

Curation

by JOYCE KASMAN VALENZA

THE INTERNET FIREHOSE analogy rings even truer today, twenty years after Internet access saw its beginning. Each of us is now not only a consumer but also a potential media producer, and it is easy to be drenched.

HUMAN FILTERS HELP

Digital curators can prevent oversaturation by filtering and diverting the onslaught and by directing what is worth sharing into more gentle and continuous streams.

Blogger, author, and NYU professor Clay Shirky, in Steve Rosebaum's *Mashable* post, "Why Content Curation Is Here to Stay" on May 10, 2010, describes the problem with traditional search and identifies the issue of filter failure:

Curation comes up when search stops working. [But it's more than a human-powered filter.] Curation comes up when people realize that it isn't just about information seeking, it's also about synchronizing a community.

We need curators more than ever as we connect complex text to the Common Core State Standards, and as we maximize the potential of emerging curation platforms and eBook building tools.

[Part of the reason that human curation is so critical is simply the vast number of people who are now making and sharing media.] Everyone is a media outlet. The point of everyone being a media outlet is really not at all complicated. It just means that we can all put things out in the public view now (Shirky in <http://mashable.com/2010/05/03/content-curation-creation/>).

Human filters make a difference. Librarians can be filters in the best sense of the word. Librarians can synchronize communities.

Curators make sense of the vast amounts of content that are continually produced. They are talented at scouting, identifying relevance, evaluating, classifying, organizing, and presenting aggregated content for a targeted audience. They create what Allen Weiner calls "informed playlists" (<http://curationchronicles.magnify.net/video/Clay-Shirky-6#c=M5ZX2G2S2CH2LNGS&t=Allen%20Weiner%20defines%20curation>).

Perhaps Albert Barnes was the ultimate curator for the pre-digital world. His suburban Philadelphia art collection and educational facility was unlike any other. Barnes was known for his visionary scouting, and for his careful selection of art work before the world discovered it as great. Known for his thoughtful juxtaposition of paintings, Barnes created wall ensembles for his students. One section of a gallery wall might contain works of different styles, periods, and from different parts of the world. They were gathered strategically so they might be contextualized, compared, and studied. His goal was for these wall ensembles, these highly curated works, to inspire learning.

WHY MUST SCHOOL LIBRARIANS CURATE?

Librarians are uniquely qualified to curate. School librarians are perhaps most ripe for this function, because

they understand the curriculum and the specific needs and interests of their own communities of teachers, administrators, learners, and parents.

We school librarians are used to critically evaluating, selecting, and sharing content and tools for learning. We are used to taming information flow to facilitate discovery and knowledge building.

We currently have opportunities and tools we have never had before to organize attractive digital collections. We can now present multiple perspectives to add value to the individual items by presenting them in a new context, to

collaboratively create wall ensembles for learners, and to help learners do the curating themselves.

As school librarians we can think of digital collection curation as the selection and assembly of a focused group of resources into a Web-based presentation that meets an identified purpose or need and has meaning and context for a targeted audience.

Unlike other Web curators, librarians are not simple one-interest enthusiasts. For us, those identified purposes include supporting teachers in their graduate level research, guiding an AP U.S. history class through finding relevant primary sources for document based questions (DBQs), leading a third grade class through their inquiry project about insects, leading the entire community in identifying copyright-friendly media or digital storytelling options, teaching middle school students how to develop an argument or how to document sources in MLA format. Those resources might include traditional library resources as well as links, instruction, artifacts, widgets, media feeds, news streams, specialized search tools, personal commentary, handouts, rubrics, mindmapping and outlining tools, and so much more! And as for those traditional resources, curation offers a face-out shelving approach for books, databases, reference eBooks and their widgets, as well as the potential to focus, scale, and maximize our use and investment in these resources.

It used to be that library catalogs functioned as the sole entry point to our collections. While some of us have done a fine job expanding the circ/cat for a new understanding of collection, for many the catalog is becoming one element of our larger collection. To manage the new possibilities for collection, a variety of curation solutions are needed with the choice of one entry point. Most likely, one platform will need to be chosen as a parking lot—it may be the library catalog, a wiki, Google Sites, or LibGuides—and it is possible to put a variety of other curation efforts in these spaces using links or embedded code. With aggregation, they will all play nice together.

Libraries are about facilitating physical and intellectual access to information and learning. Curation is an opportunity for librarians to scale out their practice, to reach community members 24/7 at the point of need, to maximize the use of digital purchases, and to point to our value as a teacher. At a time when some school librarians are expected to travel among multiple schools, curation may be a way to scale our practice and be effective if it isn't possible to be physically present. Curation allows us to represent the presence of an information professional.

We need curators more than ever as we connect complex text to the Common Core State Standards, and as we maximize the potential of emerging curation platforms and eBook building tools like Apple's iBooks Author App (<http://www.apple.com/ibooks-author/>).

WHY AND WHAT ARE WE CURATING?

Curation of current digital resources (e.g., podcasts, slidecasts, infographics, blogs, presentations, twitter streams, ebooks, etc.) can facilitate the discovery of valuable Web content and can also promote and lead users back to valuable print materials. Using tools like the embeddable previews in Google Books is a way to share content from print and eBook collections. Curation can also be used as a strategy for building a reading culture. In the past we might have called this face-out shelving.

School librarians can curate for faculty and administrators—for educators who are seeking to inform and improve their practice—as well as for those currently in graduate

LIB GUIDE EXAMPLES:

- Judy O'Connell's Revolutionising Libraries with Social Media. <http://libraryschoolcampusguides.com/socialmedia>
- Joyce Valenza's New Tools Guide. <http://sdst.libguides.com/newtools>
- Joyce Valenza's TL Guides. <http://libraryschoolcampusguides.com/tlguidess>

LIVEBINDERS EXAMPLES:

- Joquetta Johnson's Public Shelf. http://www.livebinders.com/shelf/search_display_author?terms=Joquetta+Johnson
- Carolyn Jo Starkey's School Librarians and the Common Core Standards. http://www.livebinders.com/play/play_or_edit?id=84777

SCOOP IT EXAMPLES:

- Karen Bonnano's School Library Advocacy. <http://www.scoop.it/t/school-library-advocacy>
- BJ Neary's Young Adult Novels. <http://www.scoop.it/t/young-adult-novels>

NEVERENDING SEARCH EXAMPLE:

- A Few Good Scoops for Us. <http://blog.schoollibraryjournal.com/neverendingsearch/2011/10/12/a-few-good-scoops-for-us/>

PAPER.LI EXAMPLES:

- TLChat Daily. <http://paper.li/tag/tlchat>
- Carolyn Starkey's Common Core Daily. <http://paper.li/carolynstarkey/1310443842>

PINTEREST EXAMPLE:

- Syracuse iSchool. <http://pinterest.com/ischoolsu/pins/>

DELICIOUS STACKS EXAMPLE:

- Lyn Hay's. http://www.delicious.com/stacks/lyn_hay

PLATFORMS FOR CURATION AND SEARCH

Curation platforms are multiplying in a way that almost mirrors the information flood they were designed to remedy. They come in a variety of flavors. Here are a few of my favorite tools divided into three of those flavors:

FOR REAL-TIME CURATION (platforms that rely on continual flow of realtime feeds, news, and socially-generated content):

Bundlr. <http://bundlr.com>
Delicious Stacks. <http://delicious.com>
Diigo. <http://diigo.com>
News.me. <http://www.news.me>
Paper.li. <http://paper.li>
Pearltrees. <http://www.pearltrees.com>
Pinterest. <http://pinterest.com>
Scoop.it. <http://scoop.it>
Storify. <http://storify.com>
Themeefy. <http://themeefy.com>

FOR DOCUMENT COLLECTION AND ORGANIZING RESEARCH:

Bibme. <http://bibme.com>
EasyBib. <http://easybib.com>
Mendeley. <http://www.mendeley.com/>
Noodletools. <http://noodletools.com/tools/index.php>
ReadCube. <http://www.readcube.com/>
Zotero. <http://www.zotero.org/>

FOR HYBRID CURATION (platforms that rely on both realtime feeds and the curation of more static, selected content for a more traditional pathfinder approach):

Educlipper. <http://educlipper.net/>
Learnist. <http://learnist.st/>
LibGuides. <http://libguides.com/community.php?m=i&ref=libguides.com>
LiveBinders. <http://livebinders.com>
MentorMob. <http://www.mentormob.com/>
Only2Clicks. <http://www.only2clicks.com>
Sqworl. <http://sqworl.com>
Symbaloo. <http://www.symbaloo.com> OR
SymbalooEDU. <http://www.symbalooedu.com>

school who will benefit from the gathering of educational journals, databases, and blogs.

Educators will also value help in gathering the tools they need for daily classroom activities. School librarians can gather lesson and rubric portals, nonfiction and documentary films, booktrailers, tools for regular classroom routines—online stop watches, classroom clipart, poster tools, game and quiz generators, etc.

School librarians might also curate for parents by gathering resources to support learning at home, explanations of new technologies, and instruction in transliteracy.

For student learning activities and interests, school librarians may collect and embed faculty relevant instruction, personal learning materials, and student work. These learning artifacts can function as lasting tools for instruction as well as models for future learners.

CURATING AS A LIFE AND STUDENT SKILL

Curation is not just about academic research. It's not just for librarians. Curation is an information life skill. It is also a buzz topic for the marketing and business worlds.

Curation skills allow learners to create personal learning environments (PLEs) for organizing content to meet both their academic and personal information needs, gathering tools for productivity and creativity, sharing their knowledge with others, and creating portfolios of their own work. PLEs are essential tools for networked learners.

Much of what students now need is dynamic and feedy and cloud-based. A notebook can no longer hold this stuff. We can guide students through the process of setting up parking lots for the development of archiving the inquiry process using wikis and Google Sites. David Loertscher refers to this as Knowledge Building Centers (<https://sites.google.com/site/knowledgebuildingcenter>). We can also introduce curation tools as an option for real-time research.

Students can now curate the content they need to feed their interests and passions, as well as their research projects. They can easily create and manage newspapers for current awareness—for their interests and passions, as well as school research.

Curation, however, is not just for the school setting. Over the course of a few years, I have helped a friend find research for the brain tumor community. At her funeral this past summer, I met a gentleman who told me he was also helping the community. His information on brain tumors continues to feed relevant, timely, life-and-death content to a community in need (<http://paper.li/WorldMedCard/1306973026>).

CURATION AS THE NEW SEARCH

Curation tools present an exciting new genre of search tool. Searchers can now exploit the curated efforts or the

bibliographies of experts and others who take the lead in a particular subject area—those who volunteer to scan the real-time environment as scouts. They also present the opportunity to guide learners in new evaluation strategies. Who is the curator? Which curators can you trust? Is a curator attached to a team, publication, institution, organization? How can the quality of their insights, selections, sources, and feeds be judged? Do their efforts have many followers? Is their curation active and current?

By linking to the search pages of the major curation tools, school librarians can help students, faculty, and parents with more long-tail needs access the expertise of a subject expert or a curator with a passion for an issue. For instance, school librarians do not need to be a LibGuides subscriber to benefit from the work of the many librarians who choose to curate in that environment. Merely visiting the LibGuides Community search box opens a portal to thousands of expertly curated guides for all ages and interests (<http://libguides.com/>).

What has been discovered is that curation rocks as a search/current awareness tool especially for issues in the news, controversial topics, and long-tail interests.

CURATION AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

While many curators effectively serve to vet signal from noise, curators may also, intentionally or unintentionally, function as gatekeepers. Does individual curation serve to narrow the lens? Can we learn to assess not only the credibility of information creators, but the credibility of information curators?

The following issues deserve consideration:

- ▶ **Issue:** How do we avoid the role of gatekeeper? Does individual curation serve to narrow the lens? Can we learn to assess not only the credibility of information creators, but the credibility of information curators?
- ▶ **Issue:** How do we avoid the "filter bubble" (Pariser 2012)? Is only the curator's (or the searcher's) point of view represented?
- ▶ **Issue:** How do we evaluate quality and relevance in emerging information landscapes and recognize exemplary curation practices? Do credibility scores (e.g., Scoop it) give data without identifying bias? Does a curation effort model passion about a topic, shared knowledge, and updates through knowledge-forming communities?
- ▶ **Issue:** How do we protect and promote ideals of intellectual property? What are the legal concerns when posting/using work

of others? What are the ethical, moral, and professional concerns?

CONCLUSION

While we may not all possess the talent and vision of Albert Barnes, we all now have powerful new tools to go along with our professional skills.

If we want our school communities to view us as information and communication authorities and information professionals, if we want our communities to understand the full scope of their information worlds, if we want our young people to grow up being able to curate their own information lives, curation is not optional.

REFERENCES:

- Loertscher, David. *Knowledge Building Center Template*. May 6, 2012. <https://sites.google.com/site/knowledgebuildingcenter/> (accessed June 7, 2012).
- Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble*. March 26, 2012. <http://www.thefilterbubble.com/> (accessed June 7, 2012).
- Shirky, Clay. In Steven Rosenbaum's "Why Content Curation is Here to Stay." *Mashable*. May 3 2010. <http://mashable.com/2010/05/03/content-curation-creation/> (accessed June 7, 2012).
- Weiner, Allen. "Allen Weiner Defines Curation." *Curation Nation*. <http://curationchronicles.magnify.net/video/Clay-Shirky-6#c=M5ZX2G2S2CH2LNGS&t=Allen%20Weiner%20defines%20curation> (accessed June 7, 2012).

OTHER RESOURCES:

- Bhargava, Rohit. 5 Models of Content Curation Influential Marketing Blog. March 30, 2011. <http://www.rohitbhargava.com/2011/03/the-5-models-of-content-curation.html>.
- Fister, Barbara. "Teaching How Information Works, Not How to Work Information: Peer-to-Peer Review." *Library Journal* (March 1, 2012). <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2012/03/opinion/peer-to-peer-review/teaching-how-information-works-not-how-to-work-information-peer-to-peer-review/>.
- Kowalski, Kirsten. "Why I Tearfully Deleted My Pinterest Boards." February 24, 2012. <http://ddkportraits.com/2012/02/why-i-tearfully-deleted-my-pinterest-inspiration-boards/>.
- Olham, Lisa. "Curation: It's Not Just for Museums Any More!" *Computers in New Zealand Schools* 23, no. 3 (2011). <http://education2x.otago.ac.nz/cinzs/mod/resource/view.php?id=244>.
- Popova, Maria. "New to Curators Code?" <http://curatorscode.org/>.
- Rosenbaum, Steven. *Curation Nation: How to Win in a World Where Consumers are Creators*. McGraw Hill, 2011.
- Shirky, Clay. "Talk about Curation." *Curation Nation*. <http://curationchronicles.magnify.net/video/Clay-Shirky-6#c=1RMHLF18HLLBQ6WK&t=Talk%20about%20Curation>.
- SLANZA. *Collected issue #6: Content Curation*. May 9, 2012. <http://issuu.com/miriamtuohy/docs/may2012>.
- Valenza, Joyce (with STHS student choir). *Curation Song Parody*. <https://vimeo.com/30204985>.
- Valenza, Joyce, and Deb Kachel. "Digital Collection School and Public Librarians." LibGuide. Pennsylvania Department of Education. <http://palibraries.libguides.com/curation>. ◀

Joyce Kasman Valenza, Ph.D., is a teacher librarian at Springfield Township High School in Erdenheim, PA. Email: joycevalenza@gmail.com

