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A school library built for the digital age: 45th Annual International Conference & 20th International Forum on Research in School Librarianship

This year's conference attracted attendees from over 30 countries and featured a range of keynote speakers, professional and research papers. It provided me with an insight into the strategies taking place in other countries as well as projects within individual schools.

Background to Japanese School Libraries: Japan's School Library Act, 1953 requires that every school has a library both at Primary and Secondary level. The quality of the libraries across the country does vary from institution to institution. The law also requires that every school should have a teacher-librarian, however a caveat in the legislation has meant that this part is not obligatory. In response to pressure, the law was revised in 1997 to ensure that a Librarain had to be recruited for schools that had more than 12 classes. This covered almost half of all the schools in Japan in 2003. The second amendment to the law in 2014 stated that schools 'should' have a school librarian.

Keynotes

Mr Takashi Atoda, Awarding winning writer and Librarian, Japan

The conference opening keynote was by a renowned Japanese columnist, short story and novel writer, Mr Takeshi Atoda. Mr Atoda has won numerous prizes for his writing and is now also the Librarian of Yanamanshi Prefectural Library. His talk was a collection of personal reminiscences of his own experiences of reading, libraries and school and also about the impact that reading had had on people that he knew personally.

He advocated that the positive impact that using the library can have on individuals can be hidden but that it is immensely powerful and long lasting. He proposed that the 'authentic' value of libraries is to work in the classroom alongside teachers and as a part of learning. Use of the library, he felt, should be required as it equipped the pupils with knowledge that they can use to be able to take part in society, in this way the library has an 'authentic value'. He stressed that the education system cannot teach everything, "I got my capabilities outside of standard learning - I was interested in things outside of the standard. That helped me to become a novelist."

He was also an advocate of active and critical reading. He mentioned Edgar Allen Poe's "Marginalia: thoughts in the margins" and the importance of how you read books. Do you agree or disagree with what you are reading? He encouraged the audience to make notes and have ideas about what they read.

He ended by stating his top three priorities for a library: third was the building and the environment, second was the collection and first was the librarian – the human resource.

Overall this session emphasised the individual as being important and the enormous and lasting difference that a library service and an engaged librarian can have on the individual and that this was important. Often how a pupil will use a library can be hidden, but this is a space that reflects a school's commitment to letting pupils explore and discover things that interest them that are not tested or examined and are outside of the expected learning pathway.

This is a powerful concept.

Dr Dianne Oberg, Professor Emerita of Alberta University, USA

School Library Evaluation: For Accountability AND Understanding

Dr Oberg's keynote addressed the difficult task of evaluating the library service and why it is important to do so. She stated that the biggest challenge is to meet the expectations for contributing to the success of school, both academic and Social.

Evaluation is about ACCOUNTABILITY and evidence for practice, but it is also important for developing understanding and opening up the possibility for transformation. Opinions and viewpoints can change because of the results from evaluation.

Evidence can be gathered in three ways:

1. Research and standards
2. Recording, Mining and Analyzing data – e.g. evidence gathered from OPAC use to inform decisions or records of which classes do not come into the library.
3. Outcomes and Impact. Evidence of practice - statistical studies correlating student achievement with library inputs

The wider global perspective is useful but it is important to consider the **context**, for example, in Canada there is no national office for education, no LIS granting agency and few school library researchers whereas in Japan there is a national office of education and a school library law.

In "Leading Learning" (2014) are the school library standards that were published for Canada. It has 5 standards and a rating system of: Exploring Emerging, Evolving, Established and Leading into the future. The standards cover key developments such as, Cultivating effective instructional design and Fostering literacies. The 2015, IFLA Library Guidelines contain 16 recommendations with the rating system: applicable, partially, applicable, not applicable

Dr Oberg emphasised that evaluation is a task for the profession.

The main impact of this session, for me, was the call to generate evaluative evidence and that guidance is needed from professional bodies to encourage and guide practitioners to become experts in gathering and analysing data from their own service.

Professor Machiko Sataonaka, Manga artist and Writer, Japan
Japanese MANGA Culture

This session focused on the history of the Manga form and the key change in style that took place within this form by the godfather of Managa Tezuku Osamu, whose art work is considered to be a 'game changer' as he turned Manga from being considered as being just for children into an art form that could be used to convey a range of complex stories and emotions for any age. Through Manga stories Professor Sataonaka said that she learned empathy for characters and also that characters could be complex, rather than either simply good or bad e.g. Astroboy. For her, Manga stories taught her the moral values of doing something just because you believe it is right or because it is for others.

Manga is used to communicate a philosophy of life and contains many genres. In junior high Professor Satonaka decided to become a cartoonist. She was annoyed by traditional girls' manga. She wanted to do something new and to create a girl who could make her own decisions and decide her own way in life. Although this was a risky decision, her stories gained readers and became more popular.

Manga places a lot of responsibility on the reader to immerse themself in the story. The art work forces you to empathise with, and understand, the position of others and the reader is exposed to many different viewpoints. She would like to see children use Manga characters as a means of expression in their work.

This session promoted the depth of emotion and empathy that can be created by using this form of storytelling. The art form is popular and easily accessible and can be used to convey a variety of themes and utilised by students themselves to create responses to tasks and ideas.

Dr James Herring, UK Future schools, future school libraries

Dr Herring's keynote was about future gazing in to schools and school libraries. This was a picture that was built up from the story of the past. The students that society needs today should be creative thinkers and innovators. The skills needed are communication, initiative, social interaction and teamwork.

What is the role of technology? The technologies that are becoming important now are: Augmented reality, 3D printing and Cloud computing. It will be interesting to see how they shape the school and the school library of the future. The key questions relating to these technologies are: Who will own and produce the technologies, Who will control these technologies, How much will technologies cost and Who will be able to access these technologies?

However, future schools are not primarily concerned with the type of technology that will be used but also with learning and **Information Literacy.** Dr Herring suggested that **Information Literacy** is going to be the key aspect in schools along with managing the learning space.

He raised some interesting questions about the nature of **Information Literacy**: is IL related to learning or information resources? Should we refer to IL skills or practices? The term practices, he

suggested, conveyed the idea that IL includes the knowledge and skills that students not only acquire but reflect on and transfer. Transferring and re-enforcing skills is crucial. He also acknowledged the continuing question of who teaches and integrates IL across the curriculum and also the problem of the terminology **– Information Literacy** as too often it gets confused or subsumed within study skills. As information sources grow, teaching students to be critical becomes even more important.

Dr Herring stressed that behind other literacies lies **information literacy** and **information literacy** practices.

Seminar Sessions: This is an overview of the breakout sessions that I attended during the conference.

Per Johansson: The challenges of a school library in the digital age as a resource helping educating refugee children and integrating them into the Swedish society.

This session focussed on the challenges presented by the growth in the refugee population in Sweden and the influx of teenagers into publically funded schools. Sweden is a multicultural society that has 100% literacy but with the influx of refugees there has been a resulting drop in the PISA results. Sweden has the highest number of refugees registered in an OECD survey.

 The amount of unaccompanied children has also risen. Per talked about the challenges of responding to teenagers who had escaped a war zone in terms of presenting them with a service that was relevant to them. School is the point of first contact but accessing what is being offered requires literacy. For some of the older teens this can be a challenge as they do not see learning a language as a priority. Additional students has meant that groups from the same country notably, Syria and Afghanistan, have risen reducing the impetus to integrate. There are big culture differences and they have different needs, created from their experiences, to the resident population.

In Sweden it is not compulsory to have a professional librarian and Teacher-librarians are not common. The library that the speaker works in is shared by 2 schools and has 60 spaces. It is open 6 hours a day and is well resourced. They advocate reading for pleasure and historically this has meant resources that are Swedish and English. Per plans to expand the literature that is available in the library to include works in Arabic and Persian. Part of the response is to use easy readers about living in Sweden and its culture, laws, human rights and gender attitudes. He hopes that authors will respond to this growing demand and write the types of stories that this audience needs. He concluded that, for him, the best way is to look at them is as human beings, just kids, and try and reach out to them in the best way that you can.

This was a thought provoking session that illustrated the different needs created by different experiences and the challenges that can be created by growth in specific groups within the community. It is important to look at balance and how funds are being allocated across the user groups and to make decision about the level of need.

Cynthia Houston: Reinventing your reference collection for the 21st century : tools and tips for creating school library print reference collection
Slideshare.net/media3693

This session focused on the importance of reinvigorating the reference section of the library. Cynthia proposed that it was important to have a reference collection strategy. Key questions to ask are: What have you got and how old is it, are we thinking strategically and what formats are we going to include? Rather than a first stop for answers, the purpose of print reference collections are as browsing grounds for curious minds. Reference books/resources can be a useful way of teaching pupils about how information is organised and should be used as part of **information literacy** teaching. Her slides included examples on how to create a plan and supporting policies. Her strongest suggestion was that it the section needs to be weeded to stay relevant and current. Reference works also must be integrated into the **information literacy** plan so that pupils actively use the resources.

This was a practical session that provided a starting point for ensuring that the reference materials that are held in a collection are both relevant and accessible. Planning is a key tool to raise awareness, good practice and to ensure that reference tools are used.

Deborah Brown: School libraries and power-houses of empathy: People on loan in the Human Library Dbrown@monte.nsw.edu.au

An example of using people as a human library was explored in this session. Deborah provided a fascinating insight into how the annual event was used to foster empathy and respect beyond the school walls through the simple act of a conversation. It was used to support the schools emphasis on social justice and to bring the world into school library. This scheme can be used to explore a range of concepts and the people used as books chosen accordingly.

Elsa Conde: School Libraries in Portugal (1996-2016) looking into the future

This session provided information about the impact of policy over the last 20 years by the ministry of education in Portugal concerning the strategic framework, evaluation model and learning with the school library. She emphasised the importance of strategic partnerships with telecommunications companies that had been created, for example, to provide equipment and resources for SEN pupils. Other examples of projects included growth of online communities, projects in health and science literacy and initiatives to improve literacy through partnership with Manga associations. The PISA results show improvement.

The strategy has included dissemination of best practice in libraries via an online portal with each project having an explanation sheet and video. I particularly like the section where the library presents 'itself' and what it does in the school. There has also been a national competition - Short films in the library – where the entries that get the most likes or number of times watched are posted on the school libraries website.

Training is also being provided through the strategy to Teacher Librarians and Teachers. This phase is

a challenge but it is taking place. Statistics on the impact of the initiatives have been collected and published: "School library network program: 20 years with RBE a story with a future". The result of the programme is that more teacher librarians are being trained and certified. The focus of the training is now turning towards cyber/media skills.

This was a snapshot of what is being undertaken at a national level to provide a strategy for providing schools with libraries and qualified librarians who can take a role in raising **information literacy** and literacy skills amongst pupils. The future plans include continued support for the promotion of new literacies.

Yuriko Matsuda Café in a school library: to strengthen links with school and society

Piccari Café runs at selected lunchtimes and after school in the library where drinks and snacks provided for free to students attendees. The scheme has become very popular, sometimes attracting around 300 people with teachers, students and past graduates attending.

The Café has become a platform for prevention and a place to pick up ideas a 'Cultural shower'. **Information Literacy** education is being undertaken in a natural way without explicit teaching but as a tool for solving problems and learning new skills as both people and resources are used in the sessions to learn, discover and develop. The Librarian's role is to promote good relationships between all the different attendees.

Naoko Sakashita, The 21st century skills of the school library - Keyword is Why? Japan

Naoko is a School Librarian and part time Lecturer at an elementary school and is attached to Kyoto Women's University. In this session Naoko identified 21st century skills as being: **Information Literacy**, critical thinking, ICT literacy, collaboration and citizenship. She suggested creating a library portfolio for each student that could be used to reflect pupil curiosity and trace the history or own ideas and how their questions grow.

The key point in this session was that curiosity needs to be nurtured it otherwise it can be lost.

Where does curiosity go?

Ross Todd and Virgilo Medina Empowering students for a Digital world: global concerns, local school evidence and strategic actions

This was an example of evidence based practice and the strategy that had been put in place in one school to discover the skills that students needed and wanted in relation to digital literacy skills teaching. The strength of this session was due to the practitioner sharing, the methodology that he had used to collect evidence, how the evidence was interpreted and the additional questions that then arose.

In his school the answers from questionnaires had revealed that pupils felt confident when asked about their digital skills, but that this did not match with their competence, however Virgilo

emphasised that it was important to acknowledge this confidence and use this to encourage competence. Perceptions of competence were uncovered through questions such as: Name some things you find easy to do online? What are some of the difficulties you have online? How can the school library help you? This provided some evidence of what the students can do. An interesting concern from the students, what does a safe website look like rather than a quality website.

Loh Chin Ee: Reading, school libraries and equity: a socio- spatial study of school libraries and reading in Singapore

The question that lay behind this piece of research was: How can the academic results and learning experience between rich and poor children become more equal? Statistics show that the children from richer homes are doing consistently better in school whereas poorer children are falling behind.

How can the library encourage more pupils to visit? Move from student as problem to space as problem. A geosemiotic approach was used and a comparative case study was undertaken to look at how the space in the school library was arranged. The results were then used to create a more student friendly environment.

This session reinforced the importance of library design and space management. It also showed that how a space is used affects the perceptions of the users. Who comes in and what they do builds an ethos, for example, reading in the library can encourage other readers. Bring pupils in to undertake research is therefore a powerful indicator of the ethos of the school.

Meghan Harper Designing an innovative school library environment to facilitate 21st century literacy skills, Kent state library, Ohio

This session also reinforced that how a space is arranged has an impact on its use. It's important to consider the attitude of learners and especially this generation who, "are impatient, creative, expressive and social. They are risk takers who thrive on less constructed environments." (Partnership for 21st century learners). For learners who are always connected and creating content, **Information Literacy** skills act as a resident umbrella that runs in the background of their activities. It is also important to bear in mind that teens come to the library for contradictory services so it is important to think about how students are going to be working in different situations and with different formats.

This session emphasised that IL skills are vital for modern learners and are almost unseen competencies that lie behind their everyday actions and decision making. The design of the library space needs to complement and facilitate the variety of needs that teenagers have both academic and social; zoning of space is key to this.

Natsuko Ogawa: A new learning space combining digital info and books - the case of Seisho-Kaichi school Japan

This was a design based session that explored the concept of designing a school *inside* a library was achieved by basing the library in the middle of the school design and placing book collections outside

of relevant classroom areas to encourage use and efficiency. The library is viewed as an organic space that is open to all. The layout of the space can be changed with the use of mobile furniture. All pupils have access to tablets and laptops.

The on-going challenge is to train teachers and students about how to use space and to combine the resources when gathering information. The school wants all the teachers to have librarian training.

David Loertscher Blanche Woolls: **The school library interdisciplinary collaborative virtual, USA**

Focussing on active learning, this session posed questions about the online resources that can be made available through the library to encourage collaborative learning and curiosity such as virtual makerspaces and knowledge building centres. They advocated the learning commons approach saying that every child needs to know that they can contribute to and not just learn from the world. There is a link to David's blog - mind shift **Http:/tinyurl.com/hzbqkd2** for more ideas and information.

Liselott Drejstam: The key to digitisation success: making the school librarian a true pedagogical partner, Sweden

There is a national strategy in place in schools in Sweden for IT called Vision 2022, which advocates for all pupils to have developed adequate literacy skills that will enable them to use digital technology and resources. Liselott has been employed to develop **Information Literacy**, literacy and provide an integrated service and to develop her vision. This has included use of SkolArena, an online tool that is controlled by school librarians, that provides access to a range of electronic sources and, in addition, ebooks by pupils can be posted onto the link. She is also involved in delivering **Information Literacy** skills in all grades from planning to evaluation. Pupil results and tests of IL skills suggest that the involvement of the librarian has been a part of improved attainment scores.

Koichi Yukishima & Kazuyuki Sunaga: A practice of one days training course of IL for teachers in Japan.

Teachers have to renew their teaching license every 10 years in Japan. They must complete a 12 hour subject course and an 18 hour elective course. The curriculum guidelines state that students must acquire skills to solve problems independently and it is recommended that the library is used as one way of doing this. Teachers should encourage pupils to take part in active research, however many do not know how so this IL course has been developed for teachers.

The course uses J. Herring's PLUS model as a basis for the research process and teachers are provided with a topic that they need to research. Teachers are then guided through the reflection process in terms of the skills they have used. Koichi and Kazuyuki have gathered positive responses from participants on the course. The next step is to provide a longer course and to use the book by J

Herring "Improving students' web use and Info Literacy: a guide for teachers and teaching librarians" (2011) that has recently been translated into Japanese so that they can include more Web 2.0 skills.

This session showed the importance of teaching the teachers **information literacy** skills that they could then apply in the classroom.

Rebecca Jones, 2016