

Managing Change: Being a Thought Leader in the Age of Knowledge

By Karin Gilbert

A 'thought leader' is a buzz term used in business, it describes someone who has knowledge that changes the paradigms of how we previously operated. I like to use this term because it reminds me that the thinking always has to come first.

It is a concept which we as educators and information specialists can apply successfully to leading in our own environments, libraries and otherwise. How we can add to the conversation about the future, is how we can be thought leaders today.

This is a summary of a talk I gave at the 2014 EduTECH conference; it focuses on six main points:

1. Redefinition of Roles
2. Cognitive Science
3. Points of Convergence
4. Curiosity and Engagement
5. Serendipitous Connection
6. Production.

1. Redefinition of roles

It's not so much how busy you are, but why you are busy. The bee is praised. The mosquito is swatted. Mary O'Connor

We can very easily be engaged with busy work and be surprised by the suggestion that our achievements are not highly valued in our organisations. All of a sudden we may find that our usefulness is being reduced to what the organisation is assigning to us. It could well be that our structures and practices are built around models that have not been rethought for some time. We need to re think and redefine the roles in our organisations; we need to look at examples of best practice from library areas across all industries. We must focus on transformational habits in our learning communities and the transactional practices must be as much as possible re-imagined in new places e.g. outsourcing, - or minimised to what is needed not just what has always happened.

We must focus on transformational habits in our learning communities . . .

Always remind yourself of the purpose of what you are doing, often habits and cultural behaviours are ingrained and not necessarily still linked to what your goals are. So ask the questions:

- How are we evaluating the effectiveness of what we do?
- What can we outsource?
- What are we not doing that is needed?
- What is in our roles and what needs to change?
- What conversation are we participating in that highlights new and different ways of doing things?

Some ways we have done this in my school environment:

- we have created new roles for librarians.
- we outsourced processing as much as possible.
- we updated our Library Management System to [OCLC's WorldShare](#), which allowed us to greatly simplify our ordering, uploading and cataloguing of records allowing us more time for other things.

- we use RFID technology and self-loan kiosks to manage independent borrowing and returns.
- we significantly reduced our physical collection of non-fiction; and focused on creating a digital platform through a range of databases and e-resources (in our case delivered via [libguides](#)).
- We have engaged with the broader community by the creation of our [blog](#) from which we post updates about what we are doing and via our presence on Twitter [@lowtherlrc](#). This broader connection has enabled further learning, increased our exposure and validated our work in new ways that were not visible before.

2. Cognitive science

Being a thought leader means ensuring that you are tapped into critical inputs for new knowledge.

Dr [Maryanne Wolf](#) is a cognitive neuroscientist who has done extensive research on what happens inside the brain as a reader develops this skill over the years. She wrote a work on her research entitled [Proust and the Squid; The Story and Science of the Reading Brain](#). She investigates and maps the changes in the brain from beginning reader to expert reader.

In the expert reader's brain – because the neuronal paths are well formed and practiced – the higher level of executive functioning that the brain is capable of is allowed more time to do that higher level of thinking. Wolf suggests this practiced brain can devote less of the brain's processing power to the tasks of connecting language, concept and the written word, and more to the higher functioning thinking. She says when talking about the expert reading brain:

Fluency does not ensure better comprehension; rather fluency gives enough extra time to the executive system to direct attention where it is needed most - to infer, to understand, to predict . . . (Wolf, p. 131)

Prediction is one of the most important aspects of what is measured in intelligence tests and is one of the best problem-solving strategies that the brain has. The expert reading brain is shown to develop functionality and thinking capacity that does not happen in any other way. It is not a built in genetic feature of our brain, rather what happens in our brain is a result of the input we give it and how we deliberately practise and form those neuronal pathways.

The science of the reading brain was the sound basis upon which we launched our [myread](#) project this year. Reading levels drop off significantly in secondary school replaced by more important things, homework, study, co-curricular, even social media!

It would also seem to be a trend with data indicating that teenagers are less interested in this pursuit (see this [report](#) from common sense media). We needed to create a climate that made a reading culture valid, which was understood by our students as being an avenue for them to fulfil their potential and to build upon their capacity to be better at their learning. The science clearly demonstrates the benefit of the expert reading brain in thinking. We needed to show our girls that this was a means to greater success, improved learning behaviours, and a goal achievable for every single person. We explained to them about the evidence of K. Anders Ericsson's famous experiment with 300 musicians which showcased and then defined the benefit of Deliberate Practice. Building a habit of practice but always aiming to improve that little bit, challenging oneself to always aim above what was previously achieved. Of course we had to tell them about the 10,000 hours they needed to gain mastery . . .

. . . identify and validate the habit and practice of reading as a means to increasing your capacity for thinking . . .

So we launched this project and have made a commitment to regular reading in homeroom but with the emphasis on them building this learning behaviour into their personal learning on a regular basis. It was a whole new way to identify and validate the habit and

practice of reading as a means to increasing your capacity for thinking (fluid intelligence), cognitive control, the working memory, and thus potentially better educational outcomes for them. It gave greater context and meaning to a practised habit that was increasingly being seen as less important to them.

Why cognitive science?

It is important to think across the spectrum of information that is available to us; identifying critical developments that are important in our fields information, libraries and education. This ability to understand, infer and then predict is absolutely essential and brings a whole new dimension to the role of the teacher-librarian and librarian particularly for those who are leaders of these areas in your organisation.

Like most things it takes consistent deliberate effort based on planning.

Good ideas emerge from the adjacent possible and are built upon good ideas before them. (Steven Johnson, Where Good Ideas Come From)

3. Points of Convergence

Where are we most likely to have the greatest impact? Key points of connection are through leadership teams, through our professional learning plan and programs, through our governance processes, through the elearning practices and plan, through student leadership. Be proactive in looking to see what will be needed. Put yourself at the point of need and also the point of convergence: be able to anticipate and facilitate, be a producer of the just in time requirements and also an instigator of innovation; best practice; new thinking:

Be a thought leader because leading in what we are discovering and transferring into best practice is our most significant curation of content.

We need to be aware of what our stakeholders need and then ensure that we are in connection with that provision. You may already work across areas such as IT, student wellbeing, subject or faculty areas, year levels, parent community needs, you need to be a constant presence.

Your library, your people and space, must have tangible connections to all areas of knowledge repositories both tacit and explicit in your organisation. Tacit will be the knowledge within your staff their experience and skills and the cultural practices that are just done but not written down anywhere. Explicit will be those databases of specific content your organisation requires to function and the articulated processes that are written generally as policy.

... tangible connections to all areas of knowledge repositories both tacit and explicit ...

Be aware of the variety and range of core content that your organisation has. You need to be aware of how they operate and how you can support teachers, in particular, in their use of them.

They are all avenues of content: we have to see that they are in the purview of our content domain apart from the obvious library content of your collection.

Your ability to predict based on what you have around you, what you see globally and what you can see is the potential, is crucial in initiating the changing dimensions of what is happening in your space.

Allocate time and opportunity to learn of such content within the framework of your library staffing.

Be alert to staff issues with these resources; utilise your Professional Learning input from your keepers of knowledge to ensure that staff see you as resources for help. For example we focus on provision of professional learning via short workshops (30 minutes) all planned according to current need for very timely points of influence. We support it with an online input e.g. a screencast, tweets, blogs or specific libguide page. Teachers like to be connected too with their point of need in this; they do not always feel confident about acknowledging or recognising their need.

This also creates a climate where 'asking' is the norm rather than being seen as a sign of inadequacy. If you emphasise that your job is to research, be informed, stay abreast of developments, then you make it easy for staff to validate why they come to you for assistance.

Of course IT departments assist in ensuring technical expertise is built upon; but often it is inside the context of teaching that staff need the most support and this is where we can have significant impact. Delivery and experience of critical content is so versatile now very often educators will be unsure or lack confidence in the best way to negotiate this content. That is where we as information and media specialists and teachers can optimise and leverage on our skills and knowledge. It is always best to keep the conversation going with your knowledge keepers in specific areas: e.g. the intranet keeper, the systems person, the curriculum database, be alert and willing to learn and always ask questions.

Be aware of the function of groups in your organisation as communities of practice. This term refers to the sharing of knowledge around the successful socialisation of the members in learning to relate and create from the collective knowledge of the group. There is the practice of the meeting itself, and then the database or repository of information, it can be your learning management system, or web based space for example. But there is also social media, and other web based tools which allow for new forms of production and value creations in work places.

Questions must be asked to assist in establishing how you go about tapping into these points of convergence. Most ideas come from the collective open environment: **Steven Johnson** also talks about liquid networks e.g. think of the coffee shops of the 17th and 18th centuries that fuelled the exchange of information.

What is the evidence we have for building capacity in our staff and how are we articulating the actions of the library staff in a plan that is aligned with our core purpose and mission?

Map and record the ways in which you assist because this will inform where you need to further invest in capacity building for both your own library staff and your organisational needs – inevitably roles will change.

Primarily:

- Knowledge building must be centred in a practice of knowledge sharing: 'asking' must be valued as part of the culture.
- Evaluate – ask yourself these questions:
 - How are we tapping in to the extraordinary knowledge of our most valuable asset our staff?
 - How are we allowing for liquid networks?
 - How are we building authentic relationships in the re-purposing of our teaching capacity for the needs of a knowledge centred economy?

4. Curiosity and engagement

Steven Johnson mapped the most significant discoveries and inventions over the last several hundred years (examining the context of their discovery) and found that in recent times that most inventions were within what he called the fourth quadrant. This is the non-market networks where the purpose of innovation is about the building of ideas upon other ideas and the discovery that it brings. It begs the question how are we providing the 4th quadrant space for innovation in our schools and organisations?

How are we ensuring that our stakeholders know how to know?

Build your organisations neuronal pathways . . . the deliberate practice necessary to ensure this happens may mean sometimes some individual spruiking, connecting one person at a time. Allocate individual team members to faculties or subject areas to assist with digital delivery of key content: (*libguides was pivotal in building our range of resources into a one stop shop that includes our catalogue, databases, curated content for specific topics; always built and developed in conversation with teachers for the learning*).

Facilitate connecting and know your mediums, tools and spaces, be the expert so that all stakeholders are confident that they will experience success. Provide some mystery; build a sense of discovery in your spaces that draws people in. Promote curiosity.

Facilitate connecting and know your mediums, tools and spaces . . .

5. Serendipitous Connection

Being a 'thought leader' means being a curious species. To do this we need to cultivate an atmosphere of serendipity as Steven Johnson says 'Serendipity needs unlikely collisions and discoveries.' Johnson describes how this has changed in the context of the web-based environment, facilitating increased connection. He says 'The secret to organisational inspiration is to build information networks that allow hunches to persist and disperse and recombine'.

The concept of public forums and discussion boards in effect 'create architecture for organizational serendipity.'

There has been a movement towards serendipitous innovation being articulated within the learning organisation by providing time space and tools to allow for discovery. Libraries are well placed to be seen as this space and this is another way in education that we can facilitate the de-privatisation of practice. We can prepare and build a culture of serendipity contrary to what you might think it is not all about happy accidents. There are three facets for building serendipitous connections:

- the prepared mind
- the act of noticing
- chance.

These can be facilitated in a knowledge centred environment by some key steps.

Understand your assets: your knowledge; in people and in databases – Connect with the keepers of the knowledge and be a filter for what is needed.

Understand your exchange: where is it happening? How is it happening? How can you build on it? Understand the purpose – creating for what?

Build an asking culture: provide the knowledge pathway for them to find an answer – it could be the provided PL, it could be the snapshots of ideas you update on your library web presence or other key connection points. Make sure you are seen as a knowledge holder.

Be curious yourself and a discoverer: channel information that could be of interest: help your staff connect: one on one: small groups, incidentally: strategically: be a voice and a listener: be an example: build the professional learning environment across multiple platforms e.g. in the staff room early morning briefing, in the staff meeting; in workshops – every term we conduct between 4 to 6 different 30 min workshops that are offered three times a week for all staff. We also provide the key content either in specific web pages, documents, screencasts, all made available via our libguides staff pages.

6. Production

In our evolving roles we are moving from being content managers and facilitators to also being content creators. We now have production librarians and e librarians, the environment has changed and so must our roles. We are creating digital content often 'just in time' digital content specifically for learning outcomes.

We are creating environments of 'making' and production that are meeting points and areas of engagement for ideas across all areas from STEM to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths). Libraries are developing makerspaces where exploration and creativity are fostered and encouraged, indeed communities of practice in action.

These communities of practice can be both formal and informal: the learning commons that is the library needs to be able to assist in building and sustaining these communities of practice. Build influence, position yourself not only within the obvious groups such as faculty groups, curriculum groups, elearning groups, performance and development groups, professional learning groups but in the informal conversations about what is happening in a particular class or particular topic, be connected to those most involved and build

authentic relationships. Connect with students: I know that sounds obvious but I am talking about connections of influence, see the wider points of connections they have and look to negotiate involvement, e.g. the justice group could well work with you on a project, we may not be investing time in actually loaning out items to students (because we use RFID and self-loan stations) but we can invest in the time to connect with them in a much wider range of activities. Craft, gaming and making, are important ways we can connect with knowledge. Use humour and challenge them with new ideas.

Encourage everyone in your staff area to read about something, be learners and experimenters.

Encourage everyone in your staff area to read about something, be learners and experimenters. Assist to ensure your staff have a range of skills, when you are talking about key projects and change improvements, there must be a range of expertise available to you to

ensure that the maximum access to the knowledge required is there; and the ability and desire to learn it if it isn't. Think about your work space and the way you interact: what priorities do you set?

How do you encourage creativity? Give time for tinkering, for researching, make connections online: twitter: feeds; follow blogs that are useful and idea generating for you.

We encourage our staff to learn to use programming inside tools like Scratch or Snap, physical computing tools like MaKey MaKeys and arduino products. Craft and electronics are very popular. Coming up with a new idea or activity or strategy is actively encourage. We combine and suggest. Build in a knowledge collection tool to allow for ideas to be stored and shared.

Map your responses to point of need intervention so you can identify the greatest needs and predictors of what will be needed. Be innovative - one of the values of the Lowther Hall girl is that of 'taking a considered risk' - we've taken that motto to heart

If the idea is good, people shift . . . soft power is quiet persistence. (Susan Cain, 2013)

References

Cain, S. (2013) *Quiet the Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, Viking: London.

Foer, J. (2011) *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, Penguin Press: New York.

Hurley, D. (2014) *Smarter: The New Science of Building Brain Power*, Viking: London.

Johnson, S. (2011) *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Seven Patterns of Innovation*, Allen Lane: London.

Wolf, M. (2007) *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Harper Collins: New York.

Karin Gilbert is the Head of the LRC at Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School in Essendon.