

Resourcing the curriculum in an online world

Abstract: *The delivery of appropriate teaching resources has changed the face of resource delivery within schools. Traditional roles are changing. This article reviews the changing roles and the pressures these changes tend to exert on the school community.*

Introduction

Delegates attending the recent ICTEV Conference would have been struck by the proliferation of commercial and “in-school” information management systems (IMS) on show. It’s a sign of the times in today’s schools where effective information management is assuming a priority. These complex and efficient systems have a number of different descriptive titles: learning management systems, virtual learning environments, portal software, online learning systems. The purpose of this article is not to conduct an evaluation but to raise a number of questions in relation to the role they play in curriculum delivery.

In commenting on this evolving technology, acclaimed knowledge management professional, Kirk Klasson, states that successful systems “*reflect the way individuals and organizations have traditionally managed and shared information and enable them to harness it more effectively*”. Are we harnessing it effectively?

Schools are still in the development stage with IMS technology. On the whole, we have found a comfort level with the Internet in particular and are aware of the rewards it brings. Transition resulting from this technological change is beginning to manifest itself and, as a consequence, the ground is shifting.

Changing Landscapes

Traditional roles are changing. When dealing with technology, teachers are being encouraged to be the *guide on the side* as distinct from their traditional role as the *sage on the stage*. As teacher-librarians connect with the new technology, they are moving from the traditional roles of *warehouse*s of learning resources to *consultants* and *facilitators* who are able to connect teachers with the most appropriate teaching resources in a variety of formats. Students are being offered options that involve a more *self-directed* and *flexible* learning system, generally presented through a web interface.

My dual role of Learning Technologies Administrator and Teacher-Librarian places me at the centre of the technology/resourcing activity at St Joseph’s College. I’m aware that we are not all natural ICT adopters, hence the value of school information management systems which endeavour to minimize teacher angst in this era of change. It is the implications of this trend that concern me, and that I am raising here as a matter for discussion. The implications are not all dire, however, neither are they all positive.

Not value for money

In my opinion, a level of fragmentation is creeping into resourcing the curriculum that potentially places an unnecessary burden on teachers and creates costly inefficiencies. I listened with alarm as a speaker at a recent conference advocated the virtues of the Internet as a source of teaching material, assuring teachers of the rewards for a “few hours” spent exploring the web in preference to reinventing the wheel. The value of the educational materials available was confirmed with suitable examples. All good stuff, however, the assumption that this was the most beneficial way for teachers to find their resources is a worry. What are their resource centre staff doing? Are teachers checking the resources already held within their own schools before launching onto the Internet?

It is so frustrating to encounter a teacher worn out from hours spent trawling the net to discover that resources they have found, or some even more appropriate, were already linked through the library catalogue, the library homepage or some other teacher or subject webpage. Herein lies

the dilemma. Many teachers are unnecessarily working too hard and limiting their teaching resources by not collaborating with their teacher-librarians or other subject teachers.

Building capacity

Andy Hargreaves, in discussing the ability of teachers to work successfully in the climate of educational change, refers to the technique of “capacity building” within schools (p.159). He’s adamant that successful innovation is only achieved if the appropriate support structures are implemented. We are fortunate to have a system of school libraries in place that act to provide the “capacity” ie support, to deal with changing curriculum.

This brings me to the crux of my quandary:

- In a value added world where we have acquired a “fast food” mentality; how are schools presenting curriculum that takes advantage of *all* available resources?
- Will the siloing potential of individual teacher webpages that rely on individual expertise and leave the school with the teacher, be encouraged?
- Are subject homepages to be initiated? If so, whose responsibility, and do they limit students to a narrow range of resources?
- Are teachers using the resources of the library to their advantage? Yes, they are linked into the IMS, but is the library catalogue being used, or are prepared pathfinders and research guides preferred?
- Are teachers training their students in the use of databases and the development of other information literacy skills, or satisfied to give them a limited list of resources that will get them through?

Conclusion

Traditionally, collaboration between subject teachers and teacher-librarians has been a relationship of mutual benefit. As we move into an era of online curriculum delivery and information management systems, that collaboration is becoming even more vital. If we are to avoid fragmentation, use of inappropriate resources and unnecessary workloads, I consider that we must take a big picture view of combining the most accessible curriculum interface, with the most appropriate resources, for the best possible learning outcomes. This is not the current trend.□

References

Hargreaves, Andy and others (2001). *Learning to change: teaching beyond subjects and standards*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Klasson, Kirk. (online) Managing knowledge for advantage: content & collaboration technologies. Retrieved 5 May 2001.

www.icasit.org/km/ManagingKnowledge.pdf

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