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## Library Technology Conference 2013



**Library Technology Conference**  
March 20 – 21, 2013 • Macalester College, St. Paul, MN

While the tradition of unseasonable warmth seems to have been a one-year thing (last year's conference featured 70-degree weather, while we

bore temps in the 20s this year), the tradition of challenging and intriguing programming was as strong as ever at the 2013 Library Technology Conference. This issue of *Reference Notes* includes reports on some of the sessions we attended. You can find the presentation materials for many more via [Macalester College's Digital Commons](#). ■

### Kimberly Bryant: Black Girls Code

*Carla Pfahl*

The Library Technology Conference continues to be one of the better conferences and one I look forward to each spring. This year was as interesting as it was diverse in breakout sessions and keynote speakers. I especially liked Thursday's keynote speaker, Kimberly Bryant, computer science engineer and founder of Black Girls Code, an organization devoted to introducing coding to girls of color between the ages of 7-17 in underrepresented communities.

Bryant talked about how at an early age books had cast a spell on her. She was a ferocious reader and credits educational opportunities for helping to change her life path. She was turned on to the sciences in the 1980's because there was a big push to get women into STEM-related fields. However, she noticed a downward trend in encouraging women into STEM-related fields by the end of that decade. Branding of the field seemed to tell girls that they didn't fit the mold of a scientist.

When Bryant left her corporate America job to start up her own computer science venture, she was concerned that there were fewer women in the field than when she left college. She started going to conferences and meet ups and noticed she was one of only a handful of women in the crowd and that there were even fewer black women.

She started Black Girls Code with twelve girls in Hunter's Point, CA, in 2011. They soon moved to Oakland, CA, and grew to 90 girls within 6 months. The summer of 2011, her organization started the "Summer of Code" and took their teaching program to several cities in the U.S. Since then the program has traveled as far as Johannesburg, South Africa, where women have even fewer opportunities for education and growth. In 1 ½ years of Black Girls Code, the organization has reached about 850 girls. Through the outreach efforts of the teaching assistants working with the program, 50% of students return for more classes.



Through this outreach she and the organization are trying to build awareness that access is not equal. There may be opportunities but there is not equal access to resources such as computers and the Internet. Bryant asked the audience if libraries could be a digital hub for Black Girls Code. This is one area she is looking at to help bridge a gap of access to resources for minority girls in underrepresented communities because, as she stated, libraries are in the communities of the disenfranchised and already provide access to resources. Bryant is beginning work to create

relationships with libraries to make this happen but she admits it is a slow process. She reported the statistic that there are 123,291 libraries in the U.S., and this is an area of great potential to become a new land for learning and children. ■

## Low-Skilled Adult Learners and Learning Technologies

*Matt Lee*

The new digital divide is less about access to technology and more about the effective use of that technology according to the [five panelists for this session](#). Those panelists are in one way or another affiliated with the St. Paul Public Schools Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and the [Hubbs Center](#) and spoke about efforts to help adult learners gain digital literacy skills. Their goal is not just to teach computer skills, but to teach the self-directed process for learning new skills required in a constantly evolving information marketplace.

The first project they mentioned was the [North Star Digital Literacy Project](#), which grew out of a partnership between the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium and the St. Paul Public Library. The Project is a series of online modules and assessments that teach benchmark skills in computer literacy. In addition to receiving a certificate of completion, learners gain language to talk about the skills they have mastered, which is critical for those seeking new career opportunities.

The panelists also discussed tools to improve equitable access to distance learning for adult learners, such as [USALearns.org](#) and [SkillsTutor.com](#), as well as resources to help creatively apply new digital skills, like [Learner Web](#). ■

## Things in a Flash: K-College iPad Apps

*Beth Staats*

What I've learned from attending library conferences over time is that conference sessions titled "Things in a Flash" are always packed full of useful information and tips, and this session did not disappoint. LeAnn Suchy of Metronet, Kate Bessey of Rasmussen College, and Karen Qualey of Bloomington Public Schools shared some great apps, including one that promises hours of fun. **Action Movie FX** lets you create a short video and then choose a special effect to add to it. I think my 6-year old has already created about 30 videos, including one where a helicopter lands on me and another where a small alien creature erupts out of his stomach (it may sound gross but we've done some serious giggling since playing with this app). **Haiku Deck** allows you to create presentations with pictures. Depending on the words in your presentation, this app searches through a collection of images and suggests them for your presentation. **Audio Boo** is an app that lets you create 3-minute recordings and gives you a link to share them. Have your students create brief oral book reviews with this app. **Leaf Snap** is a STEM-related app that includes high-quality images of leaves with maps and geographic information on their location. You can even take a photo of a leaf with white paper as a background and **Leaf Snap** can help identify it. **Flashcardlet** creates flash card sets or you can download sets already created from Quizlet. **FitBrains**, which also includes a web-based version, offers memory, problem solving, and speed tests. The **NASA App HD** is way more than just an app. It includes NASA TV, news articles, videos, photos and images, detailed planet information, and much more. **Hungry Fish** is a cute game that teaches addition, subtraction, and negatives. ■

## Hot, Free, and Downloadable: Tech for Teens and Why You Care

*Beth Staats*

Amy Boese and Marcus Lowry, of Ramsey County Library, presented a fun and informative session on their experience with teen tech programming. The session included Sriracha sauce, Hot Tamales, books, and candy as giveaways. Amy and Mark talked about how they have collaborated with schools, community education and cable television. They have offered Teen Tech camps and after school programs. They have made a concerted effort to reach out to people NOT using the library.

They also mentioned how drop in or passive access to tech is important for teens. According to Amy and Mark, one of the “coolest things ever” is the 3D printer they purchased (they recently purchased a second). They passed out some small plastic trinkets that patrons have created with the 3D printer.

They also discussed and demonstrated several “hot” programs including **Sketch Up**, a free 3D modeling program which is a great tool for designing square three-dimensional objects. **Pixologic** is another free 3D modeling program that offers better fluidity and is better for designing forms. **Stencyl** creates a stand-alone Flash game. **Inkscape** is a free, open-source graphics editor, perfect for the future fashion designer. **Pixlr** is an online photo editor, perfect for taking and editing photos. **Weebly** lets you create your own website and link all of your stuff in one place. (A must for students working on a History Day web site!) **Club Create** lets you remix songs or create your own and gives you the ability to import vocal and instrumental tracks (this is when the presenters started dancing).

Challenges faced by Amy and Mark relating to teen tech programming include the open lab morphing into a makerspace. As we all know, cutting edge technology sometimes fails. Free software often goes away and leaves us to seek out something else. Libraries and schools often block downloads. Vendor issues or bugs are sometimes common and in many cases there is nothing we can do about it. Finally, staffing changes make it difficult to keep connections in the community. ■

## Changed but Still Critical: Brick and Mortar School Libraries in the Digital Age

*Matt Lee*

Doug Johnson of Mankato Public Schools began his session on library facilities design by reminiscing about the design of libraries in his earliest experience. Tall study carrels provided students the opportunity for individual learning, and more often than not, the opportunity to make funny noises undetected by their beleaguered librarian.

Today, the trend in school library design is to facilitate social learning among and between students. Speaking metaphorically, the learning commons movement turns a library from an individual store into a multi-faceted mall. From a supermarket to a kitchen.

But how can a school library be both social and productive? One option is zoning: providing different spaces in the library for different activities. Johnson shared examples of different activities that might be carried out in these zones:

- Clustering several high-end computers with sophisticated software in team formations to facilitate student creation of content
- Presentation space, for practice or formal sessions
- Shared model classroom, for a school building to test out the newest instructional technologies



Johnson ended with discussion of the design of a new thoughtfully designed school library in St. Peter. The design

enables the library to be used by the community, allows for visual control of the area from a central service desk, encourages multiple types of uses of the space, and focuses on fine aesthetics as a measure of the level of respect the library feels for its visitors.

Visit [Johnson's wiki](#) for more on the topic, including a Pinterest board of school library design ideas. ■

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## Death to Google Reader and QR Codes: Birth to the Next Phase of Interactive Technologies

*Carla Pfahl*

Reading about another technology that goes by the wayside always makes me think of the Semisonic song *Closing Time*, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." You're going to have that song stuck in your head now, aren't you?! You may have heard the news that Google has pulled the plug on its free RSS service, Google Reader. On July 1, 2013, it will join Meebo on the other side of the technology rainbow. If this is news to you and/or you have an active Google Reader, you have one of two options. The first is to start reading up on reviews of alternative RSS readers and use Google Takeout to export your feeds and subscriptions so you can feel safe that no bit of knowledge will be lost. The second option you have is to cut the cord of the RSS reader altogether. From now until July 1st, there will be many articles coming out talking about the death of RSS. Will there be something to replace it? Is it necessary to replace RSS? What other options are out there to collect alerts and stay up-to-date with the latest trending issues? It would be interesting to see a new RSS tool that also incorporates social and collaborative features. Perhaps Facebook will explore some possibilities of creating an add-on RSS tool. Whatever will become of RSS is up to the users - if there is a need, there will be a tool.

Another technology that is coming to an end is QR Codes. This seems to be more of a slow dying death rather than an abrupt end. Not so long ago QR Codes were all the talk. After all, [Target](#) is now using QR Codes to enhance the shopper experience. It seemed like in 2008 presentations and conferences were devoted to them. The problem with QR Codes is that they are an awkward intermediate tool. How they work is you take a picture of a code with your smart phone. That will then record your contact information and send you a website, video or document, or a link via a text message to one of those places. New applications being produced,

called augmented reality apps, can now take out that intermediate step and instantly add the enhanced features to your smartphone. All you need to do is run your smart phone over the content and bingo! it's on your phone.

One example of an augmented reality app being used by a Japanese newspaper Tokyo Shimbun, according to [Springwise.com](#), is the AR News app, which allows children to scan articles with their smartphones and transform them into more kid-friendly versions. [Crunchbase.com](#) reviewed the new app by blippar.com saying it transforms the real world into a visual 3D experience, "On opening the app and holding the phone up to visual 'markers', traditional print media, advertising and real-world objects can be recognized and instantly jump to life with exclusive content and interactive opportunities. Users can literally 'pull' information, entertainment, offers and augmented reality 3D experiences out of the world around them, simply by holding their phone up to a marker. No clicks, no delays - just instant gratification." [Amazon](#) has also started exploring an augmented reality app that, at this point, can be used in conjunction with QR Codes on Androids to price check and get more information about a product.

QR Codes have been a [tool for libraries](#) to enhance user experiences and guide patrons to more information about services, policies, and resources for the past few years. In fact, libraries caught on quickly to the many uses of QR Codes. It will be exciting to see how libraries adapt to the new suite of augmented reality apps that are starting to come out and create new ways of interacting with users in yet another platform. ■

## Improving Digital Literacy with New Online Tools

*Matt Lee*

Mary Ann Van Cura of State Library Services recently brought two new digital literacy initiatives to our attention.

[DigitalLearn.org](#) is an IMLS-funded site of the Public Library Association. It just launched in beta, but currently includes several online tutorials on topics like "Intro to Email," "Basic Search," and "Using a PC." Other tutorials on Macs, basics of the Internet, and more are coming soon.

[EveryOneOn.org](#) has a similar focus, but aggregates tutorials and learning objects from multiple sites

(including DigitalLearn.org). The site also includes a training class locator that points people to public libraries and other community organizations in their neighborhoods where they can access computers and assistance.

Both of these sites seem like they might be used fruitfully in conjunction with the locally-grown [North Star Digital Literacy Assessment](#). ■

## ELM Spotlight

### Calling All ELM Portal Users!

*Matt Lee*



If you or your library users access the ELM databases via the ELM portal at [elm4you.org](http://elm4you.org), we want to hear from you. We're conducting a brief user survey to help improve the experience of finding and accessing the ELM databases on the portal and to gain ideas for promoting and communicating about ELM.

By answering five or six questions about research and the ELM portal, respondents can also be entered into a drawing for a free iPad Mini! Please share this message with anyone you know that uses the ELM portal.

The survey can be found on the [ELM website](#), is open to Minnesota residents, and will run until June 4th, when we'll have the drawing and notify the winner. Thanks for your help garnering feedback! Insights gained via survey responses will help us make the ELM portal as effective as it can be. ■

### Intro to ELM for Teachers

*Matt Lee*

The ELM databases can help teachers achieve classroom objectives, but sharing that message can be more difficult than it seems. If you'd like a conversation-starter with your teachers, or just some brief 30-minute intro videos to share, consider our recently completed series of webinars: *Intro to ELM for Teachers*. There are five webinar recordings in the series.

- Intro to ELM for Teachers: [Elementary School](#)
- Intro to ELM for Teachers: [English Language Arts](#)
- Intro to ELM for Teachers: [Social Studies](#)
- Intro to ELM for Teachers: [Science](#)
- Intro to ELM for Teachers: [Professional Development for Educators](#)

In many cases, these webinars used customized search topics gathered from webinar attendees. If you'd like to schedule a customized webinar on a topic of interest to you and your teachers, send an email to [mtxref@umn.edu](mailto:mtxref@umn.edu). ■

## AskMN Is 5 Years Old!

Carla Pfahl

Five years ago on March 24, 2008, seven eager libraries quietly “flipped the switch” and pointed users to a new collaborative service on their libraries’ websites. With the first question from a Minnesota State University – Mankato student at 12:30 in the afternoon of March 24th, 2008, AskMN: The Librarian Is In! began. Since then, AskMN has grown to 30 libraries and has taken in over 100,000 questions. If you are wondering what the very first question was, here it is:

“i am looking for articles on the war in iraq one that talks about the good of the war and one that talks about the bad, and one that has both?”

Everyday librarians are assisting patrons with questions just like this and many others by navigating them through the world of information and helping find best resources, offering search strategy suggestions, building relationships, and much more. AskMN’s growing network of libraries, dedicated to providing access to services for their patrons and connecting with other libraries, have given over 100 librarians and library staff opportunities to expand their reference skills and connect with their communities in new ways. I look forward to the prospect of working with many more libraries and librarians to find new ways that AskMN can be of value to their library and their users. ■

## April Free Learning Opportunities from WebJunction

Cecelia Boone

Check out WebJunction’s [Webinar page](#) for more information about these sessions, which are free and available to staff of libraries throughout the Minitex region. Pre-registration is required.

*Engaging Stakeholders, the First Step to Creating a Digitally Inclusive Community*  
Wednesday, April 10, noon Central

*Extending Access to E-books for Public Libraries: New strategies*  
Tuesday, April 30, noon Central

Archived versions of earlier WebJunction webinars are also available on the webpage.

The WebJunction website also contains a monthly list of other [freely available training opportunities](#) that are available to the library community.

Also, remember, [WebJunction Minnesota](#), which provides access to online, self-paced courses and other features, is available to all members of the Minnesota library community. ■

## Lost Your Librarian Mojo?

Jennifer Hootman

Do you feel like you've lost your librarian mojo? If you do, then you're probably not alone. Well, you could be alone. But in either case, spring is in the air and perhaps this is a good time to get it back!

Not so long ago while still in winter's grip, I read a brief article from *Education Week Teacher*, "Reclaiming Your Teacher Mojo." I have recently re-discovered it in a pile of papers during my own office spring cleaning. The article has some good advice that I think works for librarians too. Let's consider it.



1) *Schedule stop times.*

Breaking up may be hard to do but we all need some unplugged, untethered down time.

2) *Set goals for yourself that don't involve work.*

Let's allow ourselves a personal goal or two that isn't about work. It can be refreshing and ultimately energizing to set personal goals that help enrich our lives which will, in turn, have a positive impact on our work lives and performance.

3) *Be comfortable with saying "no."*

Oh, dear. This one is hard for us, but we can do it. Something's gotta give, right? Or here's another way to look at it. What's the cost of trying to do everything?

4) *Learn to weed.*

Hint: this has nothing to do with your library's collection. Let go of tasks that are not priorities. Scary! But healthy!

5) *Pay attention to pace.*

Slow down now and then - we can't be in fifth gear 24/7 and still be effective.

6) *Embrace those around you.*

Hugs are great, but the suggestion here is to reach out to others and have conversations. Be present!

7) *Get creative with work space and place.*

While we may be tempted to take it upon ourselves to remove office cube walls as played out in "Office Space," this piece of advice is really just encouraging us to think about getting up out of our chairs and offices for a breath of fresh air or change in scenery every once in a while. Try doing some of your work outside for awhile. Or during inclement weather maybe there is a quiet place you can find in your workplace to which to escape and refresh. This is not encouraging hiding in the stacks.

8) *Take a rest.*

This is about the power of being still. Try setting a timer for a five-minute break and just sit.

9) *Rethink your to-do list.*

Monster to-do lists may seem helpful but actually might lead us to be less productive. Try setting only two or three goals per day.

10) *Hit the ground running with your list.*

Once the more doable to-do list is created, start off with one of the easier ones. Once one of them is accomplished, then we've got some momentum.

11) *Know that sometimes the journey can be messy.*

As Longfellow reminds us, "Into each life some rain must fall." And as Marie Howe suggests, this is "[What the Living Do.](#)" Rain falls and sinks clog, but that's exactly what happens in a journey. Difficulties and problems arise, but life doesn't end. We must keep on moving forward.

Hopefully this was as useful to you as it was for me. P.S. You're not alone. ■

## Reference Notes

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