Are you the principal of an information literate school community?

Do you and your staff understand the meaning of information literacy and more importantly are you the principal of an information literate school?
Lyman & Varian (2003) who conducted research in 2002, to determine the amount of new information created and stored annually, found that 5 exabytes of information, which is equivalent to the information contained in 37, 000 new libraries the size of the Library of Congress book collection, had been created. (There are 17 million books in the Library of Congress library.) Does your school community have the skills to manage and use such information?

A school which will both lead the way in the 21st century and facilitate a learning environment in which your students may 'confidently define, locate and critically use information from across a broad range of information sources and technologies' (Todd 1996*)*, is a school which through problem-solving, decision-making, exploration and creativity develops students who are information literate. The Australian School Library Association (2006) defines information smart communities as those which 'use the latest and best information to develop sound policies.'
Is this your school?

As a school leader how can you utilise your current staff to facilitate change within your current school community? How can you use the unpredictable change process to build a vibrant learning community? The solution is more viable than you ever imagined.

Fullan (1999) says that 'it is the quality of the relationships among organisational members, as they evolve, that makes for long term success.' As principal you are in the position to develop and foster relationships that will lead to the development of a committed learning community. Guiding ideas, writes Senge (1996), that are insightful, informed and demonstrate common goals, are 'fostered by leaders who lead as teachers, stewards and designers.' It is your role to provide the balance between external and internal forces to develop purposeful knowledge (Fullan 1999). This is the role which you must adopt in order to expedite the development of an information literate school community.

To implement successful change practices within a community, an understanding of the theories which underpin a successful learning community is first required. Fullan (1999) cites the Child Development Project which succeeded, because as a model, it encompassed dual theories - pedagogical reform and shaping local conditions. Learning communities are developed to facilitate and develop reciprocal knowledge which will benefit the community and the individual. The learning community as defined by Kilpatrick (2003) links the members of the community by both definition and use. The community members may share a common purpose or interest and decide to join as a partnership to enhance potential outcomes. They may be geographically aligned and initially collaborate, simply because of location, however, the outcome could be the same as if the group had specifically joined with the goal of effecting a change.

Yarnit (2000) considers that the increase in the popularity of a learning community which is geographically bound and forms a partnership between public, private and non-profit

organisations was the direct result of a change in world economics which enabled easy access to information and communication technology. This then led to the definition of a learning community as being one which addresses the needs of its locality. In forming the learning community the criteria for its establishment needs to be considered.

Kilpatrick (2003) also acknowledges that learning communities are formed with people who share a common purpose. Learning communities are able to achieve a solution to a problem, e.g. the design of a new report format, by collaborating and using the strengths that are inherent in each group member. Kilpatrick (2003) recognises that learning communities have two major foci, these being the human element and the curricular structures which are used to develop knowledge. Consideration of the human element is important and it is imperative that within educational learning communities there is a feeling of trust which has been developed between the principal and the staff, and the staff with each other. Change is not sustainable if this is not evident. An autocratic leader can only achieve and sustain change whilst they are present. The community must believe in the common purpose of an information literate school community.

When learning communities share a common goal they support each other in learning (Wilson and Ryder c1997?) and within a learning community the members expect learning to take place. Wilson and Ryder (c1997?) suggest that learning communities can become dynamic when all participants are involved in the learning experience and all members have the opportunity to share the leadership roles. Kilpatrick (2000) says learning communities can be deliberately fostered through the sharing of leadership and utilising the skills and knowledge of all contributors. It is the role of the principal to facilitate this sharing of leadership. Wilson and Ryder (c1997?) agree that 'within a dynamic learning community the observer would expect to see an organisation in which the leadership is shared amongst groups of people who through the engagement in a high level of dialogue, interaction and collaboration are able to negotiate learning activities which result in the sharing of new knowledge.'

A dynamic learning community has the capacity for change, as it develops community members who are adept at diagnosing and addressing their learning needs. The community is not static. A professional learning community reflects changes that occur 'in relationships, culture, roles, norms, communication patterns and practices' (Huffman 2001). The creation of a school vision is integral to the change process and although it can be implemented over time it must be based upon the common values and beliefs of the community. It is a vision which must be shared by all, collaboratively written and not just invented by the administrators to frame and display in the foyer of the school office.

To implement the theories of a learning community it is often necessary to change the thinking and actions of staff, students and the community which is why the principal must be a leader 'who models what matters'. They must create a change environment in which people are open to new ideas, responsive to change, and eager to develop new skills and capabilities' Henri (2005). This is not always easy as too often it is the experienced teachers who are suspicious of change as they have a strong belief in' if it's not broken, don't fix it.'

Henri (2000) describes an information literate community as 'a school community that places a high priority (policy, benchmarking, funding and evaluation) on the pursuit of teacher and student mastery of the processes of becoming informed'.

An information literate school has a constructivist environment, whereby the focus is on shared responsibilities, mentoring relationships and active learning. A successful information literate community is evidenced by the presentation of successful teaching programs which have been developed through a team approach to teaching and a commitment of staff to lifelong learning. Planning days, whereby staff can collaboratively plan units of work, grade/stage functions or report formats are essential to allow teachers the opportunity to experience successful collaboration. 'Successful programs show evidence of the teachers, the librarian, and the principal working together to facilitate, develop and implement instructional programs' (Henri 2005). As dialogue is encouraged in an information literate school community, changes within an environment are noticed more readily and solutions to problems shared throughout the group.

The information literate community has the capacity to develop information-literate students who know how to use information to their best advantage, irregardless of the situation. 'They are able to accurately identify the most useful information when making decisions.' (Hancock 1993) Becoming information literate is a life long journey and one which should be shared. Henri & Oberg (2005) stress that that information literacy begins with the educators and they must be information literate themselves before they can act as models for their students.

The theories associated with developing a learning community will enable you to confidently embark on the journey of developing your information literate school community, but before converting these theories to practices there is already an ally amongst your staff who daily employs the skills necessary to develop an information literate school community. It is time that the school community utilised the skills and knowledge of the teacher librarian!

'As members of the school instructional team, teacher librarians provide leadership in information literacy and work collaboratively with classroom teachers to ensure that literacy skills are integrated effectively into the instructional program' (Asselin, Branch & Oberg 2003, p7). The skills of the teacher librarian can be successfully utilised to contribute to the development of the learning community.

In addition to being a part of the school instructional team, the teacher librarian who administers the resources is mirroring, to a lesser extent the role of the principal who administers the school. At 'a most basic level, principals and librarians both administer varieties of programs and services that contribute to teacher and student success.' (Hartzell, 2003) As a result the teacher librarian is often perceived by the community as being a staff member in a position of authority. Capitalizing upon this perception can have immediate benefits for initiating the beginnings of an information literate community.

Hartzell's, (2003) view of change inherently involving conflict can be minimised by utilising the skills and knowledge of the teacher librarian. As the teacher librarian has the opportunity to interact with all others across the school community they are in an ideal position to implement change. The teacher librarian has access to information and knowledge about curriculum across all faculties or grade levels and is in contact with community members across all levels (Farmer

1999). This results in the teacher librarian having access to considerable information which is perceived as being a person with considerable influence. With the additional responsibility of resource management the teacher librarian is able to directly influence staff and students by providing advice on suitable purchases which will support teaching and learning. Teacher librarians also have the practical skills of organisation. These organisational skills need to be utilised for the benefit of all. Shared leadership will provide the teacher librarian with the opportunity to share these skills and knowledge with the community.

The teacher librarian who is involved in collaborative teaching and learning practices accommodates, and is cognisant of teachers' instructional styles and capabilities, in order to develop successful working relationships. An information literate learning community must have this understanding and collaboration between members for change and learning to occur. Team work is the underlying concept of a successful learning community. Teacher librarians continually practice teamwork. They are continually required to coordinate activities, negotiate suitable appropriate timings for all, build team relationships and consider the content of lessons and the location whereby the learning will take place. Professional development of staff is an ongoing service provided by the teacher librarian who shares the latest in retrieval techniques, designs research projects for students and assists staff and students in finding the resources they require.

'In schools where the library and librarian are properly recognised as integral to student success, the library is a powerful arena for transformation' (Hartzell, 2003). The library exhibits information literacy excellence, but this needs to be expanded to encompass the school community.
This transformation is exemplified in the Library Power project, a program of the DeWitt Wallace-reader's Digest Fund which through improved library facilities, resources and provision of professional development for librarians, teachers and principals is able to demonstrate, through improved student performance that 'school reform involves changing more than school structure and procedures' Zweizig and Hopkins (1999). It requires the community to be conducive to sharing and the development of a culture which requires collegial relationships based on trust and respect. This is the relationship currently shared by the teacher librarian with the community.

An information literate school community needs access to information in order to facilitate change. Wilson and Ryder (c1997?) list a number of ways in which the community may access information, all of which are currently used by teacher librarians and include human resources, archived interactions, frequently asked questions, information search tools and instruction. The teacher librarian sees the big picture, often through necessity, and is able to effectively work with fellow community members to plan, prioritise and focus on what is critical. Their environment which contains the resources of the school demonstrates their ever evolving commitment to lifelong learning and providing better information.

Information literate school communities are staffed with personnel who realise that learning is active and not passive and that knowledge is not static. These same personnel are able to objectively make decisions about old curriculum and consider the process as well as the content. The teacher librarian who may manage a collection of a few hundred or a collection of thousands

is continually required to assess the authenticity and currency of resources, often making tough decision to 'weed' resources which may be personal favourites. The teacher librarian needs to be, and is objective. An information literate school community looks beyond the immediate walls of the classroom to enrich the learning environment of their students, utilising resources from all media, a skill already demonstrated by the teacher librarian. Collaborative activities are evident and are used for student's learning experiences and to enrich the professional development of the staff involved.

Teacher librarians are in the most favorable position to be the leaders in developing an information-literate community due to their skills and knowledge but it should be an initiative for all learning communities whereby each member of the community contributes toward aspects of information literacy through the application of the skills of higher-level thinking and problem-solving

Principals who have developed information literate school communities acknowledge the worth of the library and the teacher librarian and the teacher librarian in turn must articulate their beliefs and act on those beliefs in concert with their principals. An information literate community is not achieved solely through the inclusion of a teacher librarian, within the community, but rather through the combined effort of the learning organisation which is led by a leader who understands the theories of developing an information literate school community and acknowledges the true worth of the teacher librarian.

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