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# School Libraries

By Jenni Yang, Teacher Librarian, Southbank International School, Kensington

**T**he library is an important central resource hub of any school. It houses an organised, essential and broad range of reading materials from magazines, picture books and non-fiction to audio-visual and reference materials. Libraries not only provide a wealth of curriculum-linked resources but also provide materials for students of all levels to access and discover the joy of reading.

At the Kensington Campus at Southbank International School, where I am based, we offer the International Baccalaureate's Primary Years Programme for students from the ages of 3 to 11. One of the defining characteristics of the PYP is to develop independent learners who have the skills to continue their learning and development outside of school and throughout their adult lives. The information seeking skills that pupils gain, and their ability to understand library organisation can only be nurtured with regular sessions in a school library.

A school library can also create an environment, which is in itself a warm, inviting workspace that inspires knowledgeable, creative thinkers to read, respond and question. A school library naturally creates a community space where people are brought together by interest, need and inquiry; where a sense of wonder about the world in which we live is nurtured.

I have been a Teacher Librarian at Southbank International School for three years now but spent the first 10 years of my career as a class teacher in the UK and in international schools around the world. I loved being in the classroom but felt like I wanted to specialise in one area. In all the schools I worked in overseas, there was always a library that was the central resource for the school and I felt that this would be a very

rewarding area to focus my attention on. So, I undertook my Masters' in Education in Teacher Librarianship to gain library management skills to add to my teaching background.

Whilst not all schools will be in the position to afford an established school library with a dedicated teacher librarian to support learning within the library, there are things that all schools can do to ensure that the benefits offered by school libraries are not lost in budget cuts.

In my role I have timetabled classes to work with every class in the school at least once a week. I am then available for the rest of the school day to work with individuals and groups that visit the library to do research for their work in class. Sometimes the work children undertake in the library fits in directly with the curriculum, sometimes with a literacy focus, sometimes they work on a particular library skill and sometimes we read for pure enjoyment!

In our planning of units we make a conscious decision to make use of the resources provided by the library to ensure that the library is a fully integrated element of the teaching and learning across the school. In the PYP our pupils work on units of inquiry that are based on six transdisciplinary themes and all our units are supported in some way by library lessons. Our pupils do some personal research for every unit so our broad library collection provides for students in all subject areas at all levels.

In today's age of rapidly changing information, it is essential that we equip our children with the skills needed to access information and to make sense of it all - these are information literacy skills. In libraries we can do this by addressing a number of key areas in the information



search process, enabling our students to work out what information they need, how to access a range of resources, analysing and synthesising the information they collect, presenting information effectively, and finally evaluating their work. By making this process explicit to our pupils we can provide them with the skills to be independent learners who are able to access information effectively.

For information literacy classes we work with the Big 6 approach to information seeking, this approach helps teachers to think about the different skills to develop through use of the library. The 6 stages are:

1. Task Definition: Working out what needs to be done
2. Information Seeking Strategies: Deciding on what resources to use
3. Location and Access: Finding the resources and the information within
4. Use of Information: Selecting what to use from the resources
5. Synthesis: Organising and presenting the information
6. Evaluation: Reflecting on the work

For example when focusing on stage 3, I might ask groups of pupils to find connections between books they find within particular hundreds sections of the library using the Dewey Decimal system, then getting them to share their findings with other groups.

Schools could also run a 'library helpers' club which would provide an opportunity for interested students to spend time assisting in the library and building a love of reading. A range of activities could include to shelve and organise books, to set up displays on selected themes, to write book reviews advertising great reads to the school community, to help with book circulation by checking in and out books, to make bookmarks promoting reading, and to work on storytelling skills and dramatisation of stories.

For teachers without access to a whole school library here are a few tips to develop information literacy skills and literature appreciation within the classroom:

- Make explicit the information seeking strategies you may be focusing on with the students using the Big 6 approach for inspiration?
- Organise your collection into subject areas as the Dewey Decimal system for ease of location
- Share resources with other classes to focus on a genre or author
- Plan, reflect and collaborate with colleagues to share ideas and specialisations
- Use you School Library Service for support
- Make use of local libraries and plan for the students to visit and learn how to find and locate books there.

School libraries should be playing a central role in education, supporting curriculum learning in the classroom, developing information literacy skills for independent learners and encouraging an appreciation and enjoyment of reading amongst children and young people. No matter what funds are available for your school there are some things that all teachers can do to bring the benefits of school libraries into the classroom.

