Collaboration Leaders

By Dianne Ruffles

Given that the one constant in our world is ever changing technology, it is crucial that teacher-librarians and school libraries maintain their focus on building relationships within their learning communities. Personal contact is still the key to maintaining the dynamic hub of intellectual curiosity and cultural life which is the school library.

The role of SLAV in this technological landscape is to encourage and prepare all members of the school library team to contribute to creating a flexible, dynamic, high-tech learning centre designed to prepare students to function effectively in a complex information and technological world. 21st century learners need to be empowered to be independent, creative, collaborative and critical thinkers whose skills are transferred to life beyond school.

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As library team members and advocates for school libraries, we need to highlight to the wider community, as well as the administrators and decision-makers in our schools, the national and international research that teacher-librarians and school library programs improve student learning outcomes with respect to students' research and reading skills (Hay, 2005 & 2006; Hughes, 2013; Todd & Kulthau, 2005). The 2013 Softlink Australian School Libraries Survey found that there is a "significant positive correlation" (Softlink, 2013, p. 2) between annual school library budgets, the number of teacher-librarians employed in school libraries and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results. Our association is currently developing a partnership program to further add to this research and provide a Victorian perspective on the role of school libraries. It is important for the Association to respond to the findings of the recent House of Representatives 2011 report which called for more research into the current staffing of school libraries in Australia, and the influence of school libraries and teacher-librarians on students' literacy and learning outcomes.

The school library as a learning space or 'learning commons' is now recognised as both a physical and virtual space that changes and adapts to the evolving needs of learners in our school communities. Our learning spaces need to be flexible in order to allow students to work collaboratively as well as individually, accommodate quiet learning, group discussions, active learning and teaching, individual and group research as well as quiet reading. School libraries need to be designed to accommodate new technologies and new pedagogies. Furthermore, 21st century school libraries provide students and staff with access to information 24/7, thereby fulfilling the expectation that information is available anywhere, any place and anytime.

It has never been more important for school library professionals to embrace these changes in the educational landscape and ride the crest of the wave whilst providing a positive learning space embracing all members of our school communities.

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Libraries have been one of the great wonders of the world and date back to the third century before the Common Era with the establishment of the famous library at Alexandria. The recent *NMC Horizon Report – 2014 Library Edition* emphasises the importance of libraries for civilisations and learning institutions for many reasons, not the least of which has been the diffusion of knowledge and advances in scholarship. The report highlights that this position is unlikely to change in the future although the role of the library and librarians may alter. This report identifies a key role for libraries as the environment for learning, research and the combination of scholarship with technology. The report recognises that there are many challenges ahead such as making libraries central to the curriculum, capturing digital outputs of research as collection materials and providing access to collections in innovative ways (Johnson et al. 2014, p. 24). Library information professionals in this challenging environment

need to become specialists in research methods and subject disciplines moving beyond the traditional role of collection managers (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 22). In particular, the report argues that the role of librarians as 'collaboration leaders' across universities and schools will be essential as open source, online classroom tools are developed and the boundaries between disciplines blur (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 23). In school libraries, our teacher-librarians along with our library team members are well-placed to lead collaborative learning as curriculum planners and innovators.

From the perspective of our professional association, we can take great heart from the NMC Horizon report – 2014 Library Edition and its recognition that it is libraries that hold the key to the future of scholarship as

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technology continues its advance. The future, however, is not without its challenges and libraries and library team members ought not sit on the sidelines but should play an active role in the learning program within our communities. School library professionals need to work to build and maintain their relationships within their communities and, in particular, make use of digital technologies to further enhance their relationships with students and staff. Building strong positive relationships with our school communities will continue to be a key focus of the professional learning program of our association.

References

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