

Moving Forward

By Dr Ross Todd

Recently I participated in the **International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA)** World Library and Information Congress in Lyon, France. There were two major activities that took some of my time: first the vibrant program and packed session centering on the review of the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines, now nearing completion. In addition to that, I attended the day-long program of the 40th Anniversary Section on Education and Training. The keynote address for this program was given by Dr Ismail Serageldin, founding director of **The New Library of Alexandria – the New Bibliotheca Alexandrina** – in Egypt. His spirited address was about embracing the transformative challenges facing all libraries and information agencies, and the opportunistic circumstances that should inspire us to invent the future.

Serageldin painted a picture of the changing structures of web knowledge, its social connectivity infrastructure, and how we can access and utilise this connected world of knowing in an increasingly semantic web. As

information providers and information users, we are increasingly part of a living, vibrant, changing and interconnected knowledge base which he termed the MetaWeb: the fusion of the current web, social software and the semantic web. It was sobering to learn that Internet traffic grew twenty times just between 2010 and 2013. The information landscape has a credo of all information to all people at all times. We were challenged to consider how we as library and information professionals handle these enormous amounts of information across multiple interconnected streams and formats, in ways that give value to users, and empower them for living, working and learning. This is quite a challenge, one that opens up opportunities for us to rethink the function of what we do and how we do it.

... we are increasingly part of a living, vibrant, changing and interconnected knowledge base ...

Our libraries have traditionally been structured around knowledge parsed into individual volumes. Our access structures, primarily through classification schemes and catalogues provide access primarily to these individual volumes. Of course we can connect to others through subject headings and index terms. The new parsing, however, will increasingly be accessed as interconnected web pages and multiple formats. Such developments provide opportunities for new conceptions of classification, curation, mapping collections by patterns of use, and a knowledge environment that is moving from mostly text with selected images to image-rich texts. In essence, Serageldin was foreshadowing an information environment that is moving from data and information collections, to connections between data and information collections.

... professionals who both defend and enable openness to knowledge, plurality, community and who nurture meaningful social change . .

While computational theory and IT development will help build those technical connections to access, retrieve and manipulate knowledge, the role of the human is to enable people to navigate the plurality of knowledge that such technology affords:

interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary is key. Human contact with knowledgeable people, the development of creative, innovative and messy spaces, the provision of community spaces for the collaborative and social engagement with knowledge; the provision of spaces for the enactment of formal and informal learning by individuals and groups – all of these define library and information agencies of the future. At the heart of this convergence and transformation are real people: professionals who both defend and enable openness to knowledge, plurality, community and who nurture meaningful social change through engagement with information in all its forms. In other words, professionals who continue to defend values of humanity, profoundly human values that we believe in: access, pluralism, human rights, custodians of past

and incubators of change for a meaningful future, protecting history and at the same time incubating and inventing the future. This is our professional goal: to provide the intellectual, creative, technical and digital spaces and interventions to encourage people to think of problems, engage in critical thinking, and create solutions, thus making the library the heart of a community's civic and intellectual journey. This is deeply human-centered work. It is all about community and relationships.

In all of this I see the potential and power of teacher-librarians. Essentially it is about leadership for community, collaboration and continuous improvement. Providing the caring environment and effort involved in fostering deep engagement with information in all its forms. Information is the foundation of community, and it is building community that is the future. I challenge you all to move forward with a vision of community building, not merely information building. Leadership is not bigger than any of our school library community. Model the way, inspire a shared vision of community, and challenge the traditional processes and structures that wall us in.

Dr Ross J Todd is Associate Professor and the Interim Chair in the Department of Library and Information Science in the School of Communication & Information at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. He is also the Director of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL). <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~rtodd>. Associate Professor Todd is also a member of the Synergy Board.