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If they build it, they will use it

Advocating a client-
centred approach to school
learning resource centre
and library programming

by Professor David V. Loertscher
School of Library and Information
Science
San Jose State University

With the rise of the Google generation, those digital natives, or millennials, whatever you call them, it seems time to rethink everything about school libraries that this generation just seems to Google around. Our new social networkers need their tech savvy skills folded into their academic skills, but to have this happen, our teacher librarians need to do some serious 180 degree thinking to build a program that is client-centered rather than organizationally centered. It is not, "If we build it, they will come." It is: "If they build it, they will use it." And, what is the difference? Carol Koechlin, consultant from Ontario and I recently presented a webinar in which we proposed the transformation of school libraries and computer labs into learning commons both virtually and physically.

The virtual learning commons replaces the one-way stream of information library web site, usually ignored, and replaces it with a giant conversation. The physical library and computer lab are transformed into an open commons where books and computers don't get in the

way; they become the experimental learning center which is the center of school improvement. You can explore these ideas on a recorded webinar and resource wiki at: <http://schoollearningcommons.pbworks.com>.

Features of the Open Commons

- Flexibility (furniture and schedule)
- Wireless
- Networking places and spaces
- Productivity spaces and tools
- Comfortable and stimulating
- Books and resources kids want and need
- Books and computers don't get in the way

Features of the Open Commons

- Celebration of learning
- A parade of exemplary learning experiences
- Individual, small groups, large group
- On its own calendar
- All specialists "office" there
- A Cultural center – Listening Lunches



Experimental Learning Center

- Why? – Neutral territory
- Safe – experimenting, risk taking
- Nurturing new teachers
- All school improvement initiatives
- All professional development
- Action research center
- **Showcase of school improvement**



From:
 Transform the School Library and Computer Lab
 into a Learning Commons
 – A Webinar
 by David Loertsher
 and Carol Koechlin
<http://schoollearningcommons.pbworks.com/>



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- * Build your knowledge of Canadian authors and illustrators and their publications
- * Understand the world of publishing and distributing Canadian Children's Literature
- * Collaborate online with fellow enthusiasts

Instructor: Joanne de Groot recently completed a PhD in Elementary Education at the University of Alberta; her research focussed on children's experiences with summer reading programs in public libraries. Joanne teaches courses on children's literature, educational technology, and Web 2.0 in the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning program at the University of Alberta.

". . . it will be the artists who give them their spirit back."

Randal McIlroy brings Derrick Grose up-to-date on Pemmican Publications and its efforts to promote Metis culture.

As an English teacher at Oxford House and Thicket Portage, in northern Manitoba in the early and mid-1980's, I was searching for books that would be culturally relevant for the Cree and Métis students in those isolated communities. Apart from traditional legends and a few biographies and memoirs, the selection was limited.

However, there was a publishing company in Manitoba that was working to extend the selection beyond the books of legends that were typical of the First Nations literature offered at that time by many mainstream publishers. For high school students there was a moving and controversial novel about abuse and recovery by Beatrice Culleton entitled *In Search of April Raintree*. For younger readers there were patterned reading books such as *I Can't Have Bannock but the Beaver Has a Dam* and *Where Did You Get Your Moccasins?* by Bernelda Wheeler. Through these books, my students had an opportunity to read about people whose experiences were in some ways similar to their own experiences, or at least the experiences of their neighbours. Although Portage and Main Press now publishes these specific titles, Pemmican Publications continues to publish new titles that enable members of Metis communities to read books that reflect their culture and concerns.



Pemmican publications from the early 1980's allowed members of Metis and First Nations communities to read about their own cultures and concerns.

On its web site <http://www.pemmican.mb.ca>, the publishing house declares its commitment to “the promotion of Metis culture and heritage.” It quotes Louis Riel’s declaration, “My people will sleep for 100 years, and when they awake it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.” To find out more about the origins of Pemmican Publications and how their work is continuing in the twenty-first century, I contacted Randal McIlroy, the managing editor of the Winnipeg-based publishing house who responded to my questions about the past, present and future.

DG - What was the first book published by Pemmican Publications?

RM - This is a rather complicated matter insofar as Pemmican began as a continuation of two existing presses, The Metis Press and Editions Bois-Brûlés, which existed under the aegis of the Manitoba Metis Federation. Pemmican was incorporated in October 1980 as a not-for-profit affiliate of Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF). It is not clear when the Pemmican logo was first used. The oldest Pemmican title still in print is *L’Espace de Louis Goulet*, the memoirs of Louis Goulet (1859-1936), which was published in 1983. That title was first published in 1976 by Editions Bois-Brûlés, in English, as *Vanishing Spaces – Memoirs of Louis Goulet*.

DG - What has been the company’s best-selling publication? How many printings have been done and how many copies have been sold?

RM - Certain illustrated titles for children have become perennials. Two outstanding examples are *Red Parka Mary*, written by Peter Eyvindson and illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson, and *Two Pairs of Shoes*, written by Esther Sanderson and illustrated by David Beyer. *Red Parka Mary* first appeared in 1996, and is in its sixth printing. *Two Pairs of Shoes* first appeared in 1990, and is currently in its seventh. When I order reprints I’ll plan for 1,500 to 2,000 copies of each, in confidence we will sell them within a year. (By comparison, new titles are commissioned originally in runs of 1,000.)

Other strong sellers include the 10 illustrated books in the *Nanabosho* series, written by Joe McLellan (sometimes in partnership with his wife, Matrine); *Eagle Feather – An Honour*, written and illustrated by Ferguson Plain; and *Little Metis and the Metis Sash* and *A Name for a Metis* – two stories written by Deborah L. Delaronde and illustrated by Keiron Flamand.

DG - What has been the company’s best-selling publication in the last year? How many printings have been done and how many copies have been sold?



Goose Girl is just one recent example of successful children's books produced by Pemmican Publications.

RM - Our greatest recent success is *Goose Girl*, written by Joe and Matrine McLellan and illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson. The illustrated title has sold 2,000 copies since November 2007, with a considerable boost from positive reviews in *Quill and Quire*, *The Globe and Mail* and *CM*. A third edition has just been printed. At the recent Manitoba Book Awards it won the McNally Robinson Book for Young People Award (Younger Category), which is bound to spur sales.

DG - What has been the greatest challenge facing the company?

RM - Like many small publishers we are challenged to stretch our resources. Keeping our backlist titles in circulation while producing new titles is a constant demand. In the last three years there has been a strong effort to digitize many older illustrated titles to facilitate reprinting.

DG - What has been the company's greatest success?

RM - Pemmican's mandate is to promote Canadian Metis writers and illustrators through stories that are informed by Metis experience. As the only dedicated Metis publishing house in Canada, Pemmican has contributed significantly to Metis literature in this nation and, thus, toward a greater understanding of the Metis people and their stake in Canada's history.

DG - What guiding principle, value or key belief contributes most to the successes of the company?

RM - Working according to a cultural mandate ensures discipline even as it raises challenges. On the first count, it allows us to focus. On the other, it forces us to consider the nature of the mandate. The ramifications of the latter are for another story, perhaps. Nonetheless, the consideration of those ramifications has encouraged a tougher editorial stance. We are not interested in cultural tokenism. We are most interested in growth. Every fresh year's roster should promote an improvement upon the previous.

DG - How does the company perceive its role in educational publishing?

RM - In the realm of children's stories, Pemmican authors find many ways to celebrate Metis culture and history, and, in the process, provide not only a window for non-Metis readers but also a mirror for the Metis. In the four volumes of the Michif Children's Series, for example, young Thomas learns aspects of his Metis heritage while coming into his own. Series creator Bonnie Murray's English texts are presented simultaneously in the Metis language of Michif, with translation from pioneering Michif linguist Rita Flamand. Deborah L. Delaronde's early illustrated stories (such as *Little Metis and the Metis Sash*) depict aspects of rural Metis life from the not-too-distant past. In *Metis Spirits*, her first short story collection for teens, modern young Metis protagonists encounter ghosts from their past, although the encouragement to take pride in heritage is intended for all readers. Author/illustrator Linda Ducharme's first book, *Pepere Plays the Fiddle*, evokes the family joy of a Metis house party of the '40s.

RM - Our stories for children are especially important to us. Without being didactic, we want young Metis readers to see something of themselves and their traditions in our books. Just as we hope those titles may help non-Metis readers understand the culture. At the same time, we celebrate the joy of reading. It must be noted that we deal frequently with Metis and First Nations school divisions, especially in rural territories.

We are not considered to be a scholarly press, although in the past we have made valuable contributions toward Metis genealogy, political and cultural history and explorations of the Michif language. Certainly, two of our greatest resource books are *Metis Legacy* and *Metis Legacy II: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways*. Both were co-produced and co-published with Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) and encompass deep cultural riches in a handsome format.



"Long ago, our ancestors used these carts to travel the prairies in search of buffalo. The carts were made entirely from wood, with two huge wheels strapped with leather. They were pulled by a horse or ox and carried the buffalo meat and hides or other belongings. The carts made a loud screeching noise when they travelled because they didn't use any grease on the axles. The axles would collect dirt and small pebbles, eventually forcing the carts to stop," his dad explained.



"Kayaash maana tii graŋperaŋtiii'inaanihk kii aapachiyewak oŋhiŋ lii sharey daŋ li preyrii lii boefloo e'nandunéwaachihk. Lii sharey yaenik li bwaa kii uhchi ushichikaashowak avik deu lii gro roo li chwiiir e'uhchi takopichikaashochiik. Kii pimitaapewak lii zhwaal obaeŋdoon aen beu la vyaŋit'd boefloo, pi lii poo obaeŋdoon pakaan kékway sii bitaen'awaawa. Naashpich lii sharey kii shookitaakoshiwak e'pimitaapaashochiik akooz ekaa li gwadruŋ e'kii shinikunakiik daŋ li nisyeu. Li nisyeu kii ati mooshakinam la ter, lii pichit rosh, ikok piyish li sharey e'ati michimushiik" opaapaawa itikoo.

These pages are from *Thomas and the Metis Cart*, illustrated by Sheldon Dawson. The Michif Children's Series teaches aspects of Metis heritage. Bonnie Murray's English texts are presented simultaneously in the Metis language of Michif, translated by Rita Flamand.

DG - How, if it all, has the company been affected by technological changes such as the expansion of Internet, e-books and online publications?

RM - We have invested more in our Internet site in recent years, both to facilitate online ordering and also to make the site more informative. Pemmican has many individual and company customers living in remote areas of Canada, and effective Internet service is essential.

For that reason I foresee a time when Pemmican makes certain titles available via download. There has not been time to explore this in depth.

DG - Thank you for sharing with *SLiC*'s readers this information about Pemmican Publications and its efforts to promote Metis culture and heritage.



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