Welcome listeners to the Charles Sturt University Teacher Librarianship podcast. Each podcast features a guest closely involved with the Teacher Librarianship profession, and they will share their insights, experience and practical hints and tips for new and evolving teacher librarians. I'm Dr. Kay Oddone, lecturer and course director for the Master of Education Teacher Librarianship at CSU. And we are glad that you could join us. We pay our respects to all First Nations elders both past and present, and to those who have passed before us from the lands where Charles Sturt University students reside. In particular, we acknowledge the Wiradjuri, Ngunawal, Gundungarra and Biripai peoples of Australia, who are the traditional custodians of the land where Charles Sturt campuses are located. I'm recording this in Brisbane, Meanjin, on the land of the Turrbal and Jagera peoples. I also extend my respect to the members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who are listening to this podcast.

KO

Kay Oddone

1:31

Today we are meeting with Suzanne Penson. Suzanne is a dynamic and experienced Teacher Librarian working in a large Catholic Secondary School at Port Macquarie. Suzanne has worked as a leader of Learning Technologies, and in the creative space as co director of LitFest2444 - a festival of story. She's influential in her role at the Lismore Catholic schools library network, and industrially as a general executive member of the Independent Education Union, New South Wales/ACT. Her commitment to the profession has delivered academic and well being outcomes for many students and teachers. Her passion is in curriculum design, incorporating higher order thinking, technology, and authentic learning experiences. It's lovely to have you with us here today. Suzanne,

SP

Suzanne Penson

2:25

I'm pleased to be here.

KO

Kay Oddone

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Let's begin by talking about your current role and your working context, if you could share that thanks.

SP

Suzanne Penson

2:35

I'm a full time Teacher Librarian at Port Macquarie in a Catholic school. The school has 1100 students, and there are two libraries - one for stage six, and one for stage four and five. We do not have a big staff, we have me full time Teacher Librarian and the equivalent of one library assistant that's a job share. So it's a big load to carry. But we try our best and do everything we can to support the students and the teachers. The staff, there'll be 100 staff 20 support staff. And it's a busy place like all schools and it's a great place to work.

KO

Kay Oddone

3:29

Wow, that really is a huge population in your school community that you are working with and supporting. I'm wondering if you could tell us what originally led you to Teacher Librarianship.

SP
Suzanne Penson
3:43

When I left school, I had no intention of doing any study. I was over it. So I went to TAFE. And I did a secretarial course. And a job was advertised at the local public library, which was at Young in New South Wales, a small country town - for a library assistant. And I applied for the position. And I got the job and the proviso was I would study a librarianship degree. And the council would pay for all my expenses and residential time and everything. So I thought, Okay, I've got the job. Now I've got to do the study. So it took me six years to do my degree while I was working. And I found that a great way to learn about the profession and to achieve in my study and my work. So it was hard. I gave up my social life but as far as achieving academically, I think it was a great way to go. Then, when I finished that I found at the public library, I was stuck in the same role. There was no progression of being in a small country town library. So I did my teaching qualifications through CSU - did my degree through Wagga and Bathurst - great uni! And I applied for a position at the Catholic school at Young. And it was a little small school. And I did my degree while I learned Teacher Librarianship. So I've been tandem with study and work.

KO
Kay Oddone
5:35

Pairing study and work is something that I think a lot of the listeners here are dealing with at the moment. So it's lovely to see that there are positive outcomes at the end of it all, and it's worth the hard work, and the push to get better in the end.

SP
Suzanne Penson
5:53

One thing that's different though, every semester, I would get a big bundle of readings, print hard copies, and all my assessments for the term and it was all mailed stamped, receipted - it was a lot harder to organise than submitting online. But we managed,

KO
Kay Oddone
6:18

Yeah, things have certainly changed with online learning and the connections that we can make now with each other as students and lecturers and building that sense of community. So it really sounds like it was quite an achievement to get through all of that. So our focus today is looking at digital information, and the information environment. So I'm wondering if you could tell our listeners, how you believe access to digital information has transformed how we educate students?

SP
Suzanne Penson
6:50

I think the glut of information has made information literacy and digital literacy so much more important and focused. Previously, the students would have an encyclopedia and print materials. And it was limited. Where now, everyone knows that the internet has got everything. But students need to be guided specifically on how to access and discern the information. I think it's really hard for kids to do that. And I think they know, I think they think they know what they're doing. When they actually don't they write the question and

come up with the first page on Google, they think that they've got the exact answer. And there's much more to it. And they really have to be led and taught how to do that. So I think that's the main thing, the focus on specific teaching of information literacy for students.

KO

Kay Oddone

7:59

I think I certainly agree with you that the glut of information has changed the way we need to approach how we teach students, and also how we support them to build those navigation and critical evaluation skills. So those things fall quite squarely into the role of the Teacher Librarian. So how do you believe this changing environment has influenced the role of the TL and what you do from day to day? You know, how has that changed since when, when you began a little while ago now, how has that changed in terms of the digital information environment?

SP

Suzanne Penson

8:39

The role has become more important, I think, the skills that a Teacher Librarian brings to a classroom are diverse and expert. They have got a handle on technology, teaching skills, students with diverse needs. You can for instance, previously, your role would have been 'can you find some books?' 'Can you get a book box?', which was what you did at that time. Now, you can support the students and the teachers so much better, which is improving your role and your relevance in the school. Another thing that I found really raised the profile of the Teacher Librarian was when I had the dual role of Leader of Learning and Teacher Librarian. And I think it was recognised that my role really did have a handle on information literacy and digital technologies. That period of time was the Digital Education Revolution. And I had to manage the budgets, which was extensive, the technology, the PD for the students, rollout to the students, PD for the teachers as well, which was very challenging. And try and change the culture of the school as far as technology went, because teachers were frightened of kids with laptops. Not all of them, quite a percentage of them were. So it was a lot of support, co-teaching, teaching people how to not be scared of the technology, play with it. And let the students use it as a tool, not just a word processor. So I think that really did make a big difference to the role and value of education of the Teacher Librarian, in my school. As far as the library space, my role is to provide a space for well being as well as information literacy, and digital technology. And I think the well being links in with the digital technology, as well. And being a leader in ethical use of technology, social media, and appropriate use as far as bullying and, and that goes, because there's a fair bit of that as well. And I think just being involved in technology is something that every teacher, and every student does. And you're a part of that. So I think it's a good role.

KO

Kay Oddone

11:53

Lots of opportunities to engage with students of all different year levels, and all different subjects and also all of the teachers and to support them. And I was really interested in that connection between well being and the changing information environment and how the TL can really play a part in that.

SP

Suzanne Penson

12:14

It's huge.

KO

Kay Oddone

12:14

You were saying that you were playing that role of leader in that area of supporting well being and you're in this fabulous, I can see a fabulous podcasting suite. I'm just wondering if you could comment on and how you took the lead with the development of getting a grant for the podcast area, which is obviously exciting for students.

SP

Suzanne Penson

12:39

Well, it started by my principal handing me a form and she said, 'You're good at writing grants, can you see what you can do with this?' And I looked at it and I thought, well, if I'm going to write the grant, I'd like the money. So I linked it in with the library. And the idea was to set up a podcasting room and a vlogging kit as well. And we had to develop a program for project based learning. And the gist of it was that the students would end up being the teacher to other students. And we use the podcast studio to record snippets for kids or they would record little podcasts to play for the other students about the task or the information and it was shared, and then they would debate as well. So we've got two microphones. That was really great. We did PD for teachers on using the podcasts, we also bought Breakout boxes. W bought 10 sets of those, so that we could get the kids communicating, collaborating, problem solving, as well. So that's sort of linked in with technology as well, because you can use the paper form for the questions or you can download the little escape room activity. And the kids do it digitally. So that's another link in there as well. But it was really good to get the podcast room - it is fantastic for boys. The boys absolutely love coming here. Now I think that's because it's another way for them to show how they can learn or what they know. A lot of the tasks I feel are female orientated. And I think it's really important to give boys an opportunity to show what they know in another medium. So that's been a big benefit.

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Kay Oddone

14:55

That's awesome. I think that that's a really great example for our listeners of how they have, you know, as a TL, you can transform learning to become so dynamic, but taking advantage of the technology, taking advantage of grants that are available, and then really hooking into supporting particular groups of learners. So, yeah, and supporting the teachers to engage with that too, and taking that leadership role. Thank you for sharing that. So I guess we've already kind of touched on these things. But I'm wondering if you would be able to outline some of the positive and some of the negative implications you've seen that having greater access to digital information has had for education, but also for your role, like what has made what has become easier or more exciting, what has become more challenging or more difficult?

SP

Suzanne Penson

15:55

For my role, it's more challenging to get a workable budget, I get a good budget, but there's always more that you can purchase. Really, that's one of the big things, finances to do what you want to do staffing, we are really understaffed compared to some schools, but we are well staffed compared to others. So it's really, you've got to really work with what you've got, and do the best you can. And prioritise, don't try to do everything. And I think that's a strength. And my priority is digital tools, such as databases, in online encyclopedias, and LibGuides. I think with a positive with the role with the LibGuides is that it's sharing with everyone. I don't lock mine up. I know a lot of schools do. And I think that's a negative

because we're in a community that we could be all sharing our resources as long as they're not paid resources,

KO
Kay Oddone
17:12

If you wouldn't mind explaining, because some of our students might not be familiar with what LibGuides actually are.

SP
Suzanne Penson
17:19

Okay. LibGuides is a product from America. And it's a curation tool that you can put all your content - digital content into a webpage. LibGuides - it's the program to use for that tool. With my LibGuides, I use it to promote reading books. I do Pathfinders for different topics that are coming up. And in a topic, Pathfinder, I would embed video from C;ickView, YouTube, I would have links to websites that I had curated, I can upload files, there's images, audio files, podcasts, you can have RSS feeds embedded in there as well. So I absolutely love doing the LibGuides. Because I feel like it's creative. And it's useful. And it's a professional tasks and that I really enjoy doing. LibGuides is great. If you can't get LibGuides there are other options. You can use Wix or Google Slides. And you can publish with those. And if you have, I don't know what other schools have out of New South Wales. But with Oliver library management system, there's a program on it called Learning Path. And it's included. And you can do pretty much the same thing with Learning Path.

KO
Kay Oddone
18:55

So what you've just described, there is a huge number of different digital resources that you're bringing together using LibGuides. And I think that, obviously, that access to all of those different resources in different modes and media is something that is really a positive in terms of developing the collection. And what are the challenges with managing so many different types of digital resources?

SP
Suzanne Penson
19:26

The challenge is quality, not quantity. You can have a big long list of websites, but you really need three gems. If it's too if you don't want to overload the students, you want to give them the best information, the best websites for them for their task,

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Kay Oddone
19:49

Really useful. Having that focus on quality rather than quantity. Because [managing the database and things] Yeah, how do you go about managing those databases and all of those things? What does that entail?

SP
Suzanne Penson
20:03

Well, to manage them, it's, it's not that difficult. And it's not that time consuming. You're paying the subscription, you've got it on your Moodle site. And you need to promote and work with teachers so that they embed it in their curriculum. And if you're lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky, you can get to co teach with that teacher, which is the cream of the day. So if you're involved with teaching, that's a really good way to get into it. For example, with some

of all the databases, we have Gale, and we have EBSCO. They all have citation tools. They all have dyslexic font, accessibility tools, note taking, highlighting, they'll read it too, as well. So if you've got a student who has low literacy, you can choose a level at their age group or their development and choose the speaker, you can even choose an American accent or German accent, and whatever you like, and the technology will read the article to the student. So the kids really like that. But we are going back to the challenges. One of the challenges I have is, I often find out that an assessment task involving technology has been written before I'm involved, and it'll come in, the kids have got their assignment, you haven't seen it. That is the most frustrating thing to me where the kids are missing out and the teacher is missing out on the experience that I could bring to those students. I'll give you an example. A History class was doing something on slavery and convicts. And they had to write a PEEL paragraph - three PEEL paragraphs and do a little report. Now I think that there should be more variety than that. So I said to the teacher, 'do you mind if we show the kids how to do a biopoem?' and she agreed. And I thought great. So those students had to find the information online, then transform it from the text to a brand new product that you cannot plagiarise. Which I think the questions we asked the students for their information tasks are so important to get the kids to think and create the new product. Another one, if you've got time for another anecdote, another history class is doing the Titanic and this is coming up. And I thought I'm going to be proactive here. And I said to the teacher, 'are you doing the Titanic? Do you mind if I look at the evidence of learning?' She said, 'Oh, yeah, that's okay'. So I thought I am going to really shake this up. So we've come up with an idea that the students take on the role of a section from construction, through to ticketing through to sailing through to disaster. And they look at the leadership qualities of what happened. So the leadership of the Boilermaker workshop, they can choose, we're not telling them what to do, we just make it free, they decide. And then they have to predict what would have happened if the leadership style had been different. So we're using a range of print resources and online resources to resource that. This is the best bit, we're going down to the marina and we're going to board a catamaran. And a Marine Safety worker who's also a work health and safety officer is going to be the person they present their information to and do the account of why it went wrong and what their leadership should have been. They're going to dress in costume and all the rest. So I was really pleased with that. And I thought if I hadn't been proactive, those kids be stuck telling us an essay.

KO

Kay Oddone

24:32

Great example of how the Teacher Librarian working with - co-collaborating with the curriculum planning can really make a big difference. And also, your understanding of the information environment means that you can come up with such creative ideas for how the students can transform and manipulate the information, which not only builds their information literacy skills, but it also removes that stress of plagiarism. And it removes that opportunity that the students are much more engaged, they're much less likely to even want to go and find other sources. And they're not going to because it's so innovative. That's fabulous. Thank you so much for sharing.

SP

Suzanne Penson

25:19

The other thing with that too is it makes a teacher's life much easier. So it's a win for everyone.

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Kay Oddone

25:25

Absolutely. And that has been something a key thing that with we know that there's been a lot of discussion about teachers workloads and the expectations on teachers. And I think that the TL is sometimes an underutilised resource, that the synergy that the TL and the teacher can create together could actually reduce the amount of work involved, while creating something even better than what was there before. [Yeah, true[. That's awesome. Thank you so much for sharing that example. I know that our listeners, our students will be very excited to hear about the opportunities and things that can happen when you get to get involved with the curriculum, and recognise that teaching part of the Teacher Librarianship role,

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Suzanne Penson

26:17

And that is the most important thing.

KO

Kay Oddone

26:19

So I'm wondering, just to finish, do you have any advice for new or for TLs, who are who are studying who are learning about these sorts of things, in terms of becoming building their own confidence with dealing with the information environment?

SP

Suzanne Penson

26:36

I think, take one step at a time. You can do a lot with a coffee machine in your office. If you've got somewhere nice for people to come and talk to you, it helps. A lot of people come to me and, and download about things. And I think it's a safe space. So if you can sort of make that comfortable for people it gives good vibes from the library. When you if you walk into your library, first day, as a Teacher Librarian, you're going to hit the ground running. You've got textbooks, this is in high school, they'll be the same in primary because you'd have all the new readers and everything. Textbooks, you've got kids coming in brand new to the school, you've got teachers wanting everything now. It's very demanding. But you can only do what you can do. And you need to just breathe, and take it one step at a time. Don't let people make you feel like you're everybody everything to everybody, because you can't be you're only one person. And it really is. Sometimes you've really got to work out when you can help and when you can't help. Or when you can help now, I mean, you can help later. One thing I do, I always, if it's something new, that's going to impact on the library, I always say, 'I'll come back to you with that'. Because you've got to think through the consequences because no one else can. One thing that is really important if in my situation, I am the only Teacher Librarian, and I'm the only voice. You've got to make sure you've got a voice somewhere. So that you've got someone on the leadership team to hear your side of the situation. I just think Be daring. I thought I was pretty brave doing the 'can I do this assignment for you?'. And that's what you've got to do. You've got to say, I can help. You've got to promote yourself. But the more you do for other people, the more other people promote you, and you have more impact in the school. Don't be scared of the job. It's a great job. I think we're more valuable now than we ever were when there was a time when the Google came in, and we were all going to be dinosaurs. We are not dinosaurs, we're superstars. If it wasn't for us, the school would not function.

SP

Suzanne Penson

29:29

And a really new project that I'm working on with our Geography teacher. We started working on this from the beginning, collaborating on how can we use drones in geography, and we've got those little drones that you have to fly inside they're not outside drones. So I put my thinking cap on, and I said why don't we get a grid on the ground? And square it up and put QR codes on the squares. And the helicopter or the drone has to land on the square. And there's a string coming out from the QR code so that there's not bedlam, getting the scan, it's the students scans it with their phone. The topic is on environmental issues. So once they've scanned it, it goes to a resource, a video, pdf, information about rain forests in Uganda, or pollution in the oceans. And then they scan another QR code. And with some information in it, they have to go through that. And they come up with another quadrant that they have to fly the drone to, to scan the next QR code. So I am really looking forward to that I think it's going to be a very successful - it will be highly engaging. It's ticking a lot of boxes with the Teacher Librarian role, because you're involved in the planning, the co teaching, the assessing, and developing relationships with teachers and students. So I'm really looking forward to that.

KO

Kay Oddone

31:26

Sounds like another excellent way of connecting the TL role and showing that it really isn't just about books and reading that there are so many aspects to curriculum development and involvement with the teachers and students. And also, obviously, the information literacy and digital literacy involved there. Thank you for sharing that example.

SP

Suzanne Penson

31:49

The other thing that is massive, is the student well being, I'll have kids come in, and they will come in every morning and just want to say hello. Other kids come in and read at lunchtime every day because they're not happy or comfortable on the playground. I'll give you I can give you another little story if you want to hear it. I had a boy who wanted to borrow the digital camera. This is when I first started here. And the rule the school rule was no equipment was allowed to leave the premises. So he would come to me every Friday afternoon, borrow the digital camera, return it on Monday morning. And he left school and came back a few years later and said that he had won the New York School of Film scholarship and it was because he been able to borrow the cameras.

KO

Kay Oddone

32:47

That's amazing. That's a fantastic story. Well, that what a great way to finish. That's a really lovely high point and I think that be daring!

SP

Suzanne Penson

33:00

Be superstars!

KO

Kay Oddone

33:02

Be a superstar. Absolutely. Thank you so much for that today. Suzanne.

We thank you for listening to this podcast. Please take some time to read the show notes and to reflect upon how this discussion relates to the module content you've been engaging with. Wherever you are, and whatever time it is, take care, and stay tuned for our next episode.