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Hacking a textbook - how University of Otago Librarians supported a new academic initiative

Abstract

This article reflects on the experience of University of Otago librarians as advisors and contributors to an innovative method of creating an academic resource; hacking a textbook to fill a gap in Australasian teaching resources for Media Studies. Librarians were involved in this online textbook project at specific points from inception through to delivery, specifically in relation to: strategic planning, compliance, research, technical and bibliographic issues, archiving, scholarly communication, marketing and social media communication. Our experience as part of this project highlighted the varied services we provided for, and anticipated as librarians, and the value placed on that by our academic colleagues.

Keywords: *scholarly publishing, hacking, Open Educational Resource, textbook, Creative Commons*

Introduction

Provision of research materials to support academics and their curriculum needs is a part of daily life for Subject Librarians at the University of Otago. However when the textbook does not yet exist, and support is sought from the initial concept design stage through to producing an Open Educational Resource, opportunities abound to be strategically embedded as partners in the whole process. This article will reflect on the roles, and wealth of librarians' planning, organisation, bibliographic, copyright compliance, writing, publishing, archiving, scholarly communication, social media and marketing competencies, employed to enhance this e-textbook's development. This involvement occurred on the ground and "in the cloud", as part of the texthack team. Being responsive and adaptive to the evolving academic needs of this project led to increased relevance and recognition for us, as librarians who positioned themselves to support teaching and learning processes (Sidorko & Yang, 2008, p. 6).

This article follows on from McGregor's (2014) press release, *Announcing: The Creative Commons Media Studies Textbook*, reprinted in *Library Life*, 422, p. 12; and in *Media Studies 101: A Creative Commons textbook* (Fisher & Gallagher, 2014, p. 5).

The Media Texthack Project

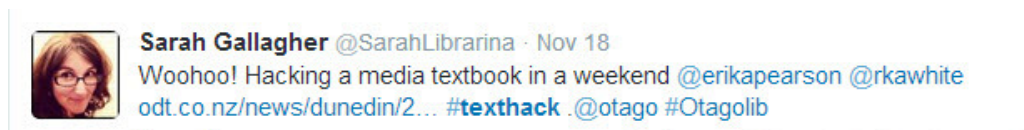
The Media Texthack project, begun in September 2013 and led by Dr Erika Pearson, Senior Lecturer in Media, Film & Communication at University of Otago, had two aims: to create an Open Educational Resource for media and communications studies, directed towards first year course requirements for New Zealand, Australian and Pacific students; and to document the process so that the experience and a template would benefit future Open Educational Resource textbooks.

Dr Pearson (Project Lead), Richard White (Copyright Officer) and Simon Hart (Policy, Planning and Evaluation Librarian) formed a steering group to discuss the roles of all involved parties and develop the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) which: "... include[d] the project being administered by the University of Otago and final storage of the book in the library's digital collection, and copyright matters." ("Updates" in *Hacking a Media Text*, 25 September, 2014). Richard White obtained seed funding from Creative Commons New Zealand.

The Texthack team comprised academic staff and post-graduate students from partners in New Zealand and Australia, and was supported by library staff from the University of Otago. As the

project got underway a blog, *Hacking a Media Text* (2013), allowed interested parties to maintain awareness of the project's background and progress. It was not difficult to generate interest in the project but it was difficult to secure commitment from some established academics who were involved in other academic publishing initiatives, so were content to watch developments. Early career researchers and senior postgraduate students were involved in the initial texthack weekend 16-17 November 2013.

Sarah Gallagher, Subject Librarian, first found out about the project through Twitter and participated with the wider community through tweeting and retweeting messages about the project progress and milestones using the #texthack hashtag. There was a lot of sharing around press releases by Creative Commons New Zealand, *Library Life*, University of Otago, *Otago Daily Times*, and *Idealog Magazine* (see Appendix).



Following the initial texthack weekend, Bernard Madill, Project Manager, emailed Thelma Fisher, Media Studies Librarian, seeking support with referencing images. She met with Dr Pearson and Bernard to identify their detailed requirements and how to provide support. Little did we realise that new roles would open for us, ones which could build on our traditional skills whilst challenging us to acquire new ones (Brophy, 2007, p. 522).

The project team needed support with copyright compliance and how to source and reference images with re-use provenance. Skills and knowledge gained from completing the LIANZA professional development online learning course, *Copyright: Guidelines for Librarians* (2013), proved invaluable. Identifying Creative Commons image sources for inclusion in University of Otago's *Thesis Information* (2014) guide provided background knowledge and awareness. This led to our readiness to participate in the 2nd mini texthack on 13 December 2013, to instruct, source and edit use of images and video files in this e-textbook. As Brophy (p. 515) describes, we felt ready to "operate with self-confidence in response to a variety of challenges in a rapidly changing environment".

A short presentation to the Dunedin based texthack group, mostly postgraduate students, involved sharing: the New Zealand Copyright Act related to image reuse; and the University of Otago *Thesis Information* guide copyright page to explore links to Creative Commons information and specific sources of copyright free images. Practical investigation involved Flickr and Google Images Advanced Search, demonstrating finding relevant images, their licensing agreements, and required attribution.

Dr Pearson invited us to stay and to join in, sign in to the Wordpress environment, and participate in finding or tracking images and video. Taking a practical part in the texthack was a highlight, working with the group, allowing us to source images and video to embed for topic sections, add them live, into Wordpress, and document the process. Established metadata documentation processes were followed to track provenance, label and caption items and to attribute them appropriately. Assisting students to develop these digital literacies in a practical setting has had ongoing positive benefits. Dr Pearson has reported positive follow-on effects from the texthack presentation, particularly for postgraduate students who took these skills and information, transferred them to their research practice, and shared this knowledge with their peers. As librarians, and postgraduate students, we participated in "sharing and developing knowledge, and beyond knowledge, meaning" (p. 517).

“We had some invaluable help from two liaison librarians who gave a short workshop to the participating postgrads. They then gave a generous amount of their time in doing some of the work themselves.” (“Updates” in *Hacking a Media Text*, 13 December 2013)

From this project two artefacts were created, a Wordpress based textbook, and a how-to guide, colloquially known as *The Cookbook*. The textbook, created under Creative Commons licensing, means educators and students can adapt it, rewrite it and distribute it for free, without seeking permission (Fisher & Gallagher, 2014, p. 5).

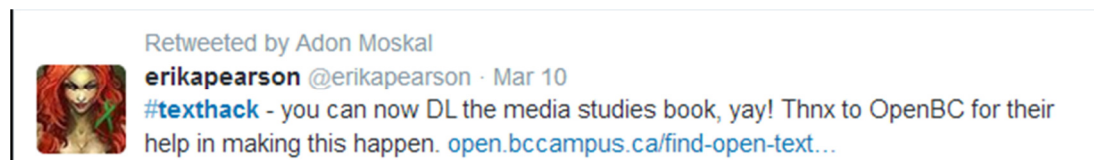
Post textbook launch

After the launch Sarah tweeted and retweeted messages about the #texthack project and continued conversations with Dr Pearson about bibliographic matters. Details about, and ongoing support around, legal deposit (NLNZ, 2014) and applying for an ISBN (978-0-473-28649-1) (NLNZ, 2014) were provided. Referencing details on a "how to cite this work" statement were added to the Wordpress textbook to display on the Contents page.

“In hindsight, it would have been appropriate to approach the National Library for an ISBN number much earlier in the process. Such a number would have then streamlined the creation of bibliographic records that could be added to library catalogues.” (Pearson, 2014a, p. 14)

The Te Puna bibliographic record describes this online textbook’s relevance to NZ study and teaching in media studies. Further mediation with internal library colleagues and external agencies allowed for minor amendments to records supporting the textbook, e.g. OUR Archive and Te Puna Cataloguing staff. Shortly after publication, a number of New Zealand libraries added local catalogue records to the textbook as tweeted by Creative Commons staff (2014, February 19).

International acclaim for the project was received from the University of British Columbia’s BC Campus which has set up an Open Textbooks initiative (2014) enabling other formats of *Media Studies 101* to be shared with users, e.g. .mobi .xml and .epub files.



When the Wordpress file was deposited into the Otago University Research (OUR) Archive (2014) by the Media Studies Librarian, these additional file types were included. Allison Brown, Digital Services Coordinator, assisted with metadata support, noting the .xml file was not operational. Further communication with BC Campus staff isolated and fixed the problem string of code, enabling their other .xml textbooks to become ‘open’. These file types were then added to the OUR Archive record. Such international librarian collaboration made this texthack project so much more ‘open’, as befits an Open Educational Resource. Brophy (2007, p. 522) describes this type of success as “adapting to the new networked world... with a willingness to meet users in their own environments” and becoming “much more visible and much more active in the learning and research processes.”

Allison, as Otago/Southland editor of *LIBROS*, invited our reflections on the texthack project to date. Following agreement from the Dr Pearson, an article was included in *LIBROS 39* covering the project gestation and early library staff involvement.

The April 2014 meeting of Otago’s Open Scholarship Community of Practice featured the Project Lead outlining the process of hacking a textbook. As librarians, feedback on our involvement was sought. A questionnaire, seeking project experiences, was conducted. Dr Pearson used this evaluation, along with usage data, to assist with writing *The Cookbook*. The development of *The Cookbook* is an important contribution to scholarship. A number of other texthack projects have been created in several disciplines but none have documented how they accomplished it.

The following diagram illustrates the librarians’ involvement in the media textbook cycle of production.

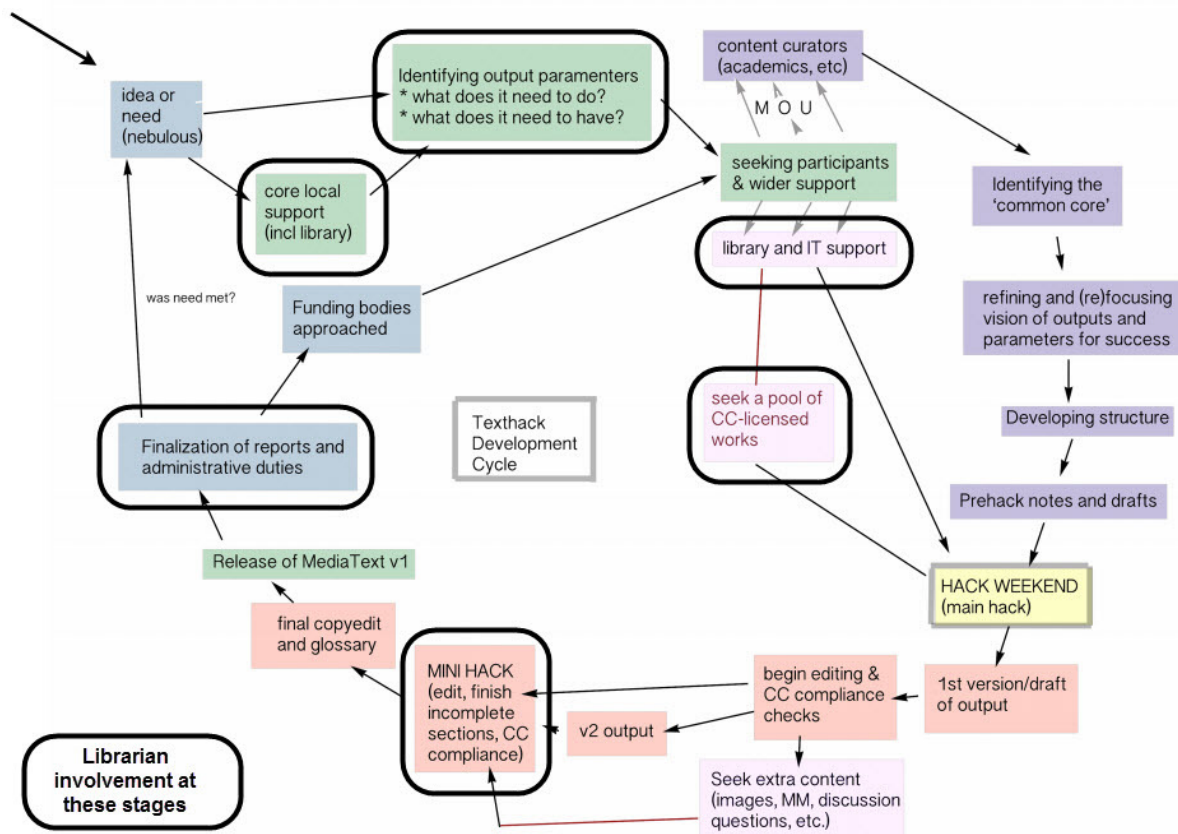
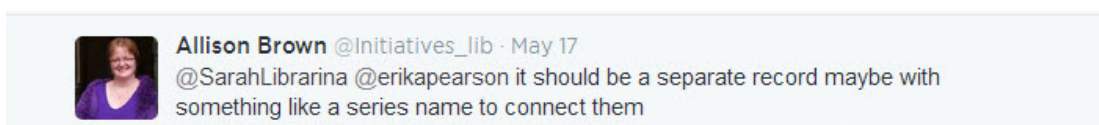


Figure 1. “A simplified representation of the cycle of production for the Media Texthack (2013)” from *The Cookbook*, p.2.

“A diverse mix of staff (including library and research staff) would be one important element of future hacks.” (Pearson, 2014a, p. 17)

Sarah and Allison spent time tweeting Dr Pearson through the process of depositing *The Cookbook* into OUR Archive. Attention was paid to linking the records of the textbook and *The Cookbook* by creating a series title of Open Educational Resource. This was preferable to adding *The Cookbook* to the textbook record as a supplementary document because it is a unique work:



Copyright and Creative Commons licensing maintenance

There will always be a need for ongoing awareness of maintenance issues around an electronic textbook. At the time of creation, image reuse rights were checked multiple times, but these can change at the whim of the owner. This issue became apparent after the launch of the textbook.

Maintenance provides an opportunity for ongoing support from librarians, but is also a consideration mentioned in *The Cookbook*, for post-production attention. This is also relevant to links and text content, whether or not additional versions are created. This was identified as “Recipe Step 13: check license status and citation of all CC materials” (p. 5). As substantial additions, updates and remixes occur alternate versions will need to be created and new Te Puna and OUR Archive records developed to reflect them.

Statistics

Through OUR Archive it is possible to obtain usage statistics related to downloads and site visits. This can provide the authors with an indication of use of their work, can be helpful when measuring the impact of their publications, and enable new scholarly and research communication opportunities.

There has been a gratifying level of interest in the textbook, nationally and internationally. The top views by country from the Wordpress site are: New Zealand, United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom (as of 3 July 2014). Statistics from OUR Archive (Media Texthack Group, 2014b) reveal the top 5 countries that have downloaded the textbook are: USA, China, NZ, France and UK (as of 2 July 2014). Due to the recent publication of *The Cookbook*, statistics (Pearson, 2014b) are still building.

Conclusion

Academic publishing initiatives can offer exciting opportunities for librarians to provide valuable research and literacy support through strategic planning, compliance, research, technical and bibliographic issues, archiving, scholarly communication, marketing and social media communication. We believe that there is considerable professional and personal value in participating as a practitioner in such a project, as well as contributing in an advisory capacity. Professionally, the role of library staff on this project has strengthened ties with academic staff and departments, enhanced collegiality between Otago library staff, and created opportunities to network with external agencies. Barton et al (2000, as cited in Brophy, 2007, p. 521) refer to this as a case of “situated literacies – which are tuned to the needs of a particular domain – to which we must bring our skills and our contribution, drawing on others as need be”. Personally, we enjoyed being on the ground as part of the team, and the collaborative respect we experienced.

Brophy (2007, p. 517) refers to the need to be “part of that shared academic enterprise”. We believe we have shared, developed and transferred a new combination of competencies, resources and expertise. These are required to partner academics successfully in innovative, Open Educational Resource publishing projects such as the Media Texthack.

View Dr Pearson’s humorous, reflective conclusion of the texthack in pictures, here - spot the ‘librarian’. <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/texthack/2014/05/15/a-recap-of-a-texthack-in-gifs-because-why-not/>

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Appendix: Other resources

More about the Media Texthack project at:

- <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/texthack>
- <http://creativecommons.org.nz/2013/11/hacking-a-media-text-in-a-weekend>
- <http://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/281800/textbook-project-internet>
- <http://www.odt.co.nz/campus/university-otago/293166/interest-textbook>
- <http://www.idealogue.co.nz/blog/2013/11/need-better-textbook-hack-it-yourself>
- <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/openotago/2014/02/13/otago-led-open-access-media-studies-textbook-goes-live/>