

## FEATURE ARTICLE BY LYN HAY:

# It's time that 21st century iCentres grace our schools

It's already happened in a number of Australian schools, and the plans for more are underway. As a result of the Australian Government's Building the Education (BER) funding program, a process of re-envisioning school libraries has been experienced by many school communities in the past 2-3 years. This program has seen the building and refurbishment of over 3000 school libraries in Australian schools as part of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program (DEEWR, 2009). The building and renovation of school library facilities has experienced a 'shift' in design, form and function as schools attempt to best meet the demands of 21st century learning (Hay & Todd, 2010; Hay, 2010b).

At the same time, education in secondary schools has 'shifted' with the introduction of Digital Education Revolution (DER) funding from the federal government to increase the PC: student ratio (DEEWR, 2010), with 1:1 laptop and mobile learning programs changing the fabric of schooling from the traditional to the digital. With the implementation of the Australian Curriculum framework and increasing demand for digital citizenship education programs in schools, the needs of students, teachers, principals and parents have 'shifted', and teacher librarians are seeing the culmination of all these changes as an opportunity to re-think 'what we do' in school libraries.

What is even more astounding is what appears to be a post-BER boom in the building and renovation of school facilities in secondary schools throughout Australia in an attempt to best meet the demands of 21st century learning. Australian communities and education systems have spent a lot of time, money and energy on building capacity for a bright and sustainable future for school libraries.

All with one goal in common: to ensure Australia's young people are provided with the opportunity to experience a quality school education that helps prepare them as critically literate, creative, and cyber-savvy citizens.



**TOP LEFT:** Maureen Twomey, iCentre Coordinator, Assisi Catholic College, Upper Coomera, QLD  
**ABOVE, RIGHT:** Our Lady of Dolours Primary School, Mitchelton, QLD. Chris Skrzeczynski, Teacher librarian.  
*Photos printed with permission*

This is a good time to think about school libraries and explore the building of iCentres in schools.

What is an iCentre? It is a facility that provides students, teachers, school executive and administration, and parents with a one-stop shop for all resourcing, technology and learning needs on a daily basis.

An iCentre is a high-end multimedia production facility which acts as the information-technology-learning hub for a school. Traditionally schools have had access to a school library, one or more IT labs and a number of classrooms with a small number of desktop computers available for student use. However, the 21st century requires a far more flexible and accommodating configuration of technology throughout the school, with mobile and handheld technologies challenging the traditional provisioning of a IT networked school (Hay, 2010a).

As a result of the Government's Digital Education Revolution, many schools are now configured with 1:1 laptop programs or trialling mobile learning programs using iPads, iPhones or android devices. Teachers require professional learning support, and students

require instant information problem-solving and technology troubleshooting at the point-of-need throughout the school day and when at home. An iCentre can provide this one-stop-shop support.

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, and the iCentre also provides the school community with a large, flexible learning space based on fluid design principles to support collaboration, performance, creativity, interactivity and exploration.

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, i.e. the form it takes reflects the function (Hay, 2010b).

How is an iCentre different from a school library? It involves the convergence of a school's facilities, technologies, people and resources to develop a centre where qualified information, technology, curriculum and e-learning leaders within a school combine

to consolidate their efforts to transform their school into a 21st century learning organisation.

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 need to rethink the way existing information and technology staff are 'blended'. This could include executive or leading teacher positions such as curriculum coordinator, ICT coordinator, learning technologies or e-learning facilitator, head of information services or teacher librarian; 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 or blending of staff allows for strategic conversations.

One Australian teacher librarian recently lamented:

I am at a newly opened school [with] loads of potential for innovation. The IT professional is co-located in library, but current library design and fitout is an architect's outdated perception of a school library. Form is hindering potential function! Unfortunately this is symptomatic of a number of schools where a quick-fix, bricks and mortar approach to building a new facility has undermined the potential of pedagogy leading strategic conversations and vision-building of a dynamic, 21st century learning centre.

It's time schools realised bang for their buck by building an iCentre.

To find out more about iCentres visit <http://studentslearn.wordpress.com/about/about-icentres/>

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