

Igniting the passion: practical ways to engage and inspire our students to learn through the school library!

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Abstract

The school library is a place where students collaborate, inquire, learn and grow. This presentation will focus on four important areas that should be addressed if students are to be engaged and inspired to learn through the school library.

- *Creating the right environment*
- *Providing a local, state, national and international focus*
- *Immersing students in a variety of text*
- *Embedding literacy and inquiry into everyday life*

Practical suggestions will be provided and participants will gather a range of helpful ideas they can take back to their own school libraries to engage and inspire their students and share with colleagues.

Keywords: Celebrate, Collaborate, Communicate, Inspire

Introduction

When students enter the school library they need to be engaged and inspired. The school library is certainly a space and a place for meeting, sharing and discussing. It is a place where students collaborate, inquire, learn and grow. There are four important areas that should be addressed if students are to be fully engaged and greatly inspired to learn through the school library. Practical suggestions and helpful ideas are provided.

Creating the right environment

When the right environment is created in the library and it becomes a space students love to visit and spend time in, a positive culture is created and students become motivated to learn. As a result, students will be enthusiastic and you will be developing readers who are not only motivated to read books but love to read, inquire and learn. You will be engaging even the most reluctant student. The atmosphere, the physical layout, colors, noise levels and placement of furniture not only need to be conducive to learning but inspiring. Flexible spaces are required to successfully accommodate a range of teaching and learning

functions. Intriguing displays captivate student's imagination and exciting programs motivate students. Students enjoy celebrating and interacting with each other through special literary events such as Book Week and National Simultaneous Storytime.

“Each year, schools and public libraries across Australia spend Book Week celebrating books and Australian authors and illustrators. Classroom teachers, teacher librarians and public librarians develop activities, offer competitions and tell stories relating to a theme to highlight the importance of reading.” (CBCA 2015)

CBCA is celebrating its 70th Anniversary this year and its primary role is to engage the community with literature for young Australians. The CBCA presents annual awards to books of literary merit, for outstanding contribution to Australian children's literature. National Simultaneous Storytime (NSS) is held each year by the Australian Library and Information Association to encourage more young Australians to read and enjoy books.

“Every year a picture book, written and illustrated by an Australian author and illustrator is read simultaneously in libraries, schools, pre-schools, childcare centers, family homes, bookshops and many other places around the country.” (ALIA, 2015)

This colorful, fun, vibrant literary event is now in its 15th year. In Australia, NSS receives positive media coverage, generates a great deal of community interest and is held annually as part of *Library and Information Week*. In 2014, over 460,000 children at over 3,100 locations across Australia took part in National Simultaneous Storytime (ALIA 2015) reading the same book and enjoying a range of supporting educational activities, songs and games with lots of fun. The aim of NSS is to promote the value of books, reading and literacy. The books are carefully selected and local writers and publishers are promoted. Involvement in NSS promotes storytime activities in schools, local libraries and communities right around the country. It provides opportunities to involve parents, grandparents, the media and others to participate in and enjoy the occasion.

Puppets and stuffed library friends allow younger students the opportunity to imagine, explore, collaborate and create through dramatic play. Working as a pair or in small groups, students can select a scene or scenes in a story or an entire story and adapt to a play creating their own dialogue. Students can choose a puppet or soft toy and read or retell them a story. Small groups of students can create skits involving characters from a picture book, a short story or novel. The skits might focus on a phase of the characters' lives that was not part of the story. When we talk about using drama to enhance learning, we are not talking about putting on a play for an audience. Rather, we are talking about improvisational role play or simulations that are unscripted and allow the learner to come to new understandings.

“Through drama, students become a part of the learning process rather than mere observers or inactive receptacles of the rich experience of learning ; in this way, their learning is deeper, more sustained, and infinitely more complex.” (Jeffrey Wilhelm, Literacy Today 2015).

Finding ways of being inclusive through games such as giant chess brings students of all ages together and encourages them to meet, share, discuss and challenge each other. We have strategically located our giant chess set near the library entrance to encourage

reluctant students to view the library as an inclusive, user friendly and fun learning space. It provides the opportunity for some down time and a focal point for students to chat together informally and challenge each other over a game. Students who show particular interest are encouraged to join the co-curricular chess club that meets weekly.

Providing a Local, State, National and International Focus

Our libraries need to be set in the local, state, national and international scene. Introducing local authors to students, building partnerships with local libraries, attending conferences at home and abroad and sharing what you learn with staff and students will inspire them, broaden their perspective and provide a worldview. The Frog Club was initiated by our local libraries and is promoted through local schools to encourage Year One students and their parents to become familiar with and use their local library. The Frog Club is endorsed by the Mayor of The Hills Shire Council, and “aims to assist every Year One child in the Shire to develop a life-long love of reading and encourage them to join their local library. Last year 863 children participated and read an amazing 30,510 books.” (Hills Shire Libraries, 2015)

“Somebody once said: reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. The Kids Own Australian Literature Awards (KOALA) encourage reading, and young minds to be exercised, let off the lead and raced around the park, even.” (Bob Graham, KOALA 2015)

Every year, young readers from all over our state of New South Wales judge their very own literary awards. By voting in the KOALA awards they can reward the Australian children's books that have most inspired, amused, terrified, enlightened and engaged them. KOALA aims to promote and encourage the enjoyment and appreciation of Australian literature for children and young adults. It gives recognition to Australian authors and illustrators and involves young readers living in our state of NSW in the process of selecting the most popular books. When students are involved in awards such as this they develop critical appreciation skills, they are given an opportunity to voice their opinions regarding the books they love to read, it encourages them to discuss and debate their views on good literature and encourages the enjoyment and appreciation of Australian children's literature.

Room To Read claims that ‘if every child received an education 171 million people would be lifted out of poverty.’ (Room To Read 2015) Room To Read works in collaboration with communities and local governments across Asia and Africa to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children, and support girls to complete secondary school with the life skills they'll need to succeed in school and beyond. Room to Read's Literacy Program is transforming primary schools into child-friendly learning environments that enable children to develop the skills and habit of reading throughout primary school and become life-long, independent readers. They currently operate in 10 countries in Asia and Africa, adapting programs to suit the individual needs of the population. Students can read the story of how this organization began by reading together the picture book, ‘Zac the yak with books on his back’ and can actively support these projects to raise funds for books for a community school or to build a library, serving an average of 300 children, and provide a child-friendly learning environment with books, puzzles and posters that will help to promote the habit of reading among young children.

“Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health, and opens the way for democratic participation and active citizenship.” (*Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, Room to Read 2015*).

By being involved in a global humanitarian project such as this, students gain a greater understanding and appreciation for children in other countries who face very different educational challenges to themselves.

The greatest benefits of attending a professional conference are the opportunities to build your network and increase your awareness of new trends happening in the teacher librarian field. In particular, attendance at IASL conferences provides me with invaluable professional learning opportunities on an international level, opportunities to network with colleagues from all over the world, learn first hand from top educators, keep abreast of latest research into school libraries, information literacy, the use of technology, pedagogy, reading and children’s literature. In addition, it gives me the opportunity to reflect on my own teaching experiences and in doing so, share with and encourage others. Presenting at an International Conference and sharing my professional knowledge and experiences with others, provides me with the opportunity to give back to the profession after over thirty years of teaching. To share my abilities, experience, knowledge, skills and passion with colleagues, both at home and abroad and with the children in my care is one of my ongoing professional goals. Networking is one of the most important advantages of attending a conference. A great way to network with colleagues is to select sessions that really interest you and talk with the people gathered there. I always endeavor to seek out colleagues by getting to sessions early and chatting with those present, staying at the end to share, listen and learn from the experience of others. Sometimes I learn as much or more from them as I do from the sessions. Ask for their business cards, and give them yours. Spend time talking to the speakers, authors and presenters. At each presentation, make notes about practical ideas you don’t want to forget. Request recommendations for books, resources, or contact names that will support your professional growth. If you can’t get to a session you would like to attend because of time constraints or clashes read the paper provided or go online and listen to the presentation later if it has been recorded. Help IASL conferences to improve by completing evaluation forms when they are provided by the organizers. Social events also provide a great opportunity to network with colleagues. Getting to know new colleagues and peers is one of the most rewarding components of conference attendance. You never know where that new relationship might lead! One of my favorite parts of IASL conferences over the years has been attending the school visits. By visiting local schools and libraries you are immersing yourself in the culture, learning first hand from teacher librarians ‘in action’ and you have the wonderful opportunity to encourage fellow teacher librarians and their students across the globe. A picture is worth a thousand words so I always take a camera to capture interesting displays, library layouts or student work to share with teachers and students at home. After the conference, share your thoughts, ideas and experiences with your principal, school executive, staff and the teacher librarians in your local area. You will retain new information and ideas better if you discuss them with colleagues. Put new ideas into practice with your students. If you approach the conference with the anticipation of learning, you will be surprised at all that you learn and how your professional and personal life will be enhanced.

Interacting with schools and collaborating with students across the globe through projects such as the IASL GigggleIT Project and International School Library Month captivate and

enthuse students, encourage the exchange and sharing of information and make learning enjoyable.

GiggleIT is a free international online collaborative project between teachers and students around the world.

“The Project operates under a Creative Commons license which allows everyone to share ideas and resources while still recognizing the work done by the original authors. GiggleIT is hosted by the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), in partnership with the International Children’s Digital Library.” (IASL 2015)

Through involvement in the GiggleIT Project students share their knowledge and experiences with others, practice real life collaboration and use the library as a creative space. Various projects can be completed each year. Students have fun while writing and learning and become globally published authors. William Clarke College is a special envoy school.

“The ISLM Bookmark Exchange Project is a simple, fun way of sharing the pleasure and delights of books and libraries and of making new friends through school libraries worldwide.” (IASL 2015)

Students are encouraged to make bookmarks on a theme and share them with students living in other countries.

Immersing students in a variety of text

Immersing our students in a variety of multimodal, digital and visual texts transforms student learning. Immersion into texts occurs when students work together as a whole class or in small groups to read, listen to and view a wide variety of text types. Learning how texts are made and why they look and act the way they do is essential social knowledge. It is the structures and features of texts that make them recognizable and that communicate their meaning or message. Students learn to differentiate between texts for a variety of purposes such as a shopping list, an email, a formal letter, a fairy tale, a poem, a mystery story, a job application or the theme music that is used to announce a popular television show. We need this knowledge if we are to develop the kind of literacy that allows individuals to become knowledgeable and critical participants in society. Talk plays a key role when students are exploring any type of text. Students discuss how these texts are constructed and why. They look for common patterns and talk about audience and purpose.

Going on a virtual journey together and visiting significant sites around your country, using a range of texts to engage students with past history and events, gives them a sense of time and the importance of place. Picture books are an excellent way of connecting students with stories from a local area. Exploring national, historical ‘stories’ fosters a child’s knowledge of their own heritage.

Using the International Children’s Digital Library to browse, locate and select books written in another language and then rewrite the book by creating the text in their own, provides opportunities for students to explore together, develop an awareness of other cultures, share, discuss and communicate. ICDL includes over five thousand children’s books online, at any one time, from more than forty countries and in approximately sixty languages. The site is

free, is easily accessible and available in eleven languages. It allows users to search for books by age, country, language, length, or genre. Award winning books, students' favorite books and new books are featured regularly. ICDL exhibitions are small collections of books from around the world with similar themes. The exhibitions include an overview of the theme, links to the exhibition books, descriptions of why the books were included, and related activities. Books can be selected on themes such as:

- Celebrating differences
- Overcoming obstacles
- Everyone needs water and water needs everyone
- Forever friendship
- Strong women and girls make the world go around

“The ICDL Foundation promotes tolerance and respect for diverse cultures by providing access to the best of children’s literature from around the world.” (ICDL 2015)

Volunteers from around the world ‘staff’ the Library. They identify books for the Collection, secure rights and send the books either physically or digitally. Books are digitized and available in a variety of text types. The collection's focus is on identifying materials that help children to understand the world around them and the global society in which they live.

Embedding literacy and inquiry into everyday life

By embedding literacy and inquiry into the everyday lives of our students we are encouraging students to make real decisions that affect their own lives and their learning. Ultimately we are encouraging students to become life long learners. Students can be encouraged to explore the collection together using passports to investigate new and exciting topics, developing literacy skills and building a sense of inquiry. Once students complete an inventory on topics of interest to them, this is then used to support and extend their borrowing. This is a flexible approach that provides open-ended experiences and investigations that enable students to enter at their own readiness levels. Students are encouraged to form their own questions, adapt and apply what they discover and share their new knowledge with others. The Teacher Librarian guides the learning and provides support as needed.

A Literature Circle is an effective, *research-based* literacy strategy that provides opportunities for purposeful classroom talk. With a focus on genuine, thoughtful conversations about good books, students meet in small groups to read, discuss and respond to the texts they are reading. As they put forward their thoughts and opinions, and listen to those of their peers, they become active readers who are practicing effective reading strategies and creating new understandings.

Developing a Human Library and inviting ‘Living Books’ to share their ‘real’ stories with students provides students with the opportunity to develop strong interpersonal skills, be inspired by and appreciate others and encourages them to inquire further.

“You truly cannot understand or criticize someone until you walk a mile in their shoes - and to do that you have to meet them and talk to them.” Noni Hazelhurst (National Patron, Human Libraries Australia – Living Libraries Australia, 2012)

Our Human Library Program at William Clarke College has provided our K-6 students with a wonderful opportunity to connect with diverse members of our school community and beyond, listen to their personal stories, communicate with them, build relationships, explore and learn. Members of our College community including staff, students, parents, grandparents and alumni, together with members of the local and wider communities have been invited to speak to the students K-8 as ‘Living Books’ in our Human Library. By participating in our ‘Human Library’ students have acquired life skills, widening their understanding of others and the world. Students are hungry for real life experiences and ‘living books’ have inspired them!

Conclusion

Students will love coming to the library when it rocks! If the library is a positive environment with a strong international focus, if it is a place where students feel comfortable to meet, share, collaborate, inquire and discuss together, if a wide variety of resources is accessible then students will engage and they will learn.

Key Learning Areas

- Students love coming to the library when it rocks!
- Our libraries need to be set in the local, state, national and international scene
- Students need to be immersed in a wide variety of texts
- We need to embed literacy and inquiry into the everyday lives of our students
- Students need to be inspired to become life long learners

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I have taught for many years in Australian schools as a Teacher and later as a Teacher Librarian. This has included experience in Primary (K-6) and Whole School (K-12) situations. Currently I am Teacher Librarian K-8 at William Clarke College in Kellyville, NSW. In 2007 I gained Accreditation at Classroom/Professional Excellence level in NSW and have maintained this since. I am actively involved in local, state and national associations in Australia and for the last 4 years have been President of the Independent Primary Schools Teacher Librarian Network NSW. This is my 7th IASL Conference. Teaching is my passion and I love working with students and staff. I am energized by exciting, new learning opportunities. I am keen to take every opportunity to raise the profile of our library and its important role in the school. I am excited when I see all students achieving, learning new skills and gaining deeper knowledge and understanding.