

# BREAKING THE RULES



**K**IM SHAW and ELLIE PANARETTOS first met while studying for their postgraduate degree in Information Management. They presented a joint paper – ‘Getting Engaged: Convergences between public and academic libraries’ – at the seventh New Librarians’ Symposium (NLS7) held in Sydney in July.

Sometimes you need to break the rules to be innovative and get to where you want or need to be.

We embraced this call on our first full day in Sydney for NLS7 when we decided to be ‘innovative’ and combine our desire to participate in the organised library tours – offered as an additional experience before the official start of the Symposium – and an appointment we just had to keep with a certain Japanese clothes store in Newtown.

Channelling our creative abilities and thinking laterally, we embarked on our own DIY tour of Newtown Library. Housed in an historic 1883 building known as the Salvation Army Citadel, this stop proved to be an excellent decision. The library’s calm and relaxing mezzanine level, with its bird’s-eye view of the shelves below, was the perfect spot from which to rest weary feet and shopping-laden arms. In this contented reverie we realised aspects of our own NLS7 presentation regarding the significant role of libraries as places of refuge and sanctuary.

Our NLS7 presentation, which focused on convergences between public and academic libraries within an ethos of engagement had, in part, been inspired by our own experience of significant change and innovation within our workplace – the academic library we were both working in when we started writing. Ellie now works as a school librarian.

We wanted our paper to provide a better understanding of the changes we were experiencing beyond the obvious economic drivers and that’s why we decided to focus on the client profile. With an increasingly diverse student population from a range of cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, the democratisation of education has led to a convergence of the student profile and that of the general public. So it should not be surprising that academic libraries, while still distinct, are nonetheless becoming more like public libraries. This is simply an observation we make to reflect on the needs of each sector and what they might potentially offer each other. The ‘good’ or ‘bad’ of it will be determined by the decisions each library makes regarding how they choose to innovate and accommodate change.



Newtown Library

As new librarians, still reeling somewhat from our swift induction to significant workplace change, we found it particularly refreshing to hear Celia Drummond's NLS7 presentation, 'Triple Trajectory'. As a Digital Assets Librarian for World Vision and with a casual gig as Photo Editor for AFL Photos, Celia is a stunning example of how much direction and possibility an individual librarian's career can offer when they are prepared to take risks, break rules and explore new opportunities. We will, for a long time to come, carry vivid images of the librarian running laps of the MCG on Grand Final Day collecting USB sticks and memory cards from photographers to upload for journalists to gain immediate access – and we don't even follow football!

'Capturing the virtue of initiative and the spirit of innovation' are the words of Michael Gonzalez, one of the NLS7 Top Guns panel, who takes issue with the phrase 'I'm not allowed'. He asks, not without a degree of incredulity, who is the 'monster' poised to attack when supposed boundaries are crossed? Self-imposed limitations can be more debilitating than external ones and who knows where the boundaries are if we don't test them occasionally?

Yes, librarians love rules but they may like breaking them just as much. Interdicts and their breaching are intimately bound – the meaning of one is unavoidably contingent on the existence of the other. This is a lesson gleaned from highly influential French intellectual Georges Bataille, whose name is now synonymous with transgression. Less well known is the fact that Bataille was also a librarian.

No one has reprimanded us for our transgression into Newtown – yet. Breaking the rules can be rewarding. We may never have experienced our transcendent moment of contentment on the Newtown Library mezzanine and, just as important, our current wardrobe wouldn't be half so fine if we hadn't!

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KIM SHAW AALIA (CP)  
Kim.Shaw@utas.edu.au

ELLIE PANARETTOS  
ellie.panarettos@gmail.com

Kim Shaw is currently working as a librarian at the University of Tasmania. Her interests include research data management and museum and library architecture and space.

Ellie Panarettos is a new librarian from Tasmania who is currently working as a school librarian. Her interests include knowledge management, library programming and the ongoing search for the perfect teacup.

Kim and Ellie first met while studying for their postgraduate degree in Information Management. They presented a joint paper at NLS7 titled 'Getting Engaged: Convergences between Public and Academic Libraries'.



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