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What your teacher librarian can do for you

Margie Wallin
Southern Cross University

Jann Small
Southern Cross University

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Margie Wallin and Jann Small

Biography

Margie and Jann are liaison librarians at Southern Cross University, and directly support the School of Education, working closely with student teachers and their lecturers. Margie also participates in the local teacher librarian network and greatly values their support and ideas. This collegial network has provided opportunities for a number of exciting projects, benefiting pre-service teachers as well as classroom teachers, teacher librarians and students.

Abstract

Pre-service teachers often lack opportunity or encouragement to build professional partnerships with teacher librarians during their teacher training. While pre-service teachers may visit the school library during their placement, this may not provide an adequate opportunity for teacher librarians to effectively highlight the services and resources that are available. Teacher librarians and principals have collaborated with Southern Cross University Library to produce a series of video clips showcasing the value of school libraries and what teacher librarians can offer their colleagues.

Pre-service teachers and libraries

Much has been written about the need for pre-service teachers to hone their own information skills, as well as to develop strategies to encourage their students to engage effectively with the information world (Asselin 2005; Asselin & Lee 2002; Branch 2003; Crouse & Kasbohm 2004; Duke & Ward 2009; Earp 2009; Floyd, Colvin & Bodur 2008; Hinchliffe 2003; Johnson & O'English 2003; Kovalik, Jensen, Schloman & Tipton 2010; Lee, Reed & Laverty 2012; Lipu 2003; Seely, Fry & Ruppel 2011). As Branch states:

Along with helping pre-service teachers develop their own information literacy skills, we also need to make it a priority for them to understand how to teach information literacy to their students. In this way, we can help pre-service teachers to become lifelong learners who can then promote lifelong learning skills in their own classrooms (2003, p. 45).

The literature also includes practical examples of how various Australian universities have embedded information literacy activities within their teacher education programs (Hobbs & Aspland 2003; Lipu 2003; Orr & Cribb 2003; Visser 1999).

While Education lecturers and academic librarians clearly play an integral role, it is also vital to provide opportunities for collaboration with school-based practitioners, including principals, teachers and teacher librarians — thus offering a broader and more holistic approach to pre-service teacher development. A key role of teacher librarians, especially to pre-service and beginning teachers, is their provision of 'curriculum leadership and pedagogical leadership' (Lee & Twomey 2011, p. 12). An awareness of the services and resources provided by teacher librarians to (all) teachers, is central to ensuring ongoing, professional collaboration:

When teachers and teacher-librarians collaboratively plan and teach resource-based units that are grounded in curriculum, they can also address the critical thinking skills and the information strategies students need to use resources effectively (Asselin 2000, p. 74).

A range of literature discusses these issues, as well as outlining opportunities for collaboration and interaction between teacher librarians and pre-service teachers (ACRL 2011; Asselin 1999; Asselin 2000; Asselin & Doiron 2003; Asselin & Lee 2002; Browne & Hansen 1987; Church 2006; Getz 1996; Holmes 2003; Miller 2005; Moreillon 2008; Paglin 2003; Roux 2008; Scheffers & Bohman 2003; Visser 1999).

SCU initiatives

Southern Cross University (SCU) is a regional Australian university with campuses at Lismore (NSW), Coffs Harbour (NSW) and the Gold Coast (QLD) and offers a range of teacher education programs. Units within these courses are offered in a variety of modes, including face-to-face (at three campuses) and online.

Academics within the SCU School of Education are supportive of information literacy endeavours within their degree programs. Student teachers are given a range of opportunities to develop their own information skills and to consider how best to support their students in becoming competent and ethical information users. Within a secondary unit, for example, student teachers are given the opportunity (within an assessment task) to develop a classroom-based information literacy activity. Exemplar activities are linked from the 'Information Literacy — activities for learning and

assessment' blog (Southern Cross University Library 2009), and have been cited by other authors (Herring 2010).

In addition to being advocates for information literacy, SCU Education academics are also proactive in promoting the value of school libraries to pre-service teachers. Local teacher librarians have been invited to speak to the student cohort during relevant lectures and tutorials — prior to school placements — but the logistics involved in finding suitable times across three campuses have proven distinctly challenging. The school library is also included in the student 'check list' of places to visit while on placement, but this often results in a single, five-minute visit as part of a school tour, and rarely offers any meaningful opportunities for discussion or collaboration.

The Coffs Harbour Teacher Librarian network is particularly collegial, and has welcomed the participation of librarians from associated sectors — including the SCU Education Liaison Librarian, as well as librarians from the Coffs Harbour City Council Library. In discussion about these 'placement' issues, the group decided to explore a 'virtual' alternative to promoting school libraries and their fantastic teacher librarians.

'What your teacher librarian can do for you' project

A series of short video clips were planned — using the 'talking heads' interview approach. As well as being a manageable format for amateur video producers, it is recognised that 'credibility and authority are the two elements that talking heads can add to a video' (Training Multimedia 2011). Within these clips, local teacher librarians could highlight and promote specific resources and services — designed to increase awareness, and to encourage interaction and collaboration between teacher librarians and pre-service teachers.

Eight teacher librarians (both primary and secondary) from the Coffs Harbour Teacher Librarian network agreed to participate, and four volunteered their libraries as venues for filming. Principals from local schools, both state and private, were also supportive of the venture, and to the delight of the project team two principals actively participated in the project. Clearly, principal support for school library ventures is critical (Hartzell 2002; Shannon 2009). In addition, two staff from the Coffs Harbour City Council Library

The clip emphasises that the library is an extension of the classroom and the lessons that the teacher librarian does should be planned with the classroom teacher and complement the learning that is occurring in the classroom

became involved — highlighting services and resources suitable for pre-service teachers while on placement and beyond.

To provide some structure for the interviews, a number of general questions were developed (Appendix A), and each participant selected the question(s) they were happy to address. While it had been initially envisaged that the primary and secondary 'interviews' would be dealt with separately, during the editing process it became apparent that segregating the content by 'level' was of limited value, as the concepts and services discussed were equally applicable to both sectors. The final organisation of the clips is noted in Appendix B.

As the majority of the project team had limited video production experience, it was decided to document elements of the process of the video clip creation, along with key recommendations or hints (Appendix C). It is hoped that this may be of value to colleagues undertaking such projects in the future.

Eleven clips were professionally produced, promoting the value of school (and public) libraries, and the expertise of teacher librarians to pre-service teachers. The clips were then uploaded to an SCU Library server.

SCU and beyond

This series of video clips was specifically designed for use with SCU Education students, as a formal part of their preparation for placements. The clips were embedded within a unit-based library guide (Southern Cross University Library 2011a), which provides resources to students undertaking their teaching practicum, either in primary or secondary schools. This guide, while designed for SCU students, is freely accessible via the Web. Feedback from academics involved in these units has been positive, and the clips have been specifically recommended to students. Usage of the clips is being monitored on an ongoing basis.

It became apparent early in the project, that there was a potentially wider audience for these clips. While the participants occasionally referred to NSW Department of Education and Communities infrastructure or resources, the majority of the content was generic and relevant to any Australian school library. In order to reach a wider audience, the clips were uploaded to both YouTube

(Southern Cross University Library 2011b) and also to TeacherTube. Links to the clips have been circulated to those Australian universities offering either Education or Teacher Librarianship programs, and also to the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), for promotion on their listserv. A range of positive feedback has been received as a result of this promotion:

MANY thanks for sending these videos. They're excellent, much needed resources. We'll pass them on to the BEd coordinator. We'll certainly share them with our MEd(Teacher-Librarianship) students (Hughes 2011) Senior Lecturer, Coordinator/Lecturer — Master of Education (Teacher-Librarianship); Master of Education (Information-Learning Connections) QUT.

These clips are fantastic. I will place some links onto my Education Study Desk for students to access across all courses; I'll certainly be highlighting them during classes as well, as both information and motivational resources. Initially I thought we might want to do a similar series ... but I can't see how we could possibly improve on what you've already achieved ... they are indeed generic and relevant across the board.

Congrats to everyone involved on producing a valuable series — an educational and promotional tool (Pauley, 2011) Faculty Librarian for Education, USQ.

An unexpected outcome of the project has been the use of the clips as promotional material. A number of statements were made throughout the various clips that showcase the value and importance of school libraries and teacher librarians.

We've set up structures at our school library which take the role of the teacher librarian to a more important level. We've placed an emphasis on having the right person in the role, training for the role, so it's not just somebody filling in or baby-sitting a class. They're actually a trained educator, a librarian — a specialist librarian, who knows the current pedagogy, who knows what teachers need to educate their children, who knows where the resources are, who knows what the resources are. 'Something special about our school libraries' (Southern Cross University Library 2011b).

In my role as principal of the school, overseeing the different programs, I want to see the library becoming an extension of the classroom. And I think the library isn't just about children. In our school, what we're trying to do is make the library present for the kids, our parents — so there is that connection between reading at home, so bring the parents in — and for the classroom teachers themselves. So there is that three-way process that comes together for the learning ... The important thing is, in terms of the learning, that what takes place in the library is an extension of what takes place in the classroom, and there's a seamless transition between the two. 'The importance of school libraries #3' (Southern Cross University Library 2011b).

The teacher librarian has the big picture of what's happening in the school ... They're a cooperative learning partner with the classroom teacher, so when you're planning a unit of work they're someone who has their finger on the pulse of available resources, different ideas for engaging students, and they can be a sounding board for ideas for the classroom teacher 'Why teacher librarians are VERY important' (Southern Cross University Library 2011b).

We encourage people [student teachers] to be keen and eager and enthusiastic, to come in and be part of all that we have to offer, and the library is a very integral part of what we provide for not just our students but our community as a whole. 'Something special about our school libraries' (Southern Cross University Library, 2011b).

Although these comments were aimed at pre-service teachers, they resonate equally within the wider school community. Teacher librarians have identified the value of showing the clips within their own schools, to highlight their services and resources to fellow teachers.

I chose to share this clip on my blog, but the other two video clips in this series are equally as stimulating. This clip would be good to show a couple of my staff who still see the LRC as an added extra. The clip emphasises that the library is an extension of the classroom and the lessons that the teacher librarian does should be planned with the classroom teacher and complement the learning that is occurring in the classroom (Robbo 2011).

It is hoped that these clips will continue to be used at the school level — wherever teacher librarians need to highlight and promote the value of their services.

Conclusion

In this current environment (Parliament of Australia. House of Representatives 2011a, 2011b), where the value of school libraries and teacher librarians is being questioned and discussed, it is refreshing and invigorating to see principals and teacher librarians actively promoting their services and discussing how they can support pre-service (and indeed all) teachers in their professional practice.

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Appendix A Initial questions

- Why are school libraries important?
- What is special about your school library?
- Why should a student teacher 'make friends' with their teacher librarian?
- As a TL, how can you help your teaching colleagues? What sort of services or resources do you offer to them?
- What three things (resources, websites ...) are you excited to share with students/with your fellow teachers?
- What is the most useful piece of advice you can give to a student teacher?
- How do Connected Outcome Groups (COGS) change how teachers can work with TLs?

- How important a role do TLs have in teaching information literacy, and how does that benefit classroom teachers?

Appendix B Final structure of clips

- The importance of school libraries #1 #2 #3.
- Why teacher librarians are VERY important.
- Words of advice.
- Connected outcome groups (COGS).
- Helping your students become information literate.
- How your teacher librarian can help you #1 #2.
- How all public libraries can help you.

Appendix C Practical recommendations and hints

Planning

- Create a storyboard, or structured outline for your project. Be very clear about the content of your project, and what practical outcomes you require.
- Identify any additional resources that need to be obtained or accessed — including individuals or physical resources (teleprompter, green screen and so on).
- Select the most appropriate 'style' of presentation for your project and your audience; for example, talking heads, panel discussions, show and tells ...
- Document what you require from the final product: number of clips; length of clips; output formats (DVD or uploadable files).

Timelines

- Be overly generous in allocating timelines.
- Include time for initial discussions, preparation and planning, as well as promotion at the end of the project.
- With filming, include set-up and clear-away time (especially if using a range of equipment, or if the location needs alteration). Also allow some 'rehearsal time' for participants.
- Allow lots of time for editing, and extra time for scripting and/or captioning [For example, 1½ hours of filming (including set-up, rehearsal and clear away) generated 20 minutes of raw footage; 2½ hours of editing of 20 minutes of raw footage generated 1 X 5 min clip; 40 minutes of final clips required 8 hours of transcription.]

Costs

- If using a professional, make sure your requirements are clearly listed when asking for a quote (number of clips required, time of each clip, location, number of individuals involved in each clip/segment, output formats required and so on).
- Consider production requirements, including printed DVDs or extra output formats (for PC/Mac, low-resolution and high-resolution files and so on).
- Do you require specific equipment — either for the content of the project, or for

the filming /editing process? Is additional hardware/software required? Is training required in the use of the equipment?

- Will you require thank you gifts, or catering for a launch of your new product?
- Don't commit your full budget to the initial quote — leave some in reserve for those unforeseen events (or for the product launch). [For example, one production company quoted an approximate rate of \$100 per hour.]

Locations

- Ensure the comfort of participants — check out appropriate seating, make sure they have a glass of water, or a gin and tonic ...
- Lighting. Can individual lights be turned on or off? Is extra lighting required?
- Noise. Identify possible sources of unwanted noise — air-conditioning units, playground bells, lorikeets in the trees outside — and strategies for dealing with these.
- Check for possible OH&S issues within the venue — access, cabling and so on.

Permissions

- Do you require specific permission or authority to use your venue(s) of choice?
- Especially when using 'group' footage, do you have (or are you required to have) permission from every individual?
- Do you have permission/authority to use images/screenshots/stills within your filming?
- Do you have permission to upload your files to publicly accessible sites (for example, TeacherTube, YouTube)?
- Don't forget to include credits or acknowledgements where appropriate.

Editing

- Keep in mind the original project aims and audience while editing.
- Creating a time-coded script can be a valuable editing tool.
- Consider clip length — 3 to 5 minutes maximum is a commonly accepted guide. If necessary, plan to break down your clip(s) into segments.

General

- Being flexible is important; having a sense of humour is essential.
- Consider using a professional for filming and editing, if funding/expertise is available.

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