

Library Team 2.0: Acting on a shared vision

By Camilla Elliott

Change is personal. It affects each individual differently with reactions both personal and emotional. Change often involves an assault on personal beliefs, ideals and sense of value as one is required to adjust behaviours to comply with new norms. Australian school libraries are undergoing some of the most dramatic change in their history due to the pressure of funding constraints, ubiquitous technology and curriculum transformation.

Rarely a week goes by without discussion on the [OZTL_Net](#) and similar mailing lists about the redeployment of library staff by principals. Conversations in other quarters will reveal statements to the effect that 'it's never been a more exciting time to be working in a school library'. Where is the problem and why is it that some library staff are feeling marginalised while others are revelling in creative, challenging learning opportunities?

Perceptions and practices

If one listens to the experiences of some library professionals, it would seem that the vision of a school library service held by principals may be out of sync with the vision of library professionals. There are complaints of staff reduction through natural attrition as retiring staff are not replaced; teacher-librarians are co-opted into ICT-focussed positions or, the teaching position is replaced by a librarian with non-teaching responsibility.

A perusal of the literature reveals that transformational 21st century school library leaders such as [Ross Todd](#), [Lyn Hay](#), [David Loertscher](#), [Carol Koechlin](#), [Pru Mitchell](#), [Joyce Valenza](#) and others have been heralding a new role for school libraries for some time. The reality is that it's a personal change requiring a new set of skills, as much as a systemic change within the school. The knowledge that a new way of thinking about school libraries is necessary is not new. What is becoming increasingly evident now, however, is that the reality of transition to a new model can be taken out of the hands of library managers and imposed by principals and policy makers. The results can reveal the disparate visions of stakeholders.

Recently, I had the confronting experience of an education auditing official on his inspection tour of the school ask, "Is this a friendly library?". After recovering from the initial shock of the question and responding with evidence of the transition of our library to a 'learning commons' model emphasising the role of the library within the learning life of the student, and a whole school approach to learning, I sought the intentions behind his question. He spoke of his experience with school libraries as a member of the [School Improvement Framework](#) auditing team and recounted a number of negative examples of his experience with school libraries encountered during audits.

Is this a general perception of others in positions of influence? Is there a belief that the library is the space where others in the school community enter with caution? It depends to whom you listen and whose voice is the loudest. Within professional

library circles, we know of the many highly regarded teacher-librarians, leading valued library services, nevertheless, that is not necessarily the commonly-held view. With this in mind, therefore, the recent advice by Karen Bonanno (2011) in [Seven strategies to develop your advocacy toolkit](#), should be heeded as practical strategies that can influence the perceptions of principals and policymakers in relation to their beliefs about school libraries.

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Role perceptions and actions

Ideally, the role of today's teacher-librarian is mobile. It is no longer restricted to the library building but seeks what **Ross Todd** so frequently refers to as "the point of intervention". This is a dramatic change to the traditional perceptions of the role of teacher-librarian and with it, the role of the whole library service within the school. As digital literacy skills become increasingly important within our technology-rich environment the teacher-librarian has a role in supporting learning anywhere it occurs within the school. This may not necessarily be in the library. Nonetheless, the traditional association of teacher-librarian with the library as a building is a mindset that is taking some changing. Strategies that remove the image of the 'box' that is seen as 'school library' and enable viewing with a lens of flexible resource provision anywhere, anytime across the school need to be sought as a means of changing perceptions.

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Support personnel are critical to the role of teacher-librarian. While they do not have the expertise within the learning and teaching program, theirs is a technical responsibility. In assuming greater

responsibility for organisational and technical matters, non-teaching library personnel have the potential to free up the teacher-librarian for learning and instruction (Loertscher, Keochlin & Zwaan, 2008). Not always an easy transition but in today's schools, a necessary one. **Cloud-based library management systems** with automated cataloguing and overdue notices are amongst the features of new and emerging library tools that clearly indicate the imminent demise of many routine library tasks. These are liberating innovations, but they also herald a different technical landscape for school libraries in the near future.

Library 1.0 versus Library 2.0

A comparison of some of tradition library team activities and those of today, clearly illustrate a change in daily practice.

| Library Team 1.0 | Library Team 2.0 |
|--|--|
| Information access - local | Information ubiquitous - Wikipedia, Google |
| Manages equipment distribution | Technology is personal/plentiful |
| Provide databases - print/cd format | Provide databases - digital |
| Distributes bibliographic lists | Social bookmark resource sharing |
| Manage overdue loans | Self check and automated overdue notices |
| Provide information alert services | RSS feeds, aggregator tools |
| Professional community - local | Professional community - global |
| Cataloguing local, SCIS, NLA | Automated cataloguing systems |
| Copyright experts | Creative Commons experts |
| Lead the culture of reading | Reading culture diversified, online <u>bookclubs</u> |
| Teach information literacy skills | Information fluency leaders |
| Literacy experts - reading and writing | <u>Transliteracy</u> - reading/writing across a range of platforms |

Some of these roles are similar; others have evolved through the influence of the Internet. Information has become a flood, access has been democratised and methods of managing it are increasingly automated. Ease of access to information is rewriting what it is to be a member of a library team. Utilising

Web 2.0 resources such as social bookmarking, RSS feeds, social networks and online picture management, demands a different skill set and an attitude that recognises the role of library technicians and assistants as curators of information. They have a crucial role in supporting learners to make sense of the overwhelming 'noise' of information.

Managing the school library successfully today requires a vision based on today's society, a commitment to personal skills growth and a belief in shared responsibility across the whole library team. Submissions to the recent **Parliamentary**

Inquiry into Teacher Librarians and School Libraries in 21st Century Australia, reveal the complexity of the role. Embracing the new landscape requires adventurous leadership and a commitment from each individual team member to step out of their comfort zone and demonstrate their ability to be active learners within the community of learners. Hay and Todd (2010) expressed concern that responses to their discussion questions about the future of school libraries generated many descriptions of what teacher-librarians did and how important this was, but very limited material about measuring student outcomes as a result of library services.

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The transition is happening. One only has to read professional library journals or peruse a range of library blogs to read evidence of remarkable transition that has been achieved by some library teams. They are opening the library as a learning space, an environment that enhances social interaction and cross-disciplinary learning outside the classroom. They are installing virtual library management systems; giving students responsibility for issuing their own loans with **RFID technology**; providing support with digital equipment and new media. They are supporting teachers through the curriculum with instruction in research practices, creative commons skills, bibliographic referencing, critical thinking and writing across a range of platforms. They are supporting learners as they explore, analyse and create. Furthermore, and most importantly, they are engaging as learners themselves to broaden their knowledge about new resource formats and platforms. They are making judgements about integrating new technologies and library practice that takes them out of their comfort zones while simultaneously building a new set of skills.

A new set of literacies

Development of a literate individual today involves a complex brew of **transliteracies** as learners manage the complexity of reading, writing and interacting across a range of platforms using a variety of technologies. A perusal of teacher-librarian job advertisements will show that principals are advertising to attract professionals who are curriculum and technology leaders able to assist teachers with the integration of technology into increasingly technology-rich classroom environments. They are seeking

elearning leaders who are practitioners within the Web 2.0 environment and capable of leading this learning within the school. They are looking for dynamic and enthusiastic technology-capable leaders who can manage the complex mix of traditional and digital.

Information continues to grow at an exponential rate. According to former Google CEO, **Eric Schmidt** (2010), every two days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilisation up until 2003. Technology is ubiquitous and the resources used for learning and those used for entertainment are merging. For example, blogging, wikis and digital storytelling can be equally classroom or personal, recreational experiences. Students need the skills to operate effectively in this environment if they are to thrive and grow as citizens capable of solving and managing problems in a world where change is a constant.

A new library model

The model of library as Learning Commons fits perfectly with this new role of school library (Elliott 2011). It uses the role of the library to coordinate the community's learners, teachers and resources through building partnerships around access to both physical and digital resources. As a Learning Commons, the library has the potential to be a place where students can learn to be self directed; learn to use their time effectively and produce work for assessment in a variety of forms. It can be a learning place with access to tools where students can produce content of their own, with the necessary support and guidance to ensure a successful learning outcome.

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Developing the library as a Learning Commons with an emphasis on the learner at its heart requires a strengthening of what Pru Mitchell (2010) refers to as "the interconnection of teaching and learning, information literacy, information management, resourcing the curriculum, literature, literacy and technology". This interconnection is based on healthy relationships. Of all the relationships involved, most important is that of the library team. They must combine under a shared vision to develop personal skills and abilities to transition into a successful group with an essential role within the learning community.

Personal response to change

Individuals respond to change according to personal abilities, interests and perceptions. Noah and Brickman (2004) advise that: a strategic sense of your library's future direction clearly impacts on how you will think about your capacity building needs. You need to consider your needs for organisational capacity in light of the strategic directions you have chosen, then assemble the resources to build capacity in the key identified areas. Responses will vary. For some, to write a book review in a reading promotion blog will be a daunting experience, while others will relish this opportunity to collaborate and converse with a mostly unidentified audience. To assist students with audio and video recording or alternative presentation tools to traditional Microsoft PowerPoint, may be unthinkable for some, while other individuals will embrace it as a process of discovery learning. It is only when we begin this journey that we realise the immensity of our roles as library leaders who must build capacity in staff to work in new ways as mentors and guides to students and teachers.

Over recent years, professional school library associations have offered multiple opportunities for professional growth. Overwhelmingly, however, the two essential ingredients common to the success of all personal learning networks (PLN) are ownership and commitment (Warlick, 2008). You are the centre of your learning network. You speak in your own voice and can share ideas and opinions in which you believe. Developing a PLN is an opportunity for self-directed learning; pursuing your own interests, in your own time, at your own level of involvement. It's a community that is always available, not restricted by geography or time. Seely Brown (2008) recommends that in order to develop ownership and

commitment, it's essential to clarify what it is for you to learn. The School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV), with State Library of Victoria (SLV), has been active in building capacity in library staff through a Web 2.0 skills development program for a number of years and is a cornerstone of professional support.

Managing time constraints

Part of the success of the SLAV/SLV Personal Learning Network is that it builds relationships as well as skills, bringing participants, if they are willing, into a community of fellow professionals. Nevertheless, apart from relationships, much of what we do on a daily basis is governed by the constraints of time. Time is a fixed quantity, subject only to management not increase. Managing it involves reviewing practices and implementing change both personally and professionally, a process requiring a vision, a roadmap and a whole team approach. According to Senge (1996) system redesign such as this, involves “adding loops and breaking links” explaining that “adding a loop” translates into designing and implementing new processes, monitoring information in new ways, and establishing new policies. “Breaking a link” means eliminating or ceasing strategies that are counter-productive to the overall library mission. This principle can be applied to create a continuous cycle of improvement. As a skill is built, applied to current practice, reviewed for improvement and celebrated, further improvement can be sought, applied and so on in a cycle. Working as a team facilitates this process, shares the learning and provides an opportunity to celebrate results that increase motivation and build confidence to look for further innovation.



Oberg (2011) assures us that the change route requires considerable flexibility as the various stages are encountered. The journey of adoption of the innovation, implementation of the innovation and institutionalisation or continuance of the innovation is characterised by uncertainty and risk-taking. Progress within today's school library requires careful attention to current practices, questioning their necessity, efficiency and value, in relation to student outcomes and the whole school learning and teaching vision (Elliott, 2011).

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To conclude, Library Team 2.0, is a group of library professionals who combine knowledge, skills and interests to support each other and build a profile that fits the model of library described by Loertscher, Koechlin and Zwaan (2008). They

envisage teacher-librarians as master teachers who plan and teach collaboratively across the school but are also “comfortable learning any new technological system and software needed to be fluent alongside the best of their users. As information specialists they are valuable resources to learners and teachers; as specialist teachers they combine their expertise to provide needed instructional interventions and differentiated teaching and learning support”. Perhaps a model focussing on the personnel rather than

process, involving team work and commitment to a common vision will achieve the transition necessary to create Library 2.0 and verify the statement that - 'it's never been a more exciting time to be working in a school library'.

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