Novel approach to literacy

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Abstract: Digital collections, book trailers and menus are helping to engage lifelong readers, writes Keeli Cambourne.
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By Keeli Cambourne

PHOTO: Higher-order thinking ... Jeanette Harkness, centre, with Roseville College students and their reading platforms. Photo: Fiona Morris

Digital collections, book trailers and menus are helping to engage lifelong readers, writes Keeli Cambourne. As part of a unique program, seeing a book come to life through sound and images is encouraging students at Roseville College to read.

The school’s librarian, Jeanette Harkness, says students in years 7, 8 and 9 are promoting the joy of literacy to the rest of the school by creating “book trailers” by using software that brings the pages to life. “The book trailers are similar to movie trailers and we use software like PhotoStory and iMovie, as well as music that represents the book, to create a book review,” she says. “The students love the book trailers, and what it also encourages is for the students to home in on the concept of a book, to practise higher-order thinking.”

Roseville College has initiated a number of literacy programs to celebrate the National Year of Reading, and the redevelopment of its library has been at the core of those celebrations. Harkness says the atmosphere and design of the new library encourage students to exploit all it has to offer. “We are using the same space but have gutted it and redefined areas,” she says. “It is very spacious and light, which the girls really like. Not all students like to sit at a desk and study, so we have incorporated lounge areas, reading nooks, two classroom areas with lounges and low tables, and a discussion room.” The school has also invested in a new digital library format, with 800 titles already available that students can download 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At Presbyterian Ladies’ College Sydney, a digital facility has been added to the library, and the principal, Paul Burgis, says the platform is open to staff and students in the senior school. “Students are able to download e-books and audios onto their notebooks, home computers, or onto any compatible mobile device like iPads, iPhones, Androids,” he says. “As all students in years 6 to 12 have notebooks, it makes sense to provide e-books. With a mobile generation, we need to tap into their idea of reading and listening - read on the go and listen on the go - as well as quietly reading a traditional book.”

The OverDrive collection is an extension of the Macindoe Research Centre’s physical library and, as well as being convenient, it can help students read more and improve comprehension, Burgis says. “Struggling or reluctant readers, learning-challenged, second-language learners and gifted readers can all benefit from this service.” Other initiatives to celebrate the National Year of Reading at PLC include the Book Vultures Club, which meets weekly.

“Students in the club are involved in holiday trips to bookshops, where they have the freedom to select books for the library,” Burgis says. “We are also now putting QR [quick response] codes on the front of books.” The students can read the codes with their mobile devices to access reviews written by the teacher, librarian or other students, or links to online reviews, including YouTube clips. From next term, storytelling sessions will be held for years 7-12.

Mount Annan Christian College in Currans Hill, Sydney, started a literacy program this year called the Daily 5, which the head of the junior school, Debbie Pope, says has been instrumental in increasing reading and comprehension rates and building language proficiency. “Daily 5 is based on five particular aspects of literacy that we get the students involved in - building stamina for reading and writing and relying on an internal stamina,” she says. “We work on individual stamina by giving direct instruction to students about what it should
look like when they read and write, how they should behave, and examples of what they shouldn't do when reading and writing."

The school has moved into the second phase of the program, called the Cafe, in which a cafe-style menu is placed in each classroom. From it, the students can select items to help them read and write. "Teachers work individually with students to set a goal, like checking for understanding and comprehension," Pope says. "It is about making the students responsible for their learning and having an ownership over their reading and writing behaviour.

"We have seen a massive increase in reading stamina and the language the children are using. There [have] also been increases in borrowing from the library and the students self-selecting books for their own level of reading."