

SSLA 2010 Conference

Saskatchewan School Library Association

THE MEDIUM – SPRING 2010

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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The 2010 SSLA Conference was held May 5th in Saskatoon, SK. at the Radisson Hotel and the Saskatoon Public School Division Board Office. Hosted by Good Spirit School Division and sponsored by GALE Learning, the theme of the Conference was *The Blended School Library Practice: Integrating Your Virtual and Real Programs*.

Judith Comfort, teacher-librarian at Dr. Charles Best Secondary School in Coquitlam, B.C., blogger and advocate for the role of teacher-librarians, shared her journey of blending her bricks and mortar library with her virtual one. This has been her focus for the last five years, and she has successfully established a blended library practice combining the best of both online and offline worlds.

Judith Comfort opened her presentation with an excerpt from *Auguries of Innocence*

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

- William Blake

She emphasized that it is imperative to determine what is needed in this age of abundance of information. Further connecting literary works to the 21st Century student, she compared what students are seeing behind their screens to Lewis Carroll's *Behind the Looking Glass*. A reading of an excerpt from Chapter One (<http://www.sabian.org/Alice/lgchap01.htm>), asked participants to examine our practice and to stop limiting ourselves by the perspectives of others and self-placed limitations. Instead, we should look through the looking glass.

Judith dared us to question, "What is a 21st century school?" In opposition to "factory" schools of the past, today's schools have porous walls. To remain vibrant, teacher-librarians must stay relevant and current. They must live online as well as offline. The school library is no longer a physical destination, but a "place" that is accessible 24/7.

Judith also reminded teacher-librarians of the importance of knowing the provincial curricula inside and out. Teacher-librarians must keep ahead of teachers in terms of resources and their needs – we must anticipate what they will need. We must model exemplary teaching and learning practices. Finally, we must keep abreast of current technology and determine if it is useful for teaching and learning. Judith advised teacher librarians to reclaim their role as literacy experts and offer alternatives to listless and lazy use of technology.

In closing, Judith Comfort stressed that teacher-librarians are needed more than ever because:

- We are the access.

- We open doors.
- We remove barriers to access.
- We put up barriers to distraction.
- We teach teachers.

Judith generously shared a website of materials she had gathered specifically to help conference participants develop their own online presence (<http://www.bestlibrary.org/trans/>). Her own school library website contains a wealth of information (<http://www.bestlibrary.org/>) and can provide inspiration for teacher librarians wanting to create and manage their own website.

Following Judith's presentation, conference participants attended a session facilitated by Carlene Walter and Donna DesRoches. Known collectively as The Disruptive Innovators, the presenters facilitated an ***Inquiry Tools Smackdown*** – a showcase of social media tools to help students engage in inquiry learning. Teacher-librarians are uniquely poised to guide inquiries into topics, problems, and issues related to curriculum content and to help students probe for deep meaning and cultivate new knowledge into a repurposed action.

As strong advocates for the development of literacy skills, teacher-librarians must be aware of emerging technologies and their application to help students develop an inquiry stance in order for to build a deeper understanding of their world.

Audience participation and suggestions formed an integral part of this interactive session.

To view the session and other presentations by Carlene Walter and Donna DesRoches, please visit the Disruptive Innovators Wiki (<http://disruptiveinnovators.wikispaces.com/>).

Also at the conference, Ruth Garnett, a director on the *SYRCA Willows Board*, outlined their mission to promote reading by granting a "Willow Award" to the Canadian and/or Saskatchewan book(s) voted by Saskatchewan students to be the best of those nominated in designated categories each year. The 2010 Willow nominees are displayed at <http://www.willowawards.ca/>.

The 2010 SSLA Conference let participants vibrating with possibilities - possibilities that extend beyond the brick and mortar of an educational building; possibilities that are only constricted by the limitations of our imagination.