A transformative vision of school library 2.0: defining the route

By Camilla Elliott

The traditional school library that classes visited with subject teachers to research assignments and learn information literacy skills has largely disappeared (Elliott, 2003). That essential role of the library as 'house of knowledge' no longer exists. A statement of the obvious, but if this change has been evident for a decade, why have so many school libraries been slow to adopt models of teaching and resource management to the extent that their very viability is threatened? Why are library leaders like Lyn Hay (2011) beseeching teacher-librarians to transform their libraries from the static Library 1.0 digital information environment to the interactive information Web 2.0 iCentres? This article will explore the need for a transformative vision, an exploration focused on individual motivation for change and the critical need for a reflective, innovative approach to library management.

The reality

The traditional model of library services was based on information scarcity. School libraries, along with information access, have played a key role in information

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literacy skills development based on their library collections and access to resources. Today's students, and in fact, the younger generation of teachers, however, have grown up in an information-rich world. Existing in a world of visual information, interaction and collaboration, naturally creates in them a preference for this type of resource for learning. It's not so much a blatant refusal to use traditional hardcopy resources, rather a preference for the familiar; it's the knowledge that there is more. In schools clinging to the Library 1.0 model, therefore, it's possible for both teachers and students to struggle to see relevance in the resources provided by the library and to move through their years of schooling without changing that perception.

Evaluating and revitalising the model

What is the role of the school library and within it the teacher-librarian and library team? Do they fulfil the needs of the community or are they feeling sidelined and struggling to find relevance? Research indicates that the response to this question relates to each individual within the library team, but principally the teacher-librarian or librarian in charge. Lee and Klinger (2011) encountered the incredible diversity of school library programs in their research into a number of Canadian school libraries. The different ways in which each library functioned and the varying roles they played within schools led them to develop a continuum of library practice to be used as a tool for evaluating and supporting revitalisation of school libraries.

In analysing their findings it became evident to them that a multitude of factors existed in each school that created a unique context for each library program. Yet, they found three consistent features in each of the exemplary school library programs that appeared central to the effective

functioning of these libraries: the school context; teacher-librarians who focused on teaching, and teacher-librarians who were agents of change. Their findings critically reflect the influence of a proactive, curriculum-focused teacher-librarian (Lee and Klinger, 2011).
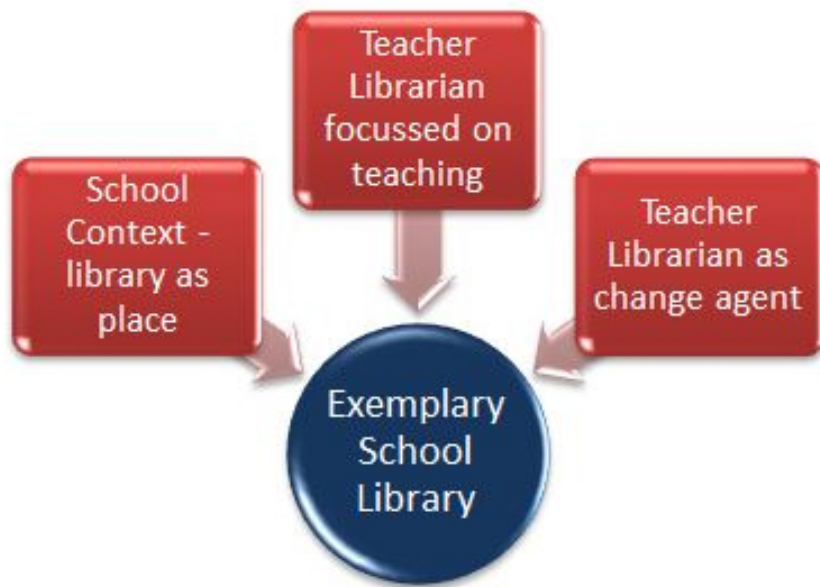
School library context

At a time when classes can access learning resources without the disruption of moving from the classroom, what does an informal observation of the school library today tell us? Personal experience indicates that it is an increasingly busy place during non-class time when activity can be frenetic. During class time, however, it is used principally by individual students, reading groups and irregular research classes. Changed access to learning resources has made it much easier for teachers to teach without the disruption of leaving the classroom. As a result, teacher-librarians who have not evaluated the value of their programs and cling to traditional resources are facing a fait accompli. Certainly, hard copy resources are still a valuable component of information literacy skill development, but they now compete in a world of ubiquitous information and a transition in methods of learning. The role of the teacher-librarian as information literacy leader has moved outside the library building.

Library as place

Use of the library has changed for class instruction; nevertheless, daily observation indicates that the students themselves are making a personal decision to visit the library during their free time. This supports Weigand's (2005) emphasis on 'library as place' when he encourages us to look at the role of the library from the perspective of the 'library in the life of the user' rather than the 'user within the library'. What is the value of the library to the individual within the community? Is it perceived as their library, or it is the library staff's domain used according to an applied set rules and regulations? Does the school community at large have a voice within the library? Do they perceive it as a place of support for their learning and teaching? These are all vital questions to consider when evaluating the role of the library from the perspective of the school community.

The library as 'place' embraces the concept of library as an extension of the classroom. Accessible physically, and embraced by the community, not simply as an information resource but more importantly, as a 'learning place'. That learning place – let's call it Commons (Elliott, 2010) or iCentre (Hay, 2011) – is a launching place for learning, providing teachers, students, parents, the whole school community with a seamless connection to learning relevant to their whole school life. It's that place where cultural, social, and intellectual exchanges occur, often mediated by, but not limited to, the resources in the library collection; a space defined by the social mood, cultural and civic expression, and intellectual values of the school community (Mardis, 2011).

Library as Learning Commons

The model of school library as Learning Commons reflects this philosophy, advocating a flexible and responsive approach to the use of the school library. This approach involves a change in perception for many within the school community and a journey of change in focus to learning collaboratively (Elliott, 2010). It aims to expand the learning experience, taking students and educators into virtual spaces beyond the walls of a school. As a transformative model, it acknowledges that students, teachers, all members of the school community, are working towards a common goal of enabling learning and nurturing success.

Physical library spaces have traditionally been places for discourse and the sharing of ideas. Each day, we see evidence of students resuming the learning of the classroom and engaging in peer discussions where they consolidate and share knowledge. They help each other make sense of their learning and embed it as knowledge internally by teaching each other. They learn to play chess or explore the intricacies of digital tools such as Game Maker, Photoshop and Google Sketchup. Some students use it as a place to be alone, content to spend that 'alone' time within the busy library environment. Regardless of activity, the learning is rich, exciting and largely, freely chosen.

Focus on teaching

The teacher-librarian in the school library is primarily a teacher. It's a complex role involving responsibilities for teaching, curriculum and resource management

responsibilities. The role of the teacher-librarian as stated by the Australian School Library Association, is to 'support and implement the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners' (ASLA).

It is not a role that can be measured by statistics but rather, should be reflected in the way it enables learning. Streatfield and Markless (2009) refer to this as a 'difference view' of the achievements of the teacher-librarian in that it shifts the evaluation focus from performance indicators that involve libraries gathering what they characterise as 'activity completion' data towards positive achievement indicators relating user 'knowledge or skills'. This data reflects the difference the teacher-librarian is making to student learning outcomes. Todd and Hay (2010, p. 37) put this in terms of an imperative of moving from 'teacher-librarian actions to student

outcomes', ensuring 'a learning-centred vision not a library-centred vision'. They insist that this requires constant vigilance against policies and procedures that come from a library perspective rather than a user perspective, awareness of what is being taught and a willingness to collaborate openly with teachers.

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Putting students in touch with the most appropriate learning resources is becoming an increasingly complex process. Students have an affinity with the ease of researching through Google, Wikipedia and Ask an Expert. As educators and teacher-librarians, we have a responsibility to open their minds to the wealth of knowledge that lies behind these easy options. In this climate of ubiquitous information, are we nourishing the kindergarten curiosity of our students by opening the doors on their mind to realise what they don't know and making them curious to learn more? Are we simply directing them to what they need to know, with enough information to pass the assessment and making do with that?

Access to new knowledge

The potential exists to draw the resources of the learning management system and the internet into the library and make them accessible across the school and beyond, thereby developing a reputation as the place you can connect with your learning in depth. Students have access to open education resources of the internet that can extend their classroom practice; however, they need assistance to make sense of the mass of information.

In helping both teachers and students learn about open resources, wikis, blogs, Classroom 2.0, Edutopia, Youtube, Wikimedia and the seemingly infinite array of learning resources, teacher-librarians are introducing them to the power of collaborative learning. Incorporating these resources into their learning is developing skills they will use beyond school each day and into the future. It is impossible to ignore the power and potential benefit of the collaborative web.

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We are on a constant treadmill of change within both our personal and professional lives. The learning community and in particular teacher-librarians, who have had a prominent role in resourcing the learning environment, are having to grapple with emerging technologies that include ebooks, social media and Web 2.0, increasingly complex databases, creative commons resources, personal publishing and RFID resource management. Nevertheless, nothing can be ignored. This is the new landscape. These changes, while significantly affecting the distribution of resources, provide opportunities for collaboration and shared learning experiences.

Outdated systems

Unfortunately, the job is not made easier by the fact that many library management systems have not kept pace with changing resources. Designed for Library 1.0, they do not necessarily scale to organise digital resources. In a report to the US Congress, Calhoun (2006, p. 15) found over three-quarters of library users started their research with a search engine and not the online catalogue, thereby placing a question over the value of the library catalogue. Five years later, the response

from distributors of school library management systems in Australia is slow to respond to the challenge.

Technical issues aside, Seth Godin (2010), in a bold statement, proposed that the way forward in dealing with the chaos created by the free flow and exponential growth of information was to build the information literacy capacity of the population. Suggesting that, rather than buying physical resources, libraries should take 'intellectual initiative' and commit to 'creating leaders, sherpas and teachers who will push everyone from kids to seniors to get very aggressive in finding and using information and in connecting with and leading others'.

School library leaders, both individuals and associations, have mapped clear recommendations and provided support for teacher-librarians to respond to the challenge by building capacity for change and that of their library teams. An examination of school library associations in Australia alone (SLAV, SLAQ, SLASA, WASLA, ASLA, ASLA(NSW) and ASLA(Tas) will identify numerous opportunities for library skill building. Many have embraced the opportunity for growth and are applying this new learning to yield innovative practice appropriate to today's learning. Others are seeking relevance.

Agents of change

Teacher-librarians as agents of change was the final feature of exemplary library practice identified by Lee and Klinger (2011). Hay (2011) also raised this as a query in reflecting on the early uptake of computer technology by teacher-librarians. The early digitisation of library collections created a buzz of excitement in the 1980s. Why is it that many libraries are still in that time warp and have not evolved to the collaborative, interactive resource that is Library 2.0?

In a move to open discussion of the role of school libraries, the 2010 federal Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools attracted 388 submissions, presented at a series of national hearings. Delayed by the 2010 federal elections, the release of the findings from this inquiry is anticipated to have an impact on the future direction of Australian school libraries. Regardless of the outcome; the aspirations, beliefs and passion of these submissions must be owned by every teacher-librarian, library technician and assistant working within a school library. The capacity to change is embedded within each individual in every school library. It's embedded in the components of daily practice that construct the learning environment of each school's library.

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Elmore (2004) reminds us, however, that cultures do not change by mandate; they change by the specific displacement of existing norms, values, structures, and processes by others; the process of cultural change depends fundamentally on modelling the new values and behaviours that you expect to displace the existing ones. School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) in its submission to the inquiry stated, "To be information literate in the 21st century, the greatest skills required by students will be the ability to access quality information sources and the skill to differentiate between real and false resources. This redefinition requires a broader approach to resourcing with an emphasis on digital access and community instruction" (SLAV). Learning outcomes are clearly at the centre of this approach; however, to be fully effective the focus must initially be directed towards an examination of the individuals who constitute the library team, and their daily activities.

As with any complex journey, to have any hope of reaching a destination, a road map is essential. We must be able to identify our starting point and have a reasonable idea of our destination. Furthermore, are all involved suitably equipped for the journey?

Learning for the journey

Senge (1994) encourages us to reflect on the learning processes involved in every organisation to which we belong, be it social, educational or employment; they all involve a process of learning. To become a 'learning' organisation, however, involves elements of trust, relationship, acceptance, and synergy that combine to produce the goals of that team or organisation. Building the learning team, in this instance the library team, requires a process. Change is a process, not an event: it is a journey into uncharted territory (Fullan 1993).

Senge (1994) also refers to a 'deep learning cycle', the development of new skills and capabilities opening up personal awareness and sensibilities which in turn develop a new

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level of understanding of the world in which we are working. It doesn't happen overnight. It's a gathering of skills and knowledge that we must commit to as individuals to move forward. It involves flexibility, uncertainty and risk-taking.
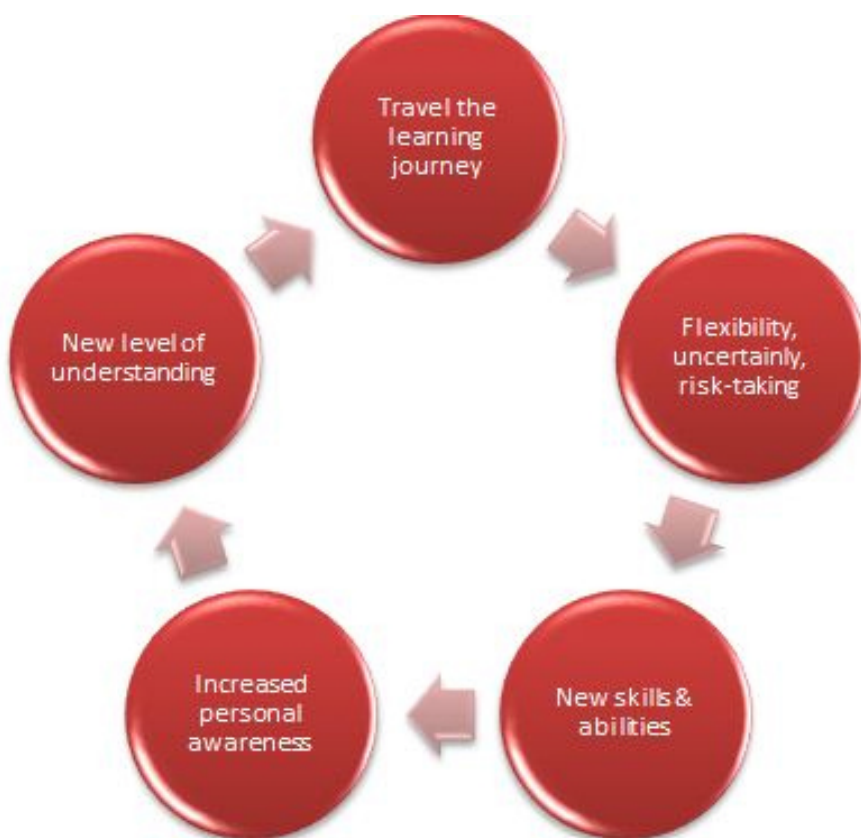
Senge (1994) also outlines a process of adapting to change involving

1. the continuous testing of experience
2. the transformation of that experience into knowledge accessible to the whole organisation, and
3. of relevance to its core purpose.

A discussion at this level is more a series of questions rather than answers. Questions can be common, however each individual library has its own unique response to the change continuum. Reflection guided by Senge's process will assist establish a current position and understanding of the system that is school library and how each member contributes. This can be an emotional experience involving close examination of current practice, beliefs and attitudes. It will, however, reveal a set of priorities for action, goal setting and strategies for development of a staff culture of learning.

To expand Senge's (1994) process further:

Do you test your experiences?

Do you reflect on established practice and question its relevance? Are you maintaining obsolete practices such as creating files of news articles that are not used? Are you aware of the curriculum and research tasks that once came into the library but are now conducted within the classroom? What is your influence on those tasks? Ross Todd has directed teacher-librarians to seeking out 'points of intervention' in these assignments rather than the traditional 'information process'. How are you seeking out that collaboration?

Are books still being restricted to 'overnight loans' as they were when they were the only resource available for an assignment on Ancient Egypt? Are you insisting on the return of overnight loans only to have them sit on the shelf because the majority of students are researching through the internet at home? What types of recreational reading do student have for borrowing? Do they have a voice in resource acquisition? These are the types of reflective questions required for discussion within each individual library team.

Are you producing and sharing knowledge?

Does the library team have the opportunity to meet and share professional knowledge? Are there regular library staff meetings? Are staff encouraged to read professionally and trial their ideas for changed practice? Are there opportunities for professional learning individually or as a group? Once these are attended, are ways sought to apply new learning to existing library practice? Our own learning is embedded within ourselves only after we have shared it with others. This may involve providing feedback within a library meeting or even sharing it within a collective online blog that can be used for team communication.

Is your learning relevant?

Care is required not to dismiss an option because it may seem out of reach. When a learning opportunity arises, Senge (1994) recommends evaluating it against our own library's core purpose. If a project is relevant to student learning outcomes and the provision of a knowledge-based resource, it is relevant. It may be taking us into unknown territory K this is the journey.

Summary

The best schools have libraries at their centres not as some sad throwback to an earlier age but as a clear and evocative prototype of what ambitious learning might look like in this century of learning.

SLAV membership numbers, the attendance at SLAV conferences and other professional learning opportunities provided by the association are indicators that many teacher- librarians are embracing the role of

change agent and modelling learning themselves in order to lead others. The qualification of teacher-librarian alone is not sufficient for us carry out such a complex role. It requires a constant process of learning and an open vision of the new learning landscape. The evidence of Lee and Klinger (2010), illustrates that the exemplary library practice has at its heart an active and informed teacher-librarian. This is further supported by Professor Stephen Heppell who stated in relation to the report of school libraries in the United Kingdom (UK):

> *'The evidence continues to accumulate that libraries – and their librarians – lie absolutely at the heart of third millennium learning organisations: a place for scholarship, a place to escape into adventures, a place of discovery, a place to share and explore, a place for deep thought, a place for surprise, and above all else a place absolutely without limits. The best schools have libraries at their centres not as some sad throwback to an earlier age but as a clear and evocative prototype of what ambitious learning might look like in this century of learning.'*

This is a time of challenge for teacher-librarians and library teams worldwide, but not only challenge – it is also a time of excitement, adventurous learning and constant surprises.

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