

DSG Part 2: Learning the ropes on teaching digital literacy

The million-dollar question for me: If our libraries were to offer full-service digital literacy classes, what, exactly, would they look like? This was my task, and I would need all the knowledge and creativity I had to be successful with this.

Unknowingly, I stepped full-on into the “Club Sandwich Generation.” These are the people who serve people both older and younger than themselves. Traditionally, it refers to *adults who are both parents* of younger people (anywhere from birth to young adulthood) *and children* of older, or senior, parents. Though the traditional definition uses familial terms (parents, children) I think librarians fit here, too. The digital age has added another layer into this club sandwich and as this series goes on, I hope it becomes clearer and clearer that this is where librarians *belong*, right in the thick of things!

Going back to my work in the data center, I had seen some of the offerings in our libraries, and I thought they were great. With my IT knowledge and hands-on tutoring experience, I figured I could create, teach, and evaluate classes, if I could only figure out *how to get started*.

Still working in the data center, I plugged along on the Internet, looking for sample classes, and figuring out how to teach the information I thought would be important for our patrons. I had some great ideas, but no *outlet* yet; I had no workshops, nor did I have permission to teach classes. I’m uncertain what I was doing, even as I look back on it today. Wandering around with more confidence than common sense, I simply proposed my idea to my boss, my poor middle manager: I could teach classes just as well, or better, than the current offerings. We’d double our return with member libraries, because they’d get a huge bang for their buck: digital literacy classes that they could advertise and host with no other real costs involved. They would get a trainer and the computers - it was a two-fer! This could be an excellent deal for our libraries, if I did say so myself.

I did say so. I was the only one who said so...in the beginning.

Sometimes, it’s better to be lucky than good - this was one of those cases.

The next-level bosses, the ones above my poor middle manager, *thought it was a good idea*. They decided to take a chance on this brash librarian who volunteered for more work, and sent me out with *my* self-made notes and handouts and ideas and *their* computers.

Well, butter my biscuit, there’s more to teaching digital literacy classes than *just knowing how to use computers and the Internet*.

There’s *people*. A few, to start. Two to four per class, which wasn’t bad for a brand-new service in 2008. Things were looking up, and classes grew steadily in both patron and library interest, as well as content. New things were happening all the time with computers and laptops, and the commercial market was in a boom period, which powered interest in my classes and training labs; I hardly had to advertise the workshops, because these companies were doing it for me, just by coming out with new gadgets. The year 2007 marked the introduction of the iPhone, with iPads launching in 2010. That was just Apple products. Android came into being in 2008, and Microsoft followed along. The Internet

of People was here to stay, with the Internet of Things just around the bend (*psst: IoT is where we are now, in 2020*).

Fabulous, right? Libraries give people access to computers and the Internet, and all will be well in the world, right? We bridge the digital divide, and our job is complete. "*If you build it, they will come.*" (Someone ought to make a movie with that line in it... oh, wait a minute....)

Right? Well, no. It turns out that *people need to understand how to use these tools*. People come into libraries with questions - nontraditional questions. There was an absolute glut of technology and tools and not enough *trainers*. Not enough *understanding*. Not enough *forethought*. Of profound importance, but something I would only begin to understand in these very recent years, *there was not enough privacy protection*. Libraries needed people to help patrons navigate this new world of cyberspace, and, serendipitously, I was in the perfect position to fill this need.

I am getting ahead of myself here. In the immediate time, up until I moved on from that job in 2011, there would be an urgent need for solid information and the training of adult learners. All of this would be on-the-job training for me - most of it picked up on accident as I learned how to read a room and interact with people. I was assisted by the patrons in one vital way: they tolerated my mistakes because they were *motivated to learn computers*. I was able to learn, grow, and overcome my mistakes because I was *motivated to teach patrons*.