

Together everyone achieves more

By Karen Russo

The members of a school library staff spend a large amount of time working very closely with each other on a daily basis.

Library technicians work next to librarians and teacher-librarians, with each having tasks requiring their specialised skills and knowledge. Each also has to engage with students and teachers to execute the more routine tasks involved with having a school library function effectively and efficiently. There is probably no better example in a school of a faculty group having the potential to function either as a fantastic, well-oiled dream team or as a dysfunctional group of people who simply suffer the presence of each other every day and get through the day as best they can, achieving what they can along the way.

The division of labour within the library faculty is a function of the totality of the tasks and the tools and knowledge (technological capability) for the completion of those tasks. The advent of new tasks or new task requirements and the adoption of new technologies impacts heavily on this division of labour.

Add to that everyone's personal values and interests and the dictates of scheduling, the constraints of the physical environment and the available technology and it is easy to see why allocating and managing the work tasks involved with running a school library is no easy feat for a library manager.

When outsiders can see, and comment, that a school library is functioning so obviously well, you have to ask why and how?

Empowering and valuing

At John Paul College, everyone in the Resource Centre has worked hard, over a number of years, to achieve the patterns of interdependence and co-ordination that result in a high degree of synergy and the common impression that things just automatically get done. The library team has evolved in a **distributive** pattern, whereby everyone is aware of the totality of the tasks and has achieved both task specialisation and task proliferation i.e. they can do their own and most other people's tasks too if required. Each staff member, be they teacher-librarian or library technician, has almost intuitively taken responsibility for certain functions of the school library, with the result that we have a "set of people who can collectively perform all of the essential leadership functions". (Gronn, 2002, p. 423).

There is no presumption that any one person's behaviour carries more weight than anyone else's. Even in my absence the show does not stop running. I certainly appreciate the fact that one member of my team has previously been in charge of the library and I deeply value the tacit knowledge and experience she brings to her deputy role. My team members all see themselves and act as leaders. By encouraging them to show micro level leadership and to be team players, daily organisation actually becomes "a process of negotiation between leaders" (Gronn, 2002, p. 427). The poster in our workroom says it all – TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More.

Library staff appreciate that our team is only as

good as the sum of its parts, and everyone takes great pride in carrying out their responsibilities to the best of their ability and in making it easier for others to carry out theirs. I see my role as Head of Library and Information Services more as a 'first among equals' position, not as the lone chief atop the pyramid (Gronn, 2002, p. 430). My leadership style has thus been one of trying to empower others and of valuing the development of strong relationships among our team members (sometimes called social capital) as much as the personal capabilities of each person (Antanokis, 2004, p. 221).

The distributive leadership that is practised in the Resource Centre allows faculty members to capitalise on their own strengths, mentor each other and build the atmosphere of trust which is necessary for the creation of a non-threatening emotional climate. It is the latter that facilitates peer support and, consequently, the development of intuitive working relationships. Intuitive understandings are known to emerge over time when two or more organisation members rely on each other and develop a close working relationship. (Gronn, 2002, p. 430).

An example of this is having two library technicians jointly manage the journal/periodical collection, with one being responsible for maintaining the subscriptions and the other managing the accession file and distribution chains. Neither sees their job as more important than the other, simply a shared role with a deeply embedded need for communication, cross checking and trust in order to achieve smooth and effective management of the periodical collection. As Head of Library, my role is to encourage and affirm both team members and have faith in their abilities. I am there to trouble shoot if they require me to do that but, more often than not, I am simply told about the problems that have been encountered and solved after the event.

Another illustration is the decision we made recently to change how we house and manage our twelve library notebook computers. Several team members were involved in the brainstorm, discussion, and analysis of our management problem. Such is the level of trust in the team that all ideas were judged on their merit for that particular situation. Everyone felt that the richness of the discussion led to the best options being



The library team at John Paul College with Karen Russo on the right.

adopted. Not that it was set in concrete. We have a “let’s trial it and see” mentality which supports a notion of continual improvement. My only role, post decision, was to arrange for the school’s maintenance department to make alterations to a trolley to enable vertical housing of the computers. The rest of the team swung into action to do all the other jobs associated with making such a change. None of this was explicitly directed by me but was very much an example of spontaneous collaboration in order to get the best outcome for ourselves and for our students.

Shared vision

How does a collection of people get to the point of being a team with this level of synergy? The research shows that successful teaming is dependent on complementary temperaments, time to develop trusting relationships, negotiated psychological space, a collective sense of humour and shared values (Gronn, 2003, p. 121). My personal feeling is that a shared vision of what the team is working to achieve is paramount. So too is being prepared to treat each other with a high level of respect regardless of rank or level. Each team member has to value the contributions of everyone else. Each person has to have the confidence to value their own contributions and to see themselves as a leader in their own sphere of expertise. There has to be a willingness to work as a team (Gronn, 2003, p. 109).

My role as the first among equals is to provide that vision of where we are going, to express appreciation and confidence in the team members, to trust that they will give of their best, to provide opportunities for leadership and to constantly reinforce our work ethic and our philosophy of looking after everyone’s social and emotional well-being – our students and our own. As the team leader I have to understand just when to intervene and when to back off. “It is a difficult balancing act to know when to leave the team alone and when to get involved” (Robbins, 2006, p. 469).

Different personality types

One approach that I took in order to have my team members value their own and others’ contributions was to introduce them to Psychological Type. This is a theory of personality developed by psychiatrist Carl Jung to explain the normal differences among healthy people. He concluded that differences in behaviour resulted from people’s inborn tendencies to use their minds in different ways. Jung observed that as people acted on these tendencies, they develop different patterns of behaviour (Myers, 1998, p. 6).

I arranged for a Human Resources consultant to provide us with some professional development in Myers Briggs Personality Indicators to focus our attention on the inherent strengths of the different personality types, with a view to increasing everyone’s tolerance levels for those who did things differently to them. It also enabled everyone to see how our individual strengths melded together to produce a strong team. Not everyone was a convert, but curiosity and awareness was certainly aroused.

I then built on this by purchasing resources that looked at Personality Type and Change, Personality Type and Teams, Personality Type and Conflict, Personality Type and Emotional Intelligence etc. I have learnt to communicate differently with different people. I have learnt that it takes all kinds to make a world of work. As a group, knowledge of Myers Briggs Personality Indicators facilitated an understanding of complementary temperaments and has improved our communication, enabled better and broader problem solving, and has alleviated stress and conflict due to misunderstanding.

I am also very interested in the concept of Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the ability to understand one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to manage one’s own and others’ emotions. The table below (Power, 2004, p. 13) outlines the competencies of emotional intelligence.

It is Emotional Intelligence skills that enable one to motivate oneself, to be able to persist in the face of frustration, to be able to control impulse, to be able to delay gratification, to be able to regulate one's emotions, to be able to keep distress from swamping the ability to think, to use one's initiative, to take responsibility, to be able to empathize, to be able to hope and to work co-operatively (Goleman, 1996, p. 34).

Because the members of the John Paul College library team all display exceptional levels of these competencies, it follows that, in the work environment, they all perform whatever skills they have to a high level. They also have excellent interpersonal skills and are very good at picking up the unspoken rules that govern success in any organisation (Goleman, 1996, p. 36). While some lucky individuals are hard-wired from birth with such skills, emotional competencies can be learned and improved upon through reading books and undertaking formal training programs.

Emotional Intelligence skills can also be learned through the mentoring process. Mentoring in the workplace is a form of adult training/education or learning which ensures the transference of knowledge and skills. It does this by providing a protégé or mentee with opportunities **to learn** by osmosis, observation and association (Samier, 2004, p. 89) from a more experienced mentor.

The mentoring relationship provides a perfect environment for optimal learning to take place since it is supportive; it provides opportunities that stretch and challenge; it exposes one to new ideas and ways of thinking; and it offers feedback and self-reflection opportunities. The inherent psychosocial functions of role modelling, acceptance and confirmation, counselling, and friendship provide support for the development of self-belief, identity, self-confidence, competence and effectiveness in mentees (Kram, 1983, p. 613). Interestingly, these same qualities are also competencies of Emotional Intelligence.

I am grateful to have been part of the Digital Literacy Mentor Program in 2001-02. My mentoring role continues with some of my original mentees and my whole team has benefited from my being part of the program. The personal benefits have been enormous, not least of which is a more comprehensive appreciation and development of my own emotional competencies.

Mentoring is life-long learning in practice. It aims to help people reach their potential, it is a sign, not of weakness, but of strength. Taking up the opportunity to be mentored shows great leadership when it is seen as a personal choice to make a difference (Sinclair, 2006, n.p.). The individuals in the library team all show this leadership because they are all prepared to learn

<p>SELF AWARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional self awareness Accurate self assessment Self confidence 	<p>SOCIAL AWARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy Organizational awareness Service orientation
<p>SELF MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional self control Transparency (acting congruently with one's values) Adaptability Achievement orientation Initiative Optimism 	<p>RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence Developing others Inspirational leadership Change leadership Conflict management Team and collaboration

from each other. Team learning is an important part of teaming and the members of the College Library team are testament to its effectiveness.

It is a credit to each individual member of the library team that we function as a distributive leadership team, with each member demonstrating leadership qualities in their everyday work and in their interactions with fellow team members. We are indeed the sum of all our parts and living proof that Together Everyone Achieves More.

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