Book Review

Walsh, A. and Coonan, E. (eds.) 2013. Only Connect… Discovery pathways, library explorations and the information adventure. Huddersfield: Innovative Libraries. 239 pp. ISBN: 9780957665217. £14.96.Pbk.

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I have been challenged to go on a journey; a journey about journeys. I don't know what I will need or who I am about to meet. But I do know that I trust those that have chosen the journeys for me (editors Andrew Walsh and Emma Coonan) and that, although they won't be accompanying me on my adventure and have left the route for me to decide, they will want me to enjoy it and to share my experiences once I arrive back home (see Endnote p.239 and the call to tweet).

I open the printed book (although I could just have easily – more easily in fact - been consulting the content which has been made available under a creative commons licence or as an e-book) and see that I am encouraged to use a 'Chapter Chooser' chatterbox to pick a chapter to read. I am not sure whether anyone would actually bother doing this, but decide to act within the spirit of the suggestion and randomly pick chapters from each of the book's sections - The Mapmakers and The Travellers - to read.

The introduction draws me in with talk of matters which are of a professional interest to me; the contextual nature of information literacy (IL) and the need to recognise the richness of real behaviour. I am particularly attracted to the phrase "information discovery journeys" and to the promise of a book which prioritises a relational approach to IL rather than viewing it as a list of skills and competencies. Like IL itself, this book suggests it is to be a broad church where those that map their way through information and those that travel with a fluidity where the process rather than the route is key can come together – or, if not exactly together, then can occupy the same space and feel their journeys validated by the very act of inclusion.

Since the authors are going to break out of text-only mode and will sometimes include video, audio, images, cartoons and interactive media, I am armed with book, pen, paper and iPad as I go forth to meet them.

Dipping between the mapmakers and the travellers, I meet characters I recognise (all the students, the various academics, the bears in Bryony Ramsden's fantastic fairytale) and characters who resonate with me less (the Reading Room Librarian from UCLA who posits herself as 'the knowing one' to the unenlightened Sir Learnsalot; the artists, Amado and Alarcon who achieve a connection with each other, but aren't so successful at communicating a learning journey to the reader). I read prose with which I am familiar and prose which I find more difficult (Norton; Amado and Alarcon). I am handed practical ideas which can be incorporated into teaching encounters (Groppel-Wegener and Walton; Groppel-Wegener) and ideas which will sit with me for a while while I consider what to do with them (Eli Pariser's TED talk on filter bubbles which Burkhardt and Carbery use with

their students; the librarian in the Memories video talking about the search skills needed in a multi-media world). Rather unexpectedly, I feel the pain and joy of some of the journeys (Osborne; Andrews and Soulsby-Kermode) and can almost taste the (literal) fabric of others (Dimmock, Hoon and MacLellan).

There are several pieces worth singling out for mention, including Antony Osborne's chapter where he contrasts informational journeys dealing with representations of gay male identity in the 1970s and post-2000s. This chapter acts as a valuable reminder of the real, personal value of information and of how much has changed in terms of access to information in a relatively short space of time. Those chapters where we hear directly from the researchers/academics themselves (Cullen and Delasalle; Johnson and Walsh), bringan authenticity and vividness to the landscape, which is often lost when we speak generically about 'information needs' rather than grounding these in a specific academic discipline. Chapters in the form of a video (Dimmock, Hoon and MacLellan) or a Prezi (Burkhardt and Carbery) are also of note. With just the inclusion of a basic text abstract, these presentations perfectly condense the information they want to convey. And there are chapters where the simple inclusion of hand-drawn pictures really brings them to life (*The Fishscales of Academicness* and *The Winning Hand of Independence*).

It is perhaps with this last chapter (*The Winning Hand of Independence*) - where the author describes a new resource which involves using playing cards to explain the differences between an annotated bibliography and a literature review - that the opportunities afforded by how the book has been made available could really be explored. At the time of writing, the author had yet to try the resource with students. I would like to think that – once she has done so – she might share her evaluation of this intervention via her chapter online

My favourite piece in the book was *The Library* by Bryony Ramsden. A beautifully written fairytale involving unhelpful bears and robots, itacts as a warning to librarians not to be gatekeepers but to strive to be partners and enablers. My only quibble is that I would have liked it if the e-version could have added something to this tale; if we could have tapped on the 'Staff advise against entering this door' notice to be shown into the corridor (or even just to move forward to the next paragraph), or if the three different endings in 'The Answer' could have been selected one at a time by us, the reader, so that we had to physically go in and out of the stories before we found the ending the author is leading us to.

I was pleased to be asked to review this book and feel that it has made a refreshing contribution to the IL literature. Not only is it unusual in being available for free online (or reasonably priced from print-on-demand service, lulu), but it also does an unusual thing in bringing together both very personal journeys through information and professional ones. But for all that it engages the reader, I am left feeling that it is rather an uneven book; but not knowing whether this matters, or whether – in fact – it is this way by design? Does the unevenness jar or is it a welcome challenge? Would further editing have made this a better book, or would it have made it too tidy, and therefore not representative of the diversity of information discovery journeys and the messiness of most explorations?

Resources

This review is based on the print on demand print version from Lulu.com:
http://bit.ly/18kMSuH
Alternative formats are available:
Online content (Creative Commons): http://innovativelibraries.org.uk
E-book : http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/17339/