

Speech by Mrs Fanny Law, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
at the Opening Session of the
34th International Conference of School Librarianship on
“Information Leadership in a Culture of Change”
on Friday, 8 July 2005

Mr Genco, Professor Bray, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hong Kong is privileged to host the 2005 International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) Conference, and I am honoured to officiate at this opening ceremony. On behalf of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, I welcome all delegates, in particular, overseas delegates who have traveled a long way to Hong Kong. For those who are here for the first time, I hope you will find time to explore this vibrant and cosmopolitan city which has a unique blend of eastern and western cultures, and has been rated a shopping paradise, and one of the most popular venues for conventions and exhibitions.

Before your arrival, I presume you have surfed the internet to find out about Hong Kong -- the weather, the currency, the people, the food and the scenic spots. Today, the amount of information that is available literally at our fingertips, by hitting at the keyboard of the computer, is inundating. The internet and the World Wide Web are permeating our society and significantly changing the way we live and work.

In an agricultural economic system, people work in fields and the source of their wealth is the crops from cultivated fields. In an industrial economic system, people work in factories to process raw materials from quarries, forests and the seabed. In a knowledge-based economic system, information is the raw material that generates wealth, driven by creativity and ingenuity. People can access information from any location through the internet.

Education in the information age

Education in the information age has to cope with new demands. It is not enough to dispense knowledge of the past. Education must also prepare young people for the future, a

future that is marked by change and uncertainty. At a time when knowledge is generated at a dazzling pace and the World Wide Web is doubling in size every 90 days, keeping abreast of new knowledge and finding the right information become a daunting challenge.

In Hong Kong, we respond to the challenge with a holistic educational reform that aims to nurture a new generation of self-regulated lifelong learners. The emphasis is to cultivate in our students the capacity for deep cognitive learning, nurture creativity and critical thinking, develop problem-solving and collaboration skills, and inculcate a commitment to continuous improvement.

To support these objectives, we have identified four key tasks, namely, reading to learn and learning to read, IT for interactive learning, project or inquiry-based learning, and moral education to promote positive values and ethical practices among students. These are the cornerstone of the 21st century curriculum of Hong Kong.

The new role of teacher-librarians

The school library and teacher-librarians have a vital role to play in the new paradigm of teaching in the knowledge economy, building partnerships for learning and developing the school into an information community, where information and communication technologies support rather than override the educational goals. The job of the teacher-librarian is no longer restricted to managing the library collection. S/he is expected to be the information specialist, resources coordinator, teaching partner, curriculum facilitator, the role model on information literacy, and programme manager of reading schemes and inquiry-based learning.

In a nutshell, as the theme of this conference suggests, teacher-librarians have a significant part to play in providing “information leadership in a culture of change”.

Information leadership

Information leadership, as Lyn Kay of the School of Studies at the Charles Sturt University in Australia explained, comprises three components, namely, information literacy, information policy and knowledge management.

Information literacy requires that students should be able to access information efficiently and effectively, evaluate information critically and competently, and use information accurately and creatively. An information literate student also practises ethical behaviours in regard to information and information technology.

School information policy regulates behaviours in using information, and covers issues such as plagiarism, privacy, intellectual property, web publishing, e-mail. Knowledge management refers to the sharing and management of the collective intellectual capital of a school across the curriculum and administration.

Information leadership does not rest on one person. It requires the collective effort of teachers, librarians, and information technologists in the school. But, as with other school improvement initiatives, the principal must provide the vision, impetus and support.

To maximise the potential of the library service in developing the school into an information community, teachers and librarians must work together and be treated as equal partners. Furthermore, teacher-librarians, like other subject teachers, must upgrade their professional capacity to cope with the new role.

The landscape in Hong Kong

Since 2001, all schools in Hong Kong have been provided with a teacher-librarian. Over the years, the government has worked hand-in-hand with the Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians' Association to provide induction training for new teacher-librarians and continuing professional development for serving teacher-librarians. The government also scaled up the automation of school libraries, and sponsored the development of a standard bibliographic database to facilitate resources sharing and collaboration among school libraries.

We have seen encouraging progress in the promotion of reading among students, and significant achievement in the IT skills of students at all levels. The more progressive schools have successfully integrated the ICT strategies with curriculum development, student-centred learning, assessment and school administration. You will hear more about the good practices of star performing schools in this conference. However, much remains to be done.

Conclusion

Developing schools into information literate communities is like an obstacle course. There are many challenges on the way. It requires vision, leadership, commitment, enthusiasm, energy and perseverance in order to work one's way to the destination. I see these qualities in many of our principals, teachers and librarians, many of whom are present today. They are the champions and role models for their peers.

I must thank them, and the Hong Kong Teacher-Librarians' Association, for their arduous efforts and congratulate them on their achievements over the years. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Hong Kong for providing high quality professional development for our teacher-librarians and for hosting this meaningful conference.

I wish you all fruitful sharing over the next four days. To the overseas delegates, I wish you an enjoyable and memorable time in Hong Kong, and look forward to your next visit. To the International Association of School Librarianship, I thank you for choosing Hong Kong for the 2005 conference and wish you success in furthering your objectives.

Thank you.