

ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

President's Report

Ruth Hall



Free, or almost free...

Library Camp OTF: 21st Century Library Learning August 5, 2009, OISE

This summer, 38 teachers with various levels of experience in the school library came together in Toronto for the first ever OTF (Ontario Teachers' Federation) Library Camp. For a minimal \$50 registration fee, participants were provided with three days of workshops, two nights accommodation, breakfast, and lunch. That's about as free as it ever gets to stay in Toronto, even if you have relatives. Under the nimble leadership of facilitators Diana Maliszewski and Ruth Hall, participants worked their way through workshops ranging from Lance/Loerstcher's 5 Key Things to Do Every Day to Make a Difference to Carol Koechlin's work on the Library Learning Commons model, to educational gaming and the report on exemplary practices in school libraries.

As part of our opening morning I shared some of my thoughts on the future direction of school libraries—provided to you here, (relatively) free of charge.

There is significant discussion “out there” about the disconnect that students, and even their parents, as digital natives, feel toward the education system. “What If: Technology in the 21st Century Classroom”, a report by the Ontario Public School Board Association says, “We are educating a generation of children and youth who have no memory of a world without the Internet, without instant access to information, without an array of media at their fingertips.” But when students come to school they feel “they have to ‘power down’ to fit into an environment that offers fewer options for learning than are available in the life they live outside of the school” (7). This is happening at the same time as schools and boards face pressures to continue to raise graduation rates and standardized test scores, while coping with shrinking school populations and pressures from a weak economy. We are seeing an increase in the use of virtual schooling and demands to embrace mobile technologies. In a world where more than half the population owns a cellphone, what does it mean for school environments when, to quote Carly Shuler, “children under 12 are one of the fastest growing segments of mobile technology users in the U.S.?”

The changes demanded in education require a shift from: teacher-centric to learner-centric; classroom-based teaching to “anyplace, anytime” learning; mandated courses to individualized learning and students producing knowledge rather than only consuming it (Frey). This isn't news to many of us, but there is an increasing sense of urgency to get started, if we have not already done so, in shifting our professional practice and in recognizing the need to address this shift in focus in our library classrooms. We may face challenges in our school boards because of restrictions on our ability to download or access certain sites or tools. Yet working with these technologies is essential, if we are to build our capacity to assist classroom teachers and understand how to use technology to engage students in deeper thinking and understanding. The 2009 report *Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Student Assessment*, expresses concern that technology, in spite of its potential, has in many cases not changed core practices and methods in education (Tucker, 7). School libraries have a key role to play in supporting use of technology that help teachers move beyond simply putting a new wrapper on the same old “bird unit”, which is nothing more than reciting facts.