

Inspiring learners – building connections through the junior school library program

By Anna Davidson

Snapshot

Anna Davidson, Junior School teacher-librarian at Carey Grammar School, outlines aspects of their library program that fosters connections of various kinds to support student learning and enrich reading experiences.

With the library being a central hub of a school environment, the role of the teacher-librarian is a multi-faceted one, requiring us to be on our toes constantly, building connections with people, environment and collections. Earlier this year, I shared some examples of how the Carey Baptist Grammar School's Junior School Library staff build connections through the library program and environment. In this article, I will expand on these examples and provide some ideas for teacher-librarians in the primary school setting to develop deeper connections within their community and collection.

Connecting students to the collection

Genrefication

In 2017, we decided to genrefy our fiction collection, a process which has had enormous benefits for the students, particularly in the development of personal reading identity. Genrefying the collection has led to deeper conversations with students about genre definition and personal reading preferences. Students can often be overheard debating whether or not a book fits a particular genre, leading to some books being moved from one genre to another, or the purchase of an additional copy so that titles sometimes sit across two or more genres. The genrefication process allows reluctant readers to find a genre of comfort, where they can safely know that they will find a book they are likely to enjoy, whilst on the other hand, the process has encouraged other students (and staff) to step outside their comfort zone to try new genres.

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From a collection management perspective, genrefication of the collection has allowed us to easily visualise the quantity of books we have within the collection, which has aided with the acquisition and de-acquisition process. Two years on, we are now looking at the genrefication of other sections of the collection, such as the Early Fiction and Junior Fiction collection. However, we will likely use a more limited range of genres, thus providing a stepping stone to the main Fiction collection for young readers.

Whilst still maintaining some form of the Dewey system, the Non-Fiction collection has been clustered into overarching genres (with relevant spine labels) such as Animals, Craft, Facts, Things to Do, Sport, Transport, Countries, Biographies, thus helping our young readers more easily locate books of interest.



Genrefication of the fiction collection

It is easier to find a book that you know what genre it is.

It is easier to find books because it is more likely I will know what the book is about, rather than the authors name. I also like it because sometimes I feel like one genre so now I can just go to that genre and pick a book.

I can find the books I like easily. When I'm looking for challenging myself it's easy because I know what the books about and whether I have read that type before.

I like the genre layout because it is more efficient to find a book that suits you.

It is much easier to find the books!

It is clear and you can find the books you like easily

I like it because it's a lot easier to find the book I want to read.

1. It's been a year since we re-organised the fiction section into genres. What do you think of it?

[More Details](#)

● I love it!	28
● I like it	45
● It's okay	13
● I don't like it	1



Student feedback about the genrefication process

Shelving

It is vital that the library collection is presented to students in an aesthetically pleasing manner, inviting young readers into the collection and encouraging them to locate books of interest as well as explore new interests. In 2017, we re-organised our Picture Fiction collection with forward facing shelving, thus enabling browsing and borrowing to occur with greater ease. Very

recently (August 2019), we have done the same to our Non-Fiction collection, where 'leisure' non-fiction is housed in forward-facing shelving and 'curriculum' non-fiction sits on traditional shelving. Of course, there are overlaps between the two and we made our decisions based on the popularity of topics with students.

Weeding continues to be a regular task and we aim to have space on our shelves to enable ease of browsing and borrowing.



Forward facing shelving in the Picture Fiction collection

Connecting students to their personal reading identity

At Carey, we, as teacher-librarians, see one of our biggest roles as helping young readers develop a positive, strong image of themselves as readers. To accomplish this, we work hard to get to know students on a personal level. We liaise with parents and teachers (both classroom teachers and Learning Development staff) to ensure we are supporting students in a way that will encourage each and every student to view themselves as a reader.

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Me as a reader

During Term 1, the library focus is on Me as a Reader, whereby all library classes from Prep to Year 6 focus on the development of personal reading identity. Throughout the term, students explore their own personal reading preferences, learn about the collection and are supported to explore new genres and types of books. For example, in the lower years, students are encouraged to borrow a variety of books from different parts of the collection and practise explaining and sharing their choices with their peers. In Year 6, students delve deeper into the different genres within the collection and develop a deeper understanding of what makes a book fit into a particular genre by focusing on features of different genres.

Reading surveys

At the start of each school year, all students in Upper Primary (Years 4 to 6) are surveyed to ascertain their attitudes towards reading. This data helps us provide individual support to students through regular check-ins with students on their reading, and the provision of 'preview stacks' supports individuals in the development of their personal reading identity. Students are very honest in their survey responses, allowing us to support students in a more authentic and relevant manner.

Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not?

Example of questions from the beginning of year survey

What are your favourite genres of fiction?

ANSWER CHOICE

A	Fantasy
B	Science fiction
C	Historical fiction
D	Humour
E	Mystery

Example of questions from the beginning of year survey

Connecting parents to our programs

Parent library

At Carey, we don't simply see our library collection as being for students; we encourage the parent community to use our library either to select additional books to share at home with children or by utilising our well-stocked parent library. The parent library provides a wide range of parenting books on topics such as raising boys/girls, technology, positive and strengths based education, medical conditions, puberty and many other topics. The Junior School leadership team often bring parents to the library and guide them towards particular books. The parent library also contains picture books that have been arranged into topics such as anxiety, responsibility, grief, feelings and many other topics. Parents and teachers utilise this collection on a regular basis when particular issues



Parent Library

are being faced in a family or classroom setting. Liaising with parents builds connections with parents, meaning we are able to gain a deeper understanding of students and their individual needs.

Advocacy on information nights and across the curriculum

Advocacy is a huge part of a teacher-librarian's role and it sometimes feels like we are bobbing up at all kinds of events within the school community. The benefit of this regular presence around the school is that students, staff and parents begin to see the absolute necessity and relevance of the school library and its services. Whilst at times it can be exhausting continually advocating for the library and its services, the benefits pay off when you develop strong relationships within the community. Just some of the ways in which the Carey Junior School library staff advocate for our library are:

- Meet the Teacher Night at the start of the school year – popping into each classroom to show a friendly face and promote the library program
- Reading Information Nights – promoting the library programs and services.
- Supporting special weeks such as Maths Week and NAIDOC Week - through displays and resources for staff to use in their classroom.



How can you use the library to support your child's reading?

- Visit the library before or after school to share a story together
- Read your child's library books together
- Read to
- Read with
- Listen to
- Read books in your mother tongue
- Encourage borrowing a broad range of books
- Return books promptly
- Use the Carey satchel

Carey
Junior School

The poster features a list of tips on the left and an illustration of a child reading a book on the right. The background is yellow with white concentric circles.

Promoting the library at Reading Information Nights

Connecting to the classroom program

Relationships are central to building strong connections to the classroom program. We need class teachers to feel comfortable and confident to approach teacher-librarians for guidance and support with the classroom program. At Carey, there many ways that we do this, including:

- Attending planning meetings
- Hosting morning teas
- Making book suggestions
- Communicating what is happening in the library program so that it complements the classroom program.
- Where possible, we connect library lessons (either story content or skill development) to the classroom's English or Integrated Studies program.

Information literacy

One of the biggest challenges faced by the primary school teacher-librarian is the time to fit everything into a weekly one-hour library lesson. Whilst this is an ongoing issue that continues to challenge us, our current approach is that we teach information literacy skills in the library program where it naturally fits. However, we provide the majority of our support to teachers through professional development and provision of resources so that they are able to teach these skills in the context of their Integrated Studies class. Currently, in conjunction with the Literacy Coordinator, we are in the process of writing an information literacy scope and sequence to support teachers and maintain consistency across year levels.

Connecting to community

Tech tinkers

Tech Tinkers is a weekly program offered for Lower Primary and Upper Primary on separate days of the week. The primary focus of Tech Tinkers is to provide students with the opportunity to explore technology and participate in design thinking challenges, mostly utilising technology. Whilst we face the challenge of not having a dedicated makerspace in the library, the program is a popular one for many students, particularly those with a specific interest in technology and building things, as well as those students who experience challenges in the outside playground setting. The Lower Primary program operates on a drop-in basis, with the same experiences on offer each week for the term, whilst the Upper Primary program runs as a term-long project, meaning students must commit to seeing a project through for the term, experiencing both the highs and lows of a design thinking challenge. Example term projects include:

Lower Primary	Upper Primary
• Dash Robot Maze	• Sphero cars and chariots
• Dash Robot Artwork	• Sphero bridges
• Dash Robot games	• Design Your Own Video Game (Hopscotch, Bloxels)
• BeeBot games	• Cardboard Construction with Makedo
• Hour of Code programming challenges	• Design and Build a Marble Run
• Marble Runs	• Cubelet challenges

The Tech Tinkers program also helps build connections with classroom teachers as they see the experiences students are having and use this to spark ideas for use in their classroom.

Literature festival

Literature festivals are an obvious way to connect school communities to books and ours, which happens mid Term 2, is no exception. We make a conscious choice to hold the Carey Celebrates Literature Festival in a non-Book Week term to ensure we have access to a greater variety of authors. The format of our festival changed in 2019, with each year level enjoying an author

presentation as well as a class workshop with their year level's author. The new format ensured that students had a more authentic, intimate experience with an author. In the lead up to the festival, students undertake an author study, which allows them to get more out of the festival experience.

Chinese language collection

Over the past few years, Carey has an increasing number of Mandarin speaking students enter the school, prompting the need for developing a Chinese Language collection in the library. To build this collection, we partnered with the [Language Resources team at CAVAL](#) and our own Chinese Language teaching team to select appropriate books for our collection. Whilst this is a growing collection, it has been immensely popular, offering an opportunity for non-English speaking parents to enjoy the library space and continue developing their child's reading ability in their mother tongue.



Chinese language graphic novels

Chinese language picture fiction

Connecting to the world

Global read aloud program

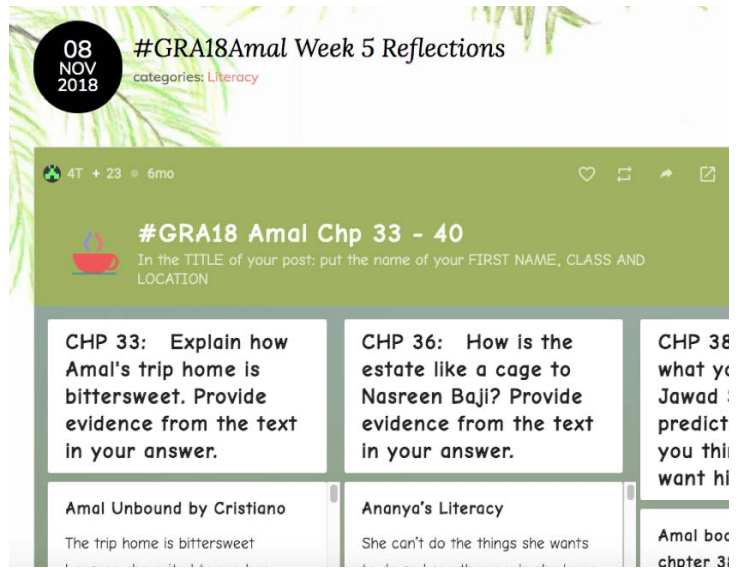
In 2015, Carey began participating in the [Global Read Aloud](#) program, which operates on the premise of one book to connect the world. Through participating in this program, students build connections with students around the world through the shared experience of a story. Often, connections extend beyond the book as classes develop a common interest in one another's lives, thus learning a great deal about life in another country. In my first year participating in the program, our classes asked and answered questions about one another's lives and even sent a

Often, connections extend beyond the book as classes develop a common interest in one another's lives...

'culture box' to one another, where we packed off a box filled with all kinds of Australian treats and symbols. Although this is not a specific library program, the library staff promote the program and actively support it through the provision of resources such as books and teaching materials.

Blogging

Each student in Years 4 to 6 at Carey manages their own blog, sharing their learning with the wider Carey community as well as a global audience. As part of my role as e-learning coordinator, I oversee the blogging program, ensuring that appropriate digital citizenship skills are taught through this authentic platform and supporting staff and students with the technical side of the blogs. One of the challenges that arises with this program is the inconsistency with teacher capability and confidence, an issue that is compounded by the movement of teachers from year to year. From a reading perspective, the blogs help students connect with others during the Global Read Aloud program and are a wonderful way for students to share book recommendations with peers.



Book chat program

The Book Chat program is one of the jewels in our library's program. The program operates from Year 3 to 6 and centres on the rich discussion of texts in a book club style format, with a selection of 5-6 books each round.

The purpose of the program is to:

- expose students to a wide range of genres and authors.
- provide students with skills to discuss texts with their peers.
- provide opportunities for students to reflect, personally and within a group, on their identity as a reader.
- encourage a love of reading

The Book Chat program provides connections on a multitude of levels as it connects students to:

- the collection
- their identity as a reader
- their peers

Parents are strongly encouraged to participate in the Book Chat program as we acknowledge that children require support as they push themselves beyond their reading comfort zone. At his recent presentation in Melbourne, Children's Laureate, **Morris Gleitzman** noted that reading the book is only one half of the process; for a story to be complete, conversation must

Book Chat Briefing

- An outline of the Book Chat program at each year level
- The structure of a Book Chat session
- How to help your child at home with their Book Chat book
- Tips for guiding a Book Chat discussion

occur. We have observed that discussions are richer when an adult is present and the richest conversations are those where the adult has also read the book. In 2019, we introduced the Book Chat Briefing session to provide confidence and support to parents participating in the program, which was well-received and has resulted in many more parents supporting students through the Book Chat sessions.

The Book Chat program also supports Carey's commitment to newly developed Positive Learner Attributes by assisting students to build 'integrity, empathy, a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect'. Empathy and compassion are integral values developed through the program as many of the books that are used offer windows in other people's lives. The emphasis on discussion provides students with structure and guidance as they unpack increasingly complex themes and different perspectives in stories.

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There are many ways that teacher-librarians can work to build multi-faceted connections in the Junior School. Here, I have presented a small snapshot at what one primary school library is doing. However, I know that readers of Synergy will have many more ideas, so let's combine our collective wisdom and create each and every one of our library programs be the best they can be. During the SLAV Primary Conference in May, participants in this concurrent session completed a Chalk Talk, where ideas to build connections were shared. You can find the list of ideas [here](#).

***Anna Davidson** has had many years of experience as a primary teacher, both in Melbourne and internationally, before transitioning to her dream job as a Teacher Librarian. Currently, Anna is Head of Junior School Library at Carey Baptist Grammar School, where she loves inspiring children of all ages with the joy of literature through the vibrant library programs. Anna's role also encompasses e-learning and she enjoys supporting students and staff in using technology in creative ways. You can connect with Anna via email or on Twitter (@davidsonteach)*