

THE Teaching Librarian

The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association
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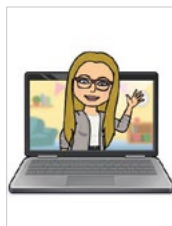
virtual @ your library

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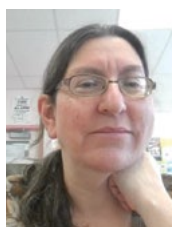
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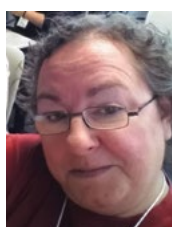
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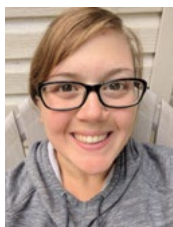
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TingL Mission

The Teaching Librarian

The Teaching Librarian (TingL) is the official magazine of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA). It is published three times a year to support OSLA members in providing significant and effective library programs and services. *The Teaching Librarian* promotes library programs and curriculum development that furthers exemplary educational objectives. The magazine fosters effective collaboration within the school library community and provides a forum to share experience and expertise.

TingL References

The Teaching Librarian is a general magazine for OSLA members and not a scholarly journal. If your article does require citation of sources, please provide them within the text of your article or column with as much or as little bibliographic information as necessary for identification (e.g. book title, year). If you feel that the works you are citing require full identification, please provide a bibliography at the end of your piece, formatted according to the latest Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) or APA Style.

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TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

January 2022 V. 29, Issue 2	"Innovation @ your library" Deadline: September 30, 2021
May 2022 V. 29, Issue 3	"Leadership @ your library" Deadline: January 31, 2022
September 2022 V. 30, Issue 1	Theme to be determined Deadline: May 31, 2022

Articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words are welcome. Articles, when approved, should be accompanied by high quality images and/or graphics whenever possible. Text must be sent electronically, preferably in a Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. Images or graphics must be sent separately in a digital format, such as .jpeg, .png, .tiff, or .ai. The minimum resolution must be 1000 px at 150 dpi. With photos that contain a recognized individual, please secure the individual's permission in writing for the use of the photo. Photos taken at public events or crowd shots taken in a public place do not require permission from the subjects. All submissions are subject to editing for consistency, length, content, and style. Journalistic style is preferred. *The Teaching Librarian* adheres to Canadian Press Style. Articles must include the working title, name of author, and email address in the body of the text. OSLA reserves the right to use pictures in other OSLA publications unless permission is limited or denied at the time of publishing.

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The Editor's Notebook



Caroline Freibauer

Moving between the physical world and virtual spaces during what seemed like countless months of pandemic restrictions was a negotiation between darkness and light. When schools first closed in March 2020, I felt as though I was locked in a dark basement with little contact from my school community or board-level leaders charged with running school libraries. Any attempts to reach out with offers of support to my colleagues was a lot like lobbing stones into a deep well. I couldn't even hear the splash. "Hello! Is anyone out there?"

But looking across the social media landscape, I could see glimmers of light across the province, and even the country, as library learning commons staff created virtual spaces and forged connections with teachers, students and parents blindly trying to navigate this new way of learning. Inspired by these school library heroes, I worked to light my own little lamp with a virtual book club and writing group. It was a tiny beacon of comfort for both me and the students as we navigated the remaining weeks of the school year.

Somehow, through the darkness, I was able to get a new job at a private school in Toronto where administrators embraced technology and were unafraid to take pedagogical risks. Although Ontario closed its physical schools more than any other jurisdiction in Canada and for longer than most countries in the world, at St. Michael's College School I was able to run book clubs for staff, students and parents, launch research projects with geography and science classes, run contests and other initiatives to boost reading, persuade teachers of ten Grade 7 and 8 English classes to try Forest of Reading books for the first time and attend meetings – maybe too many! I must admit that I became a huge fan of Nearpod to facilitate interactive teaching and learning. Our school library team was able to generate enough light to support learning at our school so that the year didn't feel like a loss.

But, as proud as I am of our efforts at SMCS, after reading

through the articles in this virtual@yourlibrary edition of *The Teaching Librarian*, I realize they pale in comparison to the many initiatives that took place across the province, where school library staff were leveraging online platforms and technology to create bonfires of online learning with the smoke signals resonating far beyond the jurisdictions of individual school boards.

At Upper Canada District School Board, school library staff were able to transform a week-long Truth and Reconciliation gathering into a virtual event on the Virtual Library Learning Commons, leveraging technology such as LibGuides and Microsoft Teams. Others created Bitmoji platforms and virtual breakout rooms to create engagement in the virtual world. One of my favourite articles in this edition is the piece on curating your online resources. My physical world is in a constant state of jumble, so you can imagine what my virtual world looks like. Lisa Noble's advice is a big help to those of us hoping to get organized.

But probably the brightest spot of light during the pandemic gloom was the Ontario Library Association's ability to pivot – I needed to use that word at least once in this piece – the Forest of Reading from an in-person celebration of reading to a series of online events. As you read through the selection of articles in our Forest feature, you will realize that the move to online wasn't all bad and that the technology changes helped extend connections to authors and other resources. In fact, even when the Forest festival returns to physical events, OLA may keep some of the online innovations.

School library staff worked hard during the dark days of the past 18 months, creating a virtual light show of teaching and learning. This virtual@yourlibrary edition of *The Teaching Librarian* is our way of capturing that lightning in a bottle. We don't know what this school year will bring, but we hope the stories and ideas in this magazine will provide a comforting beacon to help light the path forward. ■

President's Report



Maureen McGrath

When you enter a tube station in England you are met with the slogan “Mind the Gap” everywhere you look. The “gap” is the space between the platform and the subway train that you must step over. We have been hearing a lot about gaps these days. And as we return to school, we are mindful of the gaps that may be awaiting us. As school library professionals, perhaps these gaps can be viewed as opportunities; we have a chance to fill the gaps, or at least lend a hand so others can safely step across.

Not every school board is reopening their learning commons, but many are. What an exciting time, to reopen those doors! Kids will be so excited to have a book in their hands again and a selection to choose from! Though online gaming will have been prolific, many kids won't have touched a robot, or a loose part for months. And some of our students have never even stepped into a learning commons. There is no doubt that there will be messes to clean up, and dust to blow off, and orders to make. But perhaps this is a time to take a fresh look at your space, consider some weeding, rethink where everything goes. There will be such a comfort in putting everything back in its place, but our learners and staff will be returning just a little bit different this year.

Certainly, educators and students are returning much tech savvier than when they left. We have closed a monumental gap, as virtual teaching forced even the most reluctant online. And our students now understand our learning platforms like never before. So how will we respond to this? We need to think about harnessing this new comfort level with the technology and how we will expand it and build on it and keep the momentum growing. I know people will be so sick of screens they may turn their backs on computers, but we can try to help them find a balance, to find the middle ground in blended learning. And maybe they will feel they don't need us anymore, as their confidence in the tools and platforms have developed. What can we offer that feels fresh and purposeful? This edition of the magazine comes at a perfect time to offer just that.

The largest gap for our students may be the loss of community felt through the pandemic. We know our school library learning commons can be the hub of the building. It provides

a welcoming and safe space for all our students and staff. As we open our doors again, we must reflect on the community we serve. Is our space inclusive, is it representative, are we using it as a place for change and to champion new ideas and address current issues? There is work to be done.

Council will be supporting you with this work. We are running a series of virtual OpenChats (#ONLibChat) throughout the fall to share ideas and continue to build a community of support and expertise. Our first will occur on Tuesday, September 28 to discuss the work of dismantling structures of oppression in our library, and long-range planning in the SLLC with this in mind. We have plans to continue our work against anti-Black racism with Dr. Andrew B. Campbell through an online learning series. And we are thrilled with the government's decision to introduce requirements to enhance reporting from school boards for library staff funding. This additional reporting is intended to provide the ministry with greater insight into how school boards are funding libraries and related supports. The Ontario School Library Association will continue to advocate with the Ontario Library Association to have input into what the reporting looks like.

We have heard so much about the “new normal”, but what does this really mean? We can't go back in time, but only move forward with the lessons taken from this experience. We can't ignore the trauma, nor can we dwell on it. What can we celebrate leaving behind from this time? And what can we celebrate that we may have previously taken for granted? John Spencer, the author of *“Empower”*, recently wrote in a blog: *My hope is that I can find that overlap between the best practices and next practices.* This makes sense to me. Take time to reflect on both.

There are so many gaps school library professionals filled over the course of this pandemic. We found resources, became tech support, stepped up online to share stories and run programming. We covered classes and some left their commons to fill gaps as classroom teachers. As the gap in our physical proximity closes, we can be mindful of what we can learn from all of this and move forward with hope and a renewed sense of our role as integral to the life and learning of a school. ■

The Buzz

Virtual Field Trips Open New Worlds For All Students

While this issue will reach you at the start of a new school year, I write this column in June as we conclude it. This past academic year has been like no other with either full virtual school, or the combination of in-person and remote learning for students.

As a result of the pandemic, many traditional learning experiences were put on hold due to closures. The silver lining is this brought new opportunities with many known attractions and destinations pivoting to provide digital learning. This included the introduction of virtual field trips, providing a gateway to so many experiences for young people.

The Ontario Science Centre located in Toronto, Ontario is amongst this group, seizing the opportunity to expand their reach and accessibility with innovative online programs and workshops. I interviewed Lorrie Ann Smith, vice president of science education at the Ontario Science Centre to learn how teachers across the province organized interactive visits that normally would not have been possible due to distance, travel time and cost of busing.

While the future is unknown, it appears that virtual is here to stay and will continue to play a key role in future learning for students of all ages.

1. On March 13, 2020, the Ontario Science Centre closed to visitors due to the pandemic. How did your organization pivot digitally during the pandemic to ensure students, teachers and families continue to learn?

Like other museums and cultural institutions, we adapted quickly to find new ways to engage with our audience – especially families with children, teachers and students. By going digital, we have expanded the reach of the Ontario Science Centre, especially through virtual school programs and livestreamed events, which have been very popular with teachers.

[Ask a Scientist](#) events stream live every other Wednesday at 2 p.m. on the Science Centre's Facebook and YouTube channels. We have featured astronauts, authors and engineers as well as our own staff scientists. For special occasions, we have partnered with other organizations, like the Cambridge

Butterfly Conservatory for our Halloween Creepy Crawlies stream and Illusionarium for a showcase of the Science of Magic. We capped off the school year in June with an event where participants learned about the science behind bubbles, including how to make giant ones and how to keep them from popping. We even shared [our famous bubble recipe](#).

Immediately after we closed our doors, we went to work to develop classroom resources for teachers, knowing they need supports for online teaching. This included engaging online content for students studying remotely from home, as well as ideas for in-person and virtual classrooms. In partnership with Science North and the Ontario Ministry of Education, we developed grade-specific, curriculum-connected [resources](#) that included video presentations and extension activities using household materials. We also developed [professional learning videos](#) and a [STEM Education Toolkit](#) focused on inquiry learning and problem-solving skills, which are aimed at Grades 6 to 8 but can be adapted for other grades. We are currently working on a new suite of curriculum-linked resources for K-8 teachers and students for the new science curriculum launching this year.

Our most popular offering was our virtual school programs for students from Grades 1 to 12. We offered live sessions with science educators via video conferencing programs such as Zoom or Google Meet, so students could enjoy an engaging, interactive experience and have their questions answered live via chat. Prior to the pandemic, these types of programs were usually delivered in-person at the Ontario Science Centre during a school field trip.

One teacher wrote to us: "I just wanted to THANK both presenters that facilitated the Light & Sound virtual field trip. My Grade 4 students, none of whom has ever been to the Science Centre, LOVED the program. I think the best comment was, 'This makes me want to be a Scientist!'"

The virtual school programs included topics such as Body Works, Destination Space and Fun with Chemistry. There was so much demand that we decided to record the programs and make them available to all teachers until the end of June so they could watch with their classes at any time. We estimate that more

than 1.25 million students have watched one of our programs.

2. How has your virtual programming made the Ontario Science Centre more accessible to students across Ontario?

In the past, people could only get an engaging and interactive Science Centre experience if they visited us in person. For elementary teachers outside the Greater Toronto Area, this was very difficult because there are barriers to taking young children on long-distance field trips.

We have heard from teachers across the province from South Porcupine to Windsor to Ottawa, who have thanked us for our resources, saying their students have benefited. One teacher told us that she loved being able to pause a video and adapt it to her lesson plan. In some cases, she said she would play something again to emphasize a scientific concept.

We know that teachers from other provinces are using our [Science at Home](#) experiments and downloadable [activities](#). And we have been pleasantly surprised to have viewers on our YouTube channel from the United States, the United Kingdom, India and the Philippines. We love that people all over the world are getting the Ontario Science Centre experience, wherever they may be.

If there's an upside to being forced to close during the pandemic, it's that we know our reach is farther than ever. From a virtual school program with a science educator, a live-streamed event, or even an online tour of an exhibition, we are accessible from anywhere.

3. Your most popular school program during the pandemic has been the Science of Anxiety. What inspired you to incorporate mental health into your workshops?

Yes, you're right. Our recorded virtual school programs were very well received in the 2020-21 school year, covering everything from Structures and Stability for Grades 1 to 3, right up to high school programs on topics ranging from Human Anatomy and Physiology to Climate Change.

Our most viewed program is Mental Health Junior: The Science of Anxiety for Grades 6 to 8. And we also have a version for older students, Mental Health Senior: The Science

of Anxiety for Grades 9 to 12.

I think this has been a very timely topic during the pandemic, as parents and educators have been concerned about the mental health of children and teens. This program was developed in partnership with local Toronto school boards and health organizations. It takes a neurobiological perspective on anxiety and about what is going on in our brains when we feel anxious, how it affects our bodies and why stress can sometimes be a good thing. We are very proud of this program, which has won both national and international awards for excellence in science programming.

4. For students in French Immersion programs, what resources are available?

All our curriculum resources are available for teachers in both English and French. The STEM Education Toolkit, also available in French, has been very popular with French immersion teachers across the province.

Some of our recorded virtual school programs are available in French. One Grade 1 teacher told us she would play a video in French first, and then follow up with the English version to reinforce an idea, as scientific concepts can be difficult to understand for young children who are just beginning to learn French.

5. While there is still uncertainty for the school year, what are your plans for virtual experiences as restrictions ease?

We are spending the summer developing additional online resources for teachers and students as well as finalizing our plans for school visits in the fall. In the event in-person field trips do not proceed this fall, we are expanding our virtual school programs with all new topics, and we will be offering a new suite of synchronous (live) bookable programs as well as continuing to offer free access to our pre-recorded school programs.

Even when students and teachers are ready to come back in person, we will continue to offer virtual field trips to engage those who are not able to visit the physical Science Centre. We are excited to be able to provide fun and informative science resources, programs and supports for all the amazing teachers and students out there. ■

Meet the Author

David A. Robertson

David A. Robertson is an award-winning author, graphic novelist and talented public speaker. Most notably, he is the 2021 recipient of the Writers' Union of Canada Freedom to Read Award.

He is the author of numerous books for young readers including *When We Were Alone*, which won the 2017 Governor General's Literary Award, the McNally Robinson Best Book for Young People Award, and was a finalist for the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award.

His acclaimed YA series, *The Reckoner*, has won the McNally Robinson Best Book for Young People Award, the Michael Van Rooy Award for Genre Fiction, and the Indigenous Writer of the Year Award at the High Plains Book Awards.

The Barren Grounds, the first book in the middle-grade *The Misewa Saga* series, received a starred review from Kirkus, was a Kirkus and Quill & Quire best middle-grade book of 2020, was a USBBY and Texas Lone Star selection, was shortlisted for the Ontario Library Association's Silver Birch Award, and is a finalist for the 2020 Governor General's Literary Award.

He is a member of Norway House Cree Nation and currently lives in Winnipeg. To learn more about him, check out his website: darobertson.ca.

TingL: How has our new socially-distanced reality impacted what you do as an author/ speaker?

It actually hasn't impacted me too much. I obviously have not travelled, but I would say that I've done almost more events than I would have otherwise because people, festivals, schools, have really embraced virtual presentations. When this is all over, I think virtual presentations will not go away. In fact, I think we've all wondered why we didn't do more of them in the first place.

What issues (social/societal/global) are influencing what you write?

What has always influenced me is the need to educate about Indigenous people through literature, in particular the youth. I didn't have books like the ones I'm writing when I was a kid, and it had a negative impact on me and my classmates. It shaped how I saw myself, and how my classmates saw Indigenous people. So, whether it's difficult stories of trauma, or stories of culture and community, this is what drives me. The thing that I've thought about more recently is land stewardship and the environment, and that's why I wove that theme into *The Barren Grounds*.

What current projects would you like to highlight?

I have a bunch on the go. I have the first and second sequels to *The Barren Grounds* coming out this year and next, I have a new picture book coming out next year, I have two other



Angela Thompson

projects that are not titled yet for adults, and two more graphic novels coming out over the next two years. So, it's a busy slate.

What is the most challenging aspect of the writing process in your mind?

I don't know. I don't really think about individual aspects of the writing process. I approach it holistically, and from there break it down into elements that contribute to the bigger picture. I think, for me, it's to always keep things fresh, unique, and challenge myself to always improve.

Any final words? Shout-outs? Thoughts to ponder?

Right now the main thing everybody should be pondering is: what's my role in reconciliation? Everybody has a role. It starts with reading and learning. ■



Professional Resources

Virtual, to me, is synonymous with my day-to-day work in our libraries. After a year and a half of strictly online research and information literacy instruction with my classes and students, virtual is pretty much the new normal.

What is exciting about this new normal is the incredible array of professional development opportunities as well as library and media resources that have since become available to us as life-long learners and school library professionals.

Whether attending an online webinar, working through a sequence of skills-based applications to earn digital badges, or heading into your home office or virtual classroom to read a library journal article or newly-published book, virtual library professional development opportunities and resources could not be easier to gather, read, and share with colleagues and peers.

Below are a few options, both print and online, that I have read or participated in, and I highly encourage you to try them as well.

Enjoy!

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Print

Leading from the Library. Help Your School Community Thrive In The Digital Age by Shannon McClintock Miller and William Bass (published 2019)

The modern school library supports education in a variety of ways. One essential role librarians play is that of a leader who works collaboratively to build relationships, mould culture and climate, and advocate for the needs of students and the community.

In [this book](#), a librarian and an education leader team up to reflect on the librarian's ability to build connections in two ways. First, they discuss the benefits of bringing the outside world into the library through social media, videoconferencing and other tools that allow librarians to partner with others. Then they expand upon these connections by addressing how librarians can lead in the greater educational community by sharing resources and strategies and partnering with school leaders to tell the story of the school community.

Through Future Ready Librarians Summer Book Club, I participated in this as a summer 2021 book club opportunity to read, reflect, collaborate, and network with other school library professionals online via Google Slides, [Facebook](#) Live events, and a Jamboard.

I highly recommend it as a book and a virtual professional development opportunity, plus it ties into International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) professional standards for school librarians.

The link is from a Follett Community webinar, similarly titled, from July 2020. There is a resource guide and the presentation slides included.

Online

The Partnership Webinars and Courses

I have participated in the [Education Institute](#)'s online webinars and courses over the past 12 years as a library professional. The Education Institute is a professional development and continuing education program for the library community developed by The Partnership of Provincial and Territorial Library Associations of Canada. The program offers various webinars and three to six-week online courses for librarians and information professionals across sectors. I have always found them professionally topical and informative, providing me with invaluable knowledge and context I can easily apply to my professional development and in my library best practices. This past year's webinars of particular note were *Cultivating Minds and Hearts: Enhancing Curiosity and Empathy through a Community of Inquiry* and the OSLA Series: *Educational Leadership, Anti-racism and the School LLC with Dr. ABC*.

Future Ready Librarians™ Challenge

The [Future Ready Librarians Challenge Series](#) is an ongoing series of bite-sized professional learning activities to help you learn new tools and strategies, focus your leadership, and connect with fellow librarians to share ideas and solutions.

I loved this as an ongoing professional development opportunity this past year. Working through “bite-sized” activities like finding an accountability partner (i.e., shoulder to cry on!), reflecting on areas of importance and need in a virtual learning and library environment, and the creation of SMART goals for the coming academic year allowed me to review and reflect on my professional goals created last September. As I worked through them, each activity allowed me to reflect on my own best practices and develop a targeted approach to our post-pandemic library life — something I consider beneficial as we return back to whatever is the “new normal” in our school libraries and library learning commons.

Dr. Margaret K. Merga @MKMerga

Dr. Merga, an author of books and articles on research communication, reading, libraries and research methods, offers [a pinned tweet of peer-reviewed articles](#) on school libraries and/or student literacy (for FREE).

Library Juice Academy

[Embedded Librarianship In Online Courses \(AISL participant takeaways\)](#)

An embedded librarian focuses “on the needs of one or more specific groups, building relationships with these groups, developing a deep understanding of their work, and providing information services that are highly customized and targeted to their greatest needs” (Shumaker).

Whether project-based (common in academic librarianship) or program-based (what most OSLA library professionals offer in our school libraries), this definition fits well with our collective objective to meet students where and when they need us.

I was drawn to this professional development opportunity because of my previous work as an embedded librarian in a post-secondary academic setting. It also mirrored what I had been intentionally doing with our students since we switched to virtual learning in the spring of 2020.

I have continued integrating embedded librarianship into my teaching and instruction of the courses I had previously partnered with in our Upper School during this past academic year. I surveyed for feedback (user experience) from my faculty about the value-added opportunities in classes and assignments with an embedded librarian (me). One hundred per cent of faculty surveyed would request an embedded librarian again in the coming school year, and 100% said that having an embedded librarian adds appreciable value to their formative or summative projects and assessments. All faculty commented that face-to-face instruction was preferred and resources, both in-library and online, were integral to student learning and success. ■

Designing for a Collaborative Virtual Library Learning Commons

If there is one good thing that has come out of the pandemic experience, it is that the importance of the virtual library learning commons is finally being understood. Even if they were fortunate enough to stay staffed during the upheaval, libraries with no virtual presence ceased to exist with sudden school lockdowns. Library professionals rose to the challenge. Online resource curation became a top priority. Pandemic or not, kids needed access to reading, and they got it with curated links, virtual read-alouds, and author visits. Teacher-librarians participated in online classrooms, co-teaching for inquiry and research learning.

The approaches were fresh and innovative, and the importance of the user interface became paramount. If the virtual space doesn't engage, then leaving is just a click away, after all. We witnessed the rapid rise of the choice grid as an entry point to learning. Making became virtual. Under the pressure of necessity, educators were exploring new ways to connect in online environments.

But what happens post-pandemic? One thing is certain: retreating from virtual spaces would be regressive. Collaborative online environments have become increasingly critical to the library program's success. What we have learned about the power of the virtual library will have long-term, positive implications, as long as we leverage the opportunity.

Learning Commons Thinking

The good news is that there are increasingly fewer barriers: there are more tools, the tools are easier to use, and we all have far more expertise about the online user experience after this extraordinary pandemic period. The key is to keep our focus on the core philosophy of the learning commons. Just like the physical space, the virtual space is a catalyst for participatory learning. Design factors in the physical space exist to facilitate inquiry, discovery, and collaboration, and so should design factors of the virtual space.

Endless pivoting between online and face-to-face learning has spawned debate about their relative merits. For the library, this is not a useful conversation. Both environments are essential. It's about facilitating learning in creative and meaningful ways across both environments, to meet the

Building Your Virtual Library Learning Commons

Resource Access: Easy access to the catalogue and online databases is basic. Customize learning through digital curation. Flip library instruction by providing ubiquitous access to basic instructional resources.

Virtual Makerspace: Create provocations to foster design thinking projects, virtual and hands-on. Connect students to curated resources for digital making and media production.

Participatory Learning Centre: Extend and enhance face-to-face instruction through online collaboration. Provide virtual programming, including opportunities to engage with experts, authors, and co-learners online.

Showcase the LLC: Share plans and events. Showcase your successes with infographics and testimonials. Make connections to school goals. Tell them the library story!

diverse needs of our learning communities.

Inspiration for Your VLLC Journey

[Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada](#) provides guidance for building a collaborative VLLC, and each stage of the growth continuum links to Canadian exemplars to inspire your efforts.

Read stories written by your Canadian colleagues about building the VLLC in *Canadian School Libraries Journal*: journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca/category/virtual-llc. ■

Digital Escape Rooms

Mary Doyle and Brooke Windsor

Escape rooms have become a popular form of entertainment in cities across the country. Many school libraries have recreated the experience using similar games for team building, or to enhance learning in an exciting way. In an escape room, participants must work together to solve a series of puzzles and riddles in order to open locks and escape. With learning going online, these games have gone digital too. A digital escape room brings this experience into the virtual world. While there is nothing quite as exciting as opening that last physical lock, digital games can still be a fun and valuable activity.

Playing this type of game is not just entertaining for your students, although they are a lot of fun. Escape rooms also encourage collaboration (you are working together against the clock, not against each other), critical thinking, problem-solving and they can be used to introduce or review course content. As an added bonus, digital escape rooms do not require physical locks or props, so they are easy and free to set up.

There are lots of free digital escape rooms available on the web. You can check out Ditch that Textbook: 30+ Free Digital Escape Rooms (ditchthattextbook.com/30-digital-escape-rooms-plus-tips-and-tools-for-creating-your-own). There are free and subscription games available at Breakoutedu.com. You also can find lots of free teacher- and librarian-generated games by searching the web.

However, there may be times when you want to create your own game to meet a specific theme or curriculum goal. In this first approach, all that is needed is Google Forms and your imagination.

Method One: Using Google Forms for a Create-Your-Own-Adventure Digital Escape Room

Imagine being the hero of your own adventure. You get to live the role of a Jedi, demigod, or superhero in a time of crisis. Successfully escaping will lead to victory for your universe!

The heart of this particular type of digital escape room is living within a themed endeavor. Players are put within a story and have to solve a variety of challenges related to the quest. Correctly completing the challenges leads players successfully

through the narrative in order to win.

The framework for the game is completely within Google Forms. No external websites or puzzles are involved which helps to keep the players within the story world you create. Google Forms is free, straightforward in its layout, and simple for players to use. Also, once you have created a template for your rooms, you can easily make a copy and refill it with a new narrative and related challenges with ease. The setup also means that it can be played at any time asynchronously. By

using breakout rooms, a group of students is able to have a designated person screenshare the digital escape room on their device; but everyone gets to play.

The only issue presented by this platform is the lack of Alt Text for images. This problem means that screen reader software for players with visual impairments will be unable to describe the images used in the escape room. There are two options to deal with the lack of Alt Text: 1) Make a separate escape room for those with visual impairments that does not use a plain image as the basis for a challenge or 2) Utilize Image Title or Hover Text to add your own Alt Text for images.

Theme

With this basic information put in your mind, it's time to look at the three steps required for building your digital escape room in this format. The first step is relatively simple. You need to start with a particular theme that will provide a popular adventure. The theme needs to be something that will be able to provide engaging challenges for your players and preferably should

YOUR MISSION:
The Rebel Alliance needs your help!

The mission is tricky though as you will need to infiltrate a First Order Star Destroyer ship that is stationed above Star Killer Base. You are required to steal information relating to the First Order's starship manufacturing center. If you can figure out where the ships are put together, the Rebellion can destroy the factory—causing the First Order to finally admit defeat.

You manage to sneak on board the Star Destroyer without any issues, but once your team makes it to the ship's control center, several Stormtroopers get suspicious of your presence and fire their blasters.

PEW-PEW-PEW!

SWOOSH!

The control center door quickly slides closed as one of the troopers punches his fellow trooper then rushes into the room with you.

One blaster managed to hit and destroy the lock though. Your team is trapped in the room until you get the information you need and figure a way out.

Luckily the trooper who took out his partner and ran into the room has been waiting for their chance to flee from the First Order. They want to help your team!

Complete any challenges in the control center. Get the manufacturing base location. Fix the lock to get out before Kylo Ren comes to handle your team himself.

YOUR TEAM:

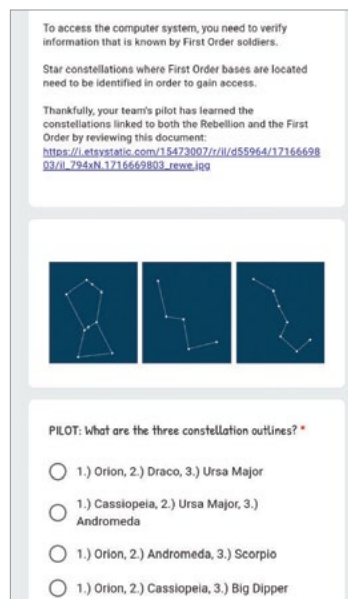
- Pilot -- Flies the ship
- Padawan -- Apprentice Jedi who is connected to the Force
- Engineer -- Maintains and fixes any part of the ship
- Military General -- Heads up this secret mission and is a point of contact for the Rebellion
- Turned Stormtrooper -- First Order soldier who wants to help the Rebellion

Narrative opening to set players into the story and explain the roles for the game

continued on page 18

...continued from page 17

be something that is popular in your school community. If you happen to choose a theme surrounding a book, movie, or television show, promotion becomes simple if you time it around a release. Examples of good themes include Marvel Comics, Percy Jackson, DC Comics, *Bridgerton*, or *Sweet Tooth*.



Escape Room Challenge - A standard challenge in the room with an external link to help players figure out the correct answer if they do not know

something in the world you are building. Just do not forget the tips about players with visual impairment when creating these challenges!

When considering classes playing the room for group work, it is also good to have “roles” within the game. For example, a game about *Jurassic World* might feature a paleontologist, an animal trainer, and a park owner. With these roles you can then craft a challenge or two that is only for a particular role. The group of student players will all get their chance to play in this scenario rather than just one person leading the whole team.

Story

Once you establish a theme and nine to 12 challenges, it is time to actually write your narrative. This aspect might be the most time consuming if you are having problems with your imagination. You will need to focus your efforts on two aspects of the story: 1) Situation (where are the players, what is happening, how are they trapped) and 2) Challenge Connections (how do each of the challenges fit into the world you are creating, how are they linked to each other, where should players start and where should they end). An example would be that the players are part of the *New Avengers* (each with their own special superpower). They sneak into a Hydra base to find out where a doomsday device is hidden, but a fire fight with Hydra soldiers causes them to get locked in a control room. The team will need to complete challenges like figuring out the password of a computer, moving heavy beams

Challenges

Once your theme is in play, you'll need to create the actual challenges in your room. It is easier to begin with the challenges so that you can craft a narrative around them rather than the other way around. Think about your theme. What small challenges or quests have you seen within the books, movies, or television shows? What could be something a person in those universes would need to do if trying to escape a tight spot? If at all possible, focus on visual challenges rather than just words. This arrangement will increase engagement as the players are having to actually interact with

in a particular order that block the secret exit and deciphering the location of the doomsday device. The mission ends after all the individual challenges are completed with the final challenge resulting in the location of the device.

Technical

Utilizing Google Forms can be a bit slow-going at first, but creating your first digital escape room on the platform does allow you to have a template to reuse for future games. The setup revolves around the multiple-choice answers being directed to different sections of your form. Each challenge and the wrong answers need to be their own “section” within the Google Form. For the wrong answers in a challenge, make those choices go to a section that lets the players know the answer is incorrect. As long as you have set up the wrong answer section directly after the challenge, players can simply click BACK to try again. The correct answer will lead to the next challenge — which will be a section that you place after the wrong answer section. Please see images for examples.

Example

Examples are always the most effective way to learn! Take a look at these digital escape rooms hosted at Stratford Public Library to understand the concepts mentioned above:

Marvel's *New Avengers* Digital Escape Room
 Access here: forms.gle/5A7B1rIdKiRewRw6A

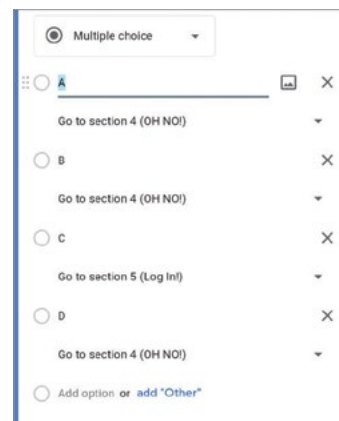
Percy Jackson Demigod Quest Digital Escape Room
 Access here: forms.gle/k5MUvTHuNGf9Nyxi8

Star Wars: Escape From Starkiller Base Digital Escape Room
 Access here: forms.gle/Y1c7LY6HdkZxqwk17

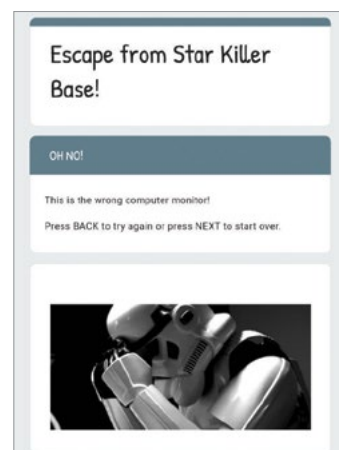
Escape from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Digital Escape Room, in partnership with The Stratford Festival
 Access here: forms.gle/zBSSpNa84FqyzadB8

Method Two: Using Google Slides/Google Forms/Google Sites to Make an Escape Room Website

In this second approach to building a game, it is again a good



How the answers look on the backend of the Google Form to lead to either the Wrong Answer Page or the next challenge



Section where players are led if they select an incorrect answer so that they can go back and try again or completely star over

idea to start with a story idea that gives the game context and builds excitement with the students as to why they are playing. This method is informed by Mandi Tolen's guest post on Ditch that Textbook (see link above).

The Room: Google Slides

To make the game itself, you begin by creating the game environment in a Google Slide. You can create a virtual room by adding a background with walls and a floor. You can add images as clues, and also link images to Google Docs, websites, or puzzles. You can add as many clues as you like. Students will need to look for clickable images in the room to find the clues.

The Locks: Google Forms

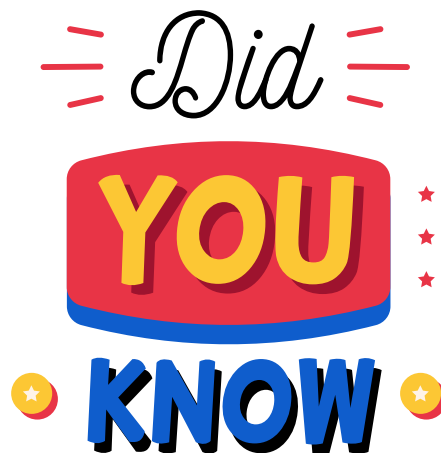
The virtual locks are put on a Google Form. This is where students will try their solutions. You can label each question as the lock being solved. In this method of play all of the locks will be available at once on the form and can be solved in any order, but all of the solutions will need to be correct before the form can be submitted. Make sure that you make each question "Required" and also include "Response validation." You can give feedback such as "Oops, try again" or "Remember to write your answer in all caps" since exact spelling and capitalization is required for short answers, for example if you are solving for a five-letter word lock. Making all of your questions multiple choice can be simpler for younger students.

Bringing It All Together: Google Sites

Once you have a room built in Slides and the locks set up in Forms, you are ready to put your game together in Google Sites. Create a new Google Site, import your slide, import your form, add any text explaining the game if you prefer and publish. You can choose if it is available publicly or only to those with whom you share the link. Don't forget that you also will need to have the privacy settings on the Slide and Form set to the appropriate audience. Your game will now be contained within its own website. Here is a very simple example of a game created using this method: sites.google.com/apps.hpedsb.on.ca/dewey-escape-room/home.

To play, you can screenshare the site with your students online and have them direct where you should click. They can suggest solutions in the chat or can unmute and collaborate and make guesses that way.

Playing these types of games can be a fun addition to library orientations or a way to support classroom teachers with curriculum. Even when learning in person, digital games are a free and an easy way to create the escape room experience, with no more bricked or lost locks. ■

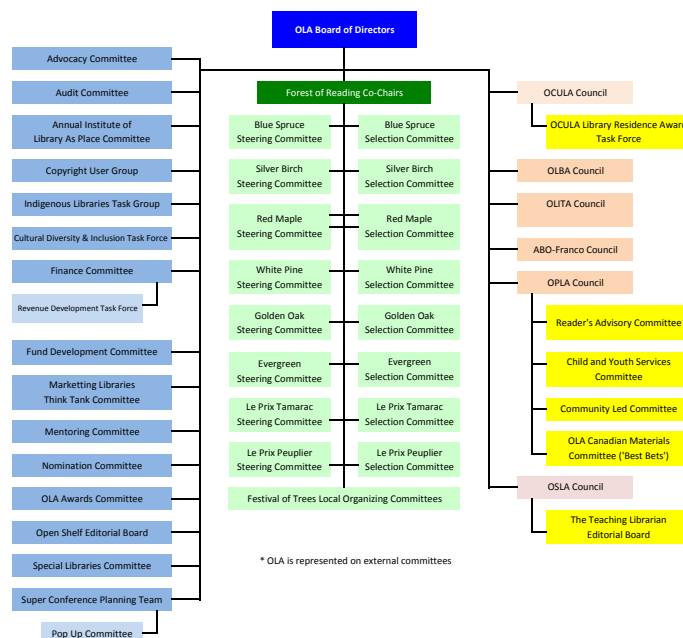


Cathy MacKechnie

OLA has a Cultural Diversity & Inclusion Committee (CDI). Chair, Mai Lu, came to our recent OSLA meeting and shared some of their work. Their website is full of wonderful resources to support Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Currently this six-member committee is looking for a school library representative. Contact Mai directly at mai.lu@utoronto.ca, if you are interested.

Check out more OLA Committees (i.e., Indigenous Advisory Committee), Task Groups (i.e., Copyright Users), Forest of Reading and Councils within the Ontario Library Association that are working hard to support literacy and libraries across Ontario.

More details can be found on the OLA site under the Advocacy tab: Advocacy Representatives and plenty of resources under Ongoing Library Issues. Happy exploring!



Bitmoji Your Library

Creating Passive Programming for the Virtual Year

During the pandemic, the staff of the library learning commons had to come up with new and creative ways to engage and connect with our students who have not been able to visit the physical space (or even at times be in the building at all). One of the most effective ways I have found to do this is by creating virtual Bitmoji libraries to share with the staff and students at my schools.

A Bitmoji library is a virtual library space you can create to deliver library content in a fun, engaging way. When it comes to creating one, the sky's the limit! The best aspect of creating a virtual library space is that they can be used as passive programming to connect with your students attending school in the building, those who opted for a year of virtual learning from home, or those stuck on quarantine or provincial lockdowns.

Once the virtual libraries are available, staff and students can then decide how to use them. For example, a themed Bitmoji library full of read-alouds sent out to staff during a COVID-19 lockdown can be used by the teacher as a bit of a break for elementary students, allowing them to listen while having some mindfulness time colouring or doing a craft as opposed to the active learning of a heavier academic subject through a screen.

Bitmoji libraries can be used for different purposes, with a variety of themes. Throughout this school year, I explored using them to connect with my students and staff in three main ways:

1. Running the Forest of Reading's Blue Spruce program

Between provincial lockdowns, school or class quarantines, and not having students allowed to use the library learning commons space, I struggled at first as to how I could still run the Blue Spruce program with students at my two schools. At the time, library staff were also discouraged from going into classrooms to prevent the transfer of COVID-19 between cohorts. I did not want to cancel the program outright, so I turned to learning how to make a Bitmoji library as the answer.

Before I started creating my library, I first recorded myself

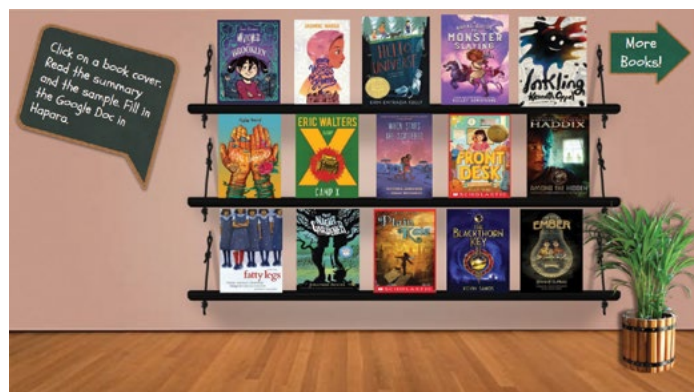
reading each of the ten titles using the Screencastify extension for Google Chrome, with me flipping the pages of the ebook from our school board's Sora (Overdrive) collection while reading out loud, much like I would have in person through a read-aloud. I then got started creating a library in Google Slides. The first slide gave instructions to teachers on how to use the Bitmoji library and listen to the stories. The second slide was the main bookshelf with pictures of all ten nominees this year. Clicking on each of the book cover photos took you to that book's respective slide. The slide page had a link to the recording of me reading that story, as well as picture links to a few of the activities provided from the Forest of Reading to go along with the story. Each page also included a Bitmoji version of me doing something that went along with the story, such as wearing a chef's hat for *Salma the Syrian Chef*.

Once the students had listened to all ten books, teachers would then click on a poster on the wall of the main bookshelf page to take them to instructions on how to have their students vote. I set up a Google Form for the teachers to submit class votes for each title, which I tallied before sending them to the Forest of Reading.

2. Showcasing Specific Themes/Monthly Celebrations

After successfully kicking off the Blue Spruce program with Bitmoji libraries, I turned my attention to how I could further utilize this platform to connect with students and promote literacy without being physically in the same space. During the January provincial lockdown, I spent my time creating a series of Bitmoji library slides for different themes and monthly celebrations that were being celebrated over the winter, including Black History Month, Lunar New Year, Bell Let's Talk Day, Valentine's Day, and our school board's STEAM week.

Each slide featured several recordings of me reading the books. For Black History Month and Lunar New Year, I also tacked on a second slide of resource links for the teachers' benefit. I borrowed the STEAM week slide from an educator from the United States who I follow on Twitter, Shannon Miller (@shannonmmiller), creates fantastically elaborate slides on different themes and often shares them through her Twitter for anyone else to use. I copied what she had created



and adapted it to remove a few of her resources that my school board doesn't have a subscription to and filled the empty spaces with a few that we do.

In the last two months of the year, I revisited this theme/celebration concept with everyone back on provincial lockdown and created two more celebration Bitmoji libraries to end the year to celebrate Pride Month and National Indigenous History Month. With these two celebration libraries, I opted to have one slide with me performing read-alouds, and the other slide with links to fiction and non-fiction titles our school board has on Sora so that junior-aged students can read more about these celebrations on their own. The link on each book cover image took them directly to the title on Sora.

3. Virtual Book Tasting

Pre-pandemic, at least once a year, I would do a book tasting event with the Grade 6 classes at one of my schools. This year, an in-person event with physical books was not in the cards, so I borrowed and adapted the idea of hosting a virtual book tasting from one of my high school co-workers instead. I created a Bitmoji library with two slides containing the titles the students would get to "taste test" for the activity. Each slide had 15 book covers on shelves. Each cover was a link to the corresponding book's page on Sora. I added the Bitmoji book tasting to a Hapara workspace — a collaborative and differentiated digital space — and created a corresponding Google Doc to go with the activity. I shared the Hapara workspace with each teacher I would be doing the activity with, for them to assign it to their students. I then went into

each of the classrooms for a short presentation introducing them to the activity.

They were tasked with recording on the Google Doc whether the book they were looking at was fiction or nonfiction, the title, author, what clues the cover/title gave you about the book. Finally, they were asked if they would want to continue reading the book after browsing a sample from Sora on the book's page (which usually was the first few pages of the book).

The activity encourages students to consider books by various authors, of different genres, or covers that visually do not look like a book they would normally gravitate to read. It also encourages them to use the online ebook platform when their physical library learning commons space is not available to them. ■

Resources

I found the following resources to be very helpful when I was first starting:

Katherine Panczner's Bitmoji Classroom Tutorial on YouTube: youtu.be/s-P_WdQWPc8

Culver City Unified School District's Bitmoji Classroom Instructions: bit.ly/CulverBitmoji

Decolonizing the Virtual Space

Renée Shah Singh

There's something about the smell of a book, the weight of it in your hands, the sound the pages make as the story unfolds. There's something about a school library, the buzz of excitement in the air, the conversations about stories, learning, and life. Exploring different ideas, concepts, and materials to foster wonderment, community and safety, the library learning commons (LLC) is the heartbeat of the school, a learning space accessible to students, educators, staff, and the wider community.

During the pandemic, when we were forced to go digital, it was about more than curating resources; it was about replicating and expanding upon the sense of community and nurturing human connections.

When I stepped into the position of teacher-librarian my main goal was to decolonize the library. In the physical library, decolonizing looks like a purging of outdated knowledge, ideas, and resources. It also means dismantling a traditional system of Eurocentric values. Quite the undertaking in a year without the challenges of teaching during a global pandemic. This belief is captured beautifully by Dr. Gholdy Muhammad in *Cultivating Genius* when she states: "Students must see themselves in the texts, including their cultures, identities, interests, experiences, desires, and future selves." (146) To that end, when creating the digital library, I was intentional and purposeful in curating resources that centre the voices, narratives, and histories of the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) community as well as ensuring equitable access to French resources for our French Immersion program. I was critically careful of the way library funds and resources were allocated. To make my process transparent, I created and shared an infographic to outline the internal discourse and self-reflection required in order to audit and further build the LLC's resources.

The digital library space can be seen as one method — of many — to actively create equitable access to diverse texts and resources. In the past, curation of LLC resources inherently valued some knowledge over others — until recently. In his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi explains: "The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist'. It is 'anti-racist'." (9) When curating resources for the LLC, both in school and online, part of creating an equitable space is to

Whose Perspective? Who is writing/ teaching about whom? Why? What is the perspective? What's missing?	Nothing about us without us Who created the content? What knowledge are they sharing? If it is not from someone of the group, why not?	Representation There is a BIPOC or marginalized person in the book as a character/ main character. Is it a rich character? Are they just there to 'be a face'?
Time and Place Products are representative of a time and place. What time and place are we representing? Are we sharing something with outdated information? We are decolonizing our curriculum.	WHAT ARE WE READING/SHARING /SHOWING? What we're asking	Voices Whose voices are we amplifying? Is there a BIPOC person or person from a marginalized community we could be sharing work from instead?
Is it accessible? Is the language used accessible? Will the message be clearly understood? What is the message?	Characters Who are the characters? What are they doing? Are they reflective of our students? Do they perpetuate stereotypes?	Purpose Why are we sharing this? Is it just to 'check a box'? How is this showing thoughtful and purposeful thinking, teaching, and learning?

Questions to ask when sharing resources. Infographic created to help staff understand the resources chosen for the library and to help audit and pick classroom resources.

ensure inclusion of anti-racist resources, programming, and teaching.

It's hard to gauge your audience digitally. Staring into an abyss of icons as you converse with what seems to be just yourself has its moments. Taking our LLC digital meant collaborating with staff more than ever before. Read alouds for *Live from the LLC* were picked to reflect themes being discussed in classrooms. Weekly LLC updates enabled educators to plan their week to include the various author visits, community events, virtual field trips, and shared story times.

The LLC evolved to include different virtual spaces and many physical places. Before, the school library was confined to operate within the hours of the school building, now the LLC was accessible any time and in any space. Students accessed the library from their homes, in the community, and even in other countries. Going digital expanded the audience beyond the school walls and welcomed in the larger community. Digital activity boards created for heritage and celebration months and the Forest of Reading were shared beyond our school community with other schools, and even

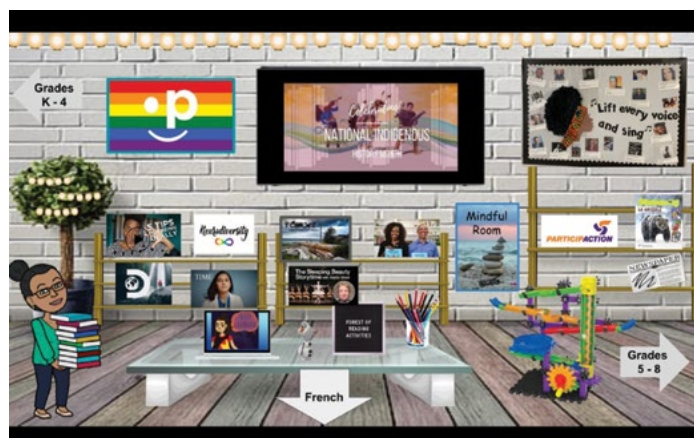


Our Virtual LLC includes videos, books, resources for Heritage Months and Celebrations, and separate “rooms” for different grade levels and French resources.

across other boards. Families in the community looked forward to exploring our weekly *Field Trip Friday*. The LLC website became a hub for resources and continues to be used by the school community both in the school and online. A virtual LLC (VLLC) was created to mimic our in-school space. The VLLC includes games, videos, links to activities, books, and more, all of which are updated monthly.

These spaces have held us up and kept us together. They helped us learn from, make sense of, and unpack some of the most challenging times in contemporary history.

These roles taken on by the LLC came with a weighty responsibility. Staff and students looked to the LLC to provide a safe space to learn, discuss, and try to make sense of what they saw going on in the world. In addition to the weekly *Live from the LLC* read alouds, we added school-wide lessons and read alouds of *A Kids Book About Racism* and *A Kids Book About White Privilege*. The online discussions that followed in classrooms and in small groups helped students talk about how they were feeling and inspired them to take action. Even our youngest learners spoke about being changemakers in their own way. Whether the topics shared in the LLC were heavy with calls to action to change the ills in our world or entertaining to bring us some hope and healing, the resources in the VLLC are multi-lingual and accessible for multi-generational family interaction. Families



Interactive activity board created to share Forest of Reading activities.

and caregivers get a window into the classroom to see how the resources reflect their children and their families’ lived experiences.

The changes to the school LLC are not just pandemic pertinent but have post-pandemic potency. A study conducted by the Ontario Library Association concluded: “All students must have access to school library professionals to help develop the information literacy skills they’ll need after they graduate. Ensure that school library professionals are empowered in all Ontario schools to lead the school strategy on information literacy. *Ontario School Library Impact Project* (April 2021)”. Going forward, school library professionals will be called to masterfully create physical and digital spaces that meet the needs of their diverse learning communities within the bricks and mortar schools and online. Our guiding mandate always has been, and will continue to be, student-centred programming with an emphasis on human connection and building community. Through the use of interactive platforms, diverse and culturally relevant resources, and opportunities to bond by sharing stories, going digital allows the library to continue servicing the learning community when it is most needed. ■

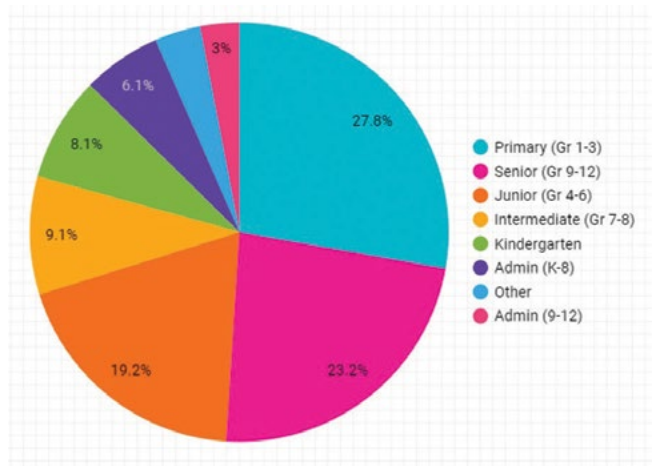
Dream Come True (DCT) Teaching Innovation: The TDSB's Digital Content Team Promotes Student Success Online

Larissa Aradji, April De Melo, Alexis Kolar, Francis Ngo, Agnieszka Kopka, Rebecca Roach and Linda Antolin

COVID-19 has disrupted and altered the way teachers educate and students learn. As educators, we have seen this pandemic decentralize and destabilize our teaching practice ultimately impacting student learning and wellbeing. Yet, in this challenging environment, the Toronto District School Board created a unique, collaborative, cross curricular, K-12 online support for teachers and students called the Digital Content Team (DCT).

The DCT is a collection of teacher-librarians who connect, create and collaborate with teachers across the TDSB. As a team we utilized our collective strengths, passions, and expertise to support any and every teacher, administrator, parent, or student who reached out for ideas or inspiration. We provided support for teachers and students in both virtual and in-person learning in a variety of ways including collaborative planning of inquiries, co-teaching, modelled instruction, digital citizenship, evaluation of online resources, and curation of culturally relevant and responsive texts. Working with teachers in an online environment through Zoom and Google Meet, relationships with teachers and administrators were cultivated and educators were supported. As educators, this professional opportunity was a **Dream Come True** (DCT).

Why do we refer to this role as a “Dream Come True”? The simple answer is: our team, our work, our impact.



DCT Support by Division

Our Team

Imagine working with a group of committed and skilled teacher-librarians, all with the desire to collaborate, assist and lead? First is Agnieszka Kopka, a K-6 educator with expertise in media and digital literacy, ESL, and special education. Agnieszka has been a digital literacy lead (DLL) mentor and library facilitator. She also is a *National Geographic* certified educator and Apple teacher. She utilizes all her teaching, mentoring and digital expertise to positively impact learning outcomes for students.

Next is Francis Ngo, a K-8 educator whose breadth of teaching and life experience focuses on using various forms of technology in the virtual library to engage and educate learners. He has collaborated extensively with educational and community stakeholders to ensure students have access to all forms of literacy and numeracy, supported through his innovative use of technology.

Larissa Aradji is a French immersion K-12 media specialist. She is a DLL mentor, Google certified innovator and trainer and an Apple distinguished educator. She connects digital resources with inquiry focused education to create authentic and deep learning for students.

In addition, we have April De Melo, a teacher librarian, emerging English language teacher, and special education teacher. She has a deep knowledge of digital resources that engage and support students and is a digital lead learner mentor. April uses a culturally relevant and responsive lens when designing learning opportunities for students, connecting resources to students' multiple identities.

Our secondary team also consisted of Rebecca Roach, an educator who uses virtual resources to foster and promote a love of reading. She collaborates with K-12 teachers to enhance and affect positive change in their teaching practice. Her anti-oppressive and equity driven professional lens champions student choice and voice.

Alexis Kolar is a secondary teacher librarian who has worked in both mainstream and alternative schools. She collaborated extensively with teachers to support all learners, including our

underserved students with multiple exceptionalities. Grounded in optimism, her ability to build partnerships with various educators deepens learning and achievement for all students.

Finally, Linda Antolin is an experienced teacher librarian who has devoted her career to supporting student and teacher learning. Her ability to cultivate positive relationships serves to build capability to innovate positive instructional practises that affect change and improve student success and wellbeing.

Our Work

During this time of unprecedented change, classroom teachers (both in person and virtually) needed assistance with collaboration and co-teaching. As a team, we worked with schools to provide indirect support by developing curated and specific resources for deep and authentic learning connected to literacy, math, equity and inclusion. We led grade and subject specific micro-sessions with individualized interventions intentionally supporting de-streaming, learners with intellectual exceptionalities and emerging English language learners. We collaborated and co-taught with experienced and new teachers across panels and curriculum to build capacity by promoting and modelling culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, universal design for learning, diversity instruction, and anti-oppression. We worked to support all learners including emerging English language learners at secondary schools, ISP, and alternative schools. Additionally, we assisted with instructional planning to promote and support de-streaming in math, science, history, English and French (Grade 9 and 10 courses).

The Digital Content Team also had the opportunity to work along with central leadership to enhance system wide objectives. We built relationships and collaborated with K-12 teachers, program coordinators, DLLs and hybrid teachers to directly impact student learning. We curated and assessed digital resources including ebooks, databases, and licensed software for learning levels, inclusion and accessibility through a lens of CRRP and anti-oppression. We promoted and modeled the use of the virtual library as a tool for equity and inclusion through our various outreach initiatives to teachers, students, and connected stakeholders. We empowered students and their families to use the virtual library for choice and voice in their learning by co-teaching. We partnered with professional library staff to review, add and expand subject guides by assessing and evaluating digital connect to ensure underrepresented voices are heard.

Our Impact

The results of this work are impactful and measurable. These statistics represent our influence from April to June.

- 201 direct DCT support requests
- 4.5 K "DCT weekly" and schedule hits
- 2,500 educators and administrators collaborated and supported in office and micro sessions.
- 1,892 Zoom participants
- 239 total Zoom calls
- 544 parent connections

- 201 teachers via Google Form requests
- 115 school collaborations

Our numbers speak for themselves. But numbers do not paint the entire picture. We received a lot of feedback highlighting how partnerships can engage student learning and change professional practise. One teacher said: "If you had not created this team, I don't know what we would have done! We would have been lost in this internet world!"

Another teacher added: "It was so fabulous! I loved how you used Jamboard to record ideas."

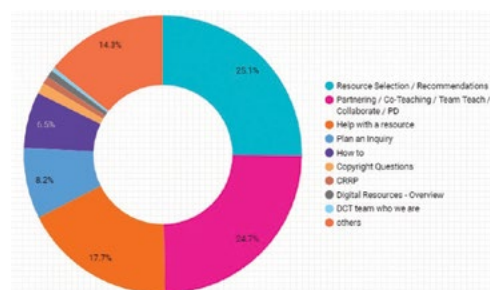
And another wrote: "My brain is going crazy with ideas to build on for my future lessons. You are such an inspiration without making me feel overwhelmed or inadequate!"

Yet another teacher commented: "I love this format as students have control over their learning."

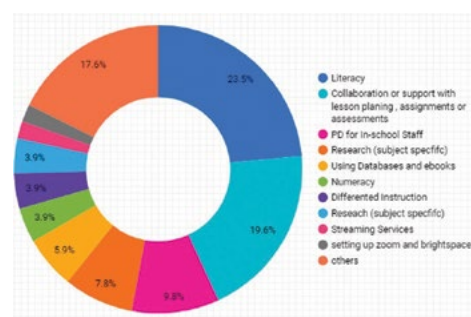
An administrator showed gratitude by reaching out and saying: "Just wanted to extend a huge thank you for supporting Monarch Park Collegiate Academic Pathways Leadership Team. Your guidance, resources and offers of support were very much appreciated and will definitely be used as we continue to build our programs to improve our support of all learners."

The power of the DCT (Digital Content Team or Dream Come True) lies in our shared pedagogy, founded in the use of digital resources through the virtual library to enhance classroom experiences, expand student learning and foster wellbeing. As a team, we have been able to use our diverse and unique skill sets to facilitate system wide use of technology and digital resources, augmenting and advancing learning for all.

Can you imagine a better job? We can't. 🇨🇦



Elementary Areas of Support



Secondary Areas of Support



Lisa Noble

What's In Your Digital Closet? (And What Are You Doing With It?)

Thoughts on Curation for Librarians and Educators

So, you're getting ready for the next school year. You've had some time to breathe, the air is getting a little cooler, and it's time to start pulling ideas together. You know you have a terrific bunch of "check-in" questions that a friend shared with you (icebreaker questions: museumhack.com/list-icebreakers-questions). You should probably find that great recipe for big-batch freezable breakfast burritos for the transition back to breakfasts in a hurry (campfire burritos: simplebites.net/do-ahead-campfire-burritos). Off to Pinterest, where you're sure you put those items, to track them down...and then you give up, and spend way too much time re-inventing the wheel, because it's just not worth wading through EVERYTHING in your Pinterest boards.

Sound familiar?

The goal of this article is to help you think more consciously about what you're curating, how you're curating and who your audience is. Along the way, I would encourage you to have a look at what you've already got in curation spaces and weed, just as you would a physical collection.

What is curation?

The definition that seems to resonate most with librarians is from Joyce Kasman Valenza, Associate Professor of Teaching at Rutgers University School of Communication and Information, who says, who says: "Curation is the story you tell

around the resources you collect. It's your instructional voice. It's about engaging with your community." Jennifer Gonzalez, at Cult of Pedagogy, has an amazing post (Curator or dumper?: cultofpedagogy.com/curator-or-dumper) on how to start to think about creating that story, and some of the pitfalls to avoid as you do it. It is the process of thinking about your designated audience, what they might need, and how they will access it, that will really govern your curation thinking.

Why curate?

If you think about the physical collections you work with, you know that they need curating. You put collections together for classes on particular topics; you put out displays on current themes; you make sure that your collection is weeded regularly. That's curating. Now think about how much information is being produced in the world's digital library space, the Internet (Internet live stats: internetlifestats.com). The sheer volume of information being produced and shared ALL. THE. TIME. means that users can be overwhelmed before they even start to dig into a topic. Think of students (I teach Grade 7s) who type in their search question, and go no farther than their first hit, on their first search engine. They don't really know if that's the best source, or if it's just the first one the algorithm threw at them. It's just likely the only one they're going to read. A carefully curated list of a few resources in multiple forms might help them go deeper (especially if it had visuals).

Curation can allow you to:

- Prepare resources to guide students in research – this is a mini-textbook created in Flipboard for students to find French menus (instead of having to search): [Les Menus](#)
- Keep track of what you're reading (Goodreads is the most common tool, but you can use Keep, or Evernote or a spreadsheet)
- Easily share resources with others, or crowd-source resources. A colleague and I started this Flipboard on financial literacy. This was very helpful for planning during virtual learning. We both have the ability to add stories: [financial literacy ideas](#).

How to curate?

The number of tools available continue to multiply. Experimenting is one of the ways to figure out what works for you (and your users!)

Tools to consider (tip of the iceberg):

- Pinterest (which now lets you subdivide your boards for better curation)
- Flipboard (creates mini-magazines – allows for an image, as Pinterest does)
- Google Keep
- Google Docs (as Hyperdocs)
- Pocket (particularly good for things you might want to access offline). I save my short fiction from tor.com on Pocket, so that I can read it on canoe trips in the interior

- Paper.li (if you are looking to share with others on a regular basis, this is one of several collators that will aggregate what you read and push it out as you schedule it). The amazing Doug Peterson creates one a couple of times a day! [Doug Pete – Ontario Educators](#)

Many of these tools have extensions that will sit on your toolbar and allow you to pop a resource you find right into the tool of your choice.

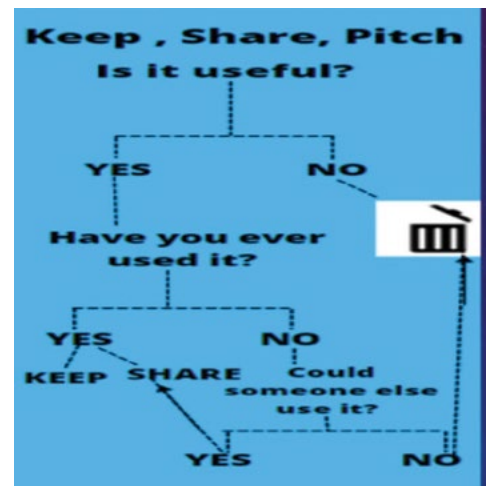
Questions to ask when Curating

to help you think about your tool

- Who is your target audience?
- How are they accessing the resource? (Do they need to install an app?)
- Is the resource link-heavy? (Use something that can handle that.)

And then? Do what you always do: revisit, review, prune, purge, as you do with any other collection.

When you get to that point – the Keep, Share, Pitch pathway is worth thinking about: (graphic created by Lisa Noble)



Who's curating well?

(a teeny tiny list to get you started)

LIBRARIANS ARE!

- @tina_zita and @the_mulc (Melanie Mulcaster) (Choice Boards/Hyperdocs) ([Hyperdocs and the teacher-librarian](#) – from 2017, but worth the read)
- @mrs.lyons.library (Beth Lyons) (Choice Boards/ReadAlouds)
- @GiftedTawk (Julia Dweck) – incredible Jamboards, collated in link.tree
- @VirtualGiff (Jenn Giffen) – using Wakelet to curate her ideas

So, yes, it's time to think about what resources you want to use in a classroom or library this year. Hopefully, this article has helped you start to think about ways to keep track of those amazing resources, share them, and find them again later. Add one of those extensions to your toolbar and see if it helps you think about where to put that terrific article that your knitting group would really appreciate. Schedule some time (15 minutes a week?) to dig into your Google Drive, or your Pinterest boards, and prune a little. Small steps to big gains (and no having to get rid of the books afterward!) ■

Nancy Clow, Sheila Cornelisse, Andrea Lorz, and Marg Mannseichner

Going Virtual and Not Missing a Beat

Supporting Indigenous Education Programming @ UCDSB

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a meme making the rounds on library social media that showed two dogs in a field staring at a high fence considering how to get over it and behind them a dog in mid-flight eager to take the leap. The caption was *librarians preparing for virtual learning*. We think of this funny image often when reflecting on how the Upper Canada District School Board Learning Commons staff (LCIs for short) approached both remote and hybrid learning. And the most comprehensive and boundary pushing program we supported virtually this past year was UCDSB's Indigenous Education initiative.

We had been in training for “clearing that fence” for several years. The importance of using authentic Indigenous resources in the classroom was well understood and accepted across our system, and we had spent years collecting, purchasing, and making accessible authentic digital resources supporting student research, inquiry, lesson planning and professional development. When we moved to remote and hybrid learning, these resources became mainstays for all classroom exploration and with a “library” of digital resources, it also helped us to package them in targeted and focused ways to support programming and special activities.

During the course of at-home learning, LCIs were involved in providing system-wide supports such as resources for Indigenous Education curriculum courses, providing links to support mental health, creating supporting documents to lead difficult conversations in the classroom, such as the Kamloops Residential School discovery of 215 children's remains as well as the planning and delivery of ongoing virtual programs and events within UCDSB. Some examples included:

1. “Quadmester” programming and accompanying classroom resources, offered virtually to all interested secondary classes engaged in Indigenous Education. These sessions featured a variety of speakers from Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities.
2. Indigenous Inquiry professional development sessions for teachers, conducted virtually “in your class, with your class” over a period of six months for Grades 5 and 6 classrooms across 16 schools.
3. Developing and hosting on the Virtual Learning Commons (VLC) digital resource calendars, teacher resources and choice boards in celebration of National Indigenous History Month.
4. Creating teacher guides and classroom question prompts to support pre-recorded Cultural Advisor presentations.
5. Oh yes, and we made reading lists. And purchased books, ebooks and audiobooks – lots of them.

At the school level, LCIs often served as the liaison between teachers and system planning for Indigenous Education, providing communications, new resources and program opportunities to classrooms. We were asked to help arrange and then sit in on presentations with First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural advisors, often providing additional information and links with follow up activities in the chat.

One of our greatest achievements was to transform the annual weeklong, in-person Truth and Reconciliation Gathering for elementary schools into a virtual event, hosted on the



Virtual Learning Commons. The learning was rich and included welcome addresses from dignitaries, pre-recorded teachings from cultural advisors, classroom discussion prompts developed by the learning commons team and an interactive component which allowed students to submit additional questions and “wonderings” they had. The gathering closed with a live panel event and a tour of the student showcase highlighting class projects and artifacts from across the board.

How did this year become so successful for the UCDSB learning commons? First, we have a great LCI team with a determined and dedicated work ethic that strives to improve knowledge daily and second, we know this work couldn’t be done without acknowledging the need to build strong relationships with teachers, principals and system staff. We supported one another as we learned many skills on the fly, never said “no”, and were grateful to have the many online platforms such as LibGuides, Microsoft Teams, the Sora collection and our online databases ready to go.

We learned a lot this year! We know that clear communication is vital to providing meaningful resources and support. We have created an amazing support system that helped us when we needed to vent, process and devise our plans of action. We recognize where we are in our own personal learning journeys, and we acknowledge the need for self-care and to support one another. Connecting hearts and minds for the important work of Indigenous Education is hard, but necessary work. It is our role as educators to provide the resources our teachers and students need to honour the Calls to Action on education in the Truth and Reconciliation Report, even when that means pivoting quickly to virtual. ■



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Core Practices Support Digital Heartbeat of the LLC

Rob Long

As I sit (actually I stand, but that sounds wrong) to write this, a song popped into my head — *Digital* by Imagine Dragons

“We are, we are the face of the future
We are, we are the digital heartbeat
We are, we are the face of the future
We don’t wanna change, we just wanna change everything”

Libraries, rooted in history and storming into the digital age we long for the paper pages, the touch and feel and smell of a tactile book. That has been something at the core of libraries for thousands of years — the storage of books, paper, scrolls and accumulated knowledge. Now, with the start of this new millennium, we have to drop all that. Are you crazy? We are not dropping all that.

We are in a new place in our schools and in the roles staff play within a library learning commons. We are now in a digital future and will likely continue to be more deeply embedded in a digital space. The question is, are we the digital heartbeat? Can we be there supporting that digital environment? This question has become more relevant throughout the pandemic. With most schools experiencing periods of virtual access, what is the role of the LLC and those supporting it?

The roles LLC staff played in the pandemic changed. Many teacher-librarians had to take on virtual classes; in some boards all library related connections were removed. For LLC technicians, many had to be even more involved in technology management, as schools went virtual and then came back in and went out again, on the pandemic technology roller-coaster.

But now, what is the face of that future LLC and the staff supporting it? There is a lot to cover in that space so let’s focus a little. And let’s look at the boards that are creating permanent virtual schools. What might the role of an LLC technician be in that digital space? One thing is for sure, it is not going to be filled with paper!

As we look at these new virtual schools, let’s also look back just a little. Start at the beginning. What was the vision for our technician role in an LLC coming into the pandemic and

now into virtual schools. This [vision statement for L/LC’s](#) was developed by the technicians at the Ottawa Catholic School Board. It is drawn from support for the six Cs within a Deep Learning framework and applied to a space that is an LLC. The original statement as it appears here was not developed with a virtual school in mind but the vision still applies.

OCSB LLC Vision Statement

A learning commons is a physical, virtual and shared space, designed to encourage students to explore their environment and the world around them. The learning commons is an innovative centre offering students a place to engage, explore and collaborate with others.

When you look at a vision statement like this and have it as a core to start from, it might be easier to see the transitional opportunities to support an LLC technician within a fully virtual environment. Let’s break it down further by category as outlined in the vision. What might a virtual LLC technician do:

The Core Practices Supporting The Six Cs

Developing Literacies

A primary function of the LLC is to support the school staff by promoting and developing literacy. The broader definition of literacy can and should include technological and cultural literacy. This is supported by ensuring that the content is available online.

Flexible Learning Spaces

With learning spaces moving online this goal is still easily achieved. Promoting and sharing flexible learning spaces — online virtual field trips, Minecraft worlds, an LLC active online space with available virtual hours for library visits — is something that stays in scope.

Resources

This one is obvious. Almost all boards support an array of online resources. An LLC tech does not need to be a master of supporting all pedagogy but being able to use the tools



and help staff connect applications to the classroom is a very valuable virtual skill. This might be something as simple as learning how to reserve books in Sora for that special project or demonstrating how to collect notes in a Google Doc in Gale. Providing technical training with staff so they understand what is new or providing guidance to students on how to use the resources are valuable activities for LLC staff.

Maker Spaces

There are many online places to make — from designing code in a Microbit simulator to designing art in 3D with Tinkercad. Here is [a good list of things](https://commonsense.org/education/top-picks/digital-resources-for-school-makerspaces) to virtually make (commonsense.org/education/top-picks/digital-resources-for-school-makerspaces). It is important to be aware and share.

Supporting the Four Elements of Deep Learning

For many boards, they have adopted a more active stance to learning like the Deep Learning framework or Project Based Learning. At OCSB it is Deep Learning and there are four key elements to Deep Learning. As an LLC technician, it is important to be able to support the school staff and students within this framework and within the LLC. As a virtual technician what might that look like?

Pedagogical Practices

How teachers teach and how parents support classroom learning are pieces that are enhanced by the LLC with tools and resources. As students dive into real projects and activities, they require guidance with tools and resources. Students also will bring deep projects into their home — even more so now with remote learning — so parents need to be part of the education team. An LLC technician can assist with parental guides to the school content.

Partnerships

Part of Deep Learning is stepping out of the classroom to learn from and with others. Although an LLC technician is not responsible for setting up the projects and conducting them, in their resource support there are ample opportunities to

make connections and develop partnering resources like [the digital human library](#).

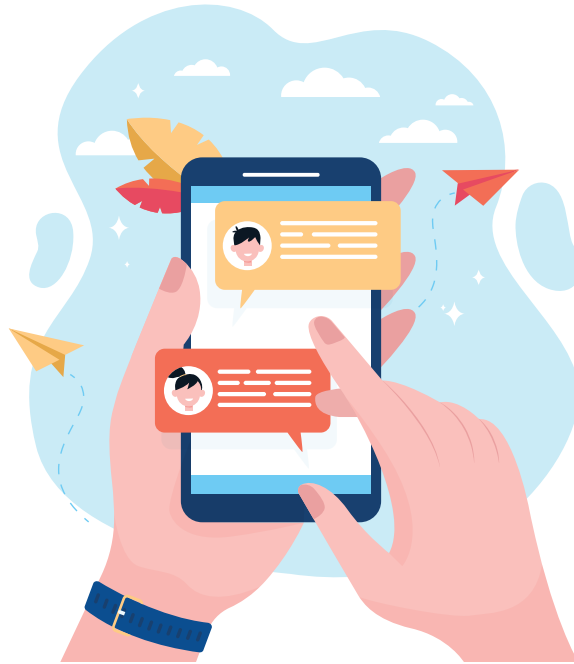
Learning Environment

Providing students with different learning spaces depending on what they are doing, who they are collaborating with and their own individual situation, is important to learning. In the virtual LLC there are many environments that can be created. Using Google Meet, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams environments might require showing the students all the features they can use or setting up partnership meetings for real time collaborations.

Leveraging Digital

From a bricks and mortar environment, a focus on leveraging technology is sometimes required to ensure that technology is to transform the practice to something that could not be accomplished without the use of technology. An often used, but good example, is the ongoing collaboration of people at a distance, like accessing an expert to work with you and learn from, or to critique and provide feedback on student work.

The role of an LLC is as strong in supporting the staff and students of a virtual school as it ever was in a brick and mortar school. That vision should be shared so staff, students, and parents understand how an LLC technician can support learning. LLC's can be the heartbeat of a virtual school and the face of the future. So go ahead and change everything, LLCs will be there to provide support even if we pick up a paper book at home. ■



The Future In My Virtual Hand

Shelagh Straughan

While in the past, distance has necessitated the need for some online programming, changes in schools due to COVID-19 protocols during the last two years opened up a virtual world not only of necessity but also of possibility. There are few professions as well prepared and suited to this transition as ours – we are adept at rolling with change. Those of my vintage will remember the cries of “libraries are dead!” with the advent of computers, then Internet, followed by ebooks. Little did people realize that teaching librarians are not only up to the challenge of transitioning, but our work is not dependent upon certain formats or technology. The programs and services we provide remain impactful even as the method of delivery morphs into something new.

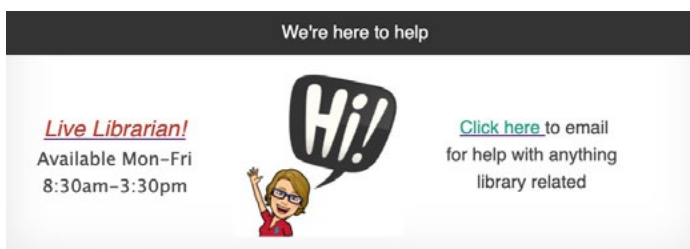
Teaching librarians have shown remarkable creativity since the abrupt shift in the spring of 2020 and during the long slog of the 2020-21 school year. For those fortunate to retain library programs during the past year, a significant shift has been required of us, resulting in a re-definition of what we knew “virtual” to be. Here’s a bit about what that looked like for us at Trinity College in Port Hope.

Virtual Services

Nothing can replace a warm smile greeting students coming into the library, but we tried our best to virtually replicate it by staffing a Google Meet during the academic day. We posted this message prominently on our library website, and it also was included in our school-wide “Where to get help” document.

The link was well used by our regulars and students following up on a class visit. It also worked really well for busy teachers who didn’t have time to come to the library, as well as distanced students who were connecting virtually when the rest of us were fortunate to be on campus. I can see this link (or perhaps a live chat feature, similar to academic libraries) being part of our new normal. Library users should have an immediate online option to bookend our in-person presence.

Most class visits for research instruction became virtual, with me connecting to a classroom via Google Meet even when we were on campus. Sometimes this was necessary due to capacity issues, sometimes it simplified presentation for a hybrid class. I found that breakout rooms and the chat feature really enhanced my work. Popping into a breakout room allowed for a focused one to one during a busy class, and sharing resource links via chat was very efficient. For example, after guiding Grade 9 Science students through [the SIFT source evaluation method](#), they had time to find and evaluate a web resource. A brave volunteer would share a link through the chat so that as a class, we could SIFT it out together – they are always more



March Book Madness- Picture Book Edition

Click on the book cover to watch a video of the book being read aloud

Sweet Sixteen	Elite Eight	Final Four		Final Four	Elite Eight	Sweet Sixteen
		TCS Championship				
						
						
						
						
						
						
						

engaged using their own suggested sites, and the chat made it so easy to share.

In addition, the library team tried to be hands-off during readers' advisory (lots of pointing) and encouraged the use of the self-check function on our app; we use the Accessit library system. It hadn't gained much traction before COVID-19 but kids loved learning how to use their phones to scan their own books, and it meant less handling on our part. I hope we can build on app use this year.

Virtual Programming

In the last issue of this publication, Jonelle St. Aubyn told us about the great success of her school's Skype visit with Jason Reynolds. Similarly (on a smaller scale), we found that a virtual author visit proved to be a great way for us to celebrate the end of White Pine when sadly, the greatly-anticipated Harbourfront festival was not an option. We were delighted to host author Zaliqa Reid-Benta, author of *Frying Plantain*, via Zoom, and White Pine readers joined with members of our Black Student Alliance to discuss this coming-of-age collection of short stories with its author. Her book was one of [the 2021 lineup](#) most enjoyed by our students.

Previously mentioned protocols also resulted in a shift of our book club sessions from in-person to online, even during much of the year when students were present on campus, and this club became surprisingly bigger and more vibrant than ever. Most participants engaged in both weekly informal

book chats, as well as more formal monthly book discussions focused on one title. Our time together was most meaningful for them when I relaxed my virtual classroom expectations and let them go wild in the chat. It was a bit nutty at times, with verbal and text chats happening simultaneously, but it all centred around books and allowed kids to take part however they felt comfortable. Similarly, running our annual 12-hour reading marathon on a Google Meet (with game/snack/prize kits distributed well in advance) was more successful than we could have imagined.

Being at school for the full month of March prompted us to run March Picture Book Madness for the whole school. While we had displays in our physical libraries, the virtual bracket was the real magic. It was created by my colleague Sarah Torrible, modified from an editable version posted freely online. Each cover image was linked to a publisher-posted video of the book being read aloud and the updated board was released with each weekly vote. All participants were entered in a draw for a copy of the winning book. So much fun during a bleak month!

This article focuses on what worked, not detailing the significant trial and error and many failed attempts. The only thing I know for sure is that there is no going back. It's quite an overstatement to say that like Rush, I "hold the future in my virtual hand" but there's some truth in there for all of us. ■

Once Upon a Digital Journey

Kasey Whalley, with notes from Andrea Ursic

Ask nearly any school library professional and they will likely confirm that there are distinct times in the school year when we are so unfathomably busy, we hardly remember who wrote Harry Potter. In March of 2020, this busyness was compounded by a quickly shifting educational landscape, unpredictable provincial and regional policy changes, and an underlying tension around our public health. All these pressures have ultimately changed the way we view, use, and represent libraries in schools.

March 2020 was also the last time I was physically in my library for nearly 14 months; I was officially on maternity leave April 9 and would not be returning until April 2021. Andrea Ursic is the teacher-librarian who designed, executed, and celebrated our library's transition into the fully digital realm with the help of Daniela Lorkovic, who was in her first year as co-teacher-librarian. I dove headfirst into this new way of working nearly 13 months afterwards. Our vastly different journeys to a digitally supportive and fully engaged library led us to discover key aspects to maintaining the relevance and reflectiveness of our library through unpredictable changes. Although each of us took a different route to the same destination, we realized that each journey required four major elements:

1. Adaptation and Improvisation
2. Reinventing the Wheel
3. Cross-Referencing Everything
4. Keeping the Core

Adaptation and Improvisation

Like most organizations over the past year, our library needed to learn to change our policies and services to better meet the students where they were – in the library, in the classroom, or at home. Each year, incoming Grade 9 students (and forgetful Grade 10, 11 and 12 students) need help resetting their school passwords and registering for our self-serve reset tool. This password allows students to access online resources, like their board-provided email, online content for their courses, and access to our digital library resources. Most of the time, these access issues were quickly solved by having students visit the library. There were underlying benefits to this in-person communication: library staff were able to address language or digital literacy barriers; there was an increased exposure

to library programs and staff; and we had opportunities to connect with the students beyond their initial access issue.

When students returned to school in September 2020, and portions of classes were being delivered entirely online, students no longer had direct physical access to our library. Andrea and Daniela had to rely on telephone calls and chat boxes to help students. Hundreds of students called or messaged the library, and Andrea and Daniela had to adapt their work processes just to meet the demand. Where we would once introduce students to other services or programs during these meetings in person, the library had to improvise a quicker and more succinct version of these interactions to better support students for the very quick start-up.

During this hectic time, the library was also responsible for distributing over 400 devices to staff and students, a task that has never been undertaken by our library before. This new task required significant logistical organization, and Andrea and Daniela implemented a system that allowed them to track school and board-provided devices. This had to be done in coordination with administrative and classroom staff to ensure every student had a viable means of participating in their classrooms, since a significant portion of content was now online. Adapting to the new processes and new tasks was done with remarkable focus on student need and support.

When I returned near the end of the year, I had to quickly adapt to these new modes of communication and responsibilities – it was a shock to me how much my job looked and functioned differently from when I left. I jumped headfirst into helping Andrea and Daniela answer student questions online and helped with the logistics of device returns. Through the last two months of the school year, we would repeatedly remark on the difference in our experiences. I was on a significant learning curve while Andrea and Daniela had already adapted and improvised new service delivery methods. By reimagining and adapting our workflows and student support systems, improvising new processes, and overcoming extraordinary workloads, our library was able to continue helping staff and students solve access, resource, and technological issues. Being able to adapt or invent new ways of delivering a service or program was key to our success in going fully digital.

Reinventing the Wheel

As part of our adaptation to a new working environment, Andrea worked on reinventing the (metaphorical) wheel. With circulation being put on hold, Andrea feared the library would lose a large portion of our connection to staff and students, so she began looking for other avenues to connect with our community. She and Daniela took tried and tested programs – ones that we know have student interest – and adapted them to an online environment. One thing she noticed was the distinct lack of after school programming. For many years, the library has hosted a book club and a writing club – both with high student attendance. The library moved the book club online and focused on the Read Woke challenge, a program with international recognition that encourages diverse reading practices. Andrea found a way to tap into student interests and representation in a way that would overcome the difficulties of having a book club online. Students were given a choice of books to read each month, each focused on a different diversity topic. Andrea and Daniela then hosted monthly meetings that provided students a platform to talk about the books they had read, made connections to other books, and had an interactive or digital media element.

Circulation and research help was also moved online. Andrea and Daniela made an effort to encourage students and staff to check our online catalogue for reading material and our databases for research material. Andrea created interactive resource packages that staff could post directly to their classrooms and linked back to digital content available through our digital subscriptions, databases, or e-book catalogue. Providing library guides and hosting a book club is not new to library operations, but our library had to find innovative ways to make these programs work in a wholly digital space. The amount of time and effort to passively program for a library is significantly less than creating constantly changing online programming and services; the digital world moves so much faster than the physical world. When I rejoined our team, I realized how valuable a digital delivery system was for these resources and programs. There was, again, a bit of a thinking shift, but overall the staff and students seemed to enjoy seeing something familiar in a new way. So much of the educational environment had shifted that having a recognizable program or service was comforting and well-received by staff and students. I joined the book club, and helped develop online content for our students and staff that looked and felt like services we had previously offered. Andrea, Daniela, and I looked for new ways to present old programming and services to better support our students in the digital realm.



Cross-Referencing Everything

As students returned to school for the 2020-2021 school year, Andrea focused on finding places where programs, policies, or services overlapped and intersected with others, to fully capitalize on collaboration. Once again, our library looked for ways to adapt yet keep familiar programs for our staff and students. Andrea and Daniela began looking for everyday things that the library could promote or create that would support students, including working closely with our mental health professionals, helping with school-wide events to support our administrative staff, and promoting or curating material on relevant national celebrations that can be used in any classroom. Not all these programs were “library-related”, but by promoting and by supporting them in multiple platforms, the library was able to maintain a core presence in our digital school spaces.

This practice became especially valuable for students who would normally come to the library to use our space but would rarely engage in library-specific services or events. By working on initiatives that reach a wider group of students and supporting programs and services that align with our library values, Andrea and Daniela were able to maintain educational relevancy, student connection, and professional collaborative practices in a fluctuating environment. One way they did this was by creating a News and Event Google Classroom where students could see contest postings, school schedules, new information, and connect with staff. This did not replace our standard school website, but it did support the resources and information students needed. Andrea and Daniela would often answer student questions on this classroom and students began to know that they could email or post a question and someone from the library would have the answer. This practice was something we often promoted and strived for during in-person learning and talked about during our orientations; we would often tell our students: “If we don’t have the answer, we know where to find it.”

Andrea also undertook moving our resources completely online. She began with a staff SharePoint site where she posted commonly used resources such as our library guides, citation material, and database access codes. While most of this was always available online, Andrea worked towards a centralized one-stop-shop for our staff to which they could directly link and bookmark. She also created a Google Site for our students that looked and functioned a bit differently. This site was focused on student engagement and resources, including direct links to the Read Woke book club, online resources to support their specific classes, and digital literacy content. She would also post links, flyers, social media handles, announcements on our social media pages so that students would receive the information instantaneously.

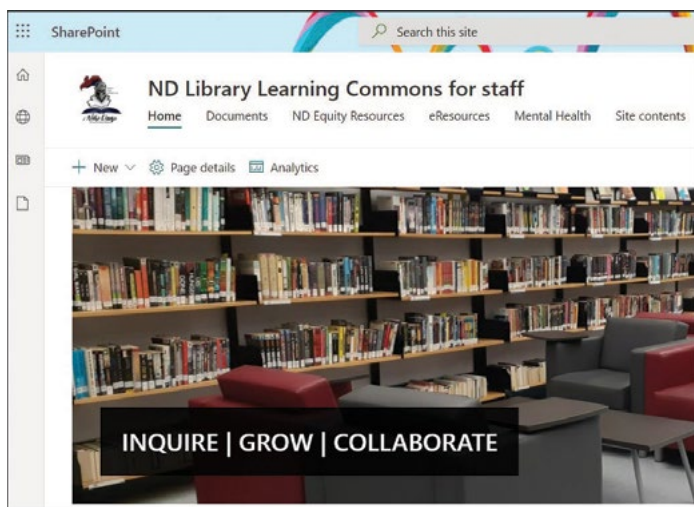
This took a significant amount of time but was immensely valuable to our staff and students. I also found it incredibly helpful when I came back to work. Both the sites and the classroom postings that Andrea and Daniela had created were perfect places for me

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to begin – I could start to understand how we were operating in a fully digital space without having to check each course’s learning site or read through hundreds of emails. Having multiple access points for staff and students to connect with us allows us to support our community through a variety of different channels. We fully embodied the practice of meeting our students where they are and prepared for where they might be.

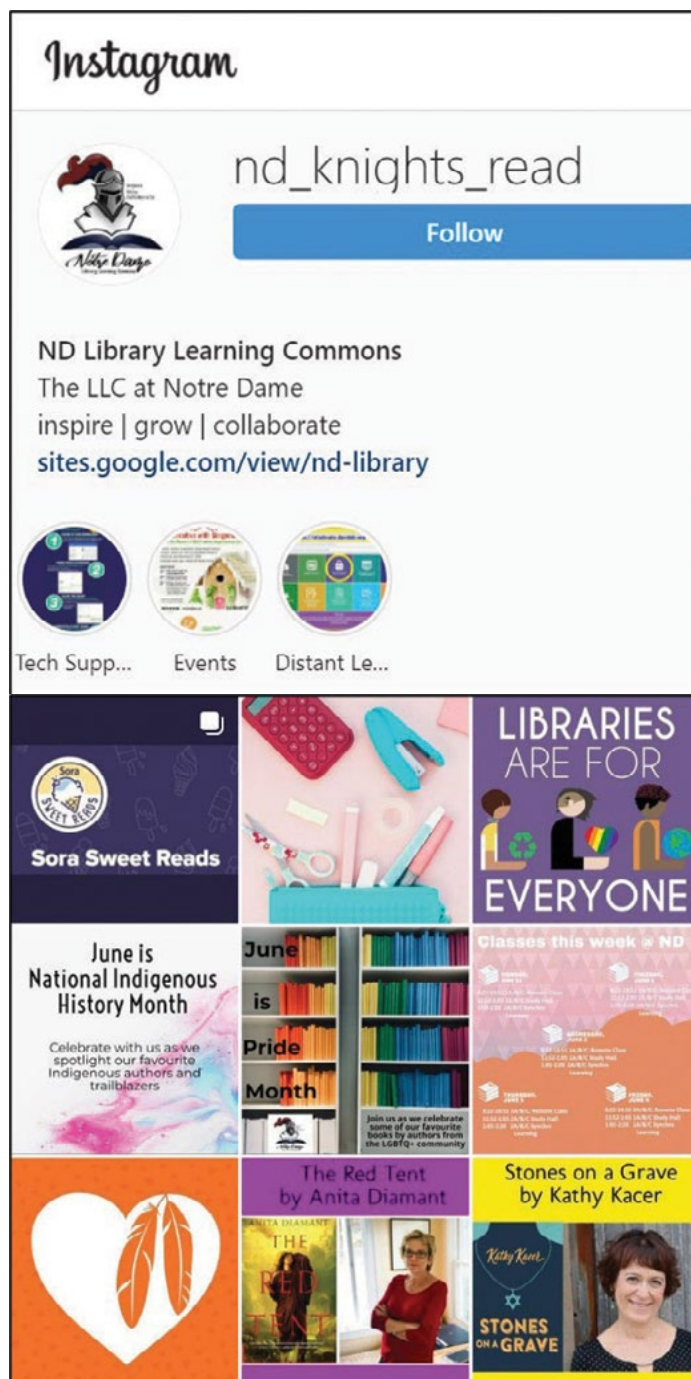
Keep The Core



Despite the adaptations, reinventions, and need for multiple channels, at the core of all this work, Andrea and Daniela, and later I, retained the fundamental value of our library: support student learning and connections in any way we can. Keeping to our core value led Andrea and Daniela to implement new programs and services that could be delivered and promoted online, including having a student contest to design our library logo.

We hope that in the coming school year we will be able to connect in more ways with our students. We’ve brainstormed new programs that use our social media accounts and engage in digital media literacy and we’re implementing a new reading program for our incoming Grade 9s that allows them to borrow physical or digital books. We’re planning to continue with in-person and online citation lessons. Andrea also would like to focus on connecting with our wider school community by having multi-school trivia events that will have online and in-person elements. A large focus we would like to continue to promote and support is diversity and representation in library programs.

Connecting with students with both static and instantaneous methods will allow the library to meet students once again where they are – through websites, on social media, and in their physical and digital classrooms. Keeping the core values of our library allowed me to ground myself during a turbulent return-to-work. We are, at the core, a library learning commons, and we intend to keep providing programs and services for our entire community to support their inquiry, growth, and collaboration. ■





Forest Of Reading®

Forest of Reading Virtual Celebrations

Meredith Tutching

Well, 2021 has been quite a year and another one full of so many pivots. As much as we were hopeful we would all be back together at events, we realized early that wasn't going to happen. The Forest of Reading staff and volunteers had to get creative. Along with our publishing friends and amazing authors and illustrators, we developed a suite of virtual programs to celebrate this year's award nominees.

The Forest of Reading Festival was delivered virtually again in 2021 in partnership with CBC Books. Nine ceremonies were presented on May 18, 19 and 20, 2021 in French and English, hosted by CBC comedian Ali Hassan. Over 110 authors and illustrators, from across the country, participated in creating virtual content that was edited and curated by CBC Books.

In addition to the award ceremonies, the Forest of Reading was able to program other virtual celebrations thanks to a grant from Canadian Heritage's Book Fund. The Ontario Library Association was excited to deliver such incredible content by Canada's best creators and below is a list of what was created and delivered in April, May and June:

- Ten English Read-Aloud programs for Blue Spruce nominees
- Ten French Read-Aloud programs for Le prix Peuplier nominees
- Six virtual events for Yellow Cedar nominees
- One White Pine event with eight authors for high school students
- Five virtual illustrator presentations
- Three Forest of Reading kid and teen committee book lists released in June
- Six interviews with the Forest of Reading winners hosted on Curio.ca (Four interviewers were children and Ali Hassan hosted the Red Maple and White Pine winners)

Additionally, this year we saw the highest number of virtual author visits presented through the Forest Fridays and Mercre-Lit programs. Twenty-four English-language nominees and 16 French-language nominees presented their books and we streamed these weekly from January to May. ■

Forest of Reading Goes Virtual

Ruth Gretsing



It is no surprise to anyone that 2020–2021 is the year of the “pivot”. But how exactly do you pivot a literary institution that regularly involves hundreds of thousands of participants across the province and even across Canada? The Forest of Reading had to respond to the pandemic, like we all did, with innovation, creativity and a deep breath of hope.

Usually, the work begins with Selection Committees, who read between 75–150 books a year in order to select the top ten for their “tree”. In a normal year, review copies are sent to each committee member in hard copy. Instead, the wonderful people at Tinlids sent out PDF files for review. As Marshall McLuhan said, “the medium is the message” – digital gives you a very different experience of a book. Some committees moved to more frequent Zoom meetings for book discussion, rather than the “season finale” style teleconference.

When the titles were released in October, they were announced with fantastic videos from BiblioVideo, the YouTube channel for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre. Coupled with a strong social media presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, this meant our amazing lists reached as many young readers as possible, whether at virtual school, home school or in-person.

From there, the Steering Committees take the reins, contacting authors and creating activities and resources for the password site. Through the password site, registered participants can access a multitude of resources, including the fabulous Forest Fridays, and Mercre-Lit. These were staples long before COVID-19, but their connection to Forest fans was critical to keeping readers engaged with the program from a distance. For Blue Spruce, some illustrators’ videos were added in March, and finally, author read alouds joined the suite as we all locked down in April. The author read alouds proved to be massively popular in 2020, and 2021 was no different. All these bonuses were available for registered participants until the end of June.

Thanks to a partnership with CBC, the festival award ceremonies were hosted on Curio.ca by Ali Hassan. Each tree got its own time slot over three days mimicking the in-person festival without the chance of bad weather! Ali briefly introduced each

book, its authors and short reading commercials from Forest readers before moving on to the grand announcement. After the ceremonies, interviews with the winners were posted. This partnership is critical in spreading the reach of the Forest across Canada.

From my vantage point in a variety of roles in the Forest — as Co-chair of the Forest, Co-chair of Silver Birch Fiction Selection Committee, and leader of my school program — I can safely say that the 2020 and 2021 Forest programs presented many challenges but were ultimately successful. That could not have happened without Meredith Tutching and her stellar team at the Ontario Library Association. They managed to rise above all challenges, even while working reduced hours and remotely. So much of this year’s Forest demonstrates the “Paradox of the Pandemic” perfectly.

Virtual Forest and the digital platforms brought so many closer to the experience, even while we were further apart. I missed chatting spontaneously with students about the amazing books and doing activities in person, but I also had more students involved at some level. As Selection Co-chair, we were used to teleconferences but didn’t usually put a face to the voice until we met up at Super Conference after Selection was done and the program was underway. Now, with more regular video conferences, I can recognize my team members, and I feel our discussions are richer and more developed because we can see each other as people rather than just voices.

The streamed ceremonies brought the Forest to all of Canada and the world, but that “rock concert” in-person vibe is hard to replace. Stories are all about making that personal connection between author and reader, among readers, between reader and story. We lost some of that due to the nature of the pandemic but tried to build as much as we could through social media and streaming to maintain those bonds.

I look forward to the best of all worlds as we take some of the lessons we learned and move forward. Happy reading everyone and watch out for the 2022 lists! They are going to knock your socks off! 📖

Virtual Author Visits

Kimberly Senf



There were no packed gymnasiums, auditoriums or classes brought together in the library for in-person author visits this year. While those moments were certainly missed in the different year that we all had in our schools and libraries, the restrictions on gatherings afforded us the chance to re-examine how we envision author visits in our schools. We have been constrained by geography most years, but this year our options were opened wide as we invited authors from across the country to speak to students at our school. The move to virtual author visits has opened exciting new possibilities for school libraries to invite both international authors and Canadian authors from across the country to speak to students, an opportunity that many schools likely had not fully realized before this year.

At Elmwood School in Ottawa, we welcomed authors and visiting speakers into our schools virtually instead of in-person, which was a shift that allowed our students to speak to authors that we would not have been able to bring in person. To celebrate I Read Canadian Day in February, we invited three Canadian authors to share their insights and perspectives with different grade groups at our school.

Erica Eades, the Junior School librarian at Elmwood School, organized the virtual visit with Ruth Ohi. Known for her popular picture book series, *Fox and Squirrel*, Ms. Ohi thrilled students with a fun and engaging presentation that combined reading, art, and storytelling during her virtual session. Our students particularly enjoyed hearing about Ms. Ohi's creative process and learning how to draw some cute critters as well.

David A. Robertson spoke to students about the teachable elements that are included in his latest novel, *The Barren Grounds*. These moments include representation of different cultures in the characters he creates within his narrative and directly commenting on the state of our environment with the setting of eternal winter in his portal story. The students were ready with their questions after his presentation, and he was content to answer as many questions as we could fit into the time allotted for his session. It is definitely a little bit clunkier having students ask questions across different classrooms on a virtual platform, but we made it work.

Elmwood has a partnership with the Ottawa Public Library and they offered our students several other opportunities to have virtual author visits at our school. Maika and Maritza Moulite, authors of *One of the Good Ones*, spoke to our Grade 9 and 10 English classes during Black History Month in February. Our Grade 11 and 12 French language students had the chance to attend a session with Diana Bélice, a French-Canadian author of several young adult novels. To highlight poetry and spoken word in April, classes across our middle and senior school were able to attend virtual sessions with Toronto spoken word artist Britta B. Her talk was invigorating and fun – it definitely kept all the students on their toes!

This year was an anomaly in many ways, but it will be remembered as a year where there was a noticeable shift with the planning and timing of our author visits. Our school community is much more open to the idea of virtual sessions with speakers that align with the work we are doing and the learning that is happening in the classroom. This shift will allow us to bring in our local authors alongside the authors from farther afield, creating engaging and diverse library programming for our students. ■



Forest Of Reading®

Get Ready for the
2022 Program Year!

Registration Opens: October 1

School-Aged Awards Nominees
Announcement: October 15

Adapting Blue Spruce Forest of Reading Program for Virtual Learning

Beth Lyons

The Forest of Reading program has always been a big deal at our school. Students start asking about it as soon as school resumes in September. Staff want to know if I have ordered the books yet and when they can start to read them. So, when we started the 2020–2021 school year with close to 80% of our school population learning virtually, COVID-19 protocols around quarantining books, a physical library space closed to all except for me, I knew we would need to make some big changes to the Forest of Reading program at our school.

In the past we have shared the Blue Spruce books with the Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes. Educators were able to borrow eight out of the ten books from the library to read and explore with their class using the Tinkering in the Forest website (bit.ly/TinkerInTheForest) I created to help with planning, provocation and inquiry sparks and integration with other content areas. The last two books were reserved for reading in the library learning commons with me (so I could join in on the fun, too!) and so educators and I could co-plan an inquiry or make opportunity together for the class.

For the oldest students in my school (Grades 4 and 5) we purchased the Silver Birch Fiction, Silver Birch Express and Yellow Cedar books to use for a student book club. Students were able to self-select their books, use a passport to track their reading, meet with educators who acted as “expert readers” for interviews about the books, and earn badges for optional maker and inquiry challenges related to the books. Given all the COVID-19 safety protocol restraints, much of our previous programming was not going to work this year.

We ultimately decided to run Blue Spruce as a school-wide literacy program for our Kindergarten to Grade 5 classes. I once again curated [the Tinkering In the Forest website](https://bit.ly/TinkerInTheForest) for educator and student use with the following guiding questions to frame the learning:

- How might reading about others help us better understand ourselves?
- How might reading about people who are different from us help us to better understand the connections between us?
- What does it mean to explore our identity?
- How will we extend our learning into action? More specifically, how might we use this learning to continue our journey towards being anti-racist?

Each week from January to April we focused on one of the Blue Spruce books for our Live from the Library virtual story times.

Classes would join me for a live reading and discussion of the picture book and an exploration of the provocations, prompts, videos and guiding questions. It was interesting to engage in discussions with students from across the grade levels to see where they made connections to the characters, the themes, and their own lives. With the virtual classes, we had the added benefit of being able to meet and talk with family members who were also at home as we explored family connection with grandparents, cooking and community. At the end of our Blue Spruce program, I asked educators to provide feedback and these are a few of the responses that will be used to guide our programming for next year:

- We had an opportunity to explore many issues that otherwise would have been difficult to initiate. The books were carefully chosen to highlight issues of cultural differences, celebrations and points of view, gender, and social identities.
- Finding time to implement the Blue Spruce program in online learning was very challenging as all online teachers will tell you everything takes more time.
- The resources were purposeful and connected to the texts allowing students to get a deeper understanding. It provided different curriculum connections that we could explore as a classroom teacher.
- I would love the whole school read alouds to continue even when we are all back in school!

Looking forward to next year, with so much of our school year and COVID-19 protocols still unknown, I can say that I will continue to engage the school-wide community in read alouds, both as part of the Blue Spruce programming and our general literacy work. I am hopeful that we can once again use a student book club model for the Silver Birch and Yellow Cedar programs if the physical library space is open and students are able to independently sign out books. Gathering the school community a few times each week to share in a story and discussion has been one of the gifts of our new virtual learning environments. As a school library professional, it has been an absolute joy and privilege to be invited into classrooms each week to share stories and community with students. A virtual teacher librarian is often very separate from students and I cherished every moment spent with educators and students this year. At times we had over half of our school joining in to listen and share in a story together. That’s a pretty cool act of community in a time when we are all so far apart. ■

Our Reimagined Forest of Reading Journey

Seeing the Forest for the Trees

Each October in the District School Board of Niagara, we eagerly await the announcement of the Forest of Reading® nominated lists. The moment these titles are announced, the planning begins for district-wide culminating student celebrations for Silver Birch, Yellow Cedar, Red Maple and a Blue Spruce family event.

This year it was apparent that these events would have to be reimagined due to the ever-changing pandemic response. As we navigated the closure of our physical library learning commons, pondered the possibilities for safe circulation, and considered the many different responsibilities our teacher-librarians were assigned, we wondered how the DSNB Forest of Reading might continue to thrive. Yet, we were determined to honour our goals of promoting a lifelong love of reading through Canadian literature, family engagement, student voice and connection. An idea emerged to provide board-wide virtual book clubs that would replace the school-based clubs of the past. The more this idea developed, the more excited we became to connect our readers from across the Niagara Region by providing a platform for them to discuss the books they were reading.

COVID-19 restrictions prevented educators and students from gathering for book clubs or even an intimate read-aloud. We wanted to equip both in-person and virtual educators with the tools they would need to facilitate learning through the Forest of Reading both in their classrooms and as an extracurricular opportunity. We did this by purchasing the titles that were available in ebook format and registering all of our schools for the program thereby providing access to the wealth of resources available through the password protected site.

A virtual orientation kickoff was held in January to provide an overview of the program including timeline, dates, incentives, what to expect at monthly meetings and a tutorial on how to access and effectively use the D2L (Desire to Learn) site for book discussions. We also developed a website to make it easier for educators, students, and families to find this information and updates about the re-imagined DSNB Forest of Reading program.

There were three main components of the DSNB Silver Birch, Yellow Cedar and Red Maple programs this year: asynchronous virtual book discussions through D2L, synchronous book club

meetings through Microsoft Teams, and a virtual celebration. Students may have been given time to contribute to book discussion during the school day but, for the most part, the Forest of Reading program ran as an extracurricular, outside of the regular school day.

Asynchronous Virtual Book Discussions Through D2L

Book discussions were facilitated through the D2L platform. Each title had its own discussion forum, moderated by educator champions and student ambassadors who had volunteered. It was wonderful for students to see educators sharing their own reading lives and thrilling to have our students step up as reading role models themselves. When asked what they might say to a friend who tells them they don't like to read, Gabriella, a student ambassador in Grade 5, offered, "I would tell a friend that said they don't like to read: 'Why don't you like reading? Maybe you haven't read the right book.'" We couldn't agree more!

Unfortunately, there were several roadblocks that prevented these book discussions from flourishing. We discovered that many students were more familiar with Google Classroom than with D2L. It was also difficult for students to follow discussions or have spontaneous conversations within this platform, and we suspected that the work of typing a response versus verbalizing it provided another barrier for some. We built in an opportunity for students to share their thinking using Flipgrid but, again, this likely presented new learning for many. Although we tried to encourage educators to provide class time for students to contribute to the discussion, this was challenging due to the limitations of having to share devices.

Synchronous Book Club Meetings Through Microsoft Teams

The first time we came together through Microsoft Teams, we nervously waited to see if anyone would log in! Soon the total number of students grew beyond our expectations and the chat notifications began to ping wildly. To engage students and to introduce each of the titles, we played two trivia games: "Whose line is it anyway?" featured the first few sentences from each Silver Birch or Red Maple book and "Two Truths and a Lie" challenged students to identify the false statement amongst the facts from the Yellow Cedar books.

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Another approach we used to build community during that first meeting, was to ask students about their favourite reading spot, why they enjoy reading, or something they were looking forward to. Jasleen in Grade 6 responded, "I am really excited about the book, *Ghost Collector* because my friend and I are in the book club, and we shared our books with each other!" Grade 7 reader Olivia said, "I love reading because it's a time I get to just relax from regular life and journey into a place in the book! My favourite place to read is in my bed with a cozy blanket :)" Adalaide, a student in the virtual school, exclaimed, "I love books! I have read 3 ½ books! I hope all of you enjoy reading! I read to go into my happy place! I love to read on my day bed! I am reading on my Kobo! What are you reading on?" It was clear that she was eager to connect with other readers. Later on in the year, Adalaide, Grade 5, shared her appreciation for the Forest program: "I love Forest of Reading because I can meet new people that love to read, and I can read books that I never would have thought of reading before."

Following that initial meeting, six after-school sessions (three for each grade grouping) were held. These included author talks with a Q and A. The switch to a virtual program allowed us to invite authors from across Canada to inspire our readers and aspiring writers. In total, five authors joined us: Heather Fawcett, David A. Robertson, Kenneth Oppel, Eric Walters, and Kathy Kacer. While there were fewer students joining in these meetings, those who attended showed that they truly appreciated the opportunity to connect with the authors through their insightful questions. In many ways, the intimate virtual experience offered a more meaningful connection with the authors than the large-scale, in-person events our board had organized in previous years. Jaxen, in Grade 7, echoed this sentiment after meeting Kenneth Oppel, "This was amazing! Normally we wouldn't be able to talk to the author but this was great." Similarly, Faiza in Grade 8 said, "My favourite part of the Forest of Reading club this year was when Mr. Kenneth Oppel, author of *Bloom*, shared his inspiration with us and I got the honour to introduce him."

Silver Birch, Yellow Cedar and Red Maple Virtual Celebration

By the time we came together in celebration at the end of the program, students had grown as readers and writers and had discovered new authors and interests. Some had even made new friends. The celebration began with a keynote address from Yellow Cedar award winner, Kira Vermond. All students in

Grades 5-8 who had registered for the program attended this fascinating presentation, though many had signed up for Silver Birch or Red Maple and had less exposure to the Yellow Cedar books. Interestingly, we noticed that there was an increase in circulation of this ebook immediately following her presentation. Kira said she "saw a spike in podcast listens the night of my presentation too. So cool."

Next, students broke off into their grade groupings. Students in Grades 5-6 were treated to an interactive talk and drawing demonstration with Gillian Goerz. Her messages that everyone can be an artist and there is no such thing as a bad drawing really resonated with our students. Students in Grades 7-8 enjoyed meeting Wesley King and were excited to learn more about the other books he has published. They were inspired by personal stories and insights into his writing process.

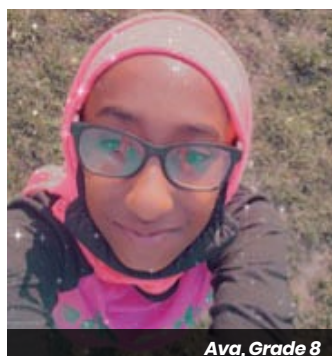
Finally, students participated in a book-connected workshop of their choice facilitated by DSBN educators and members of our local community. Workshops included: Comic Creation, Dragon Drawing, Humane Society Virtual Tour, Design Your Own Jigsaw Puzzle, Virtual Ghost Tours, Exploring By the Seat of Your Pants with Dr. Cylita Guy, Yoga for Wellness, Virtual Field Trip to the Bird Kingdom, Designing Interactive Graphic Novels, and Behind the Scenes with a Shaw Festival cast member. We weren't sure how the virtual workshops would compare to the in-person experiences of the past. We need not have worried. The workshops were incredibly engaging and the few technical glitches were readily overcome. Facilitators wowed our readers through their creative approaches to delivering an interactive, online experience through green screen technology, live tours and guided demonstrations. The only complaint we heard from students was that they could not attend them all!

For students like Jane, who just finished Grade 5, this was the first opportunity to participate in Silver Birch. She tells us that she is really looking forward to next year – partly because her cousin, Clara, has participated in the DSBN Celebration of Reading in person and told her how great it was too.

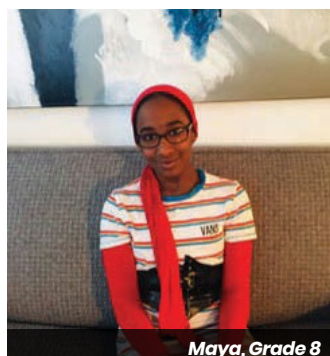
While our plans for next year are uncertain, what we do know is that we will continue to celebrate and nurture our DSBN community of readers through the Forest of Reading program and connect readers beyond the classroom. ■



Faiza, Grade 8



Ava, Grade 8



Maya, Grade 8



Adelaide, Grade 5

Blue Spruce

For our youngest readers and their families, a virtual event was held in the evening. The goal was to promote a family culture of reading and celebrate the joy of shared literacy experiences. The highlight of the night was a read-aloud, Q and A and drawing demonstration with illustrator Charlene Chua. We were wowed by the amazing artwork shared in the chat that was created by our Blue Spruce students. These drawings were also posted on the website that we created for Blue Spruce which was developed to provide families with activities to do at home with each of the books.

Forest of Reading co-chair, Ruth Gretsinger (also an educator in our board) flexed her teacher librarian talents by sharing an engaging read-aloud of *Tricky*, a 2019 Blue Spruce nominee. That year, our DSBN Bookworms band (a dedicated group of teacher librarians) were able to write and perform a number of songs inspired by the Blue Spruce books. It was a true joy to see students come together through the screen as they happily danced along with the video recording of the song for *Tricky*. Though we had originally hoped to have new songs recorded this year, restrictions related to COVID-19 prevented this from happening. Plans are already in the works to bring the band together again next year! We can't wait for the 2022 Blue Spruce nominated titles to be announced!

"Something I always look forward to in the school year is the Forest of Reading program. Although it was a little different this year, I am grateful the experience was just as enjoyable. I loved meeting with the authors and other students for critical discussions on the books we read. It was such a great experience and definitely worth the time!" said Aya, Grade 8.

"Forest of Reading was quite an adventure for me! I love that I got to meet authors from amazing books and got to know their experiences while writing so when we sit down with their book we can feel the pressure and the challenges of the author and the character," said Anika, Grade 5.



"The Forest of Reading program was an amazing experience to be a part of. I found it as a wonderful way to connect readers – and writers from all around Niagara to learn and share wonderful experiences and tips for authorship. I'm truly grateful for the opportunity, and have enjoyed the online journey!" said Maya, Grade 8.

To celebrate student reading accomplishments, each student who participated in the Silver Birch, Yellow Cedar or Red Maple book clubs received a #DSBNReads swag bag including a journal, pen, bookmark, booklight. They were also able to self-select a brand new book!

"I liked participating in Silver Birch this year because it got me to read more often. Some of the technical difficulties were frustrating, but getting to 'meet' so many authors even if we were all at home was amazing. Being a book ambassador was fun! I loved my 'Dragon Drawing' workshop on the virtual celebration – there were so many interesting ones I wish I could have done more! I am really looking forward to participating again next year and hope it can be in person. I really liked the variety of books we got to read – fantasy, realistic, scary – it kept me interested," said Jane, Grade 5.

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