

The Teacher-librarian and Pedagogy

By Christine Lean

This article is a report on the *Seeing Learning Professional Development (PD): Improved Pedagogy through Focussed Observation*, an Independent Schools Victoria PD series led by Dr Julie Landvogt in 2013 and its application to teacher-librarians.

My journey into this PD began with my involvement in the Christian College Geelong's Gifted and Talented program looking for opportunities for professional development that would help teachers examine their pedagogical practices and experiment with ways to improve. My reasons for an interest in pedagogy may not be immediately obvious, however I believe that pedagogy is intrinsic to the role of a teacher-librarian. Without a culture of excellent pedagogical practices in a school, teacher-librarians will not be able to make effective use of teaching opportunities. Poor pedagogical practices in a school are a source of frustration as teacher-librarians attempt to become involved in the teaching and learning processes – for example, students coming in to the library with poorly researched and written inquiry tasks that encourage copy and paste activity rather than critical and creative thinking. Additionally, teacher-librarians themselves need to have excellent pedagogical practices in order to take advantage of their often dislocated and fragmented opportunities.

Discussions about pedagogy are hard to start within a school as they often come with judgement which is destructive and therefore counterproductive. The Seeing Learning PD assisted us to find a way to have these discussions without judgement. The original team, or Triad, attended five full day PD sessions run by Dr Julie Landvogt. The use of three teachers in a Triad (hence the name) is best practice as discussions held between the two observers in front of the 'teacher' are essential to the process. The teacher presenting the lesson discovered that he/she reflected deeply on practice because of this process rather than just concentrating on feedback received from the observing team members. Thus the value of the process was magnified and began the process of real behavioural change for our teaching practice.

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The Seeing Learning PD taught us a method of feedback called *The Ladder of Feedback* ([see link](#)) that allows discussion of pedagogy in a non-judgemental manner, therefore enabling positive and constructive discourse about pedagogy. The protocol of this method is very structured and has rules that need to be followed. However, as the trust develops within each Triad, the rules can be relaxed and modified as long as the basics are not ignored. These basics are:

- discussion is about what was observed in the lesson;
- all members of the Triad contribute to the discussion equally during which time other members listen without interruption;
- each lesson is discussed separately;
- and the teacher of each lesson listens to what was observed prior to having an opportunity to present their own commentary on their lesson.

Initially, we practised implementing the Ladder of Feedback by watching a lesson from [Uncut Classrooms](#) and giving feedback on our observations of a video of a lesson. We discovered that, even with the best of intentions, it was very hard to be non-judgemental. To our relief we learnt this very quickly as it is much better to learn how to be non-judgemental to an online lesson than to a current colleague!

Description of the Triad observation process:

1. Teachers create a Triad for observations. This is best left to teachers to arrange as they will select members with whom they feel comfortable. Plus they will choose members that fit into their timetables. For school economic reasons, it is best if observations can be carried out during prep lessons as this means that no additional CRT expenses are incurred by the school.
2. Observations are conducted during the presenting teachers regular lesson – one teacher takes their normal lesson and two teachers observe the lesson (preferably in one of their prep lessons).
3. Prior to the observations the Triad has agreed upon the 'lens' through which the round of lessons will be observed (examples of lenses are questioning, feedback, discourse).
4. Each teacher sends a basic description of their lesson to the other members of the Triad.
5. The observers take notes during the lesson detailing what they observe keeping in mind the negotiated lens.
6. Following each observed lesson the observers thank the teacher who took the lesson but do not discuss the lesson at this point.
7. The Triad meets after each teacher has conducted an observed lesson and they follow a protocol to discuss each lesson. This protocol is called the Ladder of Feedback ([see link](#)).
8. The Triad then discuss their next round of observations.

Teacher-librarians are in a prime position to initiate and be involved in discussions about pedagogy in their school. The use of the Inquiry Process in the Australian Curriculum gives teacher-librarians an opportunity to provide assistance to their colleagues as they hold very specific expertise in this area. [The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \(AITSL\) - Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) requires that teachers are observed and observe in order to prove that they meet the standards. Teacher-librarians often teach in the open with other teachers present. Together these occurrences present a very real opportunity to teacher-librarians to be a part of the development of the practice of excellent pedagogy in their schools.

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References

Making learning visible (n.d.) 'The Ladder of Feedback: A Routine for Giving Feedback about an Idea or Artefact', Accessed at: <http://www.makinglearningvisibleresources.org/ladder-of-feedback-see-supporting-learning-in-groups-in-the-classroom.html>.

Christine Lean has over 30 years' experience as a teacher-librarian. She is an active member of SLAV, speaking about the teacher-librarian and the General Capabilities and the Australian Curriculum at various workshops, and is the branch delegate for the Geelong Region. She is the LITEhouse (Library) Coordinator at Christian College Geelong with responsibility for the College's four libraries and the implementation of the information literacy and reading for pleasure programs.