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Future Oriented Schools and Libraries

School librarians need to be proactive in identifying new ways to help students prepare for the world of the future. Students need relevant educational experiences that support emerging demands created by information and service based economies.

The economies of Pacific Rim countries such as the USA, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Canada are increasingly based on the “intangible” industries of service and information. The increasing and ever-changing demands of these economies create major pressures on traditional models of schooling designed to create a work force for economies based on manufacturing.

The change from an economy based on manufacturing industries to one based on the intangible industries of service and information places new and evolving demands on school libraries. School librarians can meet this learning challenge created by Web-based and interlinked service oriented economies through a “Future Oriented School” approach.
iCentre

What is the definition of an "iCentre" in a Future Oriented School library? The term was introduced by Hay, and he states, "An iCentre is the central facility within the school where information, technology, learning, and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and technology specialists" (2010, 151). School librarians who develop iCentres will need to act in a senior leadership role or as a Chief Information Officer of the library.

School libraries need to evolve into iCentres by combining a range of existing and future capabilities including:
- Schoolwide leadership focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) based changes in learning;
- ICT support centre;
- Locations for group and individual ICT based learning;
- Electronic advice and training centres;
- Provision for e-learning resources;
- "Housing" for the exemplars, stories, case studies, and celebrations of a successful e-world; and
- Provider of the exploration/discussion/answer methodologies for students exploring appropriate and ethical behaviors in an e-world.

At the most conceptual level the iCentre is an amalgam of the following functions:
- The School Librarian taking leadership roles as the Chief Information Officer of the school.
- The iCentre becoming the location for all ICT support and advice.
- The iCentre becoming an exemplar centre of a digital learning location and support facility.

The term iCentre, over other popular terms such as "Learning Commons," is preferred by this author because of its obvious relevance to currently popular technology products. The similar term, "Learning Commons," emanates from the United States schooling environment and is discussed very fully in a series of three books by Loetscher et al. (2008, 2010) and Koechlin et al. (2010).

This article will briefly review both the pressures creating the need for these changing roles and advice on the attributes and characteristics needed in both school librarians and school libraries for developing iCentres.

The Setting for an iCentre

Documented pressures, caused by socioeconomic and technological changes, are currently affecting all societal agencies, including schools. A review of the literature, such as Hough (2008a and b, 2009); Shapiro (2008); and the Web site Shaping Tomorrow (http://www.shapingtonorrow.com), shows the major trends shaping the pressures on schools and their iCentres. These trends include:
- Technologies now lead social change (in that they develop and provide options before any discussions about whether they are socially desirable and acceptable). An extension of this is that younger generations are using technologies in a largely unsupervised way because of the slowness/failure of older generations (and many schools) to adapt/use it as quickly as younger people can;
- Technologies are changing the ways in which people can define themselves, their family units, work and work units, and economic and "social order" assumptions. In learner terms, school-aged learners now experience Web-based options and experiences without the guidance and boundaries that previous generations received from the older members of their community.
- As economies focus more and more on intangibles, knowledge is becoming a valuable commodity. An example of this is Web-based transgressions, e.g., breaking copyright and inappropriate posting of content, often ignored by the younger learner.
- The major investment in ICT capabilities is NO LONGER in funded school systems, but rather is in the home, and is accompanied by a remarkable amount of freedom and trust for the young people. This situation contrasts very strongly with the usage patterns of ICT in the traditional school setting, often using ICT equipment that is far inferior to the home environment of the learner. In partial review, the context for schools that face the future and their iCentres can be summarized as:
- Young people have constant access to powerful ICT-based Web learning systems out of school in an environment of trust or neglected supervision from parents, and this reality compares very unfavorably with their actual experiences in the formal school setting.
- ICT is now the PRISM through which all modern life and commerce is increasingly viewed and can no longer be presented as discrete experience to be scheduled when available with limited school resources.
- Schools need to accept that the major ICT investments now occur OUTSIDE the school, and schools need to create networked learning communities where these resources can be harnessed for meaningful school initiated learning.
- Students are NOT capable and independent as ICT-based learners and are desperately seeking the modern equivalent of adult supervision, guidelines, and rules of behavior for this modern Web-based world they enter so freely, and without apparent supervision.

Some Selected Features of Relevance to Schools and School Libraries

It is important to understand current trends in information and communication technologies from several sources, such as Hough (2008) and Leading a Digital School by Lee and Gaffey (2008). An
defend this data wisely to both benefit schools and react to justified and unjustified criticism and commentary.

There are numerous commentaries on the differences and learning characteristics of generations. "The Ten Commandments of Generation Z" by Buchel is typical (2009).

A representative list of current digital technologies freely available to young learners, together with likely usage(s), is summarized by Lee and Ryall (2010, 121). This is part of an argument for schools accepting and using home-based resources in a learning partnership.

The following list represents many of the typical pressures on younger people, partly created by their enormous belief in their technical capabilities, accompanied by a lack of social maturity and wisdom about the implications of their e-behavior(s):

- Copyright and protection of Intellectual property (e.g., plagiarism)
- Protection of privacy (in a world that is creating more e-scrutiny)
- Protocols of learning online (e.g., chat/discussion/notice boards)
- Conduct/protocols for e-communication (e.g., mobile phone protocols, sms, email, twitter and Facebook protocols)/Avatar behaviors, e.g., in Second Life
- Cyber-bullying
- Protecting against e-predators (identity theft, grooming, pedophilia, avatar relationships)
- Ethical use of information harvested on the Web (identity theft, plagiarism)
- Building and upgrading digital competencies for learning (A Google search usually provides large quantities of unsorted, low-grade information.)
- Acceptance that digital learning has adult implications that can be triggered by individual behavior(s) at any age, if there is available access to a "Web-capable" device
- Acceptance of adult/legal concerns about texting, cyber bullying, etc.
- Developing and protecting cyber images and identity

This list also offers an important starting point for the leadership tasks of the school librarian as Chief Information Officer of the school.

Teachers

Black reviewed the recent Australian research on teachers' use of technology across three Australian education sectors. He noted the following:

Technology is still an "innovation" rather than a mainstream activity; the most important additional investment needs to be in teachers—to provide the support and professional learning that enables teachers to embed technology into their practices. Time to learn is the greatest barrier (2008, 32).

The core argument here is that principals and executives of schools (and especially librarians) need to incorporate into their educational leadership practices the deep understandings that derive from developing "Future Oriented Schools." School librarians in effective ICT-based schools need to assist (many) teachers by developing in them new ICT-based learning mindsets and techniques in which they may not have been initially trained.

Strategies to deal with this situation are provided by Zagami and Finger (2010) who review the following positive influences and how to implement them:

- Paradigm Changing curriculum tools (203-204)
- Transforming social networks to learning networks (204-205)
- Teaching and parenting in a "new" world (205-206)
- Roles for the professional educator (208-210).

Finger and Jameson-Proctor provide a detailed conceptualization of stages of teacher development against school features and redesigned working conditions (2010, Table 14.1, 220-221). They also suggest a redesign of teachers' working conditions based on the following requirements:

- Redesign Professional Development
- Engage Parents and the Community
- Exploit Digital Technologies for Redesigning Teachers' Roles
Redesign Learning Spaces (2010, 224-225).

It is clear that the school librarian and the school iCentre can and should be very actively involved in supporting or providing a number of these changes. The detailed advice contained within the recent compendium edited by Lee and Griffin is an excellent resource for librarians who plan to be proactive as CIOs, and maintain their influence and presence by creating a functional iCentre (2010).

Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence to support the view that schools need to evolve in networked learning communities, relying on greater partnerships between schools, home, and the community. As schools continue to adapt, school librarians have a major role to play in the transformation.

Useful and practical advice is available from Hay on how to go about the task of building iCentre capabilities in a school. Following are three key ideas:

- Librarians need to actively promote their role as Chief Information Officer and influence the leadership of the school.
- School libraries need to evolve into iCentres that house the knowledge-based resources essential to modern learning and schooling.
- The iCentre will need to provide students and staff with a "one-stop shop" for all resourcing of technology and learning needs on a daily basis (2010, 155-156).

References:


Web Links for Future Oriented Schooling:


This article is based on a keynote address presented by the Author at the International Association of School Libraries Conference held in Brisbane Australia in October 2010. For a full version of the keynote, see: http://www.iasi-online.org/events/conf/2010/

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