# Personal Professional Development:

An Interview with Steve Hargadon

Interview by David V. Loertscher and Jennifer Gulassa

Editor's Note: If you have not met Steve Hargadon or listened to some of his hundreds of interviews, then it is time you meet an outside voice that is not only a supporter of teacher librarians but also a proponent of educational change. We caught up with him recently to ask about this passion for learning and education. Here is the result.
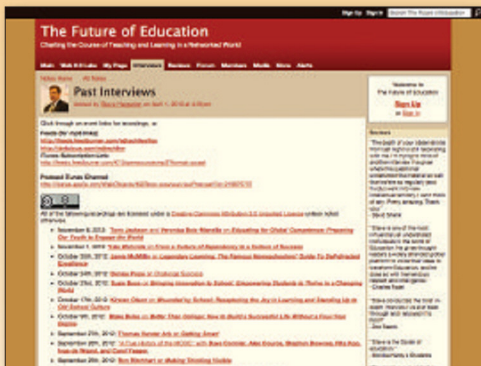
DVL: How did you become interested in being a super interviewer in the field of education?

SH: I was interested in open-source software and education and decided to interview a few people like Richard Stallman, and my interests shifted to Web 2.0 software. Now, after more than 300 interviews under my belt, it is interesting how the conversation has changed from just technology to the changes in the culture of education.

In 2007, I had just interviewed Mark Andreson, the creator of the Mosaic browser and the cofounder of Ning. And I had been listening to folks discussing how blogs were a way to connect people together. The Ning became a new platform for social learning, and it became apparent to me that this was an incredible way for peers to connect with one another without going through some formal institution. So these technologies began to reshape from whom and how we learn.

DVL: What flavor of education do you find the most attractive?

SH: The Internet has allowed a tremendous amount of teaching and learning to take place outside the ordinary boundaries of the traditional institution, which is why librarians are so critical today. If you think about how we can now find resources, we can reframe how learning can take place. It is helping us reshape our perceptions of the lecture format and how social learning is developing and giving us opportunities to discover the influence of peers in the learning process.

If you like this flavor, it is easy to listen to the various voices that I have interviewed by connecting to the major webinar sources I have created: The Future of Education, The Global Classroom Project, Classroom 2.0, and Library 2.0. You can subscribe to these sources to keep up on current interviews but also search back to find the interviews I have done in the past.

The interviews are interesting because they are kind of my own personal learning process. When there is a book, I spend some time with the book getting to know its content and its author because I am a better interviewer when I know something about the author. I am also intrigued at the significant value in everything that I read. Even when I don't agree with what the author is saying, there is something to be learned, especially from the thoughtful, civil conversation that takes place about those issues beyond judgment and point of view. A subject that I have explored a lot lately is the notion of "agency"—the idea that the learner is the one who should be making the choices about the learning. Looking at the long-term value of education, we live in a world in which it is impossible to learn all we need to know in school to prepare for a career. So it is more important to be teaching our students *how* to learn; our end goal should be to promote the self-direction and the agency of the learner. Once we commit to that, a whole host of conclusions comes with it. It is hard for us to think of the learner as the agent while we are consumed with the idea of testing and assessment, which essentially requires training, not learning. It is accepted that our kids need to be innovative in order to compete with other countries. Producing kids who are innovative requires supporting and liberating the learner rather than the kind of control and mandating we are seeing in education today. Also, in an era when we are thinking of financing, there is no one who will benefit financially directly from a critical independent thinker. It is hard to find a financial backer for independent thinking.

DVL: Thinking back over the last year, what interviews would you recommend to school librarians?

SH: With the above ideas in mind, this past year I conducted interviews that kind to put those things in perspective. One interview was with Kirstin Olson about her book *Wounded by School*, which looks at the effect of schools—most people's perception of themselves and learning that was shaped by a school environment. Are we empowering every person to be a learner?

Another interview that was interesting was with Blake Boles, who talked about alternate ways of learning outside of college in his book called *Better than College.*

Still another interview was with Thomas Vanderham, who comes from a very different perspective than my own but proved to be a rich discussion about the question, "Does online learning actually save time, or does self-directed personal learning actually require more time investment?" He thought it was less time with online education, and my thought was that it was more time, but the conversation was very interesting.

Nikhil Goyal was a student who wrote a book called *One Size Does Not Fit All*, which was about the history of education and our current educational structure.

I enjoyed the Patrick Farenga interview about home-schooling and what value it can bring to the conversation around traditional education and increasingly how those two are using the same language.

The interview with Michael Strong about Socratic teaching (*The Habit of Thought*) was fascinating. If your ultimate goal is to create independence of thinking, this conflicts a little with the existing narratives about politics and business. We are at a very interesting moment in time where we need critical thinkers to contemplate how democracy works and the protection of rights and habeas corpus, climate change, and wars. We need to be creating learners who can participate in these complicated discussions.

Tony Wagner from Harvard wrote a brilliant book about creating innovators and what kinds of teachers really make a difference in the lives of their students.

Editor's Note: Here is the URL of the collection of interviews Hargadon did throughout the year. You will also find a list of his many other recordings here: http://www.futureofeducation.com/notes/Past_Interviews.

DVL: What has attracted you to the library community?

SH: The Internet has allowed a lot of teaching and learning to take place outside of the traditional setting. This is part of why librarians are so important. We now have the capability to find resources online; this is helping us to reframe our understanding of where learning takes place.

Because of that, it is making it possible to restructure the lecture format and reshaping our perceptions of how social learning really is—it is giving us opportunities to consider the impact of peers on the learning process.

I think I have always been a library fan. When I started Classroom 2.0, I had been looking at another program called Library 2.0 started by Bill Drew. I believe this was one of my inspirations. About a year after it had begun, Drew was shutting down Library 2.0, and I connected with him to help maintain it. Not long after that I was invited to an event at San Jose State University, and met Sandy Hirsch, and was invited to run a workshop on running a conference about Library 2.0 each year at San Jose State.

These experiences I have had with librarians have helped him see how undervalued librarians are and how librarians are the people we should be turning to to understand how to cope with the massive amounts of information that is available on the web. Librarians are experts in managing information. Just like how the home-schooling world has helped inform how learning can and should be more self-directed. Librarians have a lot to teach the rest of us about information, scholarship, filtering information, and information literacy.

DVL: What international conferences are you conducting?

SH: Check out the Library 2.0 conferences each fall (you can find the November 2012 conference recordings online at http://www.library20.com/page/2-012-conference).

I have just concluded a deal to run a school leadership summit in March of 2013; this will be a virtual conference about school leaders teaching each other.

I am hoping to lead a worldwide STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) virtual conference sponsored by a large technology company.

Then a worldwide virtual home-school virtual conference.

I have about 100,000 members on my social networks for both Library 2.0 and

Classroom 2.0, and I get about 100,000 attendees at the virtual conferences. I hope to raise that to a million attendees, which I know is ambitious, but also seems possible. There are so many incredible opportunities to participate with one another online and teach and learn with each other worldwide.

DVL: What's on the horizon?

I see this world platform as a positive environment for teachers to learn from one another, and I think this could be what our students need as well; including collaboration with peers as part of the learning process is extremely powerful. We see it in professional development for educators, and we will see it for students as well.

Lead learners can make the most progress in their career by concentrating on their own learning. In the same way that we put the oxygen mask on ourselves before putting them on our children, educators should first be the learner before thinking about bringing it into the classroom or the library for students to use.

Pure professional development, connected educators and librarians, are the future of the way we move forward in our professions.