

Shift happens. It's time to rethink, rebuild and rebrand

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The future of school libraries has been a hot topic these past 18 months as a result of Australia's Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding, a range of online forums and conferences exploring the vision for 21st century school libraries, followed by the national Inquiry into Australian school libraries and teacher librarians. These are all significant 'blips' on our profession's radar. But what does our future hold? How do we as individuals, our school communities and our education systems build capacity for a bright and sustainable future for school libraries?

In this commentary I would like to explore some of the issues, concerns and potentials of school library futures in 2010 and challenge you to examine how our own practice can contribute to building capacity for a sustainable future where school libraries become key learning centres of information, inquiry, innovation, immersion and instructional excellence. I introduce the concept of the iCentre and the ways schools can develop such a centre based on

the principles of form, function and brand. I also want to explore these issues in terms of generational change, not just human generational change, but also pedagogical generational change, generational change in terms of the teacher librarian (TL) profession, and generational change in terms of technology 'generations' which is moving much faster than people, professions, pedagogy and, particularly, that of change in education institutions.

Generational change

Take a close look at this photograph of a school library in the 1970s. The caption published under this photo reads:

A Modern School Library is a multimedia center designed to complement classroom studies and offer a variety of educational materials to students and teachers. In the library above, natural light and comfortable furniture help provide pleasant surroundings for students working on assignments. Individual stalls called carrels offer privacy to students listening to recordings. (World Book 1979, p. 220)

How does this compare with your school library in 2010? What are the

similarities and differences? For some TLs, this image is in stark contrast to a description of their school library in 2010, while for others the contrast may not be so dramatic!

For years I have heard TL colleagues and students lament about the challenges they face on a daily basis with their school community's traditional perceptions of the role and function of the school library and the TL position. So how much has changed in the past 40 years? On one hand, we could argue quite a lot has changed. On the other, one could argue our profession is still fighting the same battles.

Generational change can be defined as:

... radical change that occurs in an organisation or a population as a result of its members being replaced over time by other individuals with different values or other characteristics... [it] generally presents both a real and a perceived crisis. In an organisation, the unspoken cultural values held by the longer serving members may be challenged, threatened or abandoned by newer members. In an ecological system, generational change of the



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'Web 2.0 is about communication, collaboration, content creation, where students are producers rather than mere consumers of information.'

representatives of one species may threaten the survival of other species.

(Wikimedia Foundation 2009)

I think this definition illustrates how TLs have felt for some time and what is proposed in this commentary will challenge and contribute to generational change within our profession.

The digital shift became the digital reshift

Earlier in the year I attended a TL Virtual Café webinar with Chris Harris as one of the two presenters (Harris 2010a). The theme was *Crisis webinar*. With an increasing number of schools across the United States losing specialist staff, including the library media specialist positions, this was a call to arms of leading practitioners, academics and consultants to work together in an effort to combat this growing trend. Chris' presentation really struck a chord with me when he identified where the school library profession was placed in the 1980s with the emergence of what he called 'the digital shift'. At this time, TLs (particularly in the mid-1980s in Australia) were at the forefront of the technology revolution in terms of library automation, which continued into the early 1990s, along with the introduction of digital resources such as CD-ROMs. The school library was often at the centre of school network roll-outs in the early 1990s and later, Internet access by the mid-1990s.

In many schools, the TL was pushing (or indeed leading!) the agenda for technology purchases and the addition of online information to the school library's diverse range of resourcing formats. The first websites developed in schools in the mid- to late-1990s were often the school library's web presence — for many TLs, the Web 1.0 world was seen as a 'natural' and powerful step

forward in the provision of resources and information services. However, something changed and shifted — how were we caught unawares?

Harris refers to this latter shift as '*the digital reshift*' with the emergence of the Web 2.0 world. In his presentation, Harris drew upon the iconic photo of Apple Corporation's Steve Jobs launching the iPad to represent this reshift (Harris 2010b, Slide 3). He argued the school library profession appeared to have lost its foothold somewhat. Why was this? Is it because TLs were still focusing on the Web 1.0 information services provision and not shifting towards greater involvement in student learning? Web 2.0 is about communication, collaboration, content creation, where students are producers rather than mere consumers of information. If a TL was not already working as an instructional partner or, even better, an instructional leader in terms of integrating technology into the curriculum, where are they now placed in this *digital reshift*? Unfortunately for some TLs, conversations about the implications of Web 2.0 were occurring within their school community or education system, without them being seen as an essential strategic partner.

Predicting this reshift

As a result of the BER program (DEEWR 2009), the focus of a large number of Australian school communities in the past two years has been based on the question, 'What do you want your school library to look like?' In architectural parlance, such focus is on '*the form* — the look and feel, the layout, the light, the furniture, and colours'. However, I would strongly argue the question to be asked by these school communities is, 'What do you want your school library to do?', where '*the function*'

guides the form, or design. The latter provides opportunities to discuss the implications of the *digital reshift* and clearly shape the future vision, goals, actions and outcomes of the school library's role in supporting student learning in 21st century schools. How has your role changed as a result of the building of your school's new or refurbished library — any shift?

I think 21st century learners predicted the *digital reshift*, but I don't think we were listening very carefully. For example, the results of my *Student Learning through Australian School Libraries* study (2004–2006) highlighted the value students place on the technology environment, services and support provided by their school library. While students ranked the school library's contribution regarding computer and Internet use as the most important out of all seven blocks of school library help, the teacher and TL groups perceived the school library as being the *least helpful* in terms of technology access and use to support students' learning (Hay 2006a). The study found that flexible access to computers, printers, Internet and other resources, including teaching expertise, before school and at non-class times is valued highly by students, and they link their academic success to such support (Hay 2006b).

Ultimately the school library was seen by these students as an information hub that supported the demands placed on them as information and technology users, both at school and when working independently from home (Hay 2006b). TLs who have strategically positioned themselves as Web 2.0 innovators and leaders of learning within their school in the past few years have managed to maintain their contribution throughout this *digital reshift*, where learning beyond the confines of the school precinct

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and learning management system has become *pratique intégrale* (integral to daily practice).

The home–school nexus

The *Student Learning through Australian School Libraries* study also highlighted the importance of building or strengthening the home–school nexus (Hay 2006a; 2006b), and within the context of the Web 2.0 world and Australia's Digital Education Revolution (DER) (DEEWR 2010) the need to establish this connection has become even more important. Add to this the impact of the five key trends identified in the 2010 *Horizon Report: K–12 Edition* report as technology drivers of technology adoption for education (Johnson, Smith, Levine & Haywood 2010, p. 4), where:

- *Technology is increasingly a means for empowering students, a method for communication and socializing, and a ubiquitous, transparent part of their lives.*
- *Technology continues to profoundly affect the way we work, collaborate, communicate, and succeed.*
- *The perceived value of innovation and creativity is increasing.*
- *Increased interest in just-in-time alternate, or non-formal avenues of education such as online learning, mentoring, and independent study.*
- *The way we think of learning environments is changing.*

With the introduction of education system roll-outs of 1:1 laptop programs and the emergence of mobile devices as ubiquitous information and communication tools, we find ourselves on the cusp of yet another 'digital shift'. Dealing with generational change has become part of our personal and professional lives — get used to it.

And let's not forget the teachers. From conversations I have had this year with principals of smaller primary

schools who have recently built fabulous new library facilities, they now need a TL! But their vision is one of a curriculum and technology leader, one who provides professional development for teachers with regard to integrating new technology tools and instructional initiatives. Someone who can lead the testing and trialling of new ideas, provide guidance in making better connections between school and home, and developing information policies and curriculum to support the development of students and teachers as informed, digital citizens. They are looking for an information leader who can assist their school in transforming pedagogical practice and student learning to accommodate the generations of 'shift' as they emerge. How does our profession's current practice reflect this role?

Rethinking what we do

In 2009 I was commissioned to write a chapter from the 'school library' perspective on strengthening the home–school nexus within the context of a digitally driven, socially networked world (Hay 2010). At the same time I was working with Ross Todd on the 21st century school library project for the NSW Department of Education and Training where we hosted an online discussion on envisioning school libraries (Hay & Todd 2010). As part of these initiatives, I was expected to ask the *hard question*, 'Do 21st century schools really need school libraries?' This is when I started to feel uncomfortable about what our future holds in terms of school libraries and TLs.

Around the same time I came across an interview with Ken Maher, Sydney-based architect and Professor of Architecture at the University of NSW where he was asked to identify what he thought was the

most innovative product design. His answer? 'The continuing editions of Apple computers, including iPod and iPhone — a communications and education revolution of outstanding design, lineage and adaptive reinvention.' (Q Magazine July 2009, p. 80)

My response to reading this was, what happened if we replaced the iPhone with, 'the school library [is] a communications and education revolution of outstanding design, lineage and adaptive reinvention.' I wish! Enter, the iCentre concept.

Building an iCentre based on form, function and brand

In the mid-1990s, we were challenged with the idea of transforming the traditional school library into an information services unit with a chief information officer at the helm (Lee 1996, 2004; Hay & Kallenberger 1996; Hay 2001, 2004). While some schools embraced this approach, I would argue this was more a branding exercise than significantly transforming *form and function*. In the past decade a number of universities have explored new ways of providing integrated information-technology-learning spaces which also draw upon a sense of community and meeting the social needs of students. This has led to the design of 'information commons' or 'knowledge commons' (Lippincott 2006), and more recently in school settings, a 'learning commons' model based on the work of David Loertscher and colleagues (Loertscher, Koechlin, & Zwaan 2008; Loertscher & Diggs 2009).

A strength of Loertscher's commons model is the emphasis on 'learning' rather than 'library' and 'labs'. However, we need to move beyond the *form* in terms of facility design and tackle one major challenge still

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facing schools today — the silo-based infrastructure of information, technology and learning — which has become the *thorn in the side* for many principals who have not been able to successfully reconcile existing power bases.

It is essential that library/information and technology departments be 're-engineered to achieve a synergy and functionality that transcends the traditional paradigms of 20th century schools' out of which will emerge 'a new information-based, technology-enriched learning centre' (Hay 2010, p.150). Schools need to develop an information infrastructure with an emphasis on 'i' (information) and 'l' (learning), not 'IT' infrastructure. What's the solution?

iCentre is a solution to the digital reshift

Schools need to brave the convergence of facilities, technologies, people and resources, to develop an iCentre which becomes the central facility within the school where information, technology, learning and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and learning technology specialists. It is a centre that provides students, teachers, administration staff and parents with a one-stop shop for all resourcing, technology and learning needs on a daily basis.

The philosophy underpinning the iCentre reflects that of our digitally driven, socially networked world, where the power of bringing information, technology and people together supports the increasingly complex machinations of the knowledge society. The concept of 'i' also builds on the successes of Apple Corporation's i-generation of digital technologies which are iconic of 21st century life. This is supported by two of the five megatrends, 'i World' and

the personalisation of products and services, CSIRO Australia (2010) has identified as significantly changing the way we live and the science and technology our society needs. These certainly highlight the need for schools to leverage generational change in terms of a new model for schooling that better reflects an 'i World'. Schools need to consider how the iCentre concept can contribute to the 'education revolution' required for schools to reinvent themselves as 21st century learning organisations. It is time to make this *shift* happen.

For many schools, the school library facility could be identified as a logical place to begin this reinvention, because an iCentre builds on and expands the portfolio of school libraries as we have traditionally known them. School architects and change agents for education, Nair and Gehling (2007) support this view, stating while libraries '... continue to evolve. The purpose and experience of libraries will change, and change again, in their physical and virtual iterations' (p. 6). This is exactly what we are faced with now and we need to seriously consider re-engineering, transforming, reshifting and rebranding what we have known traditionally as school libraries into a 21st century learning centre that is more than what it is now.

Form

The iCentre is a high-end multimedia production facility which acts as the information-technology-learning hub for a school. While it is the technology engine of a networked school connecting classrooms, specialist learning spaces, offices, corridors, homes and mobile devices to the wider networked world, it also provides the school community with a large, flexible learning space based on fluid design

principles to support 'collaboration, performance, creativity, interactivity and exploration, both online and offline' (Schibsted 2005). One would expect the layout of an iCentre to look different on a daily basis depending on the range of individual, small group, class-based, or whole year- or discipline-based activities it accommodates at any given time, that is. the *form* it takes reflects the *function*.

An essential component of the iCentre concept is that the technical and administrative aspects of technology management are secondary to the learning agenda within the school. Schools can reshape their existing information and technology infrastructures to 'build' an iCentre. Keeping in mind that the *form* involves not just the blending of physical and online facilities, schools will be required to rethink the way existing information and technology staff are 'blended'. This would include executive or leading teacher positions such as curriculum coordinator, ICT coordinator, learning technologies facilitator, head of information services or TL; teachers involved in the provision of professional development for staff and learning technology mentorship; and a range of support staff. Ultimately the goal here is to ensure the necessary staffing reflects the same convergence of information, technology and learning in society. This convergence requires all team members to be part of the same conversation about the intersection of information, technology, curriculum and pedagogy in supporting the educational goals of the school. These conversations inform the strategic directions, policy and practice to meet these goals. This team approach is essential for an iCentre to deliver a holistic, synergised educational program that supports 21st century learning.

'The iCentre brand can provide our profession with an opportunity to re-engineer "what we do" within the context of 21st century learning'

A school adopting a 'one-stop shop' approach would, therefore, base all support staff, including information, technical and administration support, within the same physical centre. For example, the recent allocation of technology support officer (TSO) positions to NSW government secondary schools to support the roll-out and maintenance of the 1:1 laptop program would be a suitable addition to the staffing profile of an iCentre team. The introduction of digital learning specialist positions in some independent school libraries is another example of potential iCentre team membership. This ensures a student, teacher, executive or parent can gain access to assistance or services they need by visiting the one 'service' or *i* desk. This would also be reflected in the provision of an *i* portal for online support.

Function

The core business of an iCentre involves:

- a qualified team of information, technology and learning experts whose knowledge, skills and motivations support 21st century learners with relevant, flexible, 24/7, customised information, technology and learning services — in school, at home and via mobile devices
- pedagogical fusion — bringing information, technology, people, and pedagogy together to support student learning, where pedagogy is central to all decision-making, policy and practice
- the support of inquiry learning and immersive learning experiences utilising a range of information and resources, without privileging one format over another, where inquiry is not an add-on to the curriculum — students learn content, skills

and values within the curriculum through inquiry (based on the work of Kuhlthau, Caspari & Maniotes 2007)

- the design of curricula that moves students beyond information literacy to that of transliteracy, developing students as independent, informed digital citizens (Hamilton 2010)
- supporting teachers to take risks as learning and technology innovators, where 'nuts & bolts' technical support and learning design supports change in pedagogical practice
- the provision of customised 'i' support for students, teachers, school administrators and parents (face-to-face and online support for all information, technology and learning needs)
- the provision of information leadership in terms of informed policy development that supports access and instruction, rather than a 'banning before thinking' approach, and a cross-curricula digital citizenship program to ensure administrators, teachers, students and parents become ethically responsible and digitally savvy citizens
- the management of a research agenda within the school where evidence-based practice, action research and data-driven policy informs a sustainable program of improved student learning outcomes, pedagogical growth, learning innovation and continuous improvement.

Brand

The iCentre brand can provide our profession with an opportunity to re-engineer 'what we do' within the context of 21st century learning. The key construct of the iCentre brand is that of a dynamic, responsive, fluid 'instructional zone' within and beyond

the school. It is a learning centre of information, inquiry, innovation, immersion and instructional intervention. It is a learning centre that supports connectivity and collaboration, critical engagement and creativity, construction and consolidation. It is a learning centre where pedagogy fuses the work of information, technology and learning specialists across the curriculum, and strengthens the home-school nexus. It is where key information, technology and learning leaders within a school *combine* to consolidate their efforts to transform their school into a 21st century learning organisation. This is the iCentre brand.

It is important the iCentre is not viewed as just a new 'cool' label for a newly refurbished school library building. An iCentre is *not* a school library. Its form and function goes well beyond that of a school library, or that of an information commons or learning commons. DiFrisco (2010) argues that:

Branding starts with goals; all successful brands are aspirational. They aspire to be something. To begin building your brand, you need to have clearly developed objectives for what you want your company [or school] to look like in the next year, five years, and ten years.

The three principles of form, function and brand provide a useful framework for schools wishing to explore the convergence of facilities, resources, people, funding, policy, programs and services to develop an iCentre. TLs as information, technology and learning specialists can play a leadership role in building their school's vision towards an iCentre approach.

Shift happens. It's time to rethink, rebuild and rebrand. Let the revolution and reinvention begin.

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