

# What we hold in our hands: Teacher-librarian, Knowledge Manager

By Karen Gilbert

At Year 9 we teach a topic called World Views. It is a great topic and inspires much discussion and thinking amongst the students. In this topic we watch a TED talk entitled 'A Life of Purpose', featuring a man called Rick Warren, who speaks eloquently about the concept of a World View. In this talk he describes the power of what is in your hand as a point of connection to understanding your purpose in life, a key question in determining your world view. He describes this by calling the 'object' in your hand a symbol of your identity, your income, and your influence. He gives an example of an NBL basketball player who he describes as having a 'basketball' in his hand. For the player it is symbolic of his identity, his income and his influence. He points out that what you do with what you have in your hand is up to you. I use the example because I applied this to my own profession. I am a teacher-librarian and what traditionally has been in my hand has been a book. It was central to my identity (my love for books my passion for storytelling), my income (the 'wealth' I have and potential to be gainfully employed), and my influence (what and how I use the knowledge and expertise I have). But of course this symbol of the book is no longer a true representation. Books no longer represent the 'knowledge' that we as information specialists leverage every day for our stakeholders: our schools' students, staff and wider community.

So what do I have in my hand? Is it a smart phone? Is it my iPad or tablet? Truth to tell I think it will be none of these things for very long; what I have in my hand is knowledge and not one object can easily represent it. As a teacher-librarian and an information specialist I am a storyteller, a literacy specialist, a digital citizen, a teacher of information fluency and eLearning, a leader, a content manager, a knowledge management specialist, a curator of content, a facilitator of learning spaces both physical and virtual, a gamer and an innovator. For us all in schools today it could be many such variations on a similar theme.

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This year I attended the EduTech K-12 education leaders' congress in Brisbane in June. Major streams of presentation were 'Leading the Digital School' and 'Learning in the Digital Classroom'. I was challenged and inspired by the presentations of Dan Pink, Sir Ken Robinson, and Salman Khan amongst others. But what did I really take away from this? Many leaders from schools all around Australia come to this conference, but not many teacher-librarians. Why? In one session I attended Alan November demonstrated the power of using Google Search techniques to his quite large audience (where only two people were teacher-librarians, he asked). In the audience there was a general consensus that their staff did not know this information. No one mentioned teacher-librarians; no one mentioned their library staff and their knowledge. We need to be challenged by this. We know that we are operating in schools in times of change. We have converging areas of influence in the school environment where there is a distinct crossover in skill sets; particularly managing content and using the relevant technology. In some schools this has led to the downgrading of staffing in the library area in favour of more IT trained staff. Yet now more than ever is our profession critical to the challenges of the knowledge society.

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Today what needs to be central to our profession is knowledge management. We cannot allow ourselves to be measured within the context of the library space only. In our schools we must be central in the knowledge

space of the entire school. We are specialists in a field that is dynamic and critical to the directions of 21st century learning. How are we viewed in our schools? Do we limit the conversation to what we are comfortable with? Are we challenging ourselves to connect with the broader communities, and areas of change in learning? Are we articulating and demonstrating the skill set that connects us as leaders of digital citizenship, information fluency, knowledge sharing, and professional learning? Are we seen as innovators? We are at the

cutting edge of information change, we are at the point of interception with a constant flow of information that needs to be curated and managed for effective learning. Our schools need to be framed around the key concepts of knowledge sharing. Are we saying we need a knowledge management approach in our structure and governance?

The concept of knowledge management (KM) is to ensure that the knowledge in any organisation is leveraged for the maximum benefit to the organisation and its core purpose. In many organisations today this practice is clearly enunciated and structured to be aligned with the desired outcomes of the organisation. In some organisations these practices occur under more traditionally understood frameworks; according to the particular purpose of that organisation. They may not be known as 'knowledge management' but there will be elements that are part of what might be understood in a specific knowledge management model. For example, all schools have some type of system to retain their information about students, past and present. They have processes in place to tap into this information as required. However the education sector has not generally looked at knowledge management models for assistance in their overall organisational practices. I believe that this approach would greatly benefit schools if indeed they were to implement such a strategic approach. I think teacher-librarians are specialists with the skill set to assist with this key thinking and strategic approach.

A KM strategy requires a culture of knowledge sharing – essentially underpinned in a school environment by the professional learning capacity of that organisation. This is absolutely crucial in any organisation but more so in a school of today.

A simple model commonly used in Knowledge Management focuses on the three cornerstones of People, Process and Technology with Content central to them all.

In **People** we understand this as the structure of our relationships and how we share and communicate with each other the knowledge we have. In **Process** we understand this as the frameworks and procedures we use to structure our organisational learning e.g. our school improvement plan our professional learning plans to ensure the purpose for knowledge sharing is achieved.

In the centre of our organisation we have **Content**; we understand this as the way our explicit knowledge e.g. such as curriculum documentation, or policies or pedagogical approaches are created, stored and managed, but it is also in the processes and interactions of the people in the organisation and is often not always visible. In **technology** we understand this as the systems we use to support all of the above components.

Crucially we need to recognise that the value of our knowledge lies in the socialisation or relationships we have within the organisation because that is how that knowledge is shared, reused and created. Vehicles such as technological infrastructure can support this exchange but the move from tacit (in people's experience) to explicit (e.g. curriculum documentation) knowledge does not ensure its reuse as much as the context that it is shared within. The focus must be on the people and their relationships. Consequently the model for professional learning is of enormous significance in the KM plan for a school.

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### **What impact should this have on our practices, processes and key communities of practices?**

- We need a model for managing our organisational learning that embraces all aspects of its transactions within the organisation, people, process and technology.
- We need to consider all our decisions in light of these relationships.
- Interactions between people need to be both deliberate and routine and supported by a culture of 'asking' to maximise learning.
- Communication and its channels and processes must be clearly articulated within the framework of the organisation.
- Capturing knowledge must be clearly articulated within the practices and processes and this same knowledge needs to be shared and easily accessible by all stakeholders.

### **In light of this what are the main areas that we need to focus on in schools?**

- Communication
- Professional learning and the Communities of Practice around this

- Access, sharing and creation of knowledge around our core purpose – that is, learning and teaching

### **Questions we can ask of our learning organisations**

Are all stakeholders able to access and use the core knowledge needed for their work? Are all stakeholders able to add to the core knowledge of the organisation from their work?

Are there routine opportunities for all types of interactions that allow for learning to happen? Is there a culture of asking questions?

Are all stakeholders clear on the vehicles for communicating, learning and operating within the processes of the organisation?

These are thoughts and questions that I hope will challenge you to new thinking about what you hold in your hand. Sir Ken Robinson suggested in his address at EduTech 2013 that the role of education is to create a climate of possibility. If indeed what we hold in our hand is key to our identity, our income, and our influence, then we are well placed to contribute to that climate of possibility.

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