

# Leading the Way in th

## Carol Koechlin



Photo: Julie Millan

**T**he Learning Commons is so much more than a room. As you might guess, it is about common places and spaces to experiment, practice, celebrate, learn, work, and play. But much more than that, it is about changing school culture and the way we do business in schools. The school library is now more than the hub of the school, where learners and teachers gravitate to find materials they need and work on projects. As well, the school library is transformed into a vital catalyst for school improvement for staff as well as students. This transformation calls for physical, virtual, and pedagogical changes in addition to a shift in mindset for all players.

We are at the crossroads of an unprecedented opportunity. Demands for school improvement, the call for 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills instruction, the growth of

Professional Learning Communities, and the potential of emerging technologies and Web 2.0 tools to re-engage the passion of teachers and the interest and learners cannot be denied. Alison Zmuda and Violet Harada say it best, “The power of the library media specialist (teacher-librarian) to contribute to the school has never been more vital, more feasible or more exciting than it is today” (2008).

Keeping pace with change is nothing new to school libraries and teacher-librarians. School libraries in Ontario have evolved over the past fifty years, from “book rooms” (built by caring parents and distributed on book carts that travelled from class to class), to designated libraries brimming with books, to the multi-resource facilities we take pride in today. Enriched print, multimedia, virtual collections, and high-tech solutions changed everything about the way we access, circulate, and use information and ideas, but it wasn’t new media types or even technologies that were the biggest catalyst for change in Ontario school libraries. It was the 1982 Partners in Action document that dramatically changed teaching and learning in those schools that fully embraced its philosophy. Scheduled classes and information skills taught in isolation were replaced with open timetables and teaching partnerships that designed and delivered inquiry learning experiences in the library. Since then, the global shift in education to programming heavy on classroom and school accountability has caused many educators and educational leaders to overlook the positive effects these programs had on both teaching and learning, school-wide. Many elementary school library programs have shifted back to scheduled classes, book exchange, and isolated computer and information skills instruction. Many secondary school librarians work hard at teaching referencing to ward off plagiarism and frantically try to address the requests of students to find the “stuff” they need to complete classroom teacher-designed assignments. We find ourselves moving backwards on the evolutionary scale. That should ring alarm bells.

We can no longer wait and let “nature” take its course. Students and teachers need our expertise and support now. We have all the “right stuff” to lead schools into sustainable improvement of teaching, learning, and learning to learn. Just as collaboration drove change in the 80’s, learning to learn is the pedagogical gold mine that must drive the change today. Successful schools will