

The Community snapshots project

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Two members of the Equity Team in Western Sydney, based at Nirimba Office, Quaker's Hill, report on a program hosted by Blackheath Public School.

See snapshots of the work being done at schools at communitysnapshots.weebly.com

In our regional consultancy work in Western Sydney schools, promoting partnerships with communities, we have been struck greatly by the capacity of school libraries to act as vital community hubs. Libraries in schools often have a large bank of internet connected computers and these can be useful in running “technology in learning” workshops for parents and community members. Teacher librarians have knowledge of information skills, and their expertise is greatly valued in this context, as they explain how to establish cyber safety, how to use and acknowledge Creative Commons images, how to distil key information and to communicate it effectively. Teacher librarians also have an invaluable opportunity to follow up such parent workshops by publishing local community viewpoints and stories as part of their digital collections.

We have found that many parents are really interested in learning about the digital publishing Web 2.0 tools that their children are using at school to create multimodal texts. Infographics tools assist with data visualisation. Websites such as *Infogram*, *Piktochart* and *Easel.ly* offer great potential for teacher librarians to show community members how to create texts which may be informative and persuasive at the same time.

You, me, us and 21C

Our *Community snapshots* website at <http://communitysnapshots.weebly.com> outlines a series of four possible workshops for parents. The key

idea underpinning the workshop series is: *What matters to us? Telling our stories...* The website shows the stories and viewpoints created by parents participating in *You, me, us and 21C*, a series of workshops created by Donna. Lizzie's contributions to the website are the infographics, which showcase the viewpoints of parents and community members surveyed at a P&C meeting in Blackheath Public School's library.

Located in the Upper Blue Mountains, on the edge of Sydney, Blackheath Public School has an active P&C committee. Meetings are held monthly in the library. Knowing that the Principal has an active interest in supporting the school library as a community hub, we approached her, and the P&C President, with a request to survey the P&C about the following issues:

- On the current affairs front, which items in the news are on your agenda at the moment and why? In Australia? Globally?
- For public libraries to act as community hubs, which new activities do you believe they could host, possibly in partnership with other agencies?
- What will our children need to be 21st Century young adults who are confident, skilled and caring? What will be their emotional and social needs? Intellectual needs? Other needs?

16 respondents wrote silently for 20 minutes. We had explained beforehand that we had been gathering information from community groups to share their beliefs, values, opinions and stories. We stated our belief in the importance of asking people what they believe contemporary libraries should offer to remain as community hubs in a time of rapid and escalating change. We explained that our project was the *Community snapshots* research

project, and that we would synthesise the P&C survey responses and provide a summary report to the committee. Our findings would be also shared online at <http://communitysnapshots.weebly.com> and at the *Intelligent Symposium 2013*. Other groups were also surveyed for this project and there was creative writing about what matters, by students and community groups.

Rationale

Our purpose was threefold:

1. *Digital collections*: To publish information, opinions and stories gathered during the *Community snapshots* research process, so that these publications might form part of the digital collections of participating libraries.

2. *Intentional archives*: To support the voluntary publication of archival material related to the “inner lives” of residents – this will be fascinating social and local history, as part of a library's digital archives.

3. *Training*: To design a series of future *Community snapshots* workshops to train community members in digital storytelling and the use of a number of simple online publishing tools with which to capture their views, via a process of qualitative community research, which empowers participants to use 21st Century tools. ►►



The Community snapshots project (cont.)

Summary of responses

Australian news: Education, the environment, the elections and the plight of refugees featured as the four major issues for respondents. This P&C's members were revealed to have a generous "big picture" view supporting environmental sustainability, social justice and equity. A small number of parents were also concerned about: out-of-control young people, the *National Disability Insurance Scheme*, the budget, human rights issues (including equity of opportunity and same-sex marriage), violence, and drugs in sport.

Global issues: The major global issues identified by the group were environmental issues, concerns about military conflicts (with a specific mention of USA's gun laws), and human rights issues and abuses. Politics, the economy, community building (including local food initiatives) and corporate injustice all rated a mention.



Piktochart infographic

Lizzie summarised some of these issues in the *Piktochart*:

magic.piktochart.com/output/34881d7e-f50d-4f62-9b91-adaa74cd3f82

In a *Community snapshots* workshop, participants would be trained in using *Piktochart* to express the main ideas arising from a *Survey monkey* survey of their community group's opinions.

Libraries as community hubs: Respondents strongly affirmed the role of libraries in celebrating literature, citing author talks, story time, reading days and book launches. Drama clubs and musical clubs were suggested, to bring to life "all that the books in the library talk about."

A second major thread discussed the library as a meeting place: for groups of all ages, for craft, art, creative writing, film groups, book groups, and groups seeking local change (such as slow food groups).

A third major thread was the role which libraries can play in supporting parents with homework centres, parenting workshops and reading tutor sessions. The school library was nominated as a place to foster connections, to provide informative courses and to assist community members in learning how to use technology. A scattering of answers mentioned the traditional information-conserving role of the library, such as documenting the local community's history, attitudes and activities.

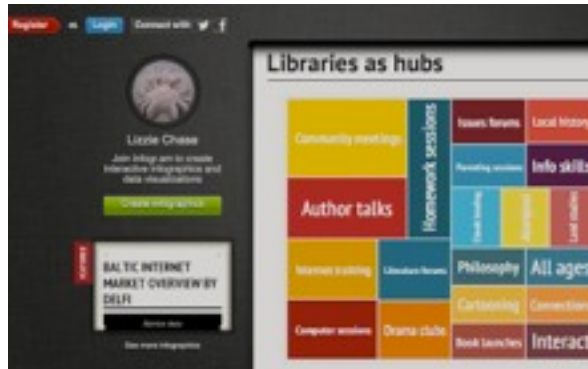
Make way for ducklings by Robert McCloskey

Right:

The classic picture book from 1941 was based on the real story of a duck who raised her family in the busy Boston Public Garden. The nine sculptures, by Nancy Schön, are tended by volunteers - and even decorated for the winter season!
Photo by Ian McLean.



The *Community snapshots* project (cont.)



***What we believe that young people need* (Easelly) and *Libraries as hubs* (Infogram) infographics.**

Teaching information management, and lending out technology such as eBooks on portable devices, were given one mention each. Another respondent suggested the library as a place to learn about issues not strongly covered in the normal curriculum, listing Aboriginal cultures and Land studies. Someone else mentioned the connection with the physical world as being important.

Place of connection, joint knowledge building and networking: In summary, all these P&C responses celebrate what libraries and librarians can do so well. These suggested activities which bring people into the same physical space to connect, learn and share together.

Infogram infographic

The infographic *Libraries as hubs* (above right) at <http://infogr.am/Libraries-as-hubs> captures a number of these key themes in an impressionistic way.

Lizzie and Donna believe that libraries have a vital role to play as community hubs and centres of learning. As part of this important role, teacher librarians find that training the community in the use of infographics and digital storytelling tools is timely and highly valued.

Community members particularly enjoy publishing about topics which are dear to their hearts, such as *What matters to us? Telling our stories*. “Technology in learning” training connects parents to the multimodal

composing which their own children are undertaking in our 21st Century classrooms. These community online publications, in turn, have the potential to be a valued part of a library’s digital collections, forming part of a community’s intentional archives: capturing “snapshots” of the diversity of a community’s viewpoints, stories and beliefs at a specific point in time. ●

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References and further reading

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