

# Learning and support for new school library staff in Aotearoa New Zealand

By *Miriam Tuohy*

## *Snapshot*

Miriam Tuohy, our regular correspondent from New Zealand, describes how the National Library of New Zealand's Services to Schools team works with new school library staff to support them and upskill them in their new role. Tuohy also details the programs changes during 2020 restrictions as they endeavoured to continue their excellent support to school library staff.

## Introduction

The start of each school year is an exciting and busy time in the library. It's a time when so much is new: a fresh intake of junior students, staff who have joined the school, and another year's collection development budget waiting to be spent. For school library staff who are new to their role, it is a time of anticipation, tempered with apprehension. There's a lot to learn!

At the National Library of New Zealand's Services to Schools our team of Capability Facilitators throughout Aotearoa often work with new school library staff one-to-one, to help them get to grips with the demands of the job. At the end of 2019, we had begun to develop a programme of online support that would dove-tail with this work and which we could deliver nationally. With the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, we put those plans on hold as responding to the pandemic became our top priority. What we learned then led to a redesigned programme that combines online delivery with face-to-face individual support.



Welcome slide from the first Zoom meeting

## Becoming a school librarian in Aotearoa New Zealand

New Zealand has no requirement for schools to have a school library or professional library staff. However, many schools (most secondary schools in fact) do have well-appointed libraries with qualified library staff.

But, there are also staff working in a school library role who do not have a background in librarianship. Some are teachers, teacher aides, or school administration staff. Some have found their way to the role via volunteering as 'parent help' at school. Many have limited hours working in the library, fitted around other responsibilities in the school. For some school library staff – myself included – earning a library qualification only happens once they're through the initial settling-in phase of the job.

### Settling into the role

Very often library staff have a 'one of a kind' role within the school. Although they are part of the wider team of educators, school library staff may not have the same opportunities to learn alongside more experienced colleagues doing the same work, as teachers would. We want the library staff who take part in our learning community to feel that we are working alongside them — providing information, encouragement, sharing experiences and ideas with

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each other. Having a personal learning network (PLN) is hugely beneficial for school library staff at any stage of their career. In her research about learning as a connected professional, Kay Oddone (2019) describes a complex multi-faceted model where networked connections help drive and shape the individual learner's personal and professional growth. We hope that our learning programme sets participants on that learning journey, by:

- *linking* them with the resources and people who can help them right away,
- encouraging them to *stretch* out – to learn more and make new connections themselves, and
- finding ways to *amplify* the learning through sharing, adapting and building on each other's ideas.

### Starting with the basics

The school librarian's role is nothing if not varied. Each day can be a juggling act as they:

- manage the day-to-day running of the library space

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- perform specialist tasks such as collection development
- help students and staff find, access, and use the information they need
- share their passion and knowledge about children's books
- use a variety of strategies to help young people discover the joy of reading.

Our support programme for new school library staff doesn't cover everything they might be expected to do. Rather, it focuses on three things that we believe will help people get off to a good start in their school library role. Broadly, our aim is to increase participants' confidence in these areas:

- library management and administration
- supporting reading for pleasure
- building relationships and connections between library staff and people within the school community (students, staff, parents and whānau), and with the wider community.

All our [professional learning and support](#) offers are also available to participants. Online courses and webinars, school library network meetings, and learning events around the country provide PD on school library development, digital literacy, and reading for pleasure.

## Delivering the programme

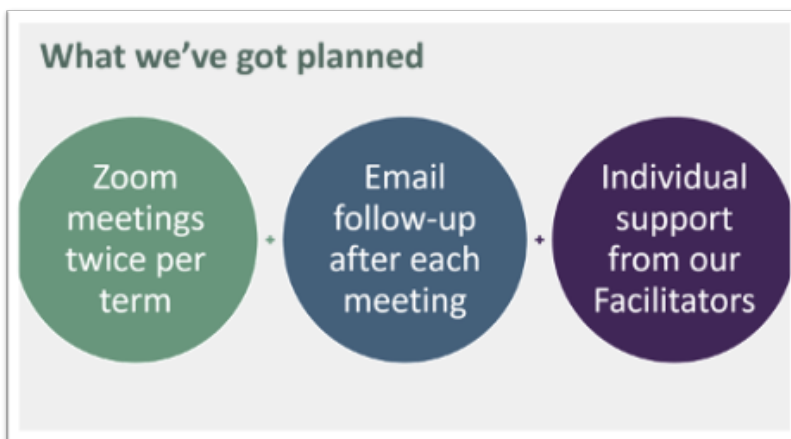
We are using three channels to connect regularly with the participants in our learning community:

1. Online Zoom meetings twice each term
  - Meetings hosted by our Capability team, with breakout sessions for learners to talk together, and the chat feature for questions and sharing any time.



Breakout session from the first Zoom meeting

2. Follow-up email sent after each Zoom meeting
  - These include links to all the resources shared, a round-up of breakout conversations and the shared chat, and some light 'homework' — a few actions for participants to work on between meetings.
3. Capability team facilitators around the country
  - Our facilitators provide further one-to-one help as needed — this might include visits to the school for hands-on support.

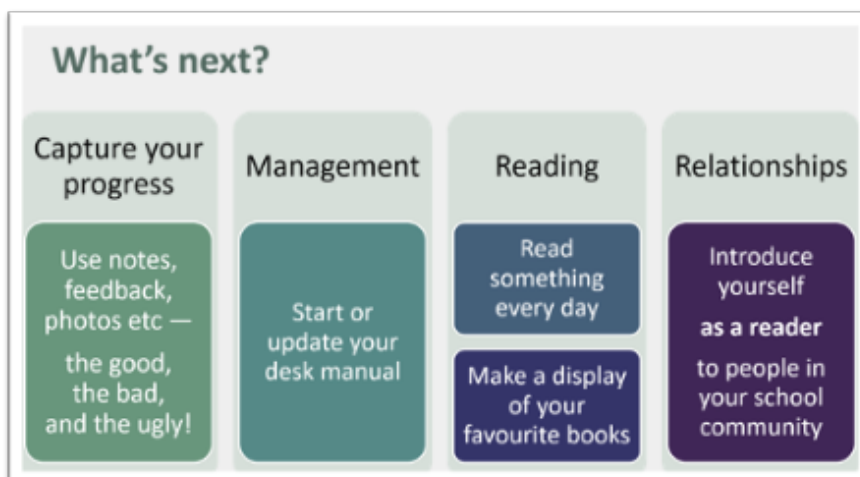


How we connect with this learning community

We have over 100 new school library staff taking part in our learning programme, most of whom started their school library job at the beginning of 2021.

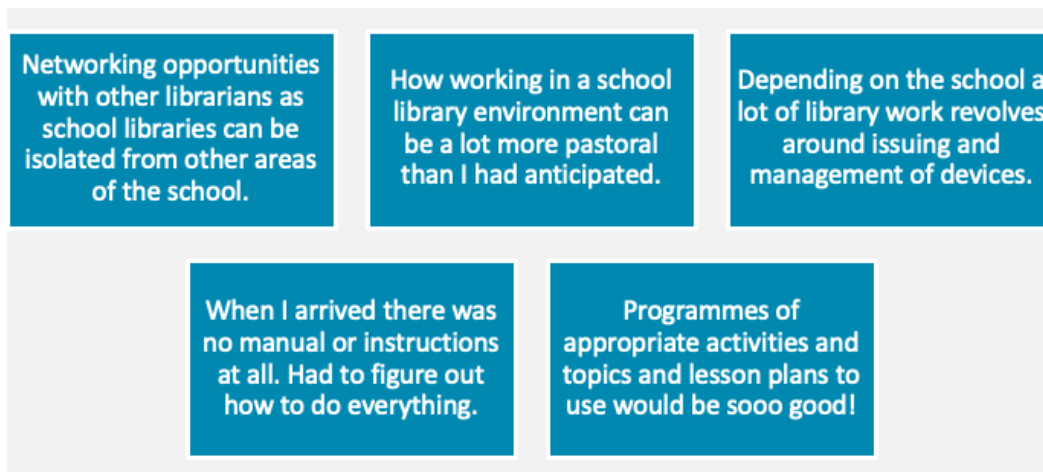
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At each meeting we ask participants to put the ideas shared into practice in their school library. We encourage them to make a habit of capturing stories (evidence of practice!) about what's happening in their school library — both to record their own progress and so they can make those positive changes visible to their school community. Sharing notes, photos, and stories back to the group at the next meeting is a valuable way to boost confidence and circulate good ideas.



Some light homework — suggested actions for follow-up from the first Zoom meeting

We've surveyed participants, and where possible we'll incorporate their feedback into our existing plans, as we build on the knowledge and confidence gains through the year. In our survey we asked, 'When you started, were there things you wish you'd known earlier about the role?'. Answers ranged from 'everything' to 'no, I'm happy to learn as I go'.



Some responses to our survey question 'Were there things you wish you'd known earlier about the role?'

## Making progress

With Term 1 almost over our first two Zoom meetings and follow-up emails are complete. We've talked about library operations and desk manuals, about being reading champions, our library collections, displays and other ideas for promoting reading, school library advocacy, and more! At our second meeting regional representatives from the National Executive of the School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (SLANZA) joined us to talk about the role they play supporting and advocating for school library staff, and to connect with those in their local region.

We're delighted to be part of the learning journey with all our new school library staff this year – we know they'll do great things!

## References

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**Miriam Tuohy** joined the National Library of New Zealand's Services to Schools as School Library Development Senior Specialist in 2016. Her involvement in the New Zealand education system spans early childhood education, primary and secondary school and tertiary libraries. Miriam was a member of the School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (SLANZA) National Executive from 2010-2016 including a year as President in 2015-16. As part of her current role, Miriam has contributed to the publication of Services to Schools framework for school library development, the 2018 and 2019 reports of the nationwide surveys of New Zealand school libraries. She is also involved in developing and delivering professional development for school library staff and teachers, and is a regular contributor to the National Library of New Zealand's Libraries & Learning blog.