needs is the core of the philosophy; establishing relationships is how needs are identified. Once needs are identified, challenges of how to meet them may prove difficult.

The community-led approach starts with mending internal organization relationships and changing attitudes, behaviour and culture. Pateman suggests that “we need to change the way we work with each other before we change the way we work with local communities.” Remembering who you work for, avoiding industry sub-cultures and taking a common sense approach to purpose, is a key factor in this model.

As museum professionals we ask: how can the community-led approach be applied to public museums, galleries and archives? Does it apply or should it? Public museums, galleries and archives share some similar community service roles with libraries: engaging with all members of a community, inspiring, educating and connecting. If public museums were to adopt community-led approaches, could we entice new audiences to visit? If museums discovered what their community really cared about, would it

“With community-led, everyone wins.” - John Pateman



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Right: Library patrons.
Photo credit: Pixabay

result in a more connected organization? Pateman proposes that a common sense of purpose and place is very important to community-led libraries. Removing barriers to access can help achieve a greater sense of true public ownership and pride in our organizations.

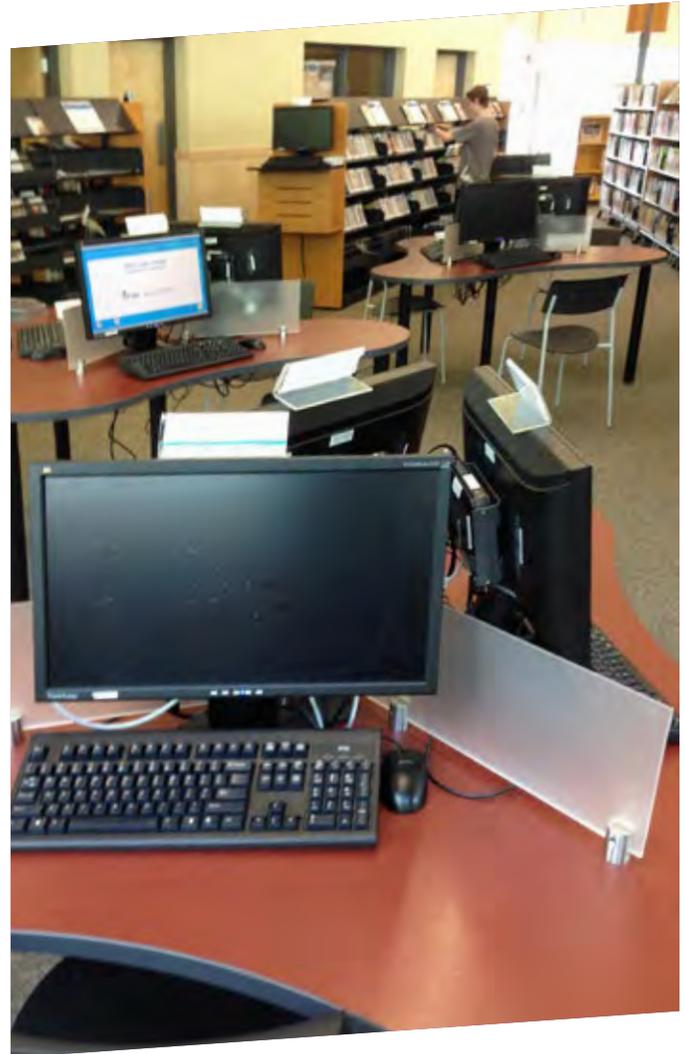
2. Digital Literacy

It will not come as a surprise to you - the future is digital. Actually, wait... the present is digital! So what does this mean for libraries and archives that traditionally have housed books, CDs, DVDs, maps and other analog materials? At the same time that museums and galleries question their relevancy in a digital world, so too are libraries.

When imagining the future, we are all asking the same questions as we consider how to position ourselves for the next (or.. er.. current) generation of museum/ archive/ library and gallery-goers.

Many academic libraries are taking the lead when it comes to digital literacy initiatives. Educating students in areas of social media, privacy, copyright fair use, open educational resources, citing internet sources, and digital identity issues, for example, is a large part of helping students improve their ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information. The University of British Columbia (UBC) has a number of initiatives to this end. The [Digital Literacy Centre's website](#) promotes the University's digital literacy programs, speakers' series and workshops, while the [UBC Digital Tattoo](#) page works to inform students about online harassment, protecting mobile devices and removing oneself from the internet. Archives, too, are starting to see the need to provide digital literacy skills to

Right: Fraser Valley Regional Library,
Sardis Branch, Chilliwack.
Photo credit: Shannon Bettles



researchers accessing digital or digitized archival materials. The Archives department at the Royal BC Museum, for example, offers an [Archives Boot Camp](#), which as well as familiarizing patrons with record collections, provides an overview of online search techniques for accessing digital collections. Can your museum, archives, gallery or cultural centre offer a digital literacy program?

3. Creating Flexible Spaces

The 77,000 square foot Surrey City Centre Library, built in 2011, is representative of current trends in library architecture, which allow for flexible, multi-purpose spaces for all ([take the virtual tour](#)). Gone are the days when patrons were faced with oversized, permanent and intimidating library desks and towering library stacks. While such historic libraries are preserved and treasured throughout the world, the modern public library building in Canada is built to be functional. Surrey City Centre Library has four floors including what staff call a “living room” space complete with digital fireplace, lounge chairs and gaming centre. Macaroni benches and book forts are meant to be used and moved around the library opening up a variety of spaces for programs of all types.



The new library architecture concepts being taught in libraries schools (LIS) features libraries where shelves come on wheels and service desks can be re-arranged. Wayfinding strategies are prioritized and flex spaces allow for spontaneous programming. Is there a similar future in store for new museum and archive facilities? What can our public museums, archives, galleries and cultural centres take away from exploring new library architecture and facility design? Perhaps museums can solve programming space issues with creative, flexible and mobile designs too. On the other hand, perhaps we need more 77,000 square foot museums?

References

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