
Volume 11
Number 2
*Special Double Issue: Thriving on
Change...Embrace the Possibilities (Fall 2005)*

July 2014

Small Change or Big Change: What Do You Want in Your Bank Account of Life?

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Recommended Citation

Tindall, J. (2014). Small Change or Big Change: What Do You Want in Your Bank Account of Life?. *OLA Quarterly*, 11(2), 12-13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1085>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Small Change or Big Change: What Do You Want in Your Bank Account of Life?

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Leah Griffith asked if I might have ideas for an article for her Quarterly theme, “Thriving on Change ... Embrace the Possibilities.” You betcha! Change drives me crazy and change exhilarates me. When was the last work day you had without it?

Mike Eisenberg’s OLA Conference keynote address, “School Libraries: Important for Schools, Important for Society, Important for Libraries,” gave me the jitters. He raised the recurring idea of a merger between OLA and OEMA. SO MUCH CHANGE!

At home my wife Pam and I were struggling through a move from ISDN to DSL service, so was Sprint and the local rural telephone service man and our dual platform home, and blah, blah, blah change can be tough on the spirit. We talked about this later over ice cream and it led to a discussion about stress in our work worlds. “How do you handle the work load you’ll NEVER finish?” Pam asked.

For me change is constant. When I have a day that is light on change, it feels unnatural—and I get the sense I’m sluffing. My work place includes three elementary schools and a middle school. Without much effort I could list twenty tasks I’ll NEVER get to. All of us live lives like this; in K–12 public education, the frustration may somehow be clearer, more a constant bombardment of limited time, limited resources, limited altruism. The first draft of this piece is being written in the corner; I’m sitting here in the reference corner, in a kiddy chair ... literally in the corner writing this draft out by hand because I type too loudly and students are taking Tesa, the electronic state tests. I think for most folks in school libraries we either smile, or grit teeth and move on to the next task. What’s the alternative? I am fortunate to love my job and the growth it provides me. I don’t feel close to burnout and I am usually eager for the next day. I also get tagged as naive and eternally optimistic. Oh well. What follows are aspects of my work world and their interrelationship

with change.

North Wasco County School District, a newly consolidated district officially began constructing a conglomerate culture in July 2004. In my community there were two districts, The Dalles and Chenowith. In The Dalles I worked with my Chenowith colleague, Betty Krause, to prepare for this change. In September 2003 Betty and I began working together, chronicling staffing history of the two districts, and ended up with a fact booklet that we distributed to twenty-two prospective board members, seven of whom were elected in May 2004 to serve on the first board beginning that July. We were both fortunate to find employment with the new district. Betty serves two high school campuses and I serve K-8 students, and we continue to look to the future to identify potential problems and undeniable opportunities. Betty and I sit on the Technology Committee and the Management Team; we know how fortunate we are to be invited to tables where important discussions take place, and those tables, of course, are the places where change happens.

National Certification for Teacher Librarians

In school librarianship things changed in 2001 with the implementation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards’ certificate in Library Media: Early Childhood Through Young Adulthood. This new opportunity was funded heavily in Oregon by both the Ford Family Foundation and the Oregon Education Association. I was a candidate that initial year, was unsuccessful, but tried again and succeeded. To my knowledge I remain the only NBC Teacher Librarian in the state, something that disturbs me. This assessment of skills includes four portfolios and six exams and is a highly valuable process involving reflective and analytical writing; www.nbpts.org/candidates/guide/whichcert/24EarlyChildYoungLibMedia2004.html. For



this writer, attaining the goal has meant professional opportunity at the building, district, regional, state, and national levels. With that comes a fair amount of invigoration ... and the exhaustion of more commitments. Seeking the certification permitted me to practice saying “no” to some opportunities (time management was crucial in juggling the work load with other parts of life). Ahhh, change. Once success found me, I relearned how to be selective about accepting new tasks, and practiced saying, “no.” The horror of change can be the inability to refuse it. Whether from lack of skill or from an insensitive supervisor, all employees would be aided by support in selectively saying, “no.”

Budget challenges

This is something all managers within librarianship face. As one within K–12 education, it can be a nerve wracking struggle with “accepting the things I cannot change.” (Here it is early June and the Oregon legislature still has no strategy for funding schools. This creates a dismal domino effect down to each school and the institution’s ability to sustain staffing and materials budgets. I truly have no clue how libraries shall fare.) Yesterday I argued for healthier staffing at the media assistant level and I sought free computers from StRUT (Students Recycling Used Technology) in order to have accessible opac’s in one of the schools. Maybe I’m in denial; I just have to push the frustration into a very large cupboard and then seek a senior moment and permanently forget where I stuck it.

Staffing obstacles

Back in the early 1990s Measure Five re-structured the flow of taxes in Oregon and school libraries have never been the same. Prior to its onerous existence, many districts had licensed and classified library staff in each building, and many districts also had district level support in such areas as cataloging and media production. It’s been a rapid decline from budget vigor to a budget

that neglects the importance of current materials that align with the curriculum, and professional staffing that can instructionally meet the information-seeking skills needs of our school communities. We all need to be ambitious lobbyists for our library-related missions. This year took me to Salem and to Washington, DC as a lobbyist. Not everyone sees things as librarians do!

The OLA/OEMA Joint Committee

As OEMA’s president-elect it was my pleasant task this year to chair the OLA/OEMA Joint Committee (chairing responsibilities rotate between the two organizations). We met three times during the year and worked creatively to find ways to increase collaboration between the two groups. Perhaps the most dramatic of the accomplishments is the creation of the July 2006 summer literacy conference, which is a partnership among OLA, OEMA, and the Oregon Reading Association, whose Shari Furtwangler has agreed to act as chair of the conference planning committee. It is a goal that training responsibilities be shared among the three groups. Additionally, the Oregon State Library and the Oregon Department of Education have been part of the evolution of this project. We are also working on the summer retreat for this year, planning to bring Washington’s Jennifer Maydole to speak to the combined boards about developing a strong, effective legislative action plan. As OLA’s and OEMA’s collaboration strengthens, surely rewards for all libraries will follow. 🌿

Jim Tindall has served on both the OLA and OEMA boards this past year, and is the incoming president of OEMA. He works for the North Wasco County School District in The Dalles, where he manages four libraries.

