Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians

in Australian schools

This submission is based on experience in dealing with schools in the K-12 sector on a range of fronts including school transformation, learning space design, leadership for teacher librarians and the role of ICT and eLearning, particularly emerging technologies such as mobile learning and Web 2.0.

Summary of main points

- Digital technologies have great potential to support personalised learning anywhere, anytime.

- The teacher librarian is at the centre of the digital school, managing software, applications and digital resource repositories, just as they managed print-based resources.

- Adequate IT infrastructure, hardware and software is required to reconstruct the old library into the new digital learning centre.

- Significant provision of professional learning is required to equip teacher-librarians with the necessary skills in Web 2.0, intellectual property and copyright for the digital world.

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Biography

Cecilie Murray specialises in learning innovation in the K-12 sector. She is Director of Delphian eLearning, an education consultancy company, and App-titude Learning, a company developing educational apps for the iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. She is an Australian leader in the use of ICT in education, particularly in relation to emerging technologies and school transformation. She is also well known for her work in mobile learning research, strategic planning, virtual learning and digital content development. She was previously Group Manager of eLearning at the Department of Education and Training, Victoria and at Emagine, the Centre of Excellence in Online Learning for the Department of Education, Tasmania where she established two virtual schools. She managed the first digital content development in Australia for The Le@rning Federation, and has worked on international projects with the UK, USA, Singapore, Japan and Indonesia.

Introduction

School libraries and teacher librarians have a significant, and much under-rated, role to play in our schools of the future. In the digital world of the 21st century, a library is a digital learning centre, pivotal to a new approach to learning and teaching.

This submission pre-supposes the transformational potential of maximising access to information for school professionals, as well as students and parents. Digital resources, software and new technologies have the potential to transform the creative capabilities of all educators, to maximise teacher effectiveness and promote the development of literate students. Every student can achieve success if they have information and creative tools.

While Principals lead change and manage the school, teachers focus on improving their skills and pedagogical approaches; ICT staff grapple with implementing IT architecture, and curriculum leaders work with teachers to embed new technologies in authentic learning experiences for Net Gen students. Who then manages the emerging technologies, the software and the digital content repositories? Who is able to lead teachers into the online world of Web 2.0 applications and find relevant online resources? It is, of course, the teacher librarian at the centre of the digital school, in the same way they were at the centre of the traditional print-based school.

The role of the teacher librarian, including the adequacy and resourcing of school libraries in Australia's public and private schools needs to be reconceptualised for the 21st century and beyond.

As a learning innovation consultancy company, Delphian eLearning has worked with schools, leaders and teacher librarians on reviewing the role and place of current school libraries and librarians in a transformed learning environment. We have provided numerous ICT and eLearning Strategic Plans for schools which includes reviewing roles, practices and spaces in school libraries, and interviewing teacher librarians and technicians, as a means to providing schools with a well-structured plan for developing a digital learning centre as the central hub of the school. We have further worked on school transformational strategies for Departments of Education and school library Professional Associations, including up-skilling teacher-librarians in realising the benefits of emerging technologies within their schools.

In App-titude Learning, we build high quality, educational apps for the iPod touch, iPhone and iPad, and have worked with schools, primary teachers and teacher-librarians to evaluate the apps. It is the teacher-librarians who source new resources for schools and evaluate their applicability for students, so a significant effort needs to be made in provision of professional learning regarding the role and responsibilities of a 21st century teacher librarian.

Commentary below focuses on the last point in the Terms of Reference:
- **the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.**

A strategic vision for 21st century learning is based on school transformation that focuses on eight variables, as defined in the diagram below.[1] Distributed leadership among the Principal and leadership team, including the teacher-librarian, ensures that all leaders actively participate in the change process with a focus on improved teaching and learning. A shared vision revolves around digital curriculum, shared pedagogical practices, use of rich ICT resources and improved student learning.

Diagram: Eight Key Transformation Variables (DEECD, 2009)

Three central elements support school leadership in implementing a 21st century vision for improved student learning and innovation: ICT, Space and Time. Investing in ICT, new learning spaces and teacher time creates the capacity for change in teaching and learning.

Rapid changes to ICT and the design of learning spaces in schools, enable teaching teams to address the needs of today's learners with enquiry-based projects, where teams of students work together. Learning space and furniture design promotes group work and collaboration, in a space where ubiquitous, mobile ICT resources complement contemporary teacher practice.

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[1] Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. *Key variables defining whole school transformation*, Melbourne. http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/innovation/lpd/variablesbrochure.pdf

As one of the 8 critical factors above, ICT contributes to whole school transformation. Students are stimulated by and engaged with ICT. They need access to a range of learning technologies, digital content and robust ICT infrastructure if they are to fully participate in the 21st century world. In their personal lives they embrace a range of ICT tools, software and social networking sites that enable them to communicate, collaborate and socialise with their peers. Schools need to provide contemporary ICT tools and resources to fulfil a vision for ICT enriched learning.

For ICT to have a transformational impact on pedagogy, teachers require confidence with the technology, space to experiment and active support from the leadership team, including the teacher-librarian as the manager of the school digital learning centre. International research indicates that ICT promotes innovation in teacher practice and significantly enhances student behaviour, attendance, desire to learn and academic achievement.[2] Significant planning and professional learning is required, however, to realise the full benefits of rich ICT environments. High quality digital resources and robust ICT infrastructure are essential factors for success and need to be planned for, by teacher-librarians who are abreast of current innovations.

In order for a learning space to cater for the learning needs of all students, it must be equipped with ICT facilities, including laptop trolleys, fixed computers in hubs, interactive whiteboards, printers and scanners, data projectors, digital still and video cameras, iPod touches and other mobile devices. Peripherals and utilities also need to be planned for in the design phase – such things as location of power points, air-conditioners and storage facilities for mobile ICT technologies such as Netbooks and handheld devices. Flexible learning spaces are both physical and virtual. Wireless needs to be accessible throughout the space and in outside areas.

The third central elements that supports a 21st century learning vision is time – teacher time. Significant provision of professional learning is required to equip teachers with ICT skills, and indeed, teacher-librarians with the necessary skills in associated issues such as understanding Web 2.0, cybersafety, intellectual property and copyright for the digital world.

Much work has been done in Victoria by the School Library Association of Victoria, in tandem with the State Library of Victoria in developing a range of professional learning initiatives for teacher librarians. These include conferences, online courses and publications on leadership, digital learning and emerging technologies.

In *Rethink! Ideas for Inspiring School Library Design[3],* teacher-librarians are inspired to reconceptualise the old library into a digital learning centre through the use of new design strategies around space and ICT. Twelve case studies present a convincing visual argument for innovative design that engages students, and draws on current knowledge about the way today's young people learn.

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[2] BECTA 2009 BECTA 2009, *ImpaCT2: The Impact of Information and Communications Technology on Pupil Learning and Attainment.* http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=25841

[3] La Marca, S., ed. 2007. *Rethink! Ideas for inspiring school library design*, School Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Web 2.0 online services offer teacher-librarians an exciting and innovative way to upskill and share knowledge and practices. Examples include:

- **Bright Ideas – a blog about web 2.0 for school librarians**
  This blog was First Runner-Up in the Best Library EduBlog 2009.

- **Celebrate change: Let's make the whole school a library!**
  Teacher-librarians learn about web 2.0 ideas, digital citizenship, FUSE repository, Ultranet online learning system, school library virtual presence and getting out into classrooms!

- **Shared learning: library technicians and assistants**
  Using Flip cameras, video editing, your role in a virtual environment, databases, FUSE, advanced searching, cybersafety, social bookmarking with Delicious or Diigo, Google for libraries

- **Personal Learning Network: Learning through sharing**
  Mentored online program over 12 weeks presented jointly with the State Library of Victoria. Using web 2.0 for collaborating and communicating. Weekly online 'how to' via Elluminate.

Summary

Digital technologies are having a major impact on student learning and on teacher capability in schools. As young people increasingly engage with a range of technologies and social networking tools to communicate, socialise and collaborate, schools, and teacher librarians in particular, work hard to learn about digital content management and production, and about the IT architecture, applications and software required for contemporary learning environments in today's schools.

Digital technologies have great potential to support personalised learning anywhere, anytime. Young learners from an early age are using such technologies as iPhone apps at home and web 2.0 social networking tools about which many teachers are unaware. It is the teacher-librarian in the school who is at the centre of the digital learning environment and who can have the greatest impact on provision of accessible, innovative digital tools for learning across the whole school.

In order to exert influence and to provide substantial leadership in the school environment, teacher-librarians require adequate professional learning in the use, management and leadership of innovative technologies for learning.