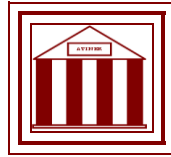# Athens Institute for Education and Research
ATINER

ATINER's Conference Paper Series
LIB2014-1186

Engaging Gen Z through Service Innovations in an Arts School Library

Soo Chin Foo
Manager
School of the Arts
Singapore

An Introduction to
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

Engaging Gen Z through Service Innovations in an Arts School Library

Soo Chin Foo
Manager
School of the Arts
Singapore

Abstract

The future of libraries in today's Internet age is very much connected to the information needs of their users. It no longer centers on the physical space in which it houses its collection. Instead, libraries should look at tapping on service innovations and e-Resources.

Existing literature on this topic may not have fully explored the role that service innovations play in supporting knowledge sharing and learning, in the context of specialized school libraries for young adults. This presentation explores the development of knowledge sharing through service innovations, to raise awareness of library and information services at the School of the Arts (SOTA), a pre-tertiary independent specialized arts school that offers the International Baccalaureate curriculum in Singapore.

At SOTA, the library leverages on Internet and technology for new services to share knowledge, such as new arrivals alert service, user education, information literacy programmes, subscription of specialized arts databases and access to a range of e-Resources for research. In addition to the provision of computers with Internet access, the library had enhanced the learning experience of its users with new infrastructure like scanner, photocopier and printer.

The research incorporates empirical study, survey, focus group and observations in promoting the meaningful utilization of library resources. By rethinking service concepts and working closely with faculty and students to better understand what is crucial to their information needs, the library moves towards the direction of a user-centric approach that underscores its relevance in the school community.

Keywords: Service innovations, knowledge sharing, information seeking, user experience, arts school, information literacy

Introduction

"Generation Z birth years closely correspond to the conception and birth of the World Wide Web." (Geck, 2006, p. 19). Generation Z or Gen Z, refers to the generation of people born from mid 1990s until present day, as defined by Macmillan dictionary. An interesting observation is that Gen Z members are born at the time when Internet proliferates at a significantly brisker rate as compared to their counterparts in Gen Y, and this has in turn an impact on the learning needs and styles of these youths.

Geck (2006) described Gen Z members as amateur searchers lacking the necessary skills to evaluate online content and using resources other than popular search tools such as Google in their research. In other words, Gen Z members need to improve on their information literacy skills in order to be savvier in today's Internet age.

This paper explores the development of knowledge sharing through service innovations such as information literacy programmes for the students at School of the Arts (SOTA). The school has an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students aged 13 – 18 years old, who are Gen Z members.

With these considerations in mind, this paper reviews key trends in librarianship that is of relevance to service concepts, and is followed with a discussion on initiatives that has been implemented at the library at SOTA. The paper concludes by suggesting that by moving towards a user-centric approach, the library is likely to transform the challenge into an opportunity to further contribute to the learning culture of the wider school community.

Literature Review

There is existing literature that relates to Gen Z, as well as libraries of high schools and academic institutions. However, there are not many studies done on specialized arts school libraries for young adults, and this paper seeks to address this gap. A literature review is explored, so as to better understand the trends that may have an impact on the development of the library at SOTA.

Knowledge is literally power in the 21st century. Libraries continue to exist as one of most information intensive organizations in society, and would need to adapt accordingly. The interconnected relationships between learners, the resources and the learning spaces are constantly changing. In order to meet the needs of the diverse student cohorts, it is necessary to be agile in the development in both virtual and physical space (Beard & Dale, 2008).

How may libraries effectively support the evolving information needs of the students and faculty members? What are the challenges that many school libraries face in engaging with its users in today's Internet age with the increasingly technology-savvy Gen Z? Not all Gen Z members are homogeneous. Nevertheless, in general, members of Gen Z are likely to be smarter, more self-directed and quicker to process information (Igel & Urquhart, 2012).

"Why does our school need a library if we have access to so much information from our classrooms via the Internet?" (Harland, 2011, p. 32). In response to this challenge, Harland (2011) described the successful transition of Plymouth Regional High School in Plymouth, New Hampshire from a legacy model library to a learning commons since 2006. The end result is a more learner-centric library that strikes a good balance between the digital resources and print materials that are housed in a redesigned physical space. The transformation has positioned the school to better prepare their students to be 21st century learners. Similarly, Chelmsford High School Library in Massachusetts has experienced a metamorphosis that has led in a shift to a user-centric learning commons that has resulted in impactful changes to the school community (Loertscher & Diggs, 2009).

Woodward (2009) noted that the most effective way to improve library service is to let customers have an active role in participating in their development. This trend of increasing end user involvement is in line with the concept of school libraries as "learning commons" that allows students to leverage on the diverse range of infrastructure and electronic resources in a conducive environment, where they can readily seek assistance from trained staff if required. The learning commons model has started to gather interest in the library and information science community as early as since the 2000s. Notably, a connection between learning commons and the transformation of academic libraries into "social, cultural, and technological centers where students, faculty, and other users can gather and work collaboratively" (Sinclair, 2009, p. 505) has been made.

Closely connected to libraries as learning commons is the concept of "blended librarianship". Blended librarians are characterized by a "new role in which the skills and knowledge of instructional design are wedded to our existing library and information technology skills" (Bell & Shank, 2004, p. 373). In their presentation of the blended librarians blueprint, Bell & Shank have theorized that blended librarians who are able to demonstrate the best combination of traditional library skills and hardware/software skills are likely to thrive in the academic environments of the future.

In recent years, the renaissance of the concept of libraries as learning commons has developed into the latest evolution of "maker spaces". Instead of being strictly demarcated by a fixed set of spaces or materials, maker spaces are a "mindset of community partnerships, collaboration and creation" as illustrated by the Library as Incubator Project 2013 (Turner, Welch & Reynolds, 2013, p. 226). Many school libraries today are looking into the feasibility of reinventing their physical spaces, possibly more for libraries in urban campus where space may be a scarce resource. This space should also be adequately responsive in complementing the various learning styles of its users. According to Houston (2013), if maker space concept is integrated with school library, the library would be changed from a physical warehouse of books and audio-visual materials into a place where participatory learning and hands-on inquiry will be the norm. "Michigan Makers" after school program is a project undertaken in the 2012-2013 school year in the library at East Middle

School in Plymouth. The incorporation of maker space concept enabled these students to explore a wide range of desktop manufacturing tools such as Arduino microcontrollers and 3-dimensional printers to "design, prototype and produce a variety of innovative technology applications" (Houston, 2013, p.26). The learning experience is reinforced with their sharing of reflections and learning points on their Michigan Makers blog.

Larson (2006) explored an interesting application at Durham School of the Arts in North Carolina, where students are provided with opportunities to develop deeper connections between art and academic subjects. An example is that its high school students who are studying American literature are required to write critical essays that compare and contrast a novel that they have chosen, with an art piece such as a film or photograph. The instruction of information skills is integrated into the students' research assignments. Accordingly to Larson (2006), the library works closely together with teachers in the planning of assignments to achieve the dual objectives of arts integration and information literacy.

About the Library at School of the Arts

In view of the evolving needs of the school community, the library at SOTA has started on a review of its service concepts from January 2013.

SOTA is a pre-tertiary independent specialized arts school that offers an integrated arts and academic curriculum in Singapore since its inception in 2008. The school has been relocated in 2010 from its original Goodman Road site to its present Zubir Said Drive campus, which is located within the arts cultural district in Singapore. SOTA provides a holistic education for its students through a six-year curriculum leading to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme or the IB Career-related Certificate Programme. Its IB Diploma is widely recognized by top universities worldwide, while international art institutes increasingly acknowledge its IB Career-related Certificate recently launched in May 2014. As a school of the future, SOTA strives towards the vision to groom upcoming generations of artistic and creative professionals.

The library at SOTA has a contemporary layout that complements the distinctive design that is unique to this urban campus. The library occupies 2 floors. Its high ceiling and many glass windows allow natural light to stream into the library. A visitor who walks pass the entrance located at the lower floor towards the main reading area known as Cool Stuff Zone is greeted with a scenic view of the city landscape. At the central of the library is a prominent centerpiece display of numerous infinity signs inter-linked to each other, which suggests that the quest for knowledge is infinite. The collection is arranged systematically with Dewey Decimal Classification. Lending titles are shelved at the General Lending Section. The dance, music, theatre and visual arts titles are shelved in special clusters and differentiated by coloured coded labels at the book spines. Popular titles that are frequently used as reference materials by

the students in their research are housed in a separate reading room known as Reference/Red Spot Room. It is a common sight in the quiet Reference/Red Spot Room to see students working on an assignment on their laptop in one of the numerous study carrels, which are equipped with individual power sockets. Professional development and curriculum materials that are crucial to support the teaching needs of the faculty members are located in another separate room known as Teacher's Resource Centre.

The higher floor is accessed by a spiral staircase, and is occupied with a Teacher's Reading Workspace and numerous Discussion Rooms of various sizes and that faculty members and students may book for classes or project meetings. Each of these rooms is well equipped with whiteboard, projector, visualizer, speaker's table and chairs.

The colour scheme throughout the library is vibrant, where multi-colored sofas juxtaposition with the neutral coloured shelves. Computers with Internet access are arranged in clusters and prominently located close to the collection to facilitate research. The library team works hand in hand with a group of faculty members in the Library Committee to deliver the library experience to its users.

The library in SOTA as a learning space, which is close to a learning commons, is very much interweaved into its culture. Faculty members frequently bring their students and conduct classes in the more informal setting of the library. Book clubs are held to discuss interesting titles. School counselors facilitate workshops to enhance the well-being of students and help them better cope with examination stress, with accompanying book display of newly arrived "Chicken Soup for the Soul" series that students are free to borrow. Students often relax on the comfortable sofas with a favorite novel, or access the databases on the computers as they work on their research in deep concentration. It is not unusual to see students reluctant to leave when library closes for the day, as they are engrossed in the developments of the novel's storyline, or put the finishing touches to their assignment.

The discussion of the review and reinvention of service concepts is broadly classified as service initiatives and e-Resources, as follows.

Service Initiatives

Service Initiatives - Students
As part of the strategy to raise awareness, the library at SOTA has evaluated the feasibility of new initiatives and embarked on several ideas that had not been explored in the school previously

Information Literacy Sessions
Information literacy sessions are regularly conducted for students who are interested to learn more about how to leverage on diverse information sources for their school assignments and projects. Information literacy is basically a set of skills that requires individuals to "recognize when information is needed and

have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" as defined by American Library Association. As the proverb "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for life" aptly sums up, it is essential to impart the required information literacy skills and knowledge to the students, so that they would know how to conduct research effectively and independently.

Similar to the challenge described by Geck (2006), the library at SOTA has observed a significant portion of the students is overly reliant on Google and needs to improve on information literacy skills.

As part of the IB core component, students are required to submit an extended essay, which is a research paper up to 4,000 words on a topic that is of interest to them. The building up of research skills start earlier when students are in Year 4, as the students embark on an independent research essay which prepares them for the rigour of the extended essay. In consultation with faculty members, the library has conducted an inaugural research skills class in lecture style to the entire Year 4 cohort in January 2013, and another session in 2014. The students learn search strategies like Boolean operators, truncation and wildcards, how to critically evaluate the information they have retrieved and other information literacy skills. They are also welcomed to enquire at the library if they require more reference or research assistance.

As students work on their information literacy, they are required to build up competencies in key skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, higher order thinking, effective communication and organization (Soloman & Wilson, 2012). They are likely to become better self-directed learners who are able to ask informed questions and proficient in tapping on a diverse range of information sources. In today's classrooms, information and communication technologies are increasingly embedded in the learning experience, while the concept of e-learning is becoming more common. The achievement of information literacy is possibly closely interlinked to the curriculum's structure and content. Significantly, Levy (2005) made the connection that as librarians become more active in supporting teachers in an environment that is progressively more focused on student-centred learning, they would need to become more attuned to pedagogy.

Pedagogy is defined as "methods and principles of teaching" by Macmillan dictionary. Levy (2005) focused on the principles on which the constructivist theory which teaching and learning is established. Constructivist theory can be further classified as either cognitive constructivism (Piaget's work that relates learning to cognitive development) or socio-cultural constructivism (Vygotsky's study that links learning with social interaction). Librarians would need to reflect on how they can meaningfully contribute to the cognitive development of students as they learn in a social space like a library. Therefore, it is essential that librarians enhance their pedagogical awareness, which would be beneficial as they become more actively engaged in the support of the inquiry-based learning and research needs of the school community.

User Education

User education is an instructional programme to help users to effectively locate the information they require. It may include library orientation, guided tour and bibliographic instruction for students at the start of their first year of study. The new students are educated on loan privileges, physical layout of the library, how to search for titles on the OPAC, how to use the infrastructure such as scanners, self-check out and self-return machines and other useful information as they are guided around the library.

In addition to the orientation that is the norm for new students as in the previous years, the library has responded to requests from students on the more advanced aspects of user education on a group or one-on-one basis. Customized bibliographic instruction is provided for students who require additional assistance, such as the access of subscribed music databases in the library microsite or retrieval of a specific print journal article.

Latest Information Literacy Titles

The library has sourced for the latest edition of titles that are suitable in terms of age group of students as well as the scope of content. The titles that are relevant to information literacy and research skills are expanded with new additions to the collection. The new books are displayed prominently on the "New Arrivals" shelves that are located strategically in the library once they have been processed and ready for loan. They are also integrated in information literacy sessions as recommended reads.

Improvements to Learning Environment

Based on observations and feedback received, the library has implemented several ideas to improve its physical space.

Near the library entrance, a "Hotspot@Library" noticeboard has been installed. Interesting information that are related to reading and literacy are displayed every month, such as a recent month's feature of interesting book related world records, which include highest earning children's author, largest private book collection, fastest selling book and so on.

To provide a more conducive learning space for the students, the library has installed blinds in Discussion Rooms that directly faced the hot afternoon sun, mounted a new display rack that features the latest editions of magazines, and switched to the brighter daylight bulbs in all study lamps.

Service Initiatives – Faculty

In order to better understand the learning needs of the students, the library has rolled out several initiatives to the faculty members, whom have a deeper understanding and more direct connection to the curriculum of the students.

Survey

To gauge the relevance and usefulness of library services, an inaugural online survey over a period of 2 weeks has been conducted in February 2013 for the faculty members. The survey questions include what are the purposes of

their visits to the library, frequency of visits, their level of satisfaction with customer service of library staff, whether the print and electronic resources are sufficient, in what ways can library play a vital role to support their curriculum needs and so on. The survey ends with questions that invited participants to share suggestions on additional publications or services they would like to see. Key findings of the survey have been reviewed to identify for possible areas of improvement.

The participants have provided valuable feedback and the library has implemented some of the suggestions received, which include a colour photocopier for students' use and new magazine titles. In addition, the library has enhanced the learning experience of its users with new infrastructure like scanner and printer.

Focus Group

The library has continued the open communication by engaging the faculty members further through a focus group dialogue in March 2014. Through the interactive discussion, faculty members have articulated more about their library experiences, as well as their ideas to help the library create the best learning environment to effectively support teaching and learning needs within its means.

Knowledge Sharing Sessions

As part of the strategy to promote meaningful utilization of library resources, the library also conducts knowledge sharing sessions with the faculty members on useful print and online resources for their research areas, corporate or institutional library memberships if they wish to tap on inter-library loans, assistance for research enquiries and so on. The latest catalogues from international publishers are regularly highlighted to help faculty members keep current with the latest products and services that are relevant to the school's curriculum and faculty's professional development. Furthermore, the library has invited and hosted reputable publishers such as Taylor & Francis and Cambridge University Press to showcase their latest titles.

E-Resources

The library at SOTA maintains the library microsites for staff and students. These microsites effectively serve as a virtual reference point of discovery, where users are welcomed to browse and search for information at a time and place convenient to them. With the support of the information technology office, the microsites are regularly uploaded with useful and relevant electronic resources, as follows.

Online Resources

A variety of databases have been subscribed. In general, the major databases such as the music databases like *Grove Music Online* and *Smithsonian Global Sound for Libraries*, to current affairs databases like

Newslink are well used. The library has also introduced new databases for faculty members to trial, such as *Garland Encyclopedia, Dance in Video, Routledge Reference Online, Routledge Performance Archive* and *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Feedback has been sought and evaluation has been done after the trials to assess if recommend subscription.

Online platforms of local major newspapers like *The Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao* are also subscribed to provide users with the option to read e-newspapers. E-books are purchased and e-journals are also subscribed. In addition to the e-Resources subscribed by the school, many students and teachers leverage on their digital library membership with the national library, where they are able to tap on more online resources for research.

New Arrivals Alert

The library has expanded the publicity outreach of newly arrived titles with its monthly alerts. Traditionally, only the individual requesters and their faculty heads get to know when the materials they have specifically requested are ready for loan after the procurement and cataloging processes. In consultation with its users, the library has come up with the idea to compile all newly arrived titles, arrange them systematically according to the faculties, and site them within the microsites. This allows all students, teachers and staff to be kept regularly updated of the full scope of the latest additions to the collection that may of interest to them, thus raising awareness of the availability of new titles.

Recommend a Title

To complement the online catalogue in which users can search for titles in the microsites, the library introduced a "Recommend a title" service. The service is well received by users, who are welcomed to suggest titles that are not currently in the collection, yet useful to support their learning or curriculum needs.

What Do the Users Think?

In general, the objective of raising awareness of library services has been largely achieved since the review of service concepts more than 1 year ago. As sufficient time is required to nurture a reading culture, it may be more meaningful to assess in possibly a few years down the road if it has resulted in higher utilization of library resources if usage is to be measured in terms of visitorship or loans.
Nevertheless, positive feedback and accolades have consistently been received, such as:

- *"…Thank you very much for taking the time to show me around your library. It was very impressive and I loved to see how successful you've been at attracting staff and student use…"*

- *"…The feedback from the last session that you did was very positive…"*
- *"…Just to let you know, the presentation at Staff Interaction really helped, I had teachers who mentioned they didn't know our library has certain access. I think the information was very useful for teachers…"*
- *"…Thank you for the sharing last Wed! It's very useful, especially the eResourses available in school and in Singapore…"*

Conclusion

With its conducive space where its users frequent for research or seek a good read, the library at SOTA is a focal point in the school that inspires the exchange of ideas amongst its community. Its transformation is somewhat in line with the frameworks of the learning commons and blended librarian, though its development as a maker space is not yet evident.

Libraries have come a long way from being a structure that store books and information since historical times. The papyrus scrolls of the Alexandria Library in ancient Egypt that was founded around 300 BCE by Ptolemy I, signified an attempt to gather the whole of world's knowledge for the use of scholars (Brophy, 2007) of that time. Libraries are one of the hallmarks of a civilized community and symbolize a window to the wider universe out there.

It is a space where learners discover ideas that may possibly result in impactful changes in the future. It also help us to remember that it is the people who have the right information at the right time, whom would thrive in today's technology world.

The changing technological landscape presents a challenge, yet there are exciting possibilities ahead as the library at SOTA works closely with its users in their learning journey.

References

Geck, C. (2006). The generation Z connection: Teaching information literacy to the newest net generation. *Teacher Librarian*, *33*(3), 19-23. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Beard, J., & Dale, P. (2008). Redesigning Services for the Net-Gen and Beyond: A Holistic Review of Pedagogy, Resource, and Learning Space. *New Review Of Academic Librarianship*, *14*(1/2), 99-114. doi:10.1080/13614530802518941. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Igel, C., & Urquhort, V. (2012). Generation Z, meet cooperative learning. *Middle School Journal, 43*(4), 16-21. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the JSTOR database.

Harland, P. (2011). Toward a learning commons: Where learners are central. *Teacher Librarian*, *38*(4), 32-36. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Loertscher, D. V., & Diggs, V. (2009). From library to learning commons: A metamorphosis. *Teacher Librarian*, *36*(4), 32-38. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson) database.

Woodward, J. (2009). *Creating the customer-driven academic library*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Sinclair, B. (2009). The blended librarian in the learning commons: New skills for the blended library. *College & Research Libraries News, 70*(9), 504-516. Retrieved June 11, 2014, from the Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson) database.

Bell, S. J., & Shank, J. (2004). The blended librarian: A blueprint for redefining the teaching and learning role of academic librarians. *College & Research Libraries News*, *65*(7), 372-375. Retrieved June 11, 2014, from the Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson) database.

Turner, A., Welch, B., & Reynolds, S. (2013). Learning spaces in academic libraries -- A review of the evolving trends. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, *44*(4), 226-234. doi:10.1080/00048623.2013.857383. Retrieved June 10, 2014, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Houston, C. (2013). Makerspaces@Your School Library: Consider the Possibilities!. *Kentucky Libraries*, *77*(3), 26-28. Retrieved June 18, 2014, from the Library Literature & Information Science Full Text (H.W. Wilson) database.

Larson, G. (2008). The media program at Durham School of the Arts. *Knowledge Quest*, *37*(1), 34-37. Retrieved June 19, 2014, from the Academic Search Premier database.

Solomon, A., & Wilson, G. (2012). *100% information literacy success*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.

Levy, P. (2005). Pedagogy in a changing environment. In *Developing the new learning environment: the changing role of the academic librarian,* edited by P. Levy and S. Roberts. London: Facet Publishing.

Brophy, P. (2007). *The library in the twenty-first century*. London: Facet Publishing.