

Thriving in the new normal: changing perceptions and leading change

By Jennifer Hall

Snapshot

In this article Jennifer Hall reflects on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent period of remote learning, and beyond. Hall explores how her team have met the challenges posed, and details the various ways they responded, to continue to offer exemplary levels of library service.

As I begin to write this article, the world as we know it is in the grips of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, a one in a hundred-year event that many experts predict will change our lives. It is a surreal feeling. As contamination and death rates soar across the globe, authorities have closed schools, businesses, churches, libraries, galleries and theatres. Much anticipated national and world sporting events have delayed starts or been postponed. In Australia we are asked to work from home, to be socially isolated from family, friends and colleagues. As Head of Learning Resources and Information Services at one of Australia's leading Independent schools in Melbourne, my interest is in how education addresses the current and foreseeable future of the social, political and economic impact of COVID-19. How will short, medium and long-term decisions at federal, state and the local school levels affect the learning of our young global citizens into the future? Our State Government's decision to move from the classroom to home schooling in the short term, means teachers, parents, extended family members and friends are partners in children's education as never before.

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Like many of my peers in school libraries across the globe, preparing for the adjustment to remote teaching and learning (referred to as 'Horizon 2' at our school) with staff from my school was swift and immediate. What became acutely obvious to me through my own experiences and the many educational global connections I have through emails, blogs and social

media, is the fundamental need for our students, and those at home, to possess essential literacy and digital skills. The ability to listen, to read, to write and to speak confidently and coherently is essential throughout our lives, but never more evident in our current environment. Improving multiliteracy skills as well, must be considered essential if students and family educators are to successfully use technology to navigate a range of multimodal tools, that schools are using to deliver online remote learning. Yet, teaching of these critical basic skills, is often taken for granted. Literacy time in class, from early years to year 12, now frequently competes with a range of subjects and co-curricular activities. The expectation for a classroom teacher to be an 'expert' in a range of areas, including literacy, has its challenges.

The decline in school libraries' staffing and resources (Tarica, 2010; Hay, 2013; Mitchell & Weldon, 2016; Softlink, 2015; Softlink, 2016; Softlink, 2017, Softlink, 2018) has also impacted literacy standards. As administrators, teachers, parents, family and friends assist in delivering home schooling, the importance for children to have well developed literacy, information and digital skills will be evident to all. Potentially, whilst navigating the diverse facets of home schooling, many adults will also question their skill levels and the value of their own educational experiences.

Last year the Caulfield Grammar School, Wheelers Hill Campus library team, very proudly accepted the 2019 School Library Association of Victoria Innovators Award, at the November Conference. The award was in recognition of the partnership between our school leadership and the library team's creative vision to merge our Junior and Secondary libraries at Wheelers Hill, to form the one ELC-12 library learning and community space. Informed by OECD Education 2030, International Baccalaureate (IB) education and Caulfield Grammar School (CGS) Strategy 2031 – Mind for Life, the aim of our ambitious library project was to ensure our design thinking was based on world-class best practice. Above all else we wanted to ensure that literacy delivered in engaging and inspiring ways by qualified teacher librarians remained the core focus of our teaching and learning space. As we reflect on our current situation, how timely our vision proved to be.

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In the short term, as we adhere to strict federal and state directives around social isolation and distancing, we are aware that our newly refurbished academic, social and recreational spaces, designed for independent, small group instruction, as well as full classes, conform to the requirements of distance isolation and campus care programs at this time. The growth and improvement in our virtual resources and services offered, are now more functional and accessible than ever before to deliver remote learning. However, whilst our excellent physical spaces, resources and services are critical, COVID-19 has made us even more aware that they are only part of the success of our library program.

Community engagement with all our users and collaborative partnerships between year level, subject teachers and qualified teacher librarians, in my experience, are real game changers for successful school libraries. The opportunities for our newly designed library and our growing literacy, research and inquiry-based teaching and learning programs and services support, is

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dependent on the growth in our community and instructional partnerships. Combining educational expertise is powerful whether teaching, onsite or remotely. A culture of collaboration, supported by IB education and a focus on evidence-based practices have allowed our staff and students increased opportunities to become part of an international community of innovative thinkers and learners. Reports from the OECD Education

2030 (2019), Young Australians (2017a; 2017b) and the New Media Consortium (2017) outline the need for students to use a range of interdisciplinary learnings to problem solve and use technology competently and confidently in the future. Development of these literacy, social and critical thinking skills are a core part of the teacher librarian's collaborative role and has ensured the library's contributions to our Horizon 2 remote learning programs are valued and have positive outcomes for teachers, students and parents.

We already had extensive evidence of and access to the valuable contributions and support offered by all CGS campus libraries, teacher librarians and library technicians on our library webpages. These important services and literature programs promote and support reading, literacy and research skills, which are key features of our library program. Hence, our qualified and experienced teacher librarian team have importantly been able to continue to collaborate in an ongoing way with all ELC to 12 teachers in their various roles, whilst remote learning. Using technology, we have continued to seek requests from teachers for curriculum resources and support for literature and research tasks. Contributions to IB approaches to teaching and learning, especially research was also sought by teaching staff through MYP Newsletters, direct emails and subject area pages. We had already been a team keen to incorporate ideas to enhance our users' experiences with the many innovative way retailers and eContent providers were servicing their users both physically and digitally.

Therefore, we realised that much of our existing blended teaching approaches on campus, could be adapted to remote learning at home. These also included continuing to be actively involved in:

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Supporting learning, literacy and literature through:

- Planning and teaching interactive ELC-6 library sessions incorporating literacy and literature activities, video and screen casting of book reviews and student recommendations via online team meetings
- Teaching and facilitating our Middle Years wide reading program classes, discussion groups, shared reading blogs, video, podcasts and book promotions remotely
- Scheduling sustained reading for 25-30 minutes and associated reading challenges in our Middle Years wide reading program classes and Junior School Literature classes
- Surveying reading goals and interests, listing current reading choices and suggestions and updating reading records
- Weblinks to online authors, illustrators, writing competitions, art and comic in residence programs
- Promotion of our annual Book Fest, Readers Cup and student literacy award
- Conversations with students through their online reading records to share what they are reading. This is especially relevant for avid readers and those students requiring additional literacy support, especially when students are working remotely

- Providing opportunity as required for students to drop off, collect or post library books.

Supporting students' research and study skills remotely through:

- Continuing to collaboratively plan, PYP, MYP inquiry units and VCE assessment tasks remotely with staff through online meetings, emails and a specially designed library remote learning website.
- Creating a range of screen cast and instructional videos via class and subject teachers' pages to encourage and assist students and families to access relevant CGS library resources.
- Supporting staff with approaches to teaching and learning (ATLs) strategies and resources.
- Supporting students through the research process, with tools for locating, gathering, analysing, synthesising, organising and referencing information and resources to support their learning on Learning Areas remote lessons.
- Facilitating and updating access to digital resources including the library catalogue with the creation of genre and literature theme pages for ease of access and increased online subscriptions for relevant software.
- Creating Library Resource Guides in collaboration with teachers to assist students to locate and access relevant online resources to support their curriculum units across PYP, MYP inquiry units and VCE assessment tasks.
- Added research skills videos to our digital 24/7 library platform, to consolidate effective use our ATL research scaffolds to support the stages of guided inquiry-based units and research including locating resources, note-taking and citing references.
- Updated support for studying at home on our existing digital 24/7 library platform where ATL research and study skills instructional video modules are available to students anywhere at anytime for skill and knowledge building. These included managing your mindset: motivation and wellbeing and effective use of our databases.
- Updated the links on our CGS Libraries academic integrity page to ensure teachers were meeting the requirements of academic integrity when using digital resources, especially with changes due to COVID-19 .
- Creating a site of quick links remote learning resources for staff and students to access.
- Asking staff to incorporate our 'Ask a Teacher Librarian' link on their online lessons so students could access research, study and reading support and queries.



Supporting students' connectedness to school through:

- Continuing to be involved as much as practical, in providing activities and workshops for both our senior and junior students, to thrive together. Remote learning has highlighted how the library can enhance our community experiences and connections. As a team we were conscious not to adversely affect our hard work and passion which had enabled us to increase student and staff frequency in using the library. In association with this greater usage, we were keen to think of ways to avoid participation rates, engagement and interests in the programs we were offering prior to COVID-19, from declining once we returned to school. We wanted to avoid if possible, having to start again to maintain student awareness and interest in our offerings and were able to achieve this through our online activities.

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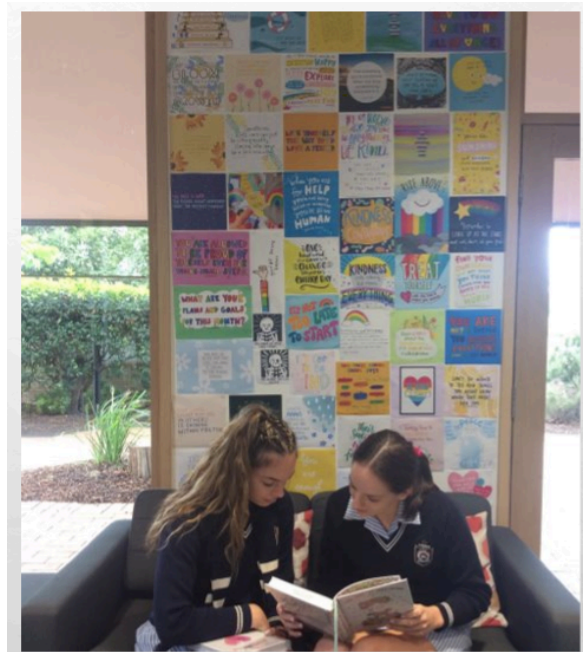
- Coordinating and supervising roles in the delivery of the campus care program during COVID-19 was a substantial and valuable way that library team members contributed to supporting students and their families.
- Our visible wellbeing program, where each Wednesday our school dedicated the whole day to Community Connection activities to reflect the importance of supporting staff, student and parent minds and bodies. On this day as well as on other days, where applicable, the library staff offered the following:
 - 'Horizon Reads' which became our **online** campus Book Club with blogs, discussion groups and activities to share and foster literacy and literature for our students and staff. We had 100 students enrol for 'Horizon Reads' the first time it was offered, which was fantastic.
 - Online access to information and resources for students to participate in from home in any suitable lunchtime and after school activities that we normally run through the library program. These included literature, study and research skills sessions all of which support and continue to encourage student voice and the opportunity to explore creative projects from home. A few programs such as Women and Men Circles, had to be postponed until we returned to campus.
 - As part of our visible well-being program, we promoted our collection of digital resources for recreation and relaxation, including Borrowbox, RB Digital, Flipster and ClickView amongst others.
 - Provided a range of creative writing club links to encourage students to participate in writing competitions and also suggested writing from home (letters, blogs) and linking to a range of writer websites locally and internationally.

- Our library technicians, assistants and teacher librarians provided technical support for students and staff for ClickView, BorrowBox, Office 365 and our learning management platform as well as a variety of apps and multi-modal tools.

Supporting Students global connections and international mindfulness through:

- As a library team we have been focused on ways in which libraries in general, and specifically our campus libraries, can bring the world into the school. We are passionate about extending the students to look beyond themselves, our school and our city especially at this time.
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- Developing this awareness and our school values of thriving together and embracing diversity, is critical in supporting **IB** international mindedness. Some of the following strategies which have been transferrable to Horizon 2, remote learning include:
 - Duplicating the context of digital screens throughout the library, which display a range of international and national news bulletins daily by updating our library digital News page and adding popular social media news sites as well. This updated webpage, also proved valuable for a future Middle Years unit on newspapers and was especially relevant for the senior English persuasive essay task.
 - Digital copies of local and international newspapers and broadcasts through ABC, BBC and SBS news services from around the world broadened student exposure to diverse perspectives on many issues. COVID-19 was especially relevant of course.
 - Significant real-world experiences related to COVID-19, was shared by so many countries, and online platforms such as ClickView TV provided an opportunity to record, store and view content as required.
 - A diverse range of commercial and educational webpages, many created because of the COVID-19 isolation, allowed us to share significant events, locations and performances through virtual tours, and famous landmarks. We also took advantage of the many creative authors, illustrators and singers sharing their stories and talents. We either linked their websites and social media presentations or created our own. Our Junior School teacher librarian, created a platform for staff across our campuses to read stories online including serial reads and puppet plays for the students. Seeing familiar faces sharing fun stories was a very positive connection for many students and their families.
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- A world map and Google Earth were other valuable resources to broaden student's knowledge and connection to all parts of the world. We included links to maps and fun activities especially for the Junior school staff to explore with their students. The option of establishing a large interactive wall map when we return to school is a goal, we will explore from the positive experiences in Horizon 2.
- Our collection development improved as we sought to address a need to acquire additional copies of eBooks and audio books from a range of sources including Bolinda's BorrowBox.



- We also focused our collection development on becoming more internationally minded resulting in Teacher Librarians, together with our library technicians used Horizon 2 to create themed pages based around novels written by authors from around the world. The emphasis on cultural settings and characters has allowed students to relate to the associated literature from a personal perspective or provided exposure to characters they would never normally know, mix or live with.
- In terms of other real-world contexts, students were surveyed to indicate if they would like to be part of our 'staff and student collection development group' to suggest future purchases. We also invited students to join our CGS Middle Years judging panel for the CBCA and YABBA shortlisted book awards.
- Library technicians spent valuable time reviewing and updating Oliver, our library management database, to further support and improve our database.
- Each year we celebrate Children's Book Awards, from Australian organisations including [YABBA](#), [CBCA \(Children's Book Council of Australia\)](#), and several others. Awards are discussed in wide reading programs and we often have several copies to ensure that students can borrow or reserve copies to circulate quickly. Promoting these titles from familiar organisations, provided a school-home connection for our students during Horizon 2 remote learning.
- Remote teaching and learning from a Library perspective also allowed us to continue to support and host national and global community programs that allow our students to have a greater awareness of social and cultural diversity. Embracing diversity, international mindedness and global connections are key drivers of our school library program and again very relevant in these current times. They included:
 - Continuing to plan for and circulate relevant information online about national and international programs we support as a campus. These include the [Indigenous Literacy Foundation](#), Great Book Swap, the St Jude School in Tanzania, [International Bookmark Exchange](#) (IASL) and International Book Giving Day. This

promotion has continued during relevant remote learning through inquiry units and library programs.

- Simultaneous Storytime was planned through Horizon 2 ready to share either on campus or during Horizon 2.
- In 2019 we participated in the International Bookmark Exchange for the International Association of School Libraries (IASL) month in October. Teaching remotely allowed us to explore renewing our global connections with students from children from Slovenia and Portugal. Communicating through letters and images to gain an understanding of how each country and their citizens were dealing with COVID-19 was the aim. However, our inquiries found that students in Slovenia did not have a BYOD program and so they were unable to communicate digitally from their homes. Instead our Junior school students wrote letters locally to ask grand friends from aged care facilities in our Melbourne neighborhood, how they were coping and to offer residents kind thoughts for their safety and well-being. Overall the letters were aimed to bring smiles to the faces of both young and old.
- Horizon 2 did also allow us to deepen our close relationships and connections to Year 3 students and staff from Mareeba Primary School in Qld. For the past four years the students from both schools have studied the diversity of each region's community facilities and services. These first hand experiences have provided learners with the chance to connect their learning with meaningful conversations to bring about changes in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the world in which we live.
- Horizon 2 tasks allowed the students to reconnect once again, with the additional opportunity for students to compare how their state has been coping with the COVID-19, and exploring the similarities and differences in health provision in particular.

The library in an IB school

Our connection and learning from IB education over the past four years since the PYP was first introduced, followed by MYP a year later, has had a positive effect on our library program and the professional learning of all staff. IB program philosophy, knowledge and curriculum has definitely supported and informed many of the positive aspects the library has been able to initiate throughout our remote teaching experiences. The library is the 'hub' of an IB school and ensuring that we maintain a presence online throughout remote learning is vital.

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Attendance at IB education networks, has also immersed our library staff in global opportunities to compare different models of library and resource provision on the basis of the future context of continuous learning. Ways of supporting student-centred learning environments in a digital world has been a distinct advantage. Now we

can also use the opportunities provided with remote learning to further create, develop and share a range of new resources and skills.

For our team these have included:

- Developing a faculty survey audit to assess explicit teaching of referencing already used to support an inquiry unit now that our new academic integrity policy is being rolled out. What are the expectations of staff at different year levels and how can we use this time to effectively identify our referencing skills across each year level?
- Create a research and multiliteracy scope and sequence, where we identified strategies and tools to be taught across Junior, Middle and Senior years in line with our new academic integrity policy.

During Horizon 2, library team members, continued to play a key role in upskilling teaching and support staff in leading professional development in a number of areas. Listening actively to our students, staff and parents to inform future priorities will continue on campus, as we assess ways in which technology has improved our staff, students and parent library experiences. Ways to market and enhance these virtual experiences moving forward to support reading, learning, health, wellbeing and especially our mental health through library programs and services will be considered. Some of these will include:

"I feel inspired to work with library staff to help our students maximise their learning within the re-invented library space. It is fit for purpose; providing a range of possibilities for exploration, collaboration and using technology imaginatively. I also like that there are welcoming places for anyone to relax with a good book.."
Jessica Russell

- Adding additional hardware to our new podcast suite to support a growing number of interested (and skilled) users. From our Horizon 2 remote learning experiences, additional hardware will now include more filming options for short, medium and longer teaching sessions. Guest slots for ex grammarians and community members to cover a range of topics will also be encouraged. Sixty second video bytes for our staff and student book promotions are also scheduled.
- Continuing to build on our online 24/7 skills platform using some of the new digital tools introduced during Horizon 2
- Further developing staff expertise in using a range of digital devices and platforms
- Growing our Makerspace program to support learning of new technologies
- Increasing our social media footprint

- Assisting teaching staff to create inquiry questions to support student learning by helping them formulate factual, debatable and conceptual questions.
- Proofreading and reviewing PYP and MYP planners and assessments before they are given to students to provide feedback on resource availability and inquiry tasks.
- Creating and curating resources that can be used at any time for students and teachers to develop their skills 24/7.
- Connecting with other state, national and international school librarians including those in MYP schools to share our learning
- Investigating library apps used in community libraries such as Solus' customised mobile app to provide added online communication and interaction for our users.

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Taking the conversation/s forward...

COVID-19 has given schools and libraries a unique opportunity to focus on the importance of literacy, literature, multiliteracy skills and the role school libraries play in education and the

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community. It is an unprecedented event in our world's contemporary history which will be written about across all mediums including books, both non-fiction and fiction. Our lives will change. We know this because we have read and studied other historical events during our lives. Now, it is our turn to reflect on how do we want to move forward, what do we take with us and what do we leave behind.

It is important that teacher librarians start or continue to be leaders of professional development and innovation at our schools to support these inevitable changes to education and society as we know it. We need to be exploring trends, frameworks and promising practice in school librarianship now as we move forward, in literacy and digital skills, to social, educational, health and cultural wellbeing.

We must use our COVID-19 remote teaching experiences and learnings to challenge and empower library professionals. In particular, the growth in multiliteracies and the future of teacher librarians to deliver these skills, knowledge and understandings in the future is critical. We must move together supporting campaigns such as ['Students Need School Libraries'](#) to support

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the education sector to improve literacy and literature skills across primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors in particular.

Our COVID-19 experiences have highlighted ways in which our school library and teacher librarians can easily adapt to remote learning with positive outcomes. However, as I reflect on our 2019 SLAV Innovation award which highlighted our leadership and library team focus to create an innovative and contemporary learning and community library space, returning to the physical rather than continuing only in the digital space, is what we are all looking forward.

Central to our physical library spaces, is the dynamic living garden we have created in response to a world-wide trend. A garden designed to include a rich planting palette connecting to the indigenous species of the area that has resulted in an increase in birdlife and insects. What pleasure and peace our garden provides for all of us on campus, with the unique opportunities to explore a myriad of social, academic and recreational pursuits that contribute to the health of our community of users. It is one of the features of our library learning and community space that we cannot duplicate in remote learning. We miss it and look forward to sharing this safe space again for learning, recreation and leisure activities to enhance the wellbeing of staff, students and families that gather regularly for cultural and arts event.

Here once again, after our experiences with COVID-19 home isolation, our library community will thrive together face to face and with great warmth, kindness and laughter in a shared space filled with curiosity and empathy that Horizon 2 remote learning cannot replace. Social interaction, people and places will become important again, just like our love of literature and our ability to read, speak and write the written word throughout our lives.

"The new library is such a nice study place. It's quiet and peaceful, which keeps me from getting distracted."

Ryan, Year 12

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Jennifer Hall's career in education has been diverse and extensive, leading library and digital learning teams in both private and public education in Victoria and Queensland. She has presented her work internationally and currently is building on her experience with IB education to advocate for changes in school library design and practices.