

Digital Resourcing and Access in the School Library: A Pandora's Box of Problems, Ponderings, and Potential

By Dianne McKenzie

The landscape of school libraries has been changing with the overwhelming and rapid introduction of different e-readers, e-books, audiobooks, podcasts, and databases. This is all great for the consumer, but what about the management of these resources in a school library?

The many advantages to supplying fiction and nonfiction in a digital format include:

- There is no need for expensive and time-consuming shipping or processing for shelving.
- Resources are in your collection immediately, without taking up physical space.
- Items are available 24/7.
- E-versions are easier to surf, scan, and skim using keyword searches.
- The font can be changed according to needs.
- The text can be read aloud for the person who needs or wants it delivered in this format.
- Hyperlinks can be embedded and followed.
- Editions can be quickly updated.
- E-versions can be downloaded on portable devices and read anywhere.

With so many positives, why doesn't every school embrace the digital format?

Libraries have been about organizing physical "things" so they can be located when required. Books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, VHS tapes, microfiche, and audio cassettes are all easy to store, organize, and retrieve, but now we have a resource that is intangible and proves a little difficult to organize and manage, especially when we need to consider copyright implications.

A GROWING STUDENT POPULATION AND A GROWING NUMBER OF E-RESOURCES

I manage a school library that is relatively small but will eventually serve 1,400 students from grades 1 to 13, all undertaking the International

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Baccalaureate programs, which are based on inquiry and resource-based learning. We do not have the space to accommodate the printed word for every direction of independent inquiry or interest that a student has in thirteen years of schooling. As we grow larger in population and take on the higher grades, our collection will be taking on more of a digital focus with the adoption of databases and digital libraries. We are a 1:1 laptop school from grade 6 with a high computer to student ratio in the lower grade levels and one hundred percent home access to computers. Many of the secondary students have portable devices that are able to host e-books. I would like to be able to offer a format of reading that takes advantage of all these digital tools.

Currently, our focus is to provide access to nonfiction in the digital form for the upper grades. Print fiction books are still popular for the reasons of convenience, portability, and browsing. We have access through the National Library to Naxos AudioBooks and a limited version of NetLibrary. We subscribe to some databases with e-book content, such as Gale InfoTrac, Global Issues in Context, Encyclopædia Britannica, and BookFlix. We also make use of Google Books and have lists of free digital libraries available for student access. Links to online manga, comics, and graphic novels are also provided, with iTunes and podcasts offering further free resources to access. In many cases these sites do not allow downloading of their resources, so access requires an active Internet connection.

The major problem is ease of access and the number of access points. The student needs to go to each individual site to search, read or listen. They need to be motivated, have a good understanding of what they want, and

know how to navigate the different sites. The integration of the digital resources into our OPAC to allow for one point searching of all our resources is appealing.

USING THE CAPABILITIES OF THE OPAC

Our library OPAC (Oliver by Soflink) allows for cataloging Web sites and electronic files. Utilizing its capability to do integrated federated searches with all the databases we have, students can do one-keyword searches in the OPAC to access database articles, e-books, video, Web sites, and images alongside the printed books we have in the library. While the OPAC helps with databases and Web sites, how can a student access free downloadable e-books without going to each site and having to figure out how to navigate, identify the format they need, choose the method required to download the item to the desired location, and open it?

Some of the strategies that will be implemented include using e-books and magazines that are free, open source, and have an independent Web site that can be given a catalog record that has a direct and active link to the page the student can select and be directed to. This would work well with Google Books, Google Scholar, and similar services. An example can be found at this link to our OPAC: <http://tinyurl.com/dcopac1> (click twice to access, then select the link itself).

This again only allows you to look at the e-book on the computer rather than download and read offline. It would also be accessible on an iPad with Wi-Fi or 3G capabilities, though the interface is not distraction free and space is lost to peripheral information.

Similarly, a free site that allows downloads could be cataloged with a direct link to the page with the specific title and download options so the title is still searchable in the OPAC. Free-ebooks (<http://www.free-ebooks.net>) allows downloads in various formats and has a number of titles. Although you do need to be a member to download, you could create a school account and give all students the access code for this one account.

COPYRIGHT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Loading the e-books on our server would be ideal. Students could search the OPAC, find the entry, and download the title from the server. Does this breach copyright? Probably, as there are now multiple copies of the book where there used to be one. If the resources were legally free and public domain downloads, is there a copyright issue if multiple copies are made from the one download? What formats would be required? All this discussion and research seems to create more questions than answers!

What about digital resources that have been purchased? It would be a blatant breach of copyright to allow students and staff to make a copy of the book and retain the original on the server. Can I trust students and staff to remove the copy from their electronic device when they are finished? We are working on instilling a culture of academic honesty and respect for intellectual property, so these considerations are important.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS USING AN AUDIOBOOK MODEL

A monthly subscription to Audible allows for one original download of the audiobook and a transfer to four computers and three mobile devices. After that, the system indicates you have reached the limit and need to de-activate one or more copies of the borrowed resource. One strategy is to have a dedicated audiobook storage machine, using iTunes, where students can access the catalog to find the titles, which can then be downloaded. This brings up another question: Will their personal devices allow them to do this when syncing is so specific to their own computers?

Other schools purchase mp3 players. They have all downloads on a central machine and load one book onto a single device, which can be lent to a student. This brings the intangible digital back to being physical. It also prevents accidental breach

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of copyright. A similar system could be used with e-books—purchasing a number of readers and lending them with the e-books on them. However, this is a very expensive option in terms of setup costs, and if a reader is lost or damaged, most parents would not be happy replacing one.

Personally, I do not believe it is the library's responsibility to supply the readers to students when we still have options for print. However, having said that, we are looking at purchasing cheap mp3 players for students who do not have their own device for downloading and listening to audio resources. We are also investigating purchasing iPads for in-library use to take advantage of the more interactive e-books that are becoming available.

SUBSCRIPTION SOLUTIONS

Subscription services such as NetLibrary, Follett, OverDrive, MyiLibrary, eLibrary, ebrary, Teachingbooks.net, and Gale Virtual Reference Library seem to have answered and solved most of the copyright and management issues. However, the services can be expensive. They also tend to lock you in to their individual platforms so you cannot change providers without losing your digital collection. Some have their own interface and download software/managers while others do not. They all offer MARC records for catalog integration and formats compatible for different e-readers.

The resources are "loaned" to the student when they are downloaded, and after a specified time, they disappear or are disabled from the e-reader, computer, or mobile device. In most cases, only one resource can be borrowed at a time, which sorts out the copyright issues, and most allow for reserves. They mostly deliver nonfiction, with a few exceptions, and they all enable you to customize the resources according to your collection and school curriculum. They also

supply usage statistics, which could be useful and supplement the library's circulation records. Adoption of one of these services will need research and reflection on what your library needs and can afford before the choice is made as it will be a longterm decision.

The most efficient and cost effective method of storing and accessing digital resources is through your own library management system, with functionality as mentioned above, but this does not seem to be in development.

There is a digital management minefield out there, which requires creative thinking, understanding of copyright laws, and many hours of research to find the best fit for your library. Until issues of formatting, copyright, accessibility, and costs are standardized, it will continue to be an area where we need to share our strategies and best practice for management. Digital resourcing is an issue with rapid growth and huge potential. We need to keep abreast of developments and offer our customers the best service and access to retain credibility and currency.

Dianne McKenzie is head of library and MYP teacher librarian at Discovery College, Hong Kong. Read her blog at <http://librarygrits.blogspot.com>.

