

QR CODES

TAKING COLLECTIONS FURTHER

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Caitlin Ahearn

caahearn@hotmail.com

With some thought and direction, QR (quick response) codes are a great tool to use in school libraries to enhance access to information. From March through April 2013 I interned at Sanborn Regional High School (SRHS) under the supervision of Pam Harland. As a result of her un-Deweying of the nonfiction collection at SRHS, I discovered that QR codes provide an excellent opportunity for librarians to create new pathways for information access. In this article, I explain the method by which Pam and I integrated QR codes into the SRHS collection and offer suggestions on ways you can use QR codes to enhance access in your library.

Why QR Codes?

When I began my internship in March 2013 at SRHS, Pam and her assistant, Jackie Fenderson, were in the midst of un-Deweying the SRHS nonfiction collection. By the end of March, through lots of work hours and decision making, we completed the un-Deweying. As a result of Pam's planning, when the project was completed the nonfiction collection had twenty-three individual sections, ranging from course-specific topics, such as "American History" and "Shakespeare," to popular subjects, such as "Cookbooks," "Music," and "Graphic Novels." It was a great feeling to accomplish such an overhaul of the collection. I remember thinking how relevant and connected the collection really was to the students' curriculum and their daily lives. The collection was suddenly organized in ways learners perceived as logical and with words that they use, rather than ways and words librarians use. For example, geography books are now gathered together in one area and are alphabetized by country name,

rather than organized by geographic location. The process appeared to be complete, and the thought hadn't really occurred to me that there was much more to do.

However, that evening I read about 1:1 iPad programs and saw a brief mention of one librarian who used QR codes for a scavenger hunt through her library. I quickly realized QR codes can be used to connect students to virtual resources, such as LibGuides and the library website. I thought about the new cataloging system at Sanborn and how I could use QR codes to incorporate SRHS online resources, such as LibGuides or Jackie's reading recommendations blog. So, though I had left school that afternoon thinking that we had reached a significant goal and truly aligned the collection with students' needs and wants, I went to sleep knowing that

un-Deweying wasn't the finish line—it was just a beginning.

How?

The next morning, I arrived to school early and approached Pam immediately with the idea. She instantly jumped on it and told me to get to work. My first step was to brainstorm a list of all of the possible virtual resources for which to create QR codes. The list included the library catalog, Jackie's reading blog, and numerous LibGuides that Pam has been creating, updating, and using in recent years. After listing possible contenders for code creation, I matched them with corresponding sections of the library. For example, a code to the library catalog would be affixed in spots throughout the library, but a code to Jackie's blog best fits

Table 1. Resources linked to QR codes posted in the library.

RESOURCES	QR CODE LOCATIONS
Online Newsstand	atop periodical shelves
Library Catalog	atop fiction and nonfiction shelves
Fenderson's Fabulous Reads (Jackie's blog)	atop fiction shelves
1960s LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of 1960s books
American History Databases	affixed to the shelf of American history books
American History LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of American history books
French Revolution LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of French Revolution books
Geography Databases	affixed to the shelf of geography books
Geography LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of geography books
History of Rock and Roll LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of music books
Resume Writing LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of college and career books
Screenwriting LibGuide	affixed to the shelf of writing skills books
Shakespeare LibGuides: <i>Hamlet LibGuide and Macbeth LibGuide</i>	affixed to the shelf of Shakespeare books

in the fiction section. After this process, I developed a strong list of fourteen codes and where to post them around the school library (see table 1).

I began my QR code journey with the Online Newsstand for several reasons. Students at Sanborn read magazines and newspapers daily, but I suspected the majority were unaware they had digital access to more than seventy publications. However, I began with the Newsstand primarily because I hoped that it would generate excitement and curiosity in students, which would get them intrigued about future codes.

Plenty of QR code generators are available online; Pam suggested I use goo.gl because, in addition to generating a shortened URL and a QR code, goo.gl supports tracking statistics. Using goo.gl, I shortened the URL for the Online Newsstand and then accessed the QR code by viewing the details for the newly shortened URL. From there, I copied the code into a file for a sign that I created to inform

library users about the Newsstand. After printing the signs, I placed them on top of the magazine and newspaper shelves (see figure 1).

Throughout the first day, to determine students' level of interest, I talked up the Online Newsstand and the code. Most students were unaware that the Online Newsstand existed, and many were thrilled that the library had QR codes. Others were excited about the Online Newsstand, but they had no idea what a QR code is or how they are helpful. This was a really important finding; my mission became not only to introduce codes into the library, but also to introduce students to the power behind QR codes.

This realization clued me into the second QR code I should post. Instead of generating another code that linked to a library resource, I determined that my next sign should be about QR codes in general and how to scan them. The sign included a brief explanation of QR codes and two recommendations for QR code

scanners, one for Android devices and another for Apple products. I also included a code to the library's website so that students could immediately test the QR code scanner app that they had downloaded (see figure 2). I placed these signs on tables around the library. These signs were a huge hit. Students typically gather in the library before and after school, and within the first two days of putting up these signs, I observed many students reading the signs, grabbing their devices, and scanning the code. What a feeling of success!

From there, I continued creating codes for the other library resources in my original list. I printed these on labels that could easily be affixed to library shelves, directly next to the corresponding un-Dewey labels that Pam and her assistant Jackie had affixed around the library to identify the library's new sections. By the end of the week, I had instances of fifteen different QR codes posted throughout the library. The 1960s code was created and



Figure 1: Signs' placement and inclusion of images on eye-catching signs.

QR Codes

Quick Response Codes

Useful Advertising, coupons, inventories, & 30 much more!

How? Using a QR Code Scanner App on any device!

Need Help? Ask a Librarian

1965 Library Use? Use the app, download then scan to see information more easily & quickly

Start using QR codes today!

Download a FREE QR code scanner to your device.

Apple Recommendation: iZiZoo

Android Recommendation: QR Code



Check out the library's website to learn more about QR codes

HISTORY DATABASES



Figure 3: Shelf label with un-Dewey category name and QR code for a related electronic resource.

posted just in time, as the English class that uses the 1960s LibGuide was just beginning their 1960s project. Thus, these students not only benefitted from having the books about the 1960s corralled in one area, but learner access to electronic information was also increased; the code was directly next to the print resources relevant to their research.

To review, these are the steps I used to create the QR code:

- 1 I logged into my Google account.
- 2 I accessed goo.gl in a separate browser tab.
- 3 In another tab, I copied the whole URL for the Online Newsstand.
- 4 I pasted the URL into the goo.gl URL shortening bar and shortened the URL.
- 5 On the goo.gl page I clicked "Details" under the new, shorter URL that was displayed to the right of the field where I had entered the Online Newsstand URL.
- 6 I right-clicked on the QR code, copied it, and pasted it into the document I had created for the sign/shelf label (see figure 3). QR codes can be resized. However, after formatting the label or sign, be sure to test the code to ensure that, in the process of resizing, you didn't accidentally crop the code and, thereby, invalidate it.

When creating signage and shelf labels, I found that less information really is more in this case. At first, I gave students a plethora of historical information about the codes themselves. Pam reminded me to stay on point and be direct with the signs and shelf labels. The objective of the signs was not to inform students about what these codes were used for in the past, but rather to tell and show them how they are used today. She advised that if students have questions about the codes, they'll often ask or investigate these questions on their own. And, it turns out, she was right; students asked many questions about QR codes. Instead of overloading signage with too much information, I recommend sticking to the point, which in this case is to increase information access.

So What?

Connecting our students directly to LibGuides and other library resources via QR codes gives

learners direct access to these resources at the same time they are searching for print resources. Students are using mobile devices at ever-rising rates, and they are using them in our libraries and schools. It is our duty as school librarians to support learners' needs and the ways they meet these needs. Now, more than ever before, students have tools to access authoritative information in electronic forms. Learners are accustomed to using various devices, including laptops, tablets, Kindles, and smartphones. It isn't for us to decide *how* they access information; we just need to support students' choices, for if we don't, we risk losing those students who feel the school librarian doesn't care about their needs. QR codes are a simple, yet meaningful, way in which we can increase our students' access to library resources. QR codes offer us just one more way to meet the information needs of today's tech-savvy, device-toting users (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Easy access to good sources of information = happy students.





Figure 5. The many information formats libraries must support today.

As students find and navigate these resources, they will become more literate and more experienced in determining the appropriate resources for their specific information needs.

By means of QR codes, students can be linked to traditional resources, such as assignment information, the library catalog, electronic databases, websites, and to 21st-century resources, such as the Online Newsstand, e-books, YouTube videos, and Twitter feeds. The possible applications of QR codes are endless—they can be generated to connect users with curated quick reference sources, an interlibrary loan request form, the library website, and author blogs, as well as to promote library events and new resources and formats.

As students find and navigate these resources, they will become more literate and more experienced in determining the appropriate resources for their specific information needs. For example, students looking for the most current information about a world conflict may choose the Online Newsstand over print media in the library, as the Newsstand is more likely to have the most current articles. However, if they are looking for the most up-to-date information

about SRHS, they may consult the school newspaper, which is only in print, or the principal's blog. The more adept our students become at deciphering exactly what they are looking for and in which medium they want the information, the more capable our students will be when searching for information after they leave our libraries. Thus, providing these QR codes is just one more way in which we can help our students enhance their transmedia skills.

What's Ahead?

During this process, I realized that it's important to remember that QR codes are just one way in which people, including our students, access information in today's world. Using them in the library setting provides us, as school librarians, with a great opportunity to increase and enhance access to our virtual spaces. That being said, in the near future further technological advancements and additional tools will be available, and we have to be willing to adjust our programs and adapt our libraries.

The ultimate goal is to expose our students to the vast number of resources available and to teach them the process of selecting the appropriate resources and media for their information needs. Therefore, I recognize that, while QR codes provide us the ability to connect our physical resources to our virtual ones today, these codes won't always be the best way to connect our resources to our patrons in the future. We'll continue to find the best ways to equip our students with the inquiry and transliteracy skills they will need to be lifelong learners.



Caitlin Ahearn is a recent graduate of the University of Rhode Island

Graduate School of Library and Information Studies and is currently working as a school librarian in southern New Hampshire. She is a member of AASL.

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