

Keynote Speech

Transforming the Roles of Libraries and Librarians in the Digital Learning Environment



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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies which have revolutionized the society, educational environment and libraries have greatly impacted on librarians and librarians. Paradigm shift in libraries has given opportunities to librarians to play key roles in the new digital environment as information experts, educators, instructional designers, instructional partner, practitioners, researchers, research partners and innovators. The role of librarians can be transformed through new competencies, research and innovation, collaborative partnership or networking, continuing professional development and internationalization.

Keywords: *Libraries, Librarians, Digital Learning Environment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies transform the global society and all aspects of education, driving towards pedagogical change and broaden the scope of traditional education and conventional distance education to include e-learning, m-learning, online learning, virtual universities, virtual courses and virtual libraries, paving the way to open library, OER (Open Educational Resources), open education and open society. Digital technologies disrupt the established way of working and develop new organization models.

This new digital learning environment accommodates an individual's learning style and promotes student-centered learning, self-directed learning, active learning and collaborative learning. Teachers adopt the role of facilitators, tutors, and learners. Similarly, students will abandon the role of solitary memorizers of facts and principles for the role of researchers, problem solvers, and strategists and complete many learning activities in groups, which foster development of interpersonal collaborative skills. (Bates, 2015).

II. PARADIGM SHIFT IN LIBRARIES

Libraries as educational institutions have been confronting tremendous pressures to increase their productivity, deliver products and services that match the reading behavior, enormous expectations and needs of demanding new generation users and stakeholders in light of the wide spread adoption and use of mobile phones and social media tools. The transition of the libraries from traditional libraries to digital libraries focuses on digital information, digital resources, digital repository, databases, network, easy accessibility, a wide range of choices and sophisticated services that enable library users to access a new networked world of information.

Library environment is in the midst of constant changes with the availability of new technologies and network information technologies, and the teaching and learning reform. Current pedagogical practices place a greater need for group study spaces, which compete against the vital need for quiet study areas (Franks & Asher, 2014). Library is not only a place, or a physical space, but has been transformed to be the platform, a system, a learning common collaborative space, an academic support center, a social area, an intellectual information dissemination center, or innovation intermediary for fostering learning, sharing, communicating and collaborating.

The library becomes a central location for users to connect with and learn from one another, create and remix, display and discuss their work, and capture and preserve community knowledge (Andrews, 2016). Library connects people, information, resources and technology across boundaries. The physical boundaries of the library disappear and the need to own or store physical items is being eliminated. The library website has become a library branch in its own right (Vassilakaki, 2015). Today's libraries, especially academic libraries, are quite different from those in the past. As innovation intermediaries, academic libraries play an important role of co-creator of value instead of a traditional service provider focused on collecting and exchanging knowledge. Innovation intermediaries develop a number of roles and functions to stimulate knowledge creation and transfer by supporting interactions and collaborations among multiple parties (Casali, 2016).

Change as a whole has a dramatic impact on the role, function, competencies and status of librarians and other information professionals and the way libraries are used.

The library and information profession is approaching a crisis point and need to change strategies. The key to thriving in this turbulent, fast changing environment is to ensure that the library maintains a detailed and current insight into the information behavior of their users (Walton, 2014). In order to be visible in the information and knowledge society and to maintain their recognition as in the past, librarians' roles have to be transformed and librarians should do things differently.

III. LIBRARIANS' NEW ROLES

Librarians should be able to remain on the cutting edge to meet new challenges, and to develop themselves as important professionals in the digital society. There is an enormous range of opportunities for librarians to participate as active and integral peers in this digital environment, all of which need librarians' new roles to increase their credibility and visibility.

1) Librarians as information experts

Librarians facilitate access to information and information resources. They are mediators between users and information, users and technology to access and retrieve information. Librarians move away from the curators of material into research support roles (Sewell & Kingsly, 2017) and various roles that are reflected in the new titles that librarians are now given, e.g. cybrarians, webrarians, embedded librarians, blend librarians, subject librarians, liaison librarians, information facilitators, information consultants, knowledge managers, teachers, learning facilitators, research partners, technology specialists, etc. This is to cope with a number of challenges that librarians face in the open learning environment as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) take off and the requirement for the services of the librarians are set to increase (Gore, 2014).

2) Librarians as educators, instructional designers, instructional partners

Librarians contribute as educators, instructional designers, instructional partners and facilitators of learning to support online environment and to develop information literate or digital literate learners. Research findings showed that different terms were identified in the literature that articulated the librarians' instructional role such as teaching librarians, instruction librarians, librarians as teachers and professor librarians and all referred to the librarians' responsibilities in developing information literacy and actively engaging in teaching and learning processes (Vassilakaki & Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2015).

Instructional design librarians or instructional designers to develop effective learner-centered online tutorials and assist with the development of information literacy instruction are a growing desire in the online environment. They are required to have many skills including those of consultants, project managers, developers, evaluators, media experts, innovators, writers, editors, and technology specialists (Turnbow & Roth, 2017).

3) Librarians as practitioner-researchers, research partners and innovators

Research is part of librarians' important role and helps improve librarians' professional work and image as well as academic recognition and faculty status. Librarians are practitioners-researchers conduct practice-oriented research or action-research on their users, their works, their libraries or their problems. Through this, librarians can have direct research experiences, and research findings can help understand their customers to improve their services and provide effective library support for the benefits of their customers. In addition, librarians are moving forward as innovators in the cyber learning with libraries as platforms for innovation and creativity in library and information management, processes, products, and services.

IV. HOW TO TRANSFORM LIBRARIANS' ROLES?

Librarians need to prepare themselves in order to stand at the forefront as leaders in the information community and new digital learning environment. Librarians' roles can be transformed through new competencies, research and innovation, collaborative partnership or networking, continuing professional development and internationalization.

1) Transforming librarians' roles through new competencies

Librarians' new competencies have been discussed and developed by many groups in the library and information profession. Librarians need to develop their professional competencies as well as their personal competencies or traits. Professional competencies include specialized expertise, digital competencies, management competencies, instructional design both traditional and online environment, research competencies and scholarly communication. In addition, personal traits, e.g. transformative leadership, positive attitudes, positive relationships, mutual respects, emotional intelligence as well as interpersonal and social skills, international outlook, networking and intercultural communication skills are essential for librarians.

2) Transforming librarians' roles through research and innovation

Research and innovation are needed in library and information science both in theory and practice, for the creation of new knowledge, innovation, or best practices for better management, decision making and problem solving in the library profession, and for the growth of library and information science as a profession and a discipline. Research and innovation are key components and key roles of librarians as practitioner - researchers and innovators. As libraries are the foundation of information practice and theory, librarians have much more roles to play and to expand. Librarians play important roles in the use of new innovating technologies, the design and development of innovative libraries, innovative library space, products, services, programs and tools to support information seeking behavior and use of customers.

3) Transforming librarians' roles through collaborative partnership or networking

Technology presents immense opportunities for the promotion of collaborative environment. Collaboration, partnership, networking are some key terms that have been emphasized in library literature and have been a long tradition of library and information profession. It is only through collaborative partnership or teamwork that high quality, effective and efficient accessible library and information services can be realized and become successful. Many examples of faculty-librarians' collaboration/partnership as well as networks show that they vary tremendously in complexity and scope and require a certain amount of entrepreneurship and creativity.

4) Transforming librarians' roles through continuing professional development

Continuing professional development is a necessity. To survive, librarians should struggle and cope with changes through continuing professional development with more focus on the online environment as priority and a prime concern. The library as a place of education should be a professional community of learners where everyone is both a teacher and a learner. As the quality and effectiveness of library and information services depend on the expertise of staff they are to be used as guidelines for librarians and all stakeholders, IFLA issued *IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development : Principles and Best Practices* (Varlets, 2016) outlined the five key points: the learner, the employer, the professional associations consortia, government agencies, and other bodies, Library/Information Science (LIS) degree- granting programs and all providers.

5) Transforming librarians' roles through internationalization

The word "internationalization" varies in the explanation and interpretation in different perspectives and context, and can be grouped in terms of activities, processes, culture and competencies of results, to develop quality, standards and excellence of the libraries and organizations. Librarians play important roles in global education and are active in international

activities. This can be arranged in many activities such as providing other language collection, offering library and information services as well as outreach and instruction to foreign students, Many regional and international professional associations including CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians), IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), OCLC - a global library cooperative are well known for their contribution to the benefits of library users and library and information profession internationally.

SUMMARY

Digital developments revolutionized the global society and education environment. Digital technology presents an enormous range of opportunities for an effective new digital learning environment and widens the scope of educational landscape. The digital age forces libraries to be transformed, moving from “a store house of books” to “information platform” in the *networked information* environment aiming to keep pace with the changing needs of the new generation scholars. This provides great opportunities for librarians to transform their roles and working practices to contribute to changes and challenges and to enhance the value and raise awareness of libraries and library profession in the global society.

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