

Anticipating needs into the twenty-first century

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The rôle of the teacher-librarian in the twenty-first century is likely to be different to the rôle which has been accepted, at least by ALIA, since the 1970s. Certainly teacher-librarians are likely to continue to have a rôle in both the school curriculum and in school management but it is the nature of the rôle which will offer exciting opportunities. I would like to foreshadow a rôle which has not yet been widely discussed, although it does have elements in common with information resource management and its practice in organisations and business.

Let us reflect on what schools need in information terms. As learning organisations (which is different from an organisation that offers learning programs and I guess schools are both) schools must have information — it is their life blood and without it they will stagnate. What is the information that schools of the twenty-first century need? It seems to me that there are two kinds of information:

Organisational information — information schools require to run as organisations which are accountable to their communities and to those who fund them. Included is financial information, personnel records, industrial arguments, the 'corporate memory', the records of meetings and decisions, policies and procedures, asset inventories, insurance policies, student records and technological specifications.

Educational information — information related to the 'core' activity, educational programs. Included is information about the curriculum, teaching and learning, research information about education.

Another way of conceptualising these two categories is to consider organisational information as being the information about a school's infrastructure and educational information as being the information about a school's programs which are dependent on the infrastructure for their delivery.

In schools it is possible to distinguish between their infrastructure (information technology, sport equipment, library collections, databases, buildings, business papers) and their programs (education and learning), in other words between what it is that supports learning and the learning that takes place.

Traditionally, teacher-librarians have been concerned in the main with educational programs, and more recently with the information skills curriculum. It is important to acknowledge that trained teacher-librarians have knowledge and skills in information and its management which is unique to them. It is important to acknowledge also that they have knowledge and skills in teaching which are shared with other teachers in schools. However, teacher-librarians do not have expertise across all areas of the curriculum, and this tends to limit their rôle in educational programs. Disciplinary or subject expertise is needed to evaluate information (as opposed to information resources) and to appreciate the process of knowledge building and dissemination in a discipline. Nor do teacher-librarians have expertise in curriculum and program devel-

opment.

This expertise lies with teachers responsible for introducing their students to ways of knowing and thinking about the world and supporting the progress of their students as self-directed and independent learners.

What then is the expertise of teacher-librarians? It lies in information and its management and as a consequence teacher-librarians are able to contribute significantly to providing support for learning and teaching programs or in other words, to the development of the school's information infrastructure. The school library and its full range of information resources is part of that infrastructure and so too are the school's students and personnel records, its archives and its financial records.

Let's call teacher-librarians information specialists, those who are responsible for the information infrastructure for both educational programs and functioning as organisations. With their expertise in analysing the information needs of school communities, retrieving information, organising information, presenting information, information specialists should be able to make a real difference to the school as an *organisation*. Information specialists would need to be senior staff members and lead teams of people in the information unit in schools. They would need to work closely with the staff, the principal and the school council.

With across-school responsibilities, information specialists would do things that maybe teacher librarians have never done before, for example, prepare a publicity program and promotional materials and activities for the school, advise school council on technology purchases, develop financial systems, draft annual reports, monitor the school's budget, contribute to staff development, maintain the 'corporate' memory and even perhaps lead the administration staff in schools. Information specialists would continue to do some things that teacher-librarians have always done, for example, maintain circulation systems, coordinate library staff, prepare and monitor budgets. This picture of information specialists in schools of course raises many questions. For example, do information specialists need to be teachers? What is/are the ideal knowledge and skill base(s) of information specialists? Where is the information team most effectively located in the school as an organisation?

The essential point of this speculation on the rôle of teacher-librarians is not that it challenges the status quo but meets the needs and shape of schools as they are likely to be in ten years time. ■

