



UN THE ONE BIG LIBRARY CONFERENCE

By William Denton and Stacy Allison-Cassin

VOTING IN PROGRESS.
PHOTO: F. TIM KNIGHT

Seventy of us crowded into the room by 9 o'clock on a hot morning late last June to decide what we'd do for the rest of the day. That's how our unconference worked. We made it up on the spot.

We came from Ontario (Toronto, Sudbury, Windsor, London, North Bay, Hamilton, Kingston, Waterloo, St. Catharines, etc.), Montreal, New York, Iowa, Ohio, and Virginia. We were librarians – public, academic, school, special, government, law, music. We were there to talk about the One Big Library.

Wendy Newman, senior fellow at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information, put it like this: "It seems like there are lots of different kinds of libraries – public libraries, school libraries, university libraries, college libraries, law libraries, medical libraries, corporate libraries, special libraries, private libraries. But really there's just One Big Library, with branches all over the world."

The authors of this article, along with John Dupuis, fellow York University librarian, thought the One Big Library was an important idea and needed more attention. How do we get a bunch of smart, thoughtful, interested people together to talk about it? Why not host an unconference, where anyone could come, at no cost, with a free lunch?

An unconference is a conference where the participants decide

the content. There was a wiki (still up at onebiglibrary.yorku.ca) on which anyone could suggest a topic. For participants, that was all the planning there was. They knew they were to show up in downtown Toronto at the Centre for Social Innovation on June 27, 2008, and what happened after that was up to them. All of the possible sessions, listed on the wiki or suggested that morning, were voted on, and by 10 a.m. the day was scheduled.

There were 10 sessions. The opening and closing sessions were combined, and there were four blocks of two concurrent sessions. Openness was the main theme: open source, open data, open access.

THE SESSIONS

Trevor Owens from the Zotero Project led the first session, telling us about their Firefox plug-in. Zotero supports all parts of the research process, from initial browsing and note-taking to the final citations. It helps people build, manage, and (soon) share their personal branches of the One Big Library.

Track One contained technical sessions. McMaster's Amanda Etches-Johnson and Western's David Fiander led a discussion about the open source website content management system, Drupal. After lunch, McMaster's John Fink talked about open source ILS Evergreen, as well as the ongoing work of Project Conifer to deploy it at McMaster, Laurentian, and the University of Windsor. John Miedema covered his WordPress plug-in, called OpenBook. (With it, a blogger can enter the ISBN of a book and OpenBook will automatically retrieve the author and title details, plus a book cover image from the Open Library.) Three technical sessions were put together into one block: David Fiander on

1	4
11:15 12 Drupal (Amanda Etches-Johnson)	Educating for the One Big Library (John Dupuis + ...)
12 4th Floor LUNCH	4th floor
1:15 Evergreen and Project Conifer (John Fink)	Open Access / Rights and Control (John Dupuis + George D)
2:15 Open Book (WordPress) Plugin (John Miedema)	Cataloguing / Semantic Web / Folksonomies / Bibliographic Control (Stacy A-C, Nasser S, Tim Knight)
3:15 Metasearch / APIs / Facebook (D Fiander / G Sinclair / Rick)	One Big Library on One Little Device (D. Scott)
4:15 WRAP UP: Do we want the One Big Library? If so, how do we build it? (Dan Scott + everyone)	

SCHEDULE. THE UNCONFERENCE PROGRAM. TWO OF THESE, AND THE SCHEDULE PAGE ON THE WIKI, WERE ALL WE NEEDED TO KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND WHERE.

One Big Library Unconference
Session Suggestion

Topic: Standardized Bibliographic API

Speakers (you and/or others): Roundtable

Suggester: Rick

Comments: Discuss the issues, challenges & benefits
in developing a standard for retrieval of bibliographic
information - Libraries, Retail sites (Amazon, etc), publishers,
etc.

Put a ● if you think this session should happen.

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VOTING FORM. A SUGGESTION SHEET. THE CHECK MARK INDICATES IT MADE IT INTO THE PROGRAM.

metasearching; Geoff Sinclair of Nipissing University on work he had done to make his catalogue easily available on Facebook; and Rick Mason of Capital University on APIs.

Track Two was more conversational. The first session was on educating for the One Big Library. Three recent McGill graduates were commandeered to lead the session: Jacqueline Barlow, Alik Tryphonopolous, and Marian Davies. George Duimovich from Natural Resources Canada and John Dupuis moderated the session on open access and rights and control of data and systems. In session three, Nasser Saleh of Queen's University, Tim Knight of the Osgoode Law Library, and Stacy Allison-Cassin led a wide-ranging discussion about cataloguing, the Semantic Web, and folksonomies to determine how they fit into the One Big Library. Laurentian's Dan Scott went last, with a session on portable computing, which was titled: One Big Library on One Little Device.

The day wrapped up back in the room where we had started. People from each session summarized what they'd talked about. A common thread of openness had emerged. The One Big Library depends on all being able to share information easily. The conversation didn't stop at the end of the unconference, however. BiblioCommons invited everyone back to its offices for a party, and three dozen of us went. Some continued on to a pub after that. Library talk continued until after midnight.

NEXT STEPS

We didn't come out of the unconference with an absolute definition of where the One Big Library is right now, or what next steps we need to take to help push it along. But we'd seen some of its building blocks and talked about some of its aspects. The informal nature of the unconference, including the direct participant involvement in deciding what would happen, the freedom to speak up during the sessions, and the balance between the semi-structured format of sessions and common break schedules all created an open, engaging environment that encouraged the discussion of ideas, possibilities, and practices. With less money available for travel and more concern over carbon footprints, small, mostly local, informal, participant-driven unconferences may grow in popularity. Will there be another one next year? Perhaps. Organize one where you are, on a topic that you care about, and see what happens. ■

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*William Denton is the web librarian
at York University.*

*Stacy Allison-Cassin is the music
cataloguer at York University.*