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**“It’s time to get out of the library…”**

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**INTRODUCTION**

I want you to take a moment to imagine this scenario. In the next twelve months you get a new principal and they are keen to try out some new ideas in how they’re going to develop the school’s learning spaces. They decided that they don’t need a library space anymore since everything’s on the internet anyway. And well, yes, we do still need books so we’ll place them around the school and in classrooms to “inspire” the students. And your new maker space is going to be run by the newly employed STEM coordinator. The new furniture you just spent 1000’s on? Well, it’s being incorporated into the new collaborative learning spaces. And the quiet study rooms the students begged you for? They’re going to be dotted around the school. How about the IT helpdesk you’ve been running for the past 20 years. Well, the IT department is now actually going to run that.

How does this make you feel? Have you experienced any of these changes? Quite possibly. **TALK TO PEOPLE NEAR YOU ABOUT YOUR SITUATION**

These are not future possibilities. They are real possibilities. These are just some of the examples I’ve collected over the past few years of a sense that our days are numbered.

Sometimes it feels harder and harder to convince schools that teacher librarians really matter. We come to conferences and everyone tells us why we matter and we tell each other why we matter but the message seems to be having some problems getting out. We’ve tried to reinvent ourselves. We’ve improved our library spaces. We’ve introduced maker spaces. We’ve become really savvy with IT.

But I would like to suggest that the the more we do this the further we’re getting away from why teacher librarians really matter. If we believe that our role is about managing physical books then yes, our days are numbered. And if we believe that our role is to create and manage a physical space then yes, it is also possible that in some contexts our days are numbered.

My challenge for you today is, what are you offering to your school that isn’t tied to the library space or the physical resources you manage? What skills do you have as a qualified teacher librarian that can’t be replaced by another teacher? How are you going to show that what you have to offer can move beyond the library walls?

I would like you to leave today feeling excited and empowered by the opportunities that our qualifications and skills can richly add to the learning outcomes of our students. And I would also like you to have a vision for what you can hope for from your role and perhaps some change that you might need to agitate for in your context.

**MY STORY AND CONTEXT**

Just a bit about myself. I am the head of library for a library service that works across our school K-12. We have recently (over the summer) redesigned our library so that we have three separate library spaces dotted throughout the school targeted at the needs of the different sections of the school. We have a teacher librarian in the junior school, myself for the middle school and a full time teacher librarian working in the senior college. We also have the equivalent of two full time technicians. I am aware that as I share with you today that not everyone is in the same position as us so my experience and what I’ve learnt might not always be easy for you to apply. But I would hope that it gets you thinking and asking questions about the status quo in your particular context.

**SOME HISTORY**

Six years ago when I started at St Andrew’s as a new teacher librarian we had one library for K-12 with multiple spaces in the library with banks of computers. We were the only access point to the internet for most of the school. Booking the library space and juggling classes kept us busy. As teachers booked in their classes for lessons the teacher librarians could ask teachers what they were working on and assist them with research tasks as necessary. We could prove the value of our contribution to the school by flicking through the pages of a paper booking sheet to show how busy we were.

But in 2013 our school introduced a one-to-one iPad program across 7-12. All students now had access to the internet in class. No longer did they need to come to the library to access online information. As we transitioned into this new stage we continued to expect that classes should come to the library to do their research lessons. After all, we also had books. And us, the experts, the teacher librarians.

Except that bringing classes to the library wasn’t really necessary anymore. As a classroom teacher, to access information online you could just jump online in class. No more booking the library space, negotiating with a librarian, no more carting a crazy class of middle schoolers through the building, settling them down in a new space. I understand why people stopped coming.

So what were our options? Complain? Jump up and down and tell everyone how important it was to collaborate with the library? But what if no one cared? Or listened? Did we just shout louder?

The era of BYOD could have been a time of great threat to our roles as teacher librarians. Having a space that teachers were forced to bring students to, forced contact with the teacher librarians. But we had to change the way we collaborated. Actually we have had to entirely change the way that we work within the school.

**SO WHAT DO WE OFFER?**

One of the biggest battles for teacher librarians is convincing other teaching staff that we have much more to offer than just a space and a pile of books. I’m not entirely convinced that as a profession we have anyone other than ourselves to blame for this. Every time that a librarian gets antsy about a lost book or a jumps up and down about eating in the library, we confirm that belief for people. We need to be very aware of the message that we communicate to others about what we think is important about our job. What are you known for in your school?

I have to say that it’s been easy for us to get distracted (and a bit dazzled by the bright lights) over the past few years. As the apparent need for our information expertise has decreased, we’ve filled up the space with maker space or becoming the ICT expert or a learning space designer. I would like to gently push on the trend to makerspaces dominating the school library horizon. Have they become our core business? They are understandably making us appear more relevant and interesting (and I need to add that we’ve got maker clubs and spaces to enable these types of activities) but is that all we’re known for in the school? Is that the only value-add that we are offering? If a makerspace is the life raft that we’re clinging onto then consider who else could run a makerspace in your school?

Being honest, there are many other teachers out there who could take on this role. We have a whole faculty of tech teachers who can at my school. And we have a team of ICT integrators who love working with students on digital projects.

We need to keep coming back to this question. What can I uniquely offer to my school as the teacher librarian? Why does my dual qualification actually matter? Why did I even bother getting that Masters degree? Am I just doing technician level work? Have I morphed into an ICT integrator?

What’s unique is that we can both teach AND manage information. Sometimes I wonder if the teaching side has got lost in the excitement of the distractions. And when I say teaching, I mean real teaching, not just lunchtime duties or one-off death by powerpoint presentations. Teaching that involves thinking hard about the individual learning needs of each student, curriculum design and planning, reviewing programmes, improving pedagogy, working with other colleagues, listening to parent concerns. We understand the curriculum. We understand how to help students and teachers find the information that they need to support this curriculum. And we understand how to educate students on how to develop the skills they need to get this information.

We need to be able to teach. We need to be able to educate kids. It should be our core passion. It’s what the organisation that we sit within is all about. When we are valuing adding in concrete ways to the goals of the school then the space, the computers, the books, the maker space aren’t going to be the deal breakers, the life rafts for us. According to Mandy Lupton’s research, Principals are expecting us to be teaching. This is an important article to read because it is warning us about what is being expected of us from our leadership.

How do we make this happen? Well, we need to be advocates for information literacy skills. In the same way as we promote books and library activities, we need to be willing to advertise our skills. But we can’t just put up posters and post on social media. We need to be more proactive than that. And we need to be smart and insightful. When we advocate for something it can have a tendency to end up moving in two ways. Either we can stay too passive or we can be overwhelming. We can sit and complain in the library that no one needs us or values us. Or we can see a slight crack in the door and push it open, knocking everyone over in our path. Teachers need to know what we can do. But they don’t need us to take over and dismiss their professionalism and expertise with our desire to be heard.

**WHY SCHOOLS NEED TEACHER LIBRARIANS**

**VIDEO**

Unhelpfully assumptions are made about the ability of our young people to find things online. Even though they are ALWAYS online (I have four teenagers in my own home) they are actually ill equipped to find the information they need to meet their academic information needs. The research is certainly debunking the assumptions made about millennials and the digital native idea. Just because they can navigate the online world doesn’t mean they have the skills to access what they need. It’s like saying “oh the students are really good at finding the library and when they get in there they can point to the shelves where the books are”. They know it’s in there SOMEWHERE but they haven’t got the actual skills to ask the virtual catalogue where the virtual information is on the virtual shelves.

In 2016 the head of Sydney Grammar school announced that the school was going device free. As much as I understand why (gee I get sick of asking students to close their devices) I also felt at the time that this decision had lost sight of what we do as educators. Surely our role is to educate students with lifelong learning skills? And isn’t teaching students how to behave appropriately with a device part of helping them grow into well rounded adults in a world that saturated by device use? Isn’t helping them to show self control around their use of devices important? Isn’t showing them how to use their devices as powerful tools for accessing information that could change their lives vital?

A few years ago I read this book ‘*Disconnected: youth, new media and the ethics gap’* (2014), One of Carrie James’ premises is that young people who work out how to use online forums in a positive way experience really strong outcomes. So students who recognise the power of online forums to advocate for political or social change can see how their contribution can make a concrete difference. In her book, Carrie James repeatedly articulates that her research showed a distinct lack of explicit adult input about online behaviour, and in particular, positive input (most adult input was identified as fear mongering about issues like stranger danger or plagiarism) (James, 2014). So we can find ourselves spending a lot of time in digital citizenship programmes focussing on the negatives of life online rather than empowering students with skills that will enable them to be the masters of the internet. Students need guidance in this area. For some reason the digital native myth has meant that our society hasn’t felt much of a need to explicitly teach kids the skills that they need to behave appropriately and positively in an online world.

As teachers we cannot tell students to ‘just’ find/do something on their iPads. They need guidance, scaffolding, explicit teaching of skills and regular reinforcement of what we want them to achieve with their devices (as we do with any other skill or content area that we teach). In my experience students and their parents are actually begging us to be the experts in information provision. Every day students tell me how hard it is to find quality information online.

My junior school librarian was recently surprised to see in a Stage 3 programme an activity which simply stated ‘students will Google information on this outcome’. Teachers are surprised when our so called ‘digital natives’ can’t find any information for themselves online. Parents are spending hours looking for information for their kids online. More than ever we need the expertise and direction of information specialists.

**HOW DO WE MAKE CHANGES?**

**COLLABORATION**

I have observed over the past few years of listening to many discussions about collaboration that teacher librarians are often frustrated with the lack of collaboration. We want to get more face-to-face time with students, but we are dependent on the goodwill of the classroom teacher. Or we are limited by timetabled RFF classes. I think that this frustration has developed into a narrative that as a profession we aren’t truly valued. But it can be too easy for teacher librarians to forget how much work it takes to manage the learning demands of just one class of students, let alone five if you have a full secondary teaching load. We dip in and out of classes and then get frustrated when teachers don’t want to collaborate with us. We need to be very careful that we aren’t complaining about where we sit in the school. It doesn’t encourage others to want to work with us if we tell them that they what they are doing isn’t enough. Our teachers are already very overwhelmed. Having a teacher librarian tell them that they aren’t being collaborative enough is way down their list of things to cope with!

These past two years I have been teaching my own middle school History classes. This has given me a fresh appreciation for the complexity of the average teacher’s role. And made me think really hard about what I can offer as a teacher librarian to support teachers. Being willing to just go and turn up to the classroom, ready to teach a skill like research online or referencing that the average teacher is far from an expert in, takes a huge amount of pressure off them. It also means that for young teachers who are only just surviving with classroom management that they don’t have to resettle kids in the excitement of a library visit. Of course, there are still plenty of teachers who like the variety of being able to access a different space in the library. Sometimes students work more effectively in the library because the vibe is different. But what BYOD has given us is the flexibility to be more responsive.

We need to network. We need to be on committees for anything and everything. We need to talk to staff about what they’re teaching. We need to talk to teachers about what we’re teaching, what we’re working on, what we’re reading, what the latest research is showing. We need to connect the problems that teachers are facing with the solutions that we can offer. We need to choose our message and stick to it. We need to be willing to teach anywhere. And BYOD enables us to do this more successfully than ever. Earlier this year I was talking with a colleague about how I think it is really important that teacher librarians work in classrooms. She responded ‘Oh yes jenny. We GET it. You are happy to teach outside the library’. And while I thought ‘Oh that’s a bit rude” I also thought ‘YES! They finally get it. They are bored with my message. They know what I think’.

**WHAT COULD YOU BE INVOLVED IN AT YOUR SCHOOL TO BROADEN OUT PERCEPTION OF YOUR ROLE?**

**STRATEGIC USE OF TIME**

As a TL you need to understand the structures of your school. Who has the power to influence change in ways that you’re not capable of?

Mandy Lupton’s recent research into what principals want from their teacher librarians is comprehensive. If any of you decided that you wanted to be a teacher librarian for a quieter life Mandy’s research would indicate that this far from what principals are looking for in their teacher librarians. They want leaders. They want a staff member who can demonstrate a global understanding of learning across the school. They want a staff member who takes the initiative to connect with staff across the school and identifies gaps in learning. I have to be honest and say that I suspect that the reason why a lot of independent schools are moving away from employing teacher librarians and replacing them with e learning coordinators or ICT integrators is that they haven’t been convinced by their teacher librarian that what they have to offer is worth a teacher’s salary. And Lupton’s research indicates this to be the case. And while having a good relationship with your principal is vital it is also important that others in leadership advocate for the value of what you can contribute. What other people could help you advocate for your skills making it into the mainstream of teaching practice in your school?

Let me tell you a story about my colleague Kate. She is the Director of Learning for Stage 4 and 5 at our school. In the last four years my relationship with Kate has dramatically influenced the impact I have as an information specialist in our school. Kate has enabled me to be involved with the assessment task process from the beginning so I am always aware when Years 7-10 have a research component to their tasks. I review and proof read all notifications (with our Director of learning support) before they go to students. This means I know who is doing research for what. It also means that Kate doesn’t need to proofread the tasks, so there’s a mutually beneficial outcome!

Kate has also helped me by telling heads of department that if there is a research component to their tasks then they should expect to be collaborating with me and inviting me to speak to their students. Kate has also ensured that I’m invited to faculty planning days so that I can be involved with thinking through programming from the beginning of the process. Using her position in the school, she has been able to legitimise my input from a curriculum point of view. The head of department or the teachers will now contact me and we discuss and negotiate what skills they would like me to teach their students. If I don’t hear from the teachers, since I already have the background knowledge about what they’re doing, I can gently remind department heads and that usually gets the ball rolling.

Some of the challenge for us as TL’s is that a lot of us like detail and control and getting things exactly right. And they’re super important. But if our profession is to have a future we need to be people who can understand the big picture and not get stuck in the detail of library land. We need to think strategically about the purpose of our role in the school. We need a vision for what we’re aiming to achieve. We need to take control of our vision for the role and demonstrate leadership by seeking to meet that vision. This is in contrast to being passively responsive to the demands of others’ perception of your role. If you find that you are spending a lot of your time doing technician level tasks it is really important that you start this process of advocating for changes to your role. Once someone works out that a technician is a lot cheaper than a teacher librarian you are on shaky ground. You want to demonstrate the complexity of your specialist knowledge at every opportunity. So that when you can demonstrate how a vast percentage of your time is being used for ordering textbooks or student supervision that will start to seem nonsensical. You want other teachers to recognise the problems of a teacher librarian being expected to spend 50% of their time on manual tasks which means you are unavailable to help a teacher plan a research unit or team teach in the classroom. You need them to advocate on your behalf because you are so invaluable and awesome! I highly recommend these two books by Lesley Farmer if you need some help in thinking about how to shape your role more strategically and creating the data to support your position.

I am of course aware that for some of you this shift in perception will be difficult. I still say yes as often as possible to requests but when I’m asked to do something that I really feel isn’t part of my role I’ll clearly explain why that doesn’t fit into my vision and understanding of what I’m seeking to achieve with my role. This may mean you still have to do a particular task in the short term, but by chipping away at the perception of what you are aiming to do you can start to turn the ship around.

Take risks but be strategic. Look at your data. Which students in the school would benefit from your input but you’re missing at the moment? For us we identified that our IB students (a smaller cohort than our HSC students) were taking up a larger percentage of our TL time. It also motivated us to look out for opportunities to work with some of the big faculties that we’d missed and try and support our HSC students more deliberately. We also keep a record of which subjects and year groups we have worked with and at the end of each year identify any areas of the school that are not gaining input from teacher librarian involvement. Data is very powerful in schools these days so use all the data you collect as much as possible to show your value in the school. We put together a library report each year. This is not a requirement by our school as we’ve never been specifically asked to do this. We have found that by putting together our statistics into interesting and easy to glance at infographics and giving it to the executive and school council it reminds people that we’re actually doing something significant! We organise our report into three areas that summarise what we’re seeking to do thorough our department. We talk about the space, our physical and online resources and what our staff have been doing.

**CONCLUSION**

The future is exciting for teacher librarians. Our skills in information literacy are more important than ever. Let’s not get distracted by the latest fade but let’s stick to advocating for what we know will give our students skills to be learners for life. In lots of ways nothing has really changed (despite appearances). We provide access to information. The form that comes in and the way that we access information has changed but people still need the skills to find the information to meet their needs. This is where teacher librarians come in. They might want to jazz us up with new titles or roles but essentially what we can offer to a school has not changed and matters more than ever. About five years ago we went through a phase of changing the names of libraries to icentres or learning commons but interestingly the latest research shows that keeping the name ‘library’ is important as it still has meaning in our society that makes sense to people of its purpose. Let’s make sure that the title of teacher librarian remains powerful and invaluable to our school communities. And not for the sake of our own jobs or the profession but because each of us really believe that what we offer makes a difference to the lives of our students now and for their future success.

**WHAT ARE YOUR TAKE HOMES FROM THIS PRESENTATION?**