

This is a preprint of a Foreword accepted for publication by Facet Publishing. It has been taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive version of this piece may be found in *The Networked Librarian: The School Librarian's Role in Fostering Connections, Collaboration and Co-creation Across the Community* (pp. xi-xvii), authored by Sarah Pavey (2024, Facet, London, ISBN 978-1-78330-620-6), which can be purchased from <https://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/the-networked-librarian/> (or <https://www.alastore.ala.org/netwsch> for customers in North America).

Foreword: The Network is the Message

Collaboration is back on the agenda for school librarians, but with a new look and feel. Networks and networking are the keys to success for the school librarian in the 21st century. Sarah Pavey's new book is a timely reminder that the service model for libraries has changed and so have the core competencies of library work. Librarianship today involves more than developing collections, organising information, delivering services and managing facilities. Our profession is all about making connections, designing interactions, building trust and forming partnerships – in other words, librarianship is about *facilitating* and *managing relationships*. But librarians in education must now engage in these activities on a much larger stage than before, working across institutional boundaries, reaching out to local communities and putting relationships with learners, colleagues and other allies at the centre of their practice. *The Networked Librarian* gives us the blueprint for success in a continually evolving educational landscape.

Collaboration is often claimed as a core value of librarianship. University librarian Jim Neal says "Cooperation is part of the professional DNA of libraries" [1]. And indeed we have a long history of libraries and librarians co-operating through resource-sharing and information networks. In the past our culture of collaboration was a strategy of last resort when there was no other way to get hold of hard-to-find material. Then we found there were everyday tasks that could be performed at higher standard and lower cost by working with others via co-operative cataloguing and purchasing consortia. Librarians in education also realised the benefits of collaborating with subject teachers, and not just in support roles as reference specialists or information consultants – teaching librarians expect to be accepted as professional peers and equal partners in the learning process from curriculum design to classroom instruction and assignment help.

A huge amount has been written on teacher-librarian collaboration with work published in magazines, books, journals, conferences and other outlets. The literature contains notable scholarship that has gained attention beyond the school library arena, particularly the taxonomies and models of David Loertscher and Patricia Montiel-Overall, which have evolved and developed over several decades with support from professional associations and government agencies [2, 3]. Scholars have also discussed building relations with school principals and administrators to facilitate involvement in lesson planning and curriculum development. Others report collaborations with public libraries to mitigate summer learning

loss and partnerships with local universities to facilitate student transition to higher education. There is much to value and use in this body of work, but it doesn't tell the whole story – hence the need for a new book that gives us a fuller picture and a fresh perspective on both the Who and How of collaboration.

For despite all the insights provided by research and reflection over the years, different sources tell us that librarians continue to have mixed results with their collaborative efforts, especially when trying to collaborate with other professions and disciplines like teachers, technologists, scientists and even humanists. Various reasons have been offered for this state of affairs ranging from skills deficits and capacity issues to our professional insularity and transactional mindset. The abilities required for collaboration tend to be poorly covered in professional competency statements, scattered around under multiple headings and also inaccurately labelled in the library literature as “soft skills”, indicating fundamental gaps in understanding that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Another concern is that in many cases current library partnership plans are too limited for the situation we find ourselves in today.

So the task for our profession is not just about getting better at what we are currently doing (or trying to do). We need to rethink both *who* we routinely work with and *how* we work with others. As other professions have recognised, this is about *Working Differently Together* [4], which makes the requirement for competency development and up-skilling more urgent as librarians become involved in new relationships and new ways of working including new leadership roles. Because the world has moved on and many of us are still playing catch-up. We now live, work and play in a *network society*, where the Internet serves as both the technological basis and the organisational form for our global knowledge economy [5]. Services in all sectors have evolved from standalone operations to networked organisations. By invoking the network paradigm, Pavey successfully recasts the narrative for school librarians and explains clearly how they can make vital connections and develop new collaborations to facilitate meaningful co-creation involving their whole community.

Networks have always been part of our personal, social and working lives, but they have now moved centre-stage. Networking enables you to connect with colleagues who share your interests and forms that vital first step towards identifying contacts with partnership potential within or beyond your institution. In the network society, collaboration is no longer an option, a strategic choice when we don't have the resources to do things on our own or realise that we can do things better by working with others. Collaboration is now a necessity, an operational imperative in a world where personal computing, networking technologies, Internet access and online services have combined to create a *participatory culture* that has shifted the way we do things and the way we think about things from individual to collective activity. Society has moved from an ethos of “doing it yourself” to one of “doing it together” [6]. Librarianship was once defined as *managing information resources for people* [7], but now it is about *managing information resources with people*.

Multi-partner collaborative relationships that cut across institutional boundaries are now the norm in industry, government and education. Business leaders, public-sector managers and community organisers know that networks and networking are the way to get things done in the sharing economy. Network competence and networking skills have become

must-have capabilities for organisations and individuals. Professional success in all sectors of society depends on knowing how to create and use operational, personal and strategic networks [8]. Technology advances and cultural changes have radically altered the context for our work, requiring us to deepen, broaden and scale-up our collaborative practices – closer working with more partners across a wider array of activities and tasks. This looks like a challenging assignment, especially for solo librarians, but sole practitioners can arguably gain the most from sharing their responsibilities, tasks, knowledge, authority and power with a diverse range of stakeholders serving as co-workers.

Many librarians are moving in the right direction by using social media to connect with students and teachers, share library and learning resources, collaborate on projects with colleagues and build community around particular issues. However, becoming a *networked librarian* involves a lot more than knowing how to use social networking sites to engage students and enhance learning. Social networking is more than individuals or groups connecting and interacting with each other through online platforms. The Web has given us new tools, but old techniques are still crucial, including in-person and face-to-face communication and conversations. Participatory culture has turned work, learning, media, research and politics into egalitarian social practices that blur traditional boundaries between work and play, learner and teacher, consumer and producer, citizen and expert, private and public.

Savvy librarians are already using participative practices such as co-design, crowdsourcing and hackathons to involve students, researchers and citizens in projects, processes and programming in both physical places and virtual communities. Edit-a-thons, gamification and makerspaces are other examples of the way that imaginative librarians are embedding learning in participative events and social venues that engage and empower participants, while also developing their own interpersonal and collaborative abilities. We see the same shift towards socially-engaged practice in the participatory pedagogies adopted in many educational institutions, including constructivist, co-operative, collaborative, community-centred, connectivist and constructionist learning in classrooms, in library learning environments and in settings beyond school boundaries.

School and public library spaces are functioning as hubs of *connected learning* that is peer-supported, interest-driven, academically-relevant, production-centred and openly-networked around a shared purpose [9]. Innovative school librarians are looking beyond their established networks of contacts to cultivate partnerships for learning in the wider community and not just with public and higher education libraries. They are initiating collaborative relationships with government agencies, non-profit organisations and social enterprises, teaming up with social workers, family hubs, recycling programmes, community arts projects, cultural institutions and science centres in order to facilitate broader and deeper student learning and promote community health and wellbeing.

These are “radical collaborations” that “demand the blurring of lines among the educator, student, and community partner as everyone in a learning community functions as both a learner and a teacher” [10]. The term *radical collaboration* comes from the field of design thinking and is used to denote boundary-crossing teamwork that uses diverse perspectives to solve problems, improve products or co-create knowledge. As education at all levels

moves from student-centred to community-centred approaches for lifelong learning and global stewardship, educators – including librarians – need to extend their networks of collaborators beyond their traditional partners and be prepared to reach out to the unfamiliar or even uncomfortable to achieve more together than they could separately by leveraging collective strengths.

The Networked Librarian adopts an expansive view of school library collaboration without neglecting the central issue of librarian-teacher collaboration. Pavey devotes a whole chapter to the issues and challenges of forming, nurturing and sustaining relationships with subject teachers, but she makes it clear that teachers are only one group of many that school librarians must enlist, engage and encourage to play their part in facilitating the intellectual, social and emotional development of students. Other chapters cover working with students, working with school leaders and governors, with parents and families, and with the many other members of the school community who support and help students (such as classroom assistants, learning mentors, specialist counsellors, cover supervisors, building managers, finance officers and so on), as well as reaching out to the local community and professional colleagues.

But in order to develop any form of collaboration, radical or otherwise, you have to initiate and create a relationship – which is why library thought leaders have been asserting that “we are in the relationship business”, which in turn means giving more attention to *communication* as “the fuel that drives relationships” [11]. This brings us back to the notion of *network competence*, a concept that originated in the business world, but has now been defined as a generic competence and graduate attribute for students at European universities. Network competence has individual and organisational aspects and is “significantly more demanding and disciplined” than networking skills [12]. It includes both the ability to initiate, manage and use a portfolio of interpersonal and interorganisational *relationships* in pursuit of personal and organisational goals *and* the ability to improve your position in a network regarding access to resources and activities.

So, proficiency in our emergent connected, collaborative, co-creating environment requires both technical and behavioural abilities, covering communication and interaction, groupwork and teamwork, co-operation and partnership, change management and conflict management. Irrespective of whether we regard these competency areas as “hard” and “soft” skills, or “scientific” and “humanistic” knowledge, the future success of school libraries undoubtedly depends on giving proper attention to interpersonal capacity in the education, training and development of school librarians. This is where Pavey’s book really breaks new ground and makes a major contribution to the literature on library collaboration. By opening the book with five chapters covering the theory and practice of group dynamics, change management, communication styles, human behaviour and team leadership, Pavey sends a clear signal that we cannot go on treating interpersonal abilities as taken-for-granted skills of library practitioners.

The Networked Librarian offers a refreshing perspective on collaboration for school librarians, informed by theoretical models and enriched by practical examples, all drawn from first-hand experience. By casting her net wide, Sarah Pavey provides a more rounded picture of the multiple productive relationships that school librarians can and must facilitate

to enable student learning, growth and wellbeing in the 21st century. She also explains how to go about creating successful working relationships from the ground up, offering us a primer on the basics of communication and teamwork, along with advice on navigating change in the workplace and dealing with disruptive behaviour in groups. There are many publications on collaboration for school librarians and a few also on communication, but this book is the first to integrate these foundational elements of library work into a readymade toolkit for practitioners in the network world. I commend it to all who care about the future of school librarianship.

Sheila Corrall
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