Leading from the sweet spot: embedding the library and the teacher librarian in your school community

By Emma Cox and Lori Korodaj

TLs lead from the 'sweet spot' where these three professional elements intersect and where they can make a powerful contribution to school success.

Biographies

Emma is a newly qualified teacher librarian, having completed her studies through Charles Sturt University, and currently works as a teacher librarian at Red Hill Primary School in the ACT. She has 15 years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher and International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme educator in independent and public schools, both in Australia and Toronto, Canada. Emma's professional interests include children's picture book literature, development of global perspectives and future skills, and the use of technology to transform teaching and learning.

Lori is a teacher librarian practitioner with over 25 years of experience in Australia and overseas, in school (K–12) and public libraries. Lori is currently teacher librarian at Lake Tuggeranong College (Years 11–12) in the ACT and Adjunct Lecturer for the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University. She has represented her profession nationally: President, ASLA ACT; director, ASLA National Board, and as a member of ASLA's ACCESS *Editorial project team. Lori has written for* Australian Teacher Magazine *and* ACCESS *and has presented at ASLA conferences, the National Education Summit and via webinar. Professional passions: providing professional learning to colleagues, advocacy for the importance of teacher librarians in schools, educational technology, and mentoring up-and-coming teacher librarians.*

This article captures Emma and Lori's presentation at the ASLA XXVI Conference, celebrating 50 years of ASLA, held in Canberra in April 2019.

Abstract

This article will examine the role of the teacher librarian as a driver of positive student outcomes in school communities — at a leadership level, the classroom level, and working alongside students and families. The ways in which teacher librarians can demonstrate leadership in the teaching and learning of General Capability skills within the Australian Curriculum is explored. The value of completing an environmental scan will be discussed in the context of supporting teacher librarians as leaders in their schools. Case study examples and practical strategies of leadership in a primary and senior secondary school will be shared and supported by reference to Australian and international 21st century learning documents and frameworks. Links to supporting resources are provided for use in conjunction with your own school strategic plans and school library documents.

Introduction

Teacher librarians (TLs) work in a broad range of formalised school settings, from pre-school to senior secondary, each with its own unique leadership opportunities and challenges. Each professional brings to their role diverse perspectives and experience; however, in the bubble of our own school settings and the frenzy of the working day, it can be difficult to determine how best to embed ourselves as leaders in our school communities. In this article, we share the leadership experiences of two TLs: Lori, a highly experienced practitioner, currently working in a senior secondary context, and Emma, a newly qualified TL working in a primary school setting. We share our leadership styles and strategies and hope to provide a new perspective by which to view and grow your own leadership capacity.

Leadership in schools

Leadership structures in schools can vary from traditional, bureaucratic and hierarchical structures to flexible, collective and shared systems (Cox 2018). It is important for TLs to reflect on the type of leadership structure that exists within their context as this allows them to think strategically about their place and role within it. Where no formal leadership role exists for the TL, a shift in attitude can be powerful.

After completing an environmental scan of her influence within the school community, Emma was surprised to learn that, despite being new to the role, she was demonstrating leadership across a significant number of elements that supported improved student outcomes across the school; for example, she was leading a whole-school device allocation and remote management project. So, she gave herself a promotion. There was no financial gain or invitation to attend senior leadership meetings; the promotion was purely self-proclaimed. However, the shift of attitude allowed Emma to think of herself as a leader, move forward strategically and work with greater confidence (Weisburg 2017).

Lori has found that the easiest way to lead in her school is to be part of key teams, specifically, curriculum and professional learning. Both of these teams have an impact on staff and students in her school community and she has been able to

provide insight into and guidance related to the understanding of General Capabilities for teachers, and resourcing and guiding research in staff professional learning communities in the last two years. As part of the University of Canberra's Teachers as Researchers project, Lori is part of her school team's three-year research: *Active impacts and influences on capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students relating to achievement of at-level outcomes: focussing on engagement, attendance and Year 12 completion.* This work will have a whole-of-school impact on pedagogy and delivery of content by the end of the project.

TLs are uniquely placed within the school community to be leaders. They have strong professional relationships with students, staff, families, school networks and external stakeholders, they are literacy, information and curriculum specialists ... and have a 'birds-eye', whole-school perspective.

Leading from the 'sweet spot'

TLs are uniquely placed within the school community to be leaders. They have strong professional relationships with students, staff, families, school networks and external stakeholders, they are literacy, information and curriculum specialists (Merga 2019), and they are one of the few in the school to have a 'birds-eye', whole-school perspective (Lupton 2014). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (AITSL 2018) sets out the professional standards for teachers under three elements: practice, knowledge and relationships. TLs work in the place where these elements intersect, positioning them in the middle of the school leadership framework. TLs have the potential to utilise their position to influence school leadership and the strategic direction of the school, to collaborate with and build the capacity

of colleagues and to model best practice teaching and learning with students. Therefore, we like to think that TLs lead from the 'sweet spot' where these three professional elements intersect and where they can make a powerful contribution to school success.

Leading the way: The Australian Curriculum and General Capabilities

The Australian Curriculum is built around three components: learning areas, General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities. However, during the phased implementation of the Australian Curriculum, the focus was largely on the learning area curriculum, with some understanding of the need to include Cross-Curriculum Priorities across all learning experiences. The General Capabilities, the essential 21st century learning skills that are developed *through* the learning, have only begun to take the spotlight in the last 12 months (Scoular & Heard 2018). This is one area where TLs can showcase their knowledge and skills through collaboration with colleagues, because, ever the early adaptors, TLs have been actively working in the General Capability space since the inception of the Australian Curriculum in 2011 (Lupton 2014). These skills of critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, literacy and ICT are right in the TL's speciality area, particularly with the connections to literature, digital citizenship, intellectual integrity and referencing (Toner 2011). Such collaboration may include developing

interdisciplinary or complementary learning programs specifically learning through General Capability skills, or working with colleagues to develop assessment tools for units of inquiry. The General Capability learning continua [PDF] provide an excellent framework for age-specific implementation of the General Capabilities.

Environmental scans: Why?

Many TLs work in small teams or, more commonly, in a solo capacity. Moreover, schools are dynamic places where the days are fast-paced and time for collaborative planning or networking can be limited. We are often so focused on our many and varied professional responsibilities and the implementation of 'the next thing' that we become overwhelmed, lose sight of what we are actually achieving in our school community and the positive contribution that is being made.

An environmental scan can be a catalyst for discussions with your leadership team and help to identify the following:

- Gaps in your service provision
- Professional learning requirements
- Career planning and pathways development

Completing an environmental scan allows the TL to identify and celebrate their current areas of reach and consider future priorities. The environmental scan could also be used to inform documents such as the library strategic plan to ensure that the desired priorities are met. It is essential to note, however, that TLs cannot be all things all of the time (Korodaj 2019b) and a staged approach with realistic time lines is recommended. For example, when prioritising the introduction of genrefication

to the library collection, the TL should place less emphasis on other areas such as the integration of new digital tools.
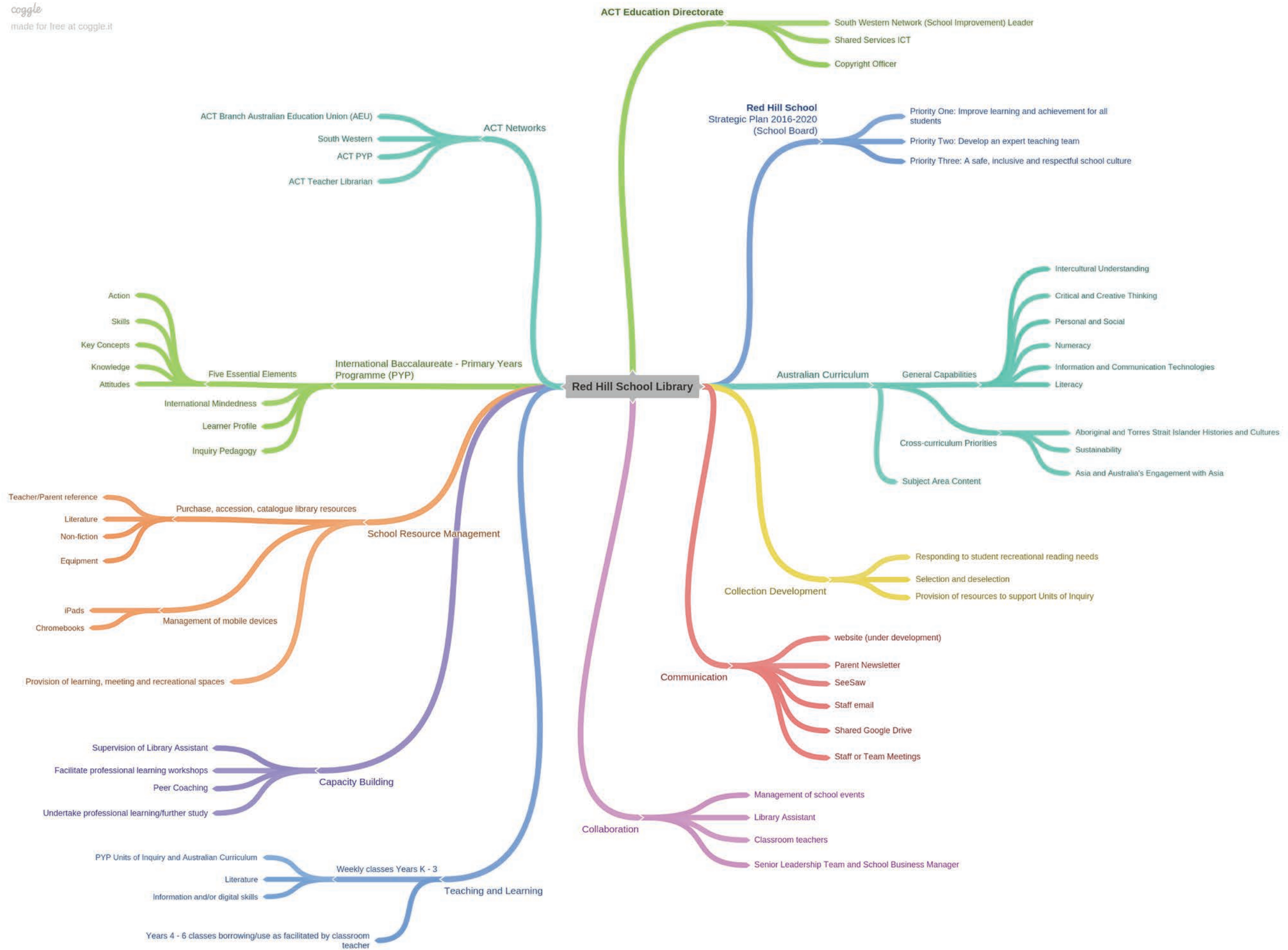
> ### Teacher librarians and 'sweet-spot' leadership: A reality check
>
> - Capabilities and priorities will be different, dependent on your career stage, level of experience and personal circumstances, and that's okay
> - All elements cannot be activated all of the time
> - Engagement with certain teams or committees may vary from year to year, dependent on the libraries service model or strategic focus
> - There could be an 'ebb and flow' effect (that is, services in high demand while assessment is being completed; but breathing time while work is being assessed and reports are being written)

Prompted by a university learning task, Emma developed this mind map to record the scope of her leadership influence, including professional relationships, library management, curriculum planning, teaching and learning.

All practitioners, newly qualified or highly experienced, will find it affirming to see the ways in which a positive contribution is being made to the school community, despite our knowing there is always 'so much more to do'. In our experience, the process has been hugely beneficial; for example, the environmental scan mind map formed the platform for which Emma negotiated modifications to the TL role for

coggle
made for free at coggle.it

ACT Education Directorate
- South Western Network (School Improvement) Leader
- Shared Services ICT
- Copyright Officer

ACT Networks
- ACT Branch Australian Education Union (AEU)
- South Western
- ACT PYP
- ACT Teacher Librarian

Red Hill School
Strategic Plan 2016-2020
(School Board)
- Priority One: Improve learning and achievement for all students
- Priority Two: Develop an expert teaching team
- Priority Three: A safe, inclusive and respectful school culture

International Baccalaureate - Primary Years Programme (PYP)
- Five Essential Elements
  - Action
  - Skills
  - Key Concepts
  - Knowledge
  - Attitudes
- International Mindedness
- Learner Profile
- Inquiry Pedagogy

Red Hill School Library

Australian Curriculum
- General Capabilities
  - Intercultural Understanding
  - Critical and Creative Thinking
  - Personal and Social
  - Numeracy
  - Information and Communication Technologies
  - Literacy
- Cross-curriculum Priorities
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
  - Sustainability
  - Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia
- Subject Area Content

School Resource Management
- Purchase, accession, catalogue library resources
  - Teacher/Parent reference
  - Literature
  - Non-fiction
  - Equipment
- Management of mobile devices
  - iPads
  - Chromebooks
- Provision of learning, meeting and recreational spaces

Collection Development
- Responding to student recreational reading needs
- Selection and deselection
- Provision of resources to support Units of Inquiry

Communication
- website (under development)
- Parent Newsletter
- SeeSaw
- Staff email
- Shared Google Drive
- Staff or Team Meetings

Capacity Building
- Supervision of Library Assistant
- Facilitate professional learning workshops
- Peer Coaching
- Undertake professional learning/further study

Collaboration
- Management of school events
- Library Assistant
- Classroom teachers
- Senior Leadership Team and School Business Manager

Teaching and Learning
- Weekly classes Years K - 3
  - PYP Units of Inquiry and Australian Curriculum
  - Literature
  - Information and/or digital skills
- Years 4 - 6 classes borrowing/use as facilitated by classroom teacher

the following school year to better meet school and library strategic goals, and Lori used the template with her team to identify areas of team success, library goals and future priorities.

Theory to practice: Primary

In the primary school context, Google Classroom and SeeSaw have supported Emma to lead from the sweet spot. Strategic use of these tools demonstrates best practice in teaching, learning and assessment, collaboration with and capacity building of colleagues, and engagement with parents and the wider school community.

Google Classroom is an excellent tool for sharing prompts, resources and modelled work samples with students, acting as a launching pad for collaborative, small-group and independent learning. In cases where classroom teachers have established a Google Classroom, TLs can be added as an additional teacher or the TL can create Google Classrooms specifically for library lessons for each class or year level. Posts can be duplicated across multiple classes and tagged by subject to manage workflow.

Primary students engage to a higher level when their classroom teacher has already established regular use of Google Classroom; however, they are consistently enthusiastic about using this tool for learning.

Google Classroom is also useful for staff professional learning. It acts as a digital platform to share workshop content and resources that colleagues can access readily afterwards. Importantly, it provides a space to engage in professional conversations with colleagues, creating momentum for particular interest areas and allowing the TL to identify potential areas for further development, or colleagues with whom they can collaborate for teaching and learning projects. Google Classroom can also be used as a platform to share readings, websites, and tutorials that have been curated by the TL to align with school priorities or identified professional interests. Staff who join the Google Classroom are sent an email notification each time new content is added, and they can access the material in their own time. In this way the TL is modelling best practice in their own professional learning, whilst facilitating a platform to support and build the capacity of their colleagues.

Emma Cox
18 Feb (Edited 19 Feb)

Who we are - A sense of self shapes wellbeing.

This term you are going to connect with the strengths of book characters and inspirational people and consider how these relate to you.

Each week you will read fiction and non-fiction literature, each book featuring a character or person demonstrating a particular attribute. You will record your reflections of each book in the Google Sheet attached here. After three weeks of reading, you will select one book character and plan and create a Clips presentation to share your thoughts and reflections. You will work in groups of three.

📗 Year 3 Who we are Readi...   🎬 Clips19-02-19_11-00.mov

Guided Inquiry Design Framework

Here is the slide deck from the breakout session I presented. I am happy to discuss this framework further with you, or share an example unit if you are interested.

📁 Guided Inquiry Design F...

5 class comments ⌄⌃

Anna ⬤⬤⬤ 28 Jun 2017
Great breakout thank you Emma!

Robyn ⬤⬤⬤ 28 Jun 2017
Thanks for a great presentation yesterday Emma. Looking forward to investigating more over the holidays.

Hazel ⬤⬤⬤ 28 Jun 2017
What a great session, Emma. I walked away thinking I can do this! Which was really helpful, so, thank you.

Emma Cox 30 Jun 2017
Thank you for the positive feedback, great to hear!

Michelle ⬤⬤⬤ 17 Jul 2017
Hi Emma, I loved the break out session and cant wait to see how you implemented the learning and knowledge in the unit of inquiry you created.


SeeSaw is a digital portfolio app which allows students and teachers to upload content and engage with families. Emma established year-level based SeeSaw classes and shares content relevant to student learning in real time during lessons. Students can also upload annotated content or reflections. This strategy has multiple benefits for modelling best-practice pedagogy. Firstly, it initiates dynamic communication and engagement with families, who appreciate the opportunity to see their child's work and post comments.

Secondly, it provides the TL the opportunity to promote and provide information about their teaching and learning program. Lastly, it allows the TL to keep dynamic assessment records for reporting, even when working

with large numbers of students across multiple year levels. Full disclosure: using SeeSaw in this way does require a significant amount of administration to set up, including obtaining relevant ICT permissions; however, once done, it is sustainable to manage throughout the school year and can be modified to carry over subsequent years.

Theory to practice: Secondary/Senior Secondary

To have an impact with students, Lori realised that there were a number of avenues from which to provide influence when leading from the sweet spot at her school. They include working with pre-service teachers while on practicum/observation; inviting staff to work with her and the rest of the
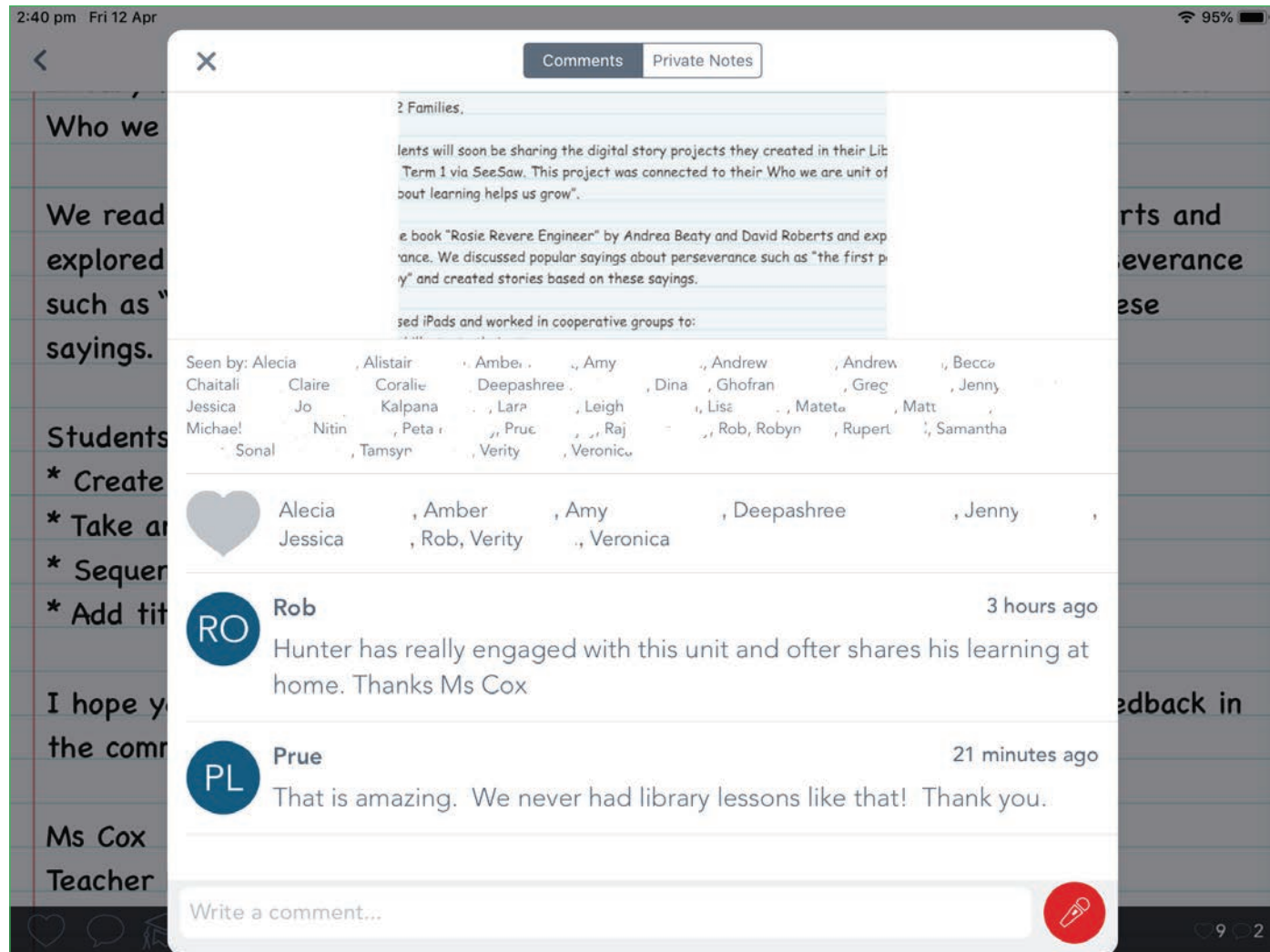
library team; embedding the TL in a program of learning leading to an assessment item submission; and strategic planning.

Pre-service teachers: All pre-service teachers that visit Lori's school have an hour-long appointment with the Lake Tuggeranong College (LTC) Library team. The first half hour covers the role of the TL, collaboration with teachers and students, and the services the LTC Library team provides. The second half hour is spent with LTC Library's library technician and assistant, finding out about the equipment we have for loan (staff and students), the work that is completed by this part of the team for teachers, and most importantly, finding resources to support pre-service

teachers as they craft their lessons and start teaching.

All pre-service teachers leave with the mantra 'The library is your friend!'. Lori and the LTC Library team see them off, knowing that with ninja-like stealth, they have added more school library supporters amongst our teaching community …

These soon-to-be teachers will demand quality school library services, qualified staff and TLs from each school they work in and will take back their learning about the school library to the universities at which they study. Comments from pre-service teachers who have visited LTC Library include 'I didn't know that the teacher librarian could be so

helpful!' and 'The library has saved me so much time in finding great resources for my prac!'.

New and current staff: There are two prongs to this avenue of influence and encouraging/reminding staff about the value of the library.

The first part is the LTC Library team learning who the new staff are at the end of each year and emailing them before they arrive at the school. This email from the library welcomes them to the school for the following year and introduces them to the support they will have from the library when they arrive. This has been welcomed happily by these recipients, and in follow-up after they arrive, Lori and the team have found that this has added significantly to the welcoming 'vibe' of the school.

The second part of the enticement of staff to the LTC Library is regular invitations to visit the library: the beginning of each school year, the beginning of each new semester, and the beginning of each term. Each is tailored to where the school community is at — the beginning of each semester encourages collaboration on revamping of tasks and location of resources to support the start of new subjects, and the beginning of term can be more about encouraging students to visit for ongoing support from the TLs.

Each email has the same overarching message — 'the library saves you time!'. Lori has found this to be an effective message with time-poor colleagues. To save you time if you're interested in trying this approach, visit the digital resources folder to find sample emails used by Lori (in the Senior Secondary folder).

Working with staff: Lori and Holly Godfree work closely with a number of teaching staff to co-design or revamp assessment tasks before they are assigned to students. Teachers who take part in this find the 'fresh set of eyes' useful and it allows them to avoid the 'copy/paste' task. Lori and Holly assist in embedding critical and creative thinking into these tasks and ensure that important information such as definitions of assignment verbs ('define', 'analyse' et cetera) and referencing information is included as well.

As a flow-on effect, Lori and Holly are now also embedded in some programs of learning. This is where the TL provides just-in-time support to students with research skills at the point of need and can work alongside the teacher to team teach some content. An example of how this looks (in some detail) can be found by visiting Lori's blog post outlining the team teaching she and Holly did with an English teacher earlier in 2019 (Korodaj 2019a). This includes what happened in the lead-up, during delivery, and possible challenges you may encounter. There is also discussion of how collaboration developed within Lori's school community.

Strategic planning: Lori takes time each year with the LTC Library team to map their services against the Education Directorate's Strategic Plan, the school's strategic plan, and best practice for school libraries. Some suggestions to get you started can be found in this document.

Feedback: What other TLs think of our suggestions

As part of our workshop on this topic, we invited colleagues to share their thoughts on our ideas. Jump into the Padlet or check out the screen capture!

Helpful session

I found the session very helpful, especially the environmental scan. It is useful to have both a secondary and primary approach as well as PYP being represented.

Great to network with the presenters :)

Also, very empowering fopr TL's to continue raising the profile of our role and our libraries.

Some of the ideas you suggested I'm already doing which gave me confidence to realise I must be on the right track! Thank you!

There were some great ideas about how to involve parents (such as see-saw) that I will be looking into further.

I also need to touch base again with our new teachers to make sure they are aware of all the resources we have and that I'm here to help them.

You fitted so many great things into such a small amount of time, but is there some way you could leave more

Great ideas

Environmental scan - great to use with my staff

Bruce meme is one I will definitely be putting on my door!

The Professional Knowledge, Practice Relationships grid will be a good way to focus my energies.

'Speed planning' is on my list for Monday.

Contact with new staff before they even get to the school - great idea as it's so easy to get bumped off their first day agenda:-/

Resources to assist you: the free stuff!

We want to support you to lead from the sweet spot, and we know how much everyone loves free stuff, so we are sharing a suite of digital resources, which can be accessed HERE. These are intended for use under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Share Alike 4.0 International License. There are also some great online resources and readings, Australian and international, that we've found invaluable on our leadership journey, available online HERE.

Contact us!

If you're keen to take the conversation further or want to discuss anything we've shared in this article, please feel free to contact us.

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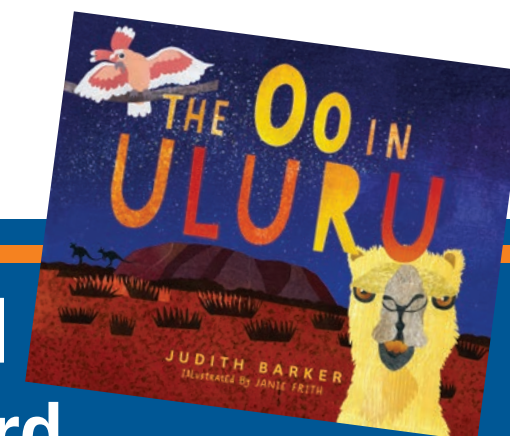Lupton, M 2014, 'Inquiry skills in the Australian Curriculum v6: A birds-eye view', *ACCESS*, November, pp. 8–29.

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The Oo in Uluru shortlisted for Speech Pathology Award

The Oo in Uluru, by Melbourne Author Judy Barker has been shortlisted for the 2019 Speech Pathology Australia book awards.

This book is a fun, Australian-themed phoneme story that teaches young readers about the long vowel Oo and where they can find it in different words. Set in the Uluru-Kata-Tjuta National Park, a young girl explores the spectacular wildlife and nature of the Anangu. Beautifully illustrated by Janie Frith the rich colours and vibrant use of multi-media enhance the magical experience of Uluru.

Judith has her own website with fun, interactive activities, spelling worksheets and other resources that are designed to accompany the visual language which is highlighted in the book in a simple, holistic and step-by-step approach, so that anyone can teach young readers at home or in the classroom.

The book is also perfect for children who have visited Uluru or are planning a trip there, with fantastic illustrations of an indigenous man playing the didgeridoo and the local wildlife. A wonderful book highlighting our indigenous culture and the local travel economy.

The Oo in Uluru is available in all good bookstores or online at www.booktopia.com.au