

## **Transliteracy and Libraries**

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Transliteracy, as coined by Sue Thomas, Professor of New Media at De Montfort University and the Transliteracy Research Group, is described as “the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks” (Thomas et al. 2007). Transliteracy definitions strive to set aside the typical “print versus digital” dichotomy in favor of a more holistic integration of the ways in which we utilize various mediums to access information and make meaning. From pen and paper to moveable type to social networking, technology has changed the way in which we interact with one another and with information. The essence of transliteracy studies focuses on the “convergence of literacies” and the relationship between those various literacies such as computer literacy, media literacy and others. Transliteracy then encapsulates the plethora of literacies necessary for successful navigation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Yet with the introduction of new forms of technology, our interactions with information and the ways in which we construct meaning for ourselves has changed. As a result, new and emerging technologies require that we expand our definition of what it means to be literate in today’s world. As librarians, we help others negotiate the world of information regardless of the container which houses that information. We help our library users access and move between and across various media whether it is an encyclopedia, a research database, or a blog. On a daily basis we work with various literacies, moving between printed text and digital interactions. Just as we help our users gain crucial information literacy skills, we too must assist our users’ by

introducing them to new and emerging technologies for communicating and producing information.

Libraries are an essential community anchor and oftentimes provide much-needed access to broadband, wireless connections, and computer classes. According to the 2010-2011 Public Library Funding & Technology Access survey, nearly 60% of Colorado libraries are the sole providers of free public internet access in their communities. Libraries play an important role in helping to bridge the digital divide and the inequity of access to information and communications technologies by providing equitable computer access and technology training. Technology training and library programs can become a natural place for information professionals to introduce library users to skills that embrace the tenets of transliteracy.

Eighty-three library locations, tribal museums, and community centers across Colorado are working to bridge the digital divide and provide necessary technology training at Public Computer Centers. These Public Computer Centers, a result of the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant administered by the Colorado State Library, are poised to help Coloradoans become engaged with technology and equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. Along with my colleagues Kieran Hixon and Crystal Schimpf, I incorporate elements of transliteracy skill-building into the trainings I deliver to library staff in the hope that libraries will be equipped to educate their own communities.

### **Transliteracy skills at work**

Staff training and development is a key component in the successful expansion of a transliterate community. Self-guided training such as the Learning 2.0 program (<http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com>) developed by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library and emulated by

Colorado Libraries 2.0 (<http://web20.coceforum.org>), and Mesa County Libraries' Webolution (<http://mcpldwebolution.blogspot.com>) provides staff with the opportunity for self-directed learning on a variety of communication tools and platforms. These programs offer staff an opportunity to experiment with unfamiliar technologies in a non-threatening manner by incorporating "sandbox time" into meaningful exercises. Encouraging staff to play and discover new communication tools can be a stress-free way to help them learn new "literacies."

Library staff can incorporate technology into programs and trainings that traditionally have had little or no technology. By doing so, we can encourage our library users to interact with new and different forms of communication and information. Including digital or media elements such as storyboards, videos or gaming into story time programs, for example, can teach both children and their parents important transliteracy skills. Creating a summer reading program that moves beyond reading to support video-making, eBook experimentation, or blogging is a way to get participants engaged in their own story making. Supporting discussion and critical thinking skills through video programming that emulates the concept of TED, the popular nonprofit whose videos showcase creative thinkers and big ideas, can be an effective way to get community members mobilized around a particular topic (<http://bit.ly/tedinspire>). Virtual town hall meetings and author talks can also offer our users new avenues for communication and community involvement. By expanding our focus of what it means to be truly 21<sup>st</sup> Century literate, libraries can help their users gain crucial transliteracy skills through library programming and service.