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The Public Library as a Learning Organisation

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Abstract

Modern public libraries have their roots in education, arising as they did from workers' educational organisations and mechanics institutes. In their 150 years of history, the emphasis on learning as a primary focus for public libraries has waxed and waned, at times giving way to the recreational and cultural role that libraries have also played.

Learning is again coming to the forefront of public library service as economies and societies of the 21st century require people to learn new skills and to retrain several times in their working lives. Whether one lives in the industrialised or developing world, acquiring an education and learning new skills is of primary importance to securing a person's future.

The UNESCO manifesto, supported by IFLA, has 12 missions – two of which focus on the public library as a learning organisation:

Mission 2: supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels

Mission 11: facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.

There are many responses libraries make to this challenge. This paper outlines some initiatives in public libraries in New Zealand which support learning. In addition to providing learning programmes and services for customers, the public library itself also needs to be a learning organisation. Programmes which encourage on-going learning among professional colleagues are also outlined.

The challenge is for librarians to work collaboratively with other disciplines, particularly educators and community developers to be 'at the table' where decisions are made affecting the lifelong learning of our citizens.

Introduction

Good morning. I am delighted to be here at the invitation of Professor Gary Gorman and grateful to the section for the opportunity to talk to you about developments in public libraries in New Zealand, particularly as they relate to learning and education.



For those of you who haven't had the opportunity to visit New Zealand and see our libraries I will give you some background. New Zealand is a long narrow country with a population of 4 million. Over a quarter of those live in the greater Auckland area in the North Island. Christchurch, where I come from is the second largest city in New Zealand and the largest city in the South Island. The South Island is mountainous and known for its scenery.

New Zealand has 74 local authorities providing public library services. A good point of access to find out more is the New Zealand public libraries website at <http://nzlibraries.com>.




The local authorities range from large city libraries such as Auckland and Christchurch, to provincial towns and districts and services which are largely rural. Unlike Australia there are no state libraries providing central government funding to public libraries. The National Library provides some support in kind to public libraries (free interloans from their collections) and offers centralised services such as the National Union catalogue and Index New Zealand – on a cost basis. The source of finance for providing library and information services comes primarily from property taxes and a small percentage from direct user charges.

So public libraries are local government responsibility. Formal education on the other hand is a central government funded responsibility. This has resulted, until recently, in public libraries focussing on individual learning, with varying levels of support for formal education and learning. Some of this is changing however, and it is some of those changes that I am going to talk to you about today.

In addition to providing learning programmes and services for customers, the public library itself also needs to be a learning organisation. In the second part of this paper I will outline a couple of initiatives which encourage on-going learning among professional colleagues.

Christchurch City Libraries

Before I do, some quick facts about the library I come from - Christchurch City Libraries. (This is Central Library)



Christchurch City Libraries
Ngā Kete Wānanga-o-Ōtautahi


Christchurch City Libraries

Some facts and figures

more than you think...

- Population served 317,000
- Central Library, 12 branches, 1 mobile, virtual library
- 5.5 million issues
- Budget: \$NZ\$21 million (10 million plus Euro)
- Approx. 2.75 million pages downloaded from our web site and 2.8 million pages downloaded from our Catalogue and CINCH by people external to the library

<http://library.christchurch.org.nz>



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It is the second largest library system in the country serving a city population of around 317,000. We have a central library, 12 community libraries, a mobile library and a virtual library providing phone, fax, email and live online services to customers from their home, school or work. We issue nearly 5.5 million items per year, have nearly 6 million page views downloaded from our website and catalogue, have a budget of around \$21 million dollars and a staff of 239 FTE. There are 10 visits per head of population to our libraries each year and registered members are about 70-75% of the population. Our libraries are busy places.

There has been great change in the last 8 to 10 years in public libraries, particularly as we have felt the impact of the internet. This has required library leaders to rethink what role the 21st century public library plays in a society which has a surfeit of options for recreation, information and learning. What are our strategic points of difference? Do we have a competitive advantage? What are the particular skills and knowledge we have and how does that make a difference? What roles have we had in the last 150 years and are those still valid?

Our history

Modern public libraries have their roots in education, arising as they did from workers' educational organisations and mechanics institutes. In their 150 years of history, the emphasis on learning as a primary focus for public libraries has waxed and waned, at times giving way to the recreational and cultural role that libraries have also played.

Learning is again coming to the forefront of public library service as economies and societies of the 21st century require people to learn new skills and to retrain several times in their working lives. Whether one lives in the industrialised or developing world, acquiring an education and learning new skills is of primary importance to securing a person's future.




Christchurch City Libraries
Ngā Kete Wānanga-o-Ōtautahi

Christchurch City Libraries UNESCO Public Library Manifesto

more than you think...

- Mission 2: supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels
- Mission 11: facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.

<http://library.christchurch.org.nz>



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The UNESCO Public Library manifesto (prepared in cooperation with IFLA)¹ has 12 missions – two of which focus on the public library as a learning organisation:

Mission 2: supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels

Mission 11: facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.




Christchurch City Libraries
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Christchurch City Libraries PLA Service Responses

more than you think...

- Basic literacy
- Formal learning support
- Information literacy
- Lifelong Learning

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The Public Library Association in the USA outlines 13 service responses which public libraries may choose to focus on². Four of these are particularly focused on learning and education:

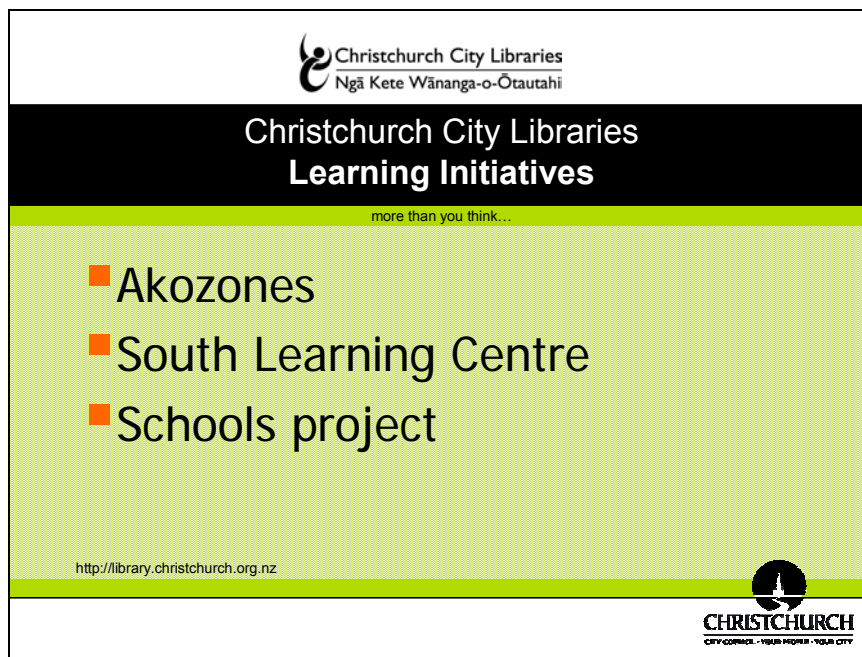
¹ <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/unesco/eng.htm>

- Basic literacy
- Formal learning support
- Information literacy
- Lifelong Learning

Each of the responses require a particular range of resources, programmes, facilities, technology and staff skills to achieve the outcomes looked for.

So there is general agreement that the public library has a role in learning and education. Most libraries have been involved in some level of programming, particularly for children for many decades. In addition the past 5 years has seen an increase in information literacy programmes for individuals and groups – particularly strong in the tertiary sector but increasingly also in public libraries. The People's Network in Britain has been a significant programme which has provided the impetus for a revitalisation of British public libraries on a country wide scale seldom seen in a democratic country.

Not many countries have either the wealth, or the central leadership to put in place the People's Network or its equivalent. However, there are possibilities for doing things differently even when resources are limited, and I want to tell you about three initiatives in New Zealand which have provided support for learning and formal education in new ways.



They are:

- Akozones in Auckland City Libraries
- South Learning Centre in Christchurch City Libraries
- Schools project also at Christchurch City Libraries

Akozones

² Himmel, Ethel and William James Wilson. Planning for results: a public library transformation process. Chicago, ALA, 1998. 2v



Auckland City Libraries has implemented four Akozones (or Learning Centres) in their libraries. An Akozone is a defined space in a library with a module of 6 PCs (standard) providing a full range of software programmes and access to the internet. The area is branded with its own look, signage and furniture which is common across all centre. The first two of these centres were established using funding from the Ministry of Education as part of their Study Support programme. This programme was targeted at year 7 and 8 (12 to 13 year olds) living in lower socio-economic communities. The original intention by the Ministry was that these homework centres would operate in schools, using teachers after school. Auckland City realised the potential for offering these services in libraries which served communities which fitted the socio-economic profile and worked with school principals in the area to submit a proposal. Akozones were designed to be “learning islands in the midst of the rich information resources of your local public library”.³ A homework club concept was used, and school children were provided with food and teacher support. In addition crèche support for the younger siblings of the target group were provided, as often afterschool care of these children was the responsibility of the older sibling.

³ McAleer, Paul and Kaye Lally. AKOZone, Auckland City Libraries Learning Centres. Report to community Services Committee, Auckland City Council, 13 December 2002. Unpublished.



As well as using the spaces for the Study support programme, at other times of the day the centres are used for such things as:

- Worktrack, a partnership programme focussing on developing job searching skills for unemployed people
- English language classes,
- Surfing the internet for seniors
- “Own tutor groups” who book the facility for their own training

In those libraries which have established Akozones there has been a 15% increase in patronage of the libraries. In addition students who were part of the Homework club/Study support programme have continued to use the library as they have moved through into secondary school.

South Learning Centre

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Christchurch City Libraries
South Learning Centre

more than you think...

- Part of 2000 m2 new library
- Collaboration between City Council and Ministry of Education (NZ\$850,000 grant)
- IT integrated into learning programmes
- Both school and community focussed programmes
- Visual integration with library


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Christchurch City Libraries will open a new 2000 m² library and learning centre in August 2003. The learning centre is a joint project between the Christchurch City Council and the Ministry of Education arising from the closure of a primary school in the area. The Council is building the centre and the Ministry has provided a grant of \$850,000 for the operation of the centre for a period of approximately three years. During the school day and school year, the programmes will focus on providing innovative programming where IT is integrated into the learning processes to a new level. At other times the Centre will provide community programmes utilising technology to enhance learning. The Centre has employed two very experienced and creative teachers to put the programmes together. The Centre comprises two 70 m² rooms – one with 30 computers with a wide range of software programmes, including video editing, and full internet access – the other a flexible space with tablet PCs and wireless networks. Floor to ceiling glass walls allow visual connection between the Learning Centre and the Library and each space has door access to the library as well. This will allow for the free flow of children between the learning centre and the physical resources and spaces of the library. Library staff will provide some of the programmes in the Centre, particularly around searching the internet and electronic databases, information literacy and catalogue use. External agencies will also provide programmes at the Centre, eg the local polytechnic provides *computing for free* courses.

The Centre is not yet open and the outcomes not yet proven. However, I believe this centre will forge a new benchmark for Learning Centres in libraries. It's based on strong partnerships with the local educational community, and has financial support from the Ministry of Education and local government. It's a place with a focus on assimilating the benefits which technology can bring into learning programmes rather than a place to learn about technology. It's a place to redesign best educational practice.

Schools project



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**Christchurch City Libraries
Schools project**


more than you think...

- Schools act as agencies of the library
- Join up new members directly into the library's database
- Bulk enrolments at the beginning of the school year
- Easy access from school to electronic resources

BENEFITS

- Good relationships with schools
- Increased membership in 13-18 year olds
- Increased use of resources

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The final project in these three is a collaboration between secondary schools and Christchurch City Libraries. Two years ago the library invested heavily in electronic databases subscribing to a range of encyclopaedias, specialist reference sources, magazine and news databases, both

citation and full text. The majority of these databases were available to members both inside the library and externally via the web, with the use of a pin. We believed that they would be particularly useful to secondary school students however, getting the message out to this customer group, many who no longer use the library for recreational purposes, would not be easy. The answer was to propose to schools, through their school librarians that they become an agency for the city libraries, enabling them to join up students and assign pins. As well, at the beginning of the year, two city library staff visited each school, equipped with wireless laptop, and enrolled students or updated existing memberships. In some cases follow up visits to demonstrate the databases and how they might be used for research and information have taken place. The outcomes of this project have been the establishment of good relationships with the school librarians, increased membership in the 13 to 18 year age group, and greater use of the databases. Perhaps too, a better understanding by this age group of what the library can do for them in meeting their learning needs.

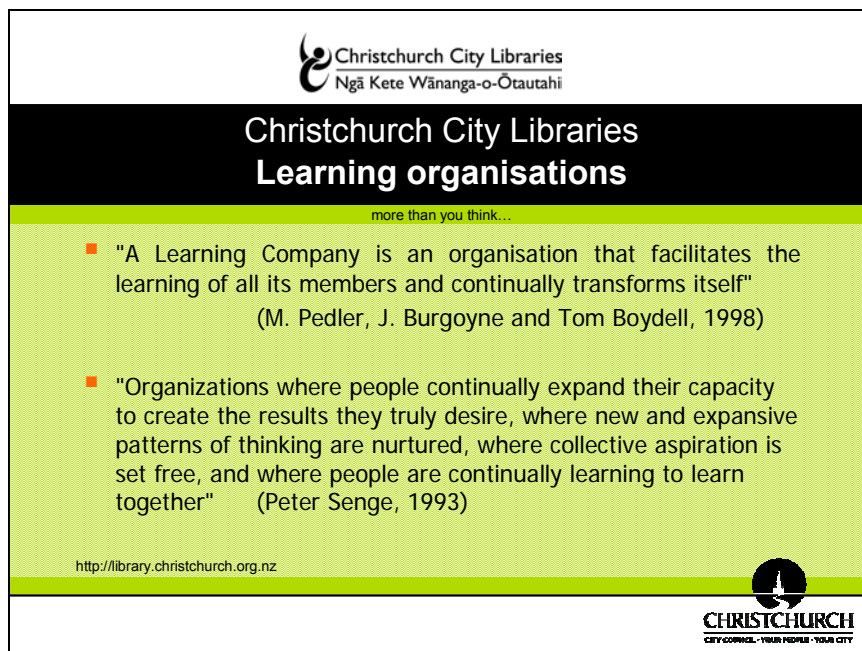
The learning organisation

In recent years much has been written about the learning organisation.

A "Learning Organization" is one in which people at all levels, individually and collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results they really care about. Some definitions include:

*"A learning company is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its member and continually transforms itself"*⁴

*"Organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together"*⁵



The poster features the Christchurch City Libraries logo at the top, which includes the text 'Christchurch City Libraries' and 'Ngā Kete Wānanga-o-Ōtautahi'. Below the logo, the title 'Christchurch City Libraries Learning organisations' is displayed in white text on a black background. A green banner with the text 'more than you think...' is positioned below the title. The main body of the poster is light green and contains two bullet points, each preceded by a small orange square. The first bullet point quotes Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne, and Tom Boydell (1998) on the definition of a Learning Company. The second bullet point quotes Peter Senge (1993) on the characteristics of organizations where people expand their capacity. At the bottom left, the URL 'http://library.christchurch.org.nz' is provided. At the bottom right, there is a circular logo for Christchurch City Council with the tagline 'CITY COUNCIL - YOUR PEOPLE - YOUR CITY'.

Christchurch City Libraries
Ngā Kete Wānanga-o-Ōtautahi

**Christchurch City Libraries
Learning organisations**

more than you think...

- "A Learning Company is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself"
(M. Pedler, J. Burgoyne and Tom Boydell, 1998)
- "Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together" (Peter Senge, 1993)


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⁴ The Learning Company: a Strategy for Sustainable Development, Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne & Tom Boydell, McGraw-Hill, 1998

⁵ The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, Peter M. Senge, Random House, 1993.

As well as supporting lifelong learning and education for our communities it is vital that we create an organisation where learning is valued and people expand their knowledge in order to make a difference. A learning organisation is an innovative organisation – the learning is focussed on expanding the capacity of people to achieve results. Being a learning organisation doesn't just mean supporting people to attain professional qualifications – although this may be part of it. More importantly it requires creating a climate of change, where finding new ways of doing things to improve service for customers is a driving value. This doesn't just happen by itself – it needs the right culture and strong leadership. Nor is this as easy as it sounds, particularly when you have an organisation such as the public library, proud of its traditions and values, often part of a larger bureaucracy. The learning organisation requires nurturing.



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Christchurch City Libraries
The Learning organisation...


more than you think...

... requires nurturing

Two programmes designed to:

- **grow the necessary leadership in the organisation**
- **Develop the idea of keeping fit for the job**

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Over the past two years we have run two programmes designed to

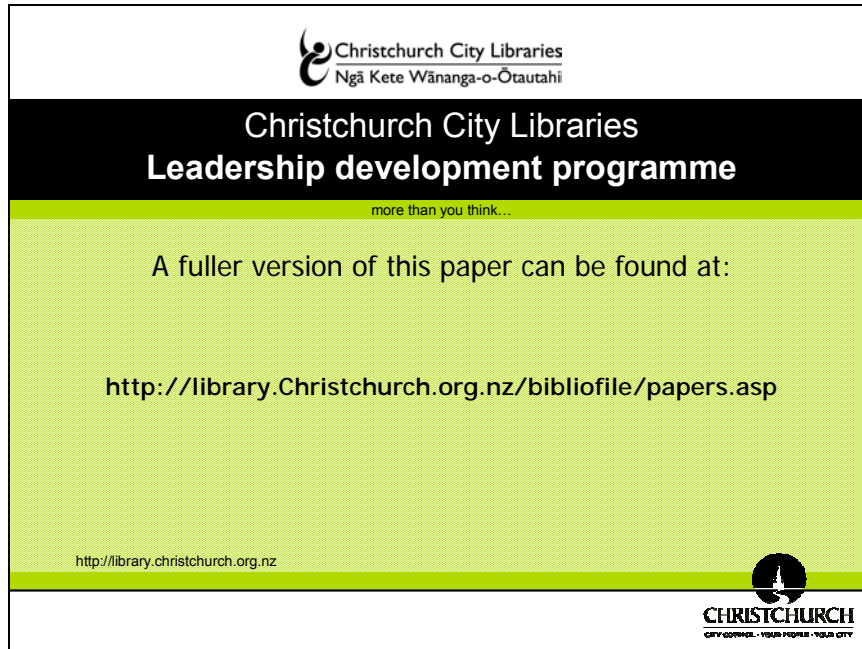
- grow the necessary leadership in the organisation and
- develop the idea of “keeping fit for the job”

Leadership development programme

This programme focussed on developing the ability of twelve of our team leaders. They were chosen for a variety of reasons – new to the team leader role, seen as having potential for growth, open to new ways of doing things and interested in learning. Unlike many leadership development courses, this programme recognised that it is not enough to introduce new concepts and techniques at a one off session, that people then take back to the job. For learning to be effective it needs to be practised, supported and evaluated so that it becomes embedded in the way we do things. The format of the programme was to break the 12 into three quads who worked with an external coach to identify issues and problems in the work place and then look for solutions to resolving those. The learning came both from the input of the experienced coach, but also from the peer support and encouragement as people shared the learning from their own situations. These quads met fortnightly over a 3 month period and in between were expected to put into practice the ideas from the previous meeting. The benefits of this programme have been many:

- Increased confidence and capability of the group

- Strengthening of peer to peer relationships – particularly across the organisation amongst colleagues who might not normally have much to do with each other in the course of the day
- A core group of influencers in the organisation working in alignment with, and achieving, organisational goals.




A more in depth look at this particular programme, which one an award from the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand can be found on our website at <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Bibliofile/Papers.asp> The author is our Human Resources Manager, Debbie Dawson.

Keeping fit for the job

The idea behind this programme was to create the expectation for on-going learning and development, and for that to be a shared responsibility of both staff and organisation. Many colleagues had acquired their formal qualification as much as 20 years ago and some had struggled to be up to speed in an increasingly electronic environment. The programme was designed to encourage people to think about how their profession had changed, the external influences and trends and to assess themselves against the competencies needed by an information professional in the 21st century. The title for the programme leant itself to concepts such as “am I fit for the for the job” – that is do I have the right skills and competencies – and “am I the best fit for the job” – that is does this particular job suit my temperament, aptitude and values?

Conclusion

Well what is the learning to be had from what I have said this afternoon? How applicable are the New Zealand experiences to the public libraries of Asia and Oceania? You may have gained some ideas for possible programmes. That’s great. But are there any general conclusions we can draw? I think they are as follows:




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Christchurch City Libraries Conclusions

more than you think...

- Public libraries and learning go together
- Educational role is increasing in importance
- Public libraries need to work with others to achieve outcomes
- The Library must be a learning organisation itself

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- Public libraries and learning go together. They are a legitimate mission of the public library and we are one of the players in helping our nations learn and grow.
- The educational role is increasing in importance again as economies and societies of the 21st century require people to learn new skills and to retrain several times in their working lives.
- Public libraries need to be working with others to achieve the outcomes their societies want. Collaborative projects provide additional resources, whether those are financial, or in people's thinking, time and commitment. The challenge for librarians is to work in partnership with other disciplines, particularly educators and community developers to be 'at the table' where decisions are made affecting the lifelong learning of our citizens.
- As well as supporting learning and education for others, the library itself needs to be a learning organisation. This means creating the climate for change and innovation so that the talents of our people can be used to achieve results for the customer. This requires effort and thinking– it doesn't just happen on its own.

Thank you.