

# T-I as Teaching and Learning Coach

By Sue Dracoulas

I've just had an 'aha' moment! I think I really 'get' graphic organisers now! At the recent SLAV conference we were asked to sketch our thoughts about the Architecture of Learning in our schools. I started to brainstorm a list when I felt this overwhelming urge to draw a concept map – and it worked. As teachers we often teach our students strategies and techniques for successful learning but when it comes to our own learning, we don't always take our own advice.

I mention this because it is a significant moment for me in my ongoing journey of understanding the role of a teacher-librarian. In a previous edition of *FYI*, I wrote about the part *Researching Together* had played in this process (Dracoulas 2005). At this point, I thought I might share with you the next phase of that journey, as I explore what seems to me to be a very fuzzy line between the role of teacher-librarian and Teaching and Learning Coach.

Berwick Secondary College is a Leading School in phase 2 of the flagship strategies of the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2006). As such, the school has been funded to develop a number of flexible learning spaces in which to facilitate learning and teaching, using the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PoLT) and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in innovative and collaborative ways (*Leading Schools Funding* 2004).

When it was announced that the school had been successful in gaining this funding, expressions of interest were sought from KLAs who

wanted to be part of the early planning and implementation. The library team seized the opportunity to develop an ICT-rich space adjoining our building. We saw the potential for collaboration with teachers on curriculum development that this proximity to classroom learning activities could enable. We envisaged a seamless flow of students from classroom to library to classroom engaged in meaningful research tasks.

Our expressions of interest for the creation of a flexible learning space utilising two existing classrooms with an access door through the library was accepted and ultimately became the first of a series of spaces created in a similar manner. Two classes would be timetabled together in each space with their teachers and would be additionally supported by a Teaching and Learning Coach. The learning environment would be ICT rich, including desktop and laptop computers and an interactive whiteboard housed in a brightly coloured room with a flexible configuration of furniture. Our aim was to develop lessons which catered for a diverse range of interests and learning styles and allowed a number of activities to be taking place simultaneously.

To ensure the library team maintained a significant role in the flexible learning spaces (there was always the possibility that teachers would simply shut the adjoining door!) and to establish best practise in information literacy skills, I decided to apply for one of the six positions of Teaching and Learning Coach, working in the flexible learning space alongside the teachers

and planning and integrating the PoLT while embedding ICT into the lessons.

In addressing the selection criteria, I realised how closely this support role approximated my role as teacher-librarian. The prospect of further professional development was very exciting. Teaching and Learning Coaches would be skilled up in PD to enable them to train other staff via both formal and informal arrangements.

As expected, the role has proved to be both challenging and enriching. As a coach, I am part of a team of experienced teachers from a range of KLAs with a variety of skills and talents. We all work to support teachers and deepen the learning experience of our students. To do this, we are given many opportunities to improve our skills and to impart this knowledge to others. As each new flexible learning space is established, it takes on its own flavour and adds new dimensions to the learning experience of our students.

The flexible learning spaces have created a wave of interest in the learning and teaching process. As we endeavour to consistently reflect the PoLT in our lesson planning and assessment practices, we are constantly reviewing and refining our work. Team teaching means colleagues benefit from each other's skill sets, with new teachers seeing first-hand how more experienced teachers handle situations, while the latter can be re-invigorated by the enthusiasm of their younger colleagues.

The library flexible learning space has been the impetus for new programs, particularly in collaboration with the English staff. As we are a large school, we have focused mainly on working with Year 7, and began the English/Library Links program in Term 2 last year. All Year 7 classes have worked on this station-rotational activity. With access to quality ICT facilities and the library adjoining the classroom, and guided by their teachers and myself as coach, students can engage in meaningful tasks where good research is at the core of the process (*Success in a Flexible Learning Space* 2006).

Following the success of the English/Library Links program, we developed a fiction-based program for Term 3 2005, called The Reading Game. Our students told us they wanted more choice in their groups and the range of activities, so the new program provided for 11 differently themed cards using Bloom's taxonomy (*What is Bloom's Taxonomy?* 2005) and Gardner's (2005) multiple intelligences. The activities also utilised a range of graphic organisers to familiarise our students with these tools. Each activity was given a points value and students aimed to reach 100 points by the end of the term.

In first term this year we adapted Jo Thompson's (2005) InfoNuts model to our school's needs. This has enabled all Year 7s to begin their school life with a clear understanding of the computer network, library systems and physical layout of the library, as well as basic research techniques and processes. Most importantly, it has allowed the library staff to build good relationships with Year 7 students that we hope will carry on throughout their school life.

The working relationships I have been able to develop with teachers who work in the library flexible learning space have been the most positive outcome for me personally. While we try to encourage teachers who book into the main library class spaces to involve us in the planning of assignments, in reality, by the time we see the assignment sheet, it is very often a



Students working on Infonuts

fait accompli. We become masters of diplomacy when trying to point out how the assignment could be structured to avoid the copying and pasting that teachers so often complain about and the students so often get away with!

However, as a Teaching and Learning Coach, I am in on the ground floor of planning these assignments and I am in the classroom when they are delivered. Gradually the teachers I work with are coming to the library to seek advice about other lessons and my expertise in communicating information literacy outcomes is being sought. I hope that long after the funding for Teaching and Learning Coaches has passed, the teacher-librarian will be recognised in the school as the real coach.

I am particularly enjoying honing my teaching skills as my understanding of the PoLT is consolidated through the wonderful opportunities for professional development I am being offered. It is incredibly rewarding to learn and try out a new way of teaching and to be able to model or demonstrate this within a team teaching situation. The feedback from peers is immediate and adds value to my own teaching skills as well as theirs. In a recent lesson, as part of the InfoNuts program, we looked at a range of graphic organisers and at the end of almost every class, the teachers commented that they, along with their students, had learned some new techniques.

The tenure of a Teaching and Learning Coach



Access to the flexible learning space through the library

under the current funding is three years, but I believe I will be able to utilise my new skills and the relationships that have been fostered in my ongoing role as teacher-librarian well beyond this timeframe. The line between the two jobs is already blurring and I often don't know which hat I'm wearing. There has also been the added benefit of raising the profile of the library in the school. A recent comment from a colleague returning from family leave was, "The library is so much more than just books these days!".

I've learned a great deal, too. I really do 'get' graphic organisers and can clearly see how they can scaffold learning.

## References

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