



Martin Gray reflects on the role of the modern Teacher-Librarian...

Libraries have never been places only about books; they are about whatever technology works. Books and card catalogues (essentially hashtags on paper), gave way to microfiche and the Oasis library catalogue to today with access to databases and Oliver's web based library enquiry. The Library has always been a repository for information and technology and a recent survey shows that over ninety-five percent of librarians teach information and technology skills to their students and nearly fifty percent teach their school staff (Gray, 2016). There is little difference in their mission today than when school libraries first became common in NSW. For a Teacher-Librarian then, best practice involves supporting the whole school's teaching and learning, with a focus on information skills.

The information skills themselves have not changed. Defining, locating, selecting, organising, presenting and assessing information are essentially the same, regardless of source. These skills are best taught in the context of subject-specific or KLA, class-based activities. Isolated information skills lessons are widely understood to be less effective. Thus a Teacher-Librarian is most effective when working with classroom teachers on class work or other assessment tasks.

This requires planning sessions between the Classroom Teachers and Teacher-Librarian, which while difficult to organise in a busy school schedule, can lead to better outcomes for students. Examples of such collaboration might include teaching a Senior PDHPE class how to use the local library's subscriber databases to find research articles, or collecting physical resources for a junior History class on the topic Australians at War from a library collection.

To remain effective, the school library must make relevant resources available; the library is there to resource the curriculum. The Teacher-Librarian, educated both fully as a Teacher and as a Librarian, is well placed to assess what resources are needed and then curate them. Resources both physical and online must be acquired and access managed. Many schools are now including electronic databases or partnering with local or state libraries to gain access (Gray, 2014). Such databases are excellent for non-fiction resources where information can change quickly or multiple users need access at the one time.

However, books are still an important part of every library. Reading on paper can lead to more in-depth comprehension and greater recall of a subject than online alone (Jabr, 2013). Books also foster an enjoyment and appreciation of reading and the Teacher-Librarian is expected to choose appropriate material to add to and remove from the collection. Reviews should be read about new books, teachers should be consulted regarding what is required, and a Teacher-Librarian is expected to know their collection well enough to know what is being used, what needs to be added, or what needs to be replaced. Children are more likely to find enjoyment and appreciation in library resources if their searches do not return irrelevant or excessive results.

A school library is not just a collection of information, it is also a space. That space has to be managed for most efficient use. Booking of classes, distance education lessons, catch-up examinations, teacher meetings or quiet study. The space must be managed to accommodate all these competing educational,



spatial and technological requirements, often simultaneously. This can involve event planning or crisis management depending on the day and situation. A well-organised and presented library will often be the gem of a school's buildings and used to host parents and other community members at information, award and school promotion events.

Importantly, the Teacher-Librarian should be part of the whole school, and as such take part in all school programs, welfare, discipline, sports (or Chess) and anything else that is required. The Teacher-Librarian leads the library on behalf of the school as outlined in the Department's *Handbook for School Libraries*; all roles vary from school to school, and visions for the library may change over time and as the school changes. Conversations in the library between all teachers, staff and students about what the school needs and what is possible and practical are vital.

Martin Gray has 20 years of experience in education, covering all cohorts from nursery schools to university and working with boards of education on three continents. He is a Google Certified Innovator, and a Department of Education Google Champion, who often presents at regional conferences for teacher librarians, school leaders and library support staff. Martin is currently working on a project to gather and publish quantifiable data on the way school libraries and teacher librarians are used today.

Further Reading

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