



## 'A teacher librarian changed my life'

By Jessica Rose Eustace

- **Being different**
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- **The teacher librarian is there to help when others don't have time.**
- **Learning responsibility and being trusted**
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### **Being different**

I was only 4 years old when my parents were told by a pre school teacher that I was 'different.' Even at that young age I already knew I didn't 'fit in' and the word 'normal' would never apply to me. I looked the same as other children but my learning difficulties included Dyspraxia and Dyslexia so that as well as seeing the world through 'rose coloured glasses,' I also found the world to be a confusing place. Putting my hands over my ears and closing my eyes became a common way for me to escape everything that I found overwhelming that other people would just call everyday life.

### **Reality verses fantasy**

Then I was enrolled in Kindergarten in a K-12 Central School in a small bush town. There I discovered a new world called the school library run by a magical person, **the teacher librarian**, who could make everything better by taking me into a world of colour and fantastic stories of people and places I could never have imagined. The world I grew up in was brown and dusty filled by the smell of sheep, dry dirt and the constant fear of drought and bushfire.

But none of this mattered when I was in the school library. Here the **teacher librarian** would read to me and my classmates about children who had wonderful adventures on rivers, sailing over wide oceans and who had so much water they could dance in the rain without even thinking about putting out buckets to catch each precious drop. Best of all, the **teacher librarian** would help me choose books I could take home each week to have as my own for a while, helping me learn about the world outside of my own existence.

### **No such thing as a stupid question**

As I grew older the **teacher librarian** was able to help me in other ways. He made the library a safe place for me and others when the bullies were making the playground an unbearable place to be, but more importantly he taught me that there was no such thing as a question that could not be explored. If I could not find an answer I only had to ask him. He never ridiculed me or made me feel dumb and he would work with me teaching me how to look up what I needed, not just giving me the answer but empowering me to learn how to find the answers for myself. Sometimes we explored encyclopaedias, sometimes texts from around

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the shelves, sometimes we would delve into parent loan boxes and teaching kits and as my ICT skills grew he helped me learn how to research using the school library computers.

### **The teacher librarian is there to help when others don't have time.**

Classroom teachers have to work with classes of 30 children so in a 60 minute time slot each student is lucky to get 2 minutes of their teacher's attention. How disheartening for both the teacher and struggling student as so many students need help from the one teacher at the same time. The teachers are often overwhelmed and just do not have the time or the environment to give those quiet children who blend into the background the time they need one on one. Classrooms need to have productive chatter and this is why the quieter atmosphere of many school libraries is perfect for that student or students who are struggling to keep up with their assignments, projects and study needs. School libraries are the places where those students who don't have books and computers at home, or a parent or relative to discuss ideas or read over work, can find help from the **teacher librarian**. She or he is knowledgeable about so many subjects and is available to work with individuals and small groups thanks to the flexible timetabling I am told that is given to the **teacher librarian** position.

The fact that the **teacher librarian** is available before school and throughout lunchtimes is also a fabulous convenience for the struggling student and for those students who are just too shy or confused to ask for help in front of their peers in the classroom. The classroom teacher may break down a task for the whole class to understand the framework and scaffolds, but there is no time for them to break down the task in different ways for each learner, especially for those who don't always understand the same way their classmates do. This is where the **teacher librarian** is a blessing. He or she is a trained teaching professional with plenty of resources and the availability for a student to feel confident to approach for further guidance.

### **Learning responsibility and being trusted**

My **teacher librarian** helped to give me and many other 'lost souls' (escapees from the playground) the skills to become volunteers as library monitors. The sense of responsibility I gained when he allowed me to experience working in our school library was amazing. He began by teaching my fellow library monitors and I how to use the alphabet to shelve the Junior Fiction and Fiction collection and then he allowed us to be in charge of sections. How exciting it was to be trusted with such an important job especially when you are a child who finds the simplest of activities like tying up shoelaces or catching a ball almost impossible. Here was something I could succeed in at last.

### **Working with clientele**

Putting books on the shelves in the correct order and keeping them neat was one thing, but as we library monitors grew older and more confident in our lower secondary school years, learning about how to use enquiry terminals to be able to help students and staff find resources they needed for teaching and learning, helped us become important volunteers in our school. The **teacher librarian**

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arranged for us to have library monitor badges so younger students could seek us out for help and we wore them with such pride.

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My proudest times were when the **teacher librarian** decided I was ready to learn how to process the resources of our school library via the OASIS system. Now that he had taught me how the Dewey Decimal system worked (not an easy task for someone as bad at Maths as I was) it was time to learn how to loan out books to clientele and to return resources for others to use. Sitting high on the stool at the Circulation Desk at lunchtimes he taught me how to respond to a broad range of queries and needs from staff and students. I was no longer tongue tied, I was able to talk to a great range of people of all ages and I was able to do so with the confidence years of patient understanding and encouragement from my **teacher librarian** had given me.

In my senior school years I was able to gain part time work at a local supermarket. There I was able to use all the skills I had learnt from my **teacher librarians** ( as my first TL had retired and another of these **dual trained teacher/librarians** took his place); being responsible for stock, meeting needs of customers, learning how to speak to the public, being confident to work independently and more. Also during my senior years with the new teacher librarian's help I was able to produce assessment tasks with competency and thoroughly developed bibliographies and detailed references that earned me very high marks and a University offer, in part thanks to being able to access such a large range of print and electronic resources that were purchased for the school library by the **teacher librarian**. I learned that it was her job to understand curriculum, staff and student needs to juggle the budget to make sure there was an equitable spread of resources to meet the curriculum needs of all students from Kindergarten level to the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate levels.

### Success

I would like to have become a **teacher librarian** myself as I have seen how **teacher librarians** work collegially with other teaching staff to help plan for the benefit of all students. I think it would be an amazing career that involves helping so many, but I have learned that **teacher librarian** positions are few and far between, so instead I have gained an IT traineeship in a government position and I will study at Uni by Distance Education to become a teacher of Information Technology. I have come a long way since that little girl who just didn't fit in and I owe much of my success, achievements and confidence to the **teacher librarians** who were so important in the last decade and a half of my life.