Teacher librarians: context (Part I)

Posted by Darcy Moore on Sunday, May 29, 2011

I am presenting to teacher librarian colleagues about ‘digital communication tools’ this week. I’d rather say we are ‘collaborating’ than I am ‘presenting’ and have used survey monkey to collect data from the delegates prior to the conference about their needs and yammer to seek advice about the perceptions of what ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ are needed in our contemporary libraries to engage students. This ‘data’ makes for very interesting reading and reveals some strong opinions.

The topic I was set - ‘digital communication tools’ - seems straightforward but the more I think about how to structure the hour the more it seems essential to establish a philosophy and acknowledge (my) paradigm. As always, context is everything and I am not a teacher-librarian.

Context

The photo below is me, on the first day of kindergarten, squinting into the sun with my library bag in hand. My first tooth fell out, lining up for a library lesson, as I chewed on that string. I can still taste the drawcord. The other photo is the view from my office at school. I am located near the fiction shelves and often chat to students about what they are reading, suggest a book or website and browse the shelves myself. I found A Game of Thrones last week. Couldn’t believe my luck that Di, our teacher librarian, had this series, currently adapted for television by HBO and having rave reviews in the US.

From my first day at school until today, libraries have been central to my life. I fondly remember all the school and municipal libraries in the several towns I lived. (Teacher) Librarians, more often than not, were kind and accommodating. Mostly they were happy to have a young male avidly reading and borrowing so regularly.
My daughters love reading, particularly enjoying ‘story-time’ at our local library. Both Miss 5 and Miss 7 count a trip to any library as a highlight of even the most exciting or adventurous week. They read books, e-books and websites with little discrimination. A good story told is a good story told.

However, having a library bag in kindergarten, kids and a partner who love reading or an office upstairs in the school library does not make me particularly qualified to pontificate - it can allow me to make some provocations, suggestions and provide an opportunity for the professional teacher-librarians to discuss ideas.

The future & the past

This blog has often featured my thoughts on the central importance of reading, my favourite books, the future of books, disruptive technologies, e-books and e-readers. Like you, I am thinking about the future of learning, reading, teaching, schools, libraries and teacher librarians. It is a favourite topic.

What digital communication technologies do teacher-librarians need or more importantly, do their students need? This is the heart of the contemporary challenge. How do teacher librarians nurture the best of the past with an eye on a future that has already arrived?

A teacher-librarian supports and implements the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners.

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What exactly is that vision in 2011?

The recent findings of the parliamentary Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools (2011) arrive at the heart of the current challenge:

While the teacher librarian’s role appears to be rapidly changing in an ever evolving digital, online and e-learning environment, it is not always clear exactly what role they should and could play in schools to...
those outside, and even within, the profession.

My personal and professional opinion can be stated making these points:

1. Kids who read succeed; kids who have the skills to access and deploy knowledge effectively – win!

2. Professional people must be the change that they want to see in others and model behaviour that assists students and colleagues to become powerfully multiliterate and critical thinkers!

3. Teacher librarians have the important role of assisting students to become culturally literate citizens. They need to be digitally savvy and enthusiastic about the widest possible world around them.

4. Developing a Personal Learning Network (PLN) is essential for teacher librarians to be engaged with professional learning and continually updating knowledge and skills.

Seth Godin (2011) sees it very clearly, and this post at his blog, The future of the library, is a very powerful piece from a man who loves reading, ideas, innovation and communicating with the written word:

We need librarians more than we ever did. What we do not need are mere clerks who guard dead paper. Librarians are too important to be a dwindling voice in our culture. For the right librarian, this is the chance of a lifetime.

Choosing appropriate digital communication tools

In the age of InfoWhelm (infosavvy, 2010) choosing the appropriate digital communication tools - to stay in-the-loop and professionally connected - is essential for any professional person, especially teacher-librarians (Figure 1).

A teacher librarian can make a start on developing a Personal Learning Network (PLN) by following these steps at their own pace:

1. Find several excellent blogs to follow and organising RSS feeds from these into a reader, like Google Reader. Here are some invaluable teacher librarian blogs by: Jenny Luca, Doug Johnson, Lucy Barrow, Bright Ideas, Tania Sheko and Judy O’Connell (whom I must thank profusely for her generous assistance with this post and my presentation).

2. Establish a Delicious or Diigo social bookmarking account.

3. Start to blog using blogED or Wordpress blog.

4. Use Google alerts.

5. Micro-blog on edmodo, yammer or twitter where you could follow @aliacys, @heyjudeonline, @lucybarrow and @sandynay.

6. Learn and teach about creative commons and attribution.

7. Do all of the above from a mobile device like a smart phone or iPad. Teacher librarians sharing and cooperating is so evident in online educator circles. There are teacher librarians on Diigo and using livebinders and others sharing information about digital citizenship and annual reports. Others are making Facebook and twitter posts into online newspapers in just a few clicks, like the Judy O’Connell Daily or The #tlChat Daily. The ASLA wiki provides another opportunity for collaboration and direction. For this post and presentation I found Facebook and twitter of fundamental import.

There are so many useful tools for teacher-librarians to investigate, such as referencing tools like Bibme or Zotero, that the community can best share, vet and assess for relevance and applicability.

Ultimately, the profession should be shaped by a growing number of hyper-connected leader and leading teacher-librarians advocating for intelligent, innovative change. This will not happen without renewed collective responsibility and advocacy. Teacher librarians, quoting Godin (2011) again, are too important to be a dwindling voice in our culture. A teacher librarian who is a:...

...data hound, a guide, a sherpa and a teacher...the interface between reams of data and the untrained but motivated user...producer, concierge, connector, teacher and impresario...

We need you!
References and further reading


Creative Commons Australia, Viewed 08 July 2011. <creativecommons.org.au/learn-more/licences>.


Teacher-librarians on Diigo, Viewed 08 July 2011. <groups.diigo.com/group/teacher_librarians>.


Twitter, Viewed 08 July 2011. <twitter.com>.


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