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Optimizing Library Services--Expanding Skills for Librarians Serving Children and Young Adults: A Transition into an Emerging Digital Culture

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Optimizing Library Services — Expanding Skills for Librarians Serving Children and Young Adults: A Transition into an Emerging Digital Culture

by **Sylvia Vincent Stavridi** (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, El Fourat Building, 4th Floor, Alexandria, Egypt) <Sylvia.stavridi@bibalex.org>

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In a high-tech environment where knowledge and information are delivered immediately, technology has added several new dimensions to the current role of librarians focused on serving children and teens and encouraging them to become engaged in their knowledge community. The role of the librarian is being re-directed from being solely responsible for information and knowledge transfer to teaching and research. This changing landscape adds different perspectives to the range of librarians' responsibilities to accommodate future changes (Partridge et al., 2010; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). They share their content knowledge to improve the quality of digital books and develop the digital creation of data, provide electronic records for different materials, and guide patrons to what information and technologies they should be able to access (Sun, 2011; Ferrari, 2012; Craig & McDowel, 2013).

New era librarians are expected to be multi-tasking professionals and information curators who prepare children for digital learning, bring together information from different sources, manage digital information systems, and adjust and develop innovative services and programs in order to meet the unique needs and interests of today's digital generation.

At the **Bibliotheca Alexandrina**, the children and young people's libraries work hard to remain up-to-date on the latest technological trends, maximizing innovative technologies to provide more advanced services and activities to our community. Digital content has become a popular format of convenience to today's young children and teens that are increasingly exposed to various types of media. The current generations of librarians serving children and teens have rapidly become instructional coaches and dynamic mediators of information. Given the digital nature of reading today,

general entry-level knowledge of the need for evaluating sources of information is no longer enough. Reinforcing a set of digital skills to communicate through technology requires today's librarians to think differently to better understand the changing nature of collections and become more informed about the application of new technologies, as well as their complex terms and functionalities. Witnessing the growing demand for technology-related services forces librarians to investigate the development of library-acquired devices and services, evaluate resources related to digital literacy, replace old technologies and implement new ones, and promote overall digital inclusion.

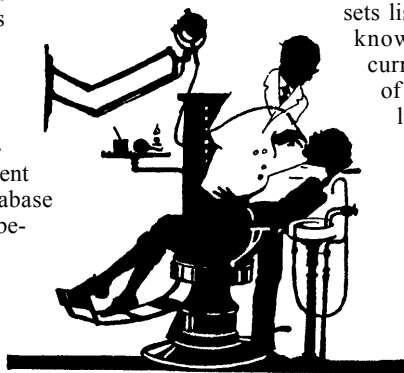
Do our children and youth librarians currently lack the knowledge and skills necessary to support the dynamic digital environment? And what skills should librarians focus on to

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serve children and young adult populations successfully?

Future trends in children and young people libraries require the librarian to be a digital literacy educator and technological adventurer with the ability to use information and communicate digital content in a wide variety of formats. This transition into an emerging digital culture explores and re-envision special skills and/or knowledge, and qualifications sought for librarians engaged in digital library practice to remain responsive to technological changes while staying connected to their local community. Required skills include varying levels of progressive technological knowledge, computer and productivity tool competencies, and associated skills and knowledge to cope with the changing information world. In this speedy development, the library ensures that both children and youth service librarians are able to utilize new platforms and resources that can genuinely exploit the integration of digital media into children and youth services.

Training librarians to be computer literate can be required at three levels: baseline, desired, and target levels. Base-line information includes basic operations such as using the printer, opening browsers and using menu bars, sending and receiving emails, and using search engines. The desired level includes skills that are a little more advanced than the basic level, but are not as developed as those in the target level which include knowledge of downloading files, cookies and general security issues (Hamada & Stavridi, 2014). With growing technical awareness and expertise, it is necessary to develop target training levels specific to each library, based on existing competencies in training and technology. While scripting languages, digital content management systems, metadata, and XML skills are often perceived as core competencies, other sub technical/digital areas such as web design and web standards (e.g., Web navigation, information visualization, and user centered design), and database design and management (e.g., SQL and Web database applications) are likely to become more relevant than ever to digital library development. In terms of advanced professionals, Heinrichs and Lim (2009) highlight the abilities that refer to multimedia skills, database development, and Web design. In addition to this, Dhanavandan and Tamizhchelvan (2013) maintain that, current practicing librarians need to seek out additional and new competencies such as communication with a computer, digital information retrieval and processing, Web-publishing, database theory, networking, human computer interaction, evaluation of information systems, and technical troubleshooting skills.



In technology-rich learning environments, it is also expected that the scope of advent basic digital skills will change to identify specific digital skill sets in two elements of digital literacy: ICT literacy and media literacy, that are to be represented by both children and young adult librarians. The impact of technology changes in format and in services requires much more in-depth technical/digital skills than ever to be more relevant to the digital library development. A list of digital competencies and technology-related skills are developed to enable full participation in a digital society and to offer greater understanding of the current and anticipated skills and knowledge of librarians engaged in digital library practice. The job market does not have formal standards for the integration of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) that apply to the new role of teacher-librarians in public libraries. So, to effectively and efficiently serve children and youth, the demand to upgrade and develop the computer-technology and digital literacy skills listed in discipline-specific knowledge areas is crucial to support the integration of digital proficiencies. Some specific examples of digital skills were articulated by the staff of each library based on their necessities in use of Information Society Technology for the field of children librarianship. The list of skills and qualifications were grouped into three common/broad categories: Digital Media Literacy, Digital Rights Management and Accessibility, and Advanced Web Technology. Each category encompasses skills such as Website development, Web page design, database management, ICT applications, hardware, networking and security, public access technology, digital knowledge management and digital content performance's evaluation. This list of skills, focusing upon the digital literacy, aspires the appropriate mix of digital competencies and information communication technology skills in conjunction with those digital literacy skill sets listed in discipline-specific knowledge to accommodate current changes in the roles of children and young adult librarians that best support technology-based service environment.

In a fast-paced digital age, librarians and individual library practitioners who are keen to be working with children and teens have been searching for ways to put up with the advances in children's and teen's access and use of information technology, along with the ability to quickly adopt and appropriately use a combination of traditional analog skills and advanced technological competencies that encompass not just technical skills, but also a variety of information and communication technologies and media and digital literacies. Adopting a new role, children's and young adults' librarians are expected to balance the use of digital technology with personal interac-

tion and combine their broad competencies and responsibilities to team up with IT librarians to evaluate and invest in the library's hardware, software and telecommunications capacity to establish a technical infrastructure designed to meet end user requirements.

Further study of the overlap for practical management, programming, and digital skills for librarians in children and young adult library areas will be useful to serve a wide variety of patrons' needs and expectations. For more details on our developing sets of technology competencies and techno-digital skills required of librarians in order to successfully serve children and young adults in the digital age, read the IGI Global article "Children and Youth Librarians: Competencies Required in Technology-Based Environment."

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There is also a growing sense that libraries can help people decide what information they can trust: 37% of Americans feel that public libraries contribute "a lot" in this regard, a 13-point increase from a survey conducted at a similar point in 2015.

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I guess that's about it for now! Happy fall! 🍂

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