**ABC Radio Brisbane – Mornings with Rebecca Levingston**

*Tuesday, 12th of September 2023, 10.32am*

**Rebecca Levingston:** Well, we thought we needed to speak to a teacher librarian. Fortunately, Lena Crowley is here who is also a member of the Queensland School Libraries Association. Lena, good morning.

**Lena Crowley:**  Good morning, Rebecca.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Very lovely to have you here. I feel like all of a sudden, I need to be on my best behaviour. It’s my nicest, sort of inside library voice-

**Lena Crowley:** Then you wouldn't fit in our-

**Rebecca Levingston:** Ohh what's your library like? Well, which school are you based at?

**Lena Crowley:** I'm at Marist College Ashgrove, I'm in the senior library there. We actually have two libraries, one for our junior campus, which is 5 to 6, and the senior campus is 7 to 12 and I'm with the 7 to 12s.

**Rebecca Levingston:** OK, well take us inside your library. If we walk through the doors, what would we see?

**Lena Crowley:** You would see- depends on what time of day you came. So before school, after school breaks, it's buzzing with the boys during the school time. The boys aren't allowed to use their devices. We have a device-free- unless they're in year 11 and 12. So generally the boys are sitting around chatting, forming friendships, looking at the magazines. We've got lots of activities that happen. During the school time, various classes are coming in using the library. We sometimes are taking classes in there, otherwise teachers are bringing their classes in themselves, but most of the time I'd say my teaching as a teacher librarian is done in the classroom, not in the library. If that makes sense-

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yes, I get it. I'm going to ask you which- the question which in the past would have been a silly question, but in 2023 I wonder if it's not- is your library full of books?

**Lena Crowley:** We certainly do have a lot of books and we've got a quite, I think, a fantastic fiction or a reading for pleasure section. And I can’t- won't say it's just fiction, because we've got a lot of readers who like to read nonfiction. Well, we have probably- and a lot of school libraries are doing this- we've bucked the Dewey System with our fiction section and we have it classified by genre because we find that's easier for our students to find exactly what they want to read.

**Rebecca Levingston:** So the Dewey system, the Dewey decimal kind-of, the code on the spine of the book, yes. So what? How does the genre section work?

**Lena Crowley:** Well, so for instance, if you went to some of the town libraries, you'd still go in and you'd probably see their fiction section is sorted alphabetically by authors... if you came to our library- and I'd have a discussion with you and usually I'd say to the boys, ‘what do you like watching on TV?’, because they're more familiar with watching. And they might say I really like space and science fiction. So I'd take them directly to our science fiction genre area where we have lots of different authors who have written in that genre.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Got it. Makes sense, yes. Would be a lot of people who wouldn't mind that at most libraries around the place. And do you find that especially the senior boys, I mean, they've got a lot going on as they're rounding out high school pressure of exams, social life, sport, whatever else is happening. Is your sense that they are also big readers for pleasure?

**Lena Crowley:** I- they do. The boys, I think they- I like to sometimes call them closet pleasure readers because some of them, they might not advertise it to all their friends, that they're doing a lot of reading for pleasure. But then you talk to some of the students and their depth and breadth of reading is quite amazing and I think that's due to mums and dads and grandparents buying their books for birthdays, Christmases over the years and so they actually do read a lot, whether they're actually borrowing the books from us is not always the case. For some of those readers, they'd like to spend their time playing handball or football out in the oval. But we do have we do have some readers who read with us right from when they’ve come, they've always borrowed. And actually I just had a- we returned the other day, who's now in year 11, and I just, I said ‘I haven't seen you in a long time,’ and he goes, ‘I haven't had time to read.’ So he was in to stock up for his school holidays, so-

**Rebecca Levingston:** How good does that make you feel as a teacher librarian?

**Lena Crowley:** Oh it’s lovely... and it's especially this- we were just talking about, this the other day- it's especially lovely when you get someone who nominates themselves as a non-reader and you managed to find the magic book that flicks the switch, and then they come back and they read another, and then they read another and then they've done the series, and then they find the author that's similar to them... So yeah, it's a lovely feeling.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Lena Crowley, a librarian, a member of the Queensland School Libraries Association giving you a bit of a tour of Marist College Ashgrove Senior Library this morning. Plenty of books, she says. Buzzing. Do you call it a library or a resource centre?

**Lena Crowley:** We actually call it a resource centre, and that change in terminology I think happened before I was there, so I can't really speak to how that changed, but I actually think it really fits what we do. Because when people think of a library, they might just think of books, whereas we really resource the entire school community. We resource our students, we resource our teachers, we resource our administration in helping to bring the school and bring the curriculum into the school. And so I think resource centre fits.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yeah. And I think as well and- this came up the other day when we were talking about the little school who needed a library... people were talking bout, you know, concerns about screens and technology, but the reality is, that is the modern world, in terms of researching information and being able to access what you want. So how do you make sure that there is that literacy in a technological sense, and also that ability to analyse information cause I think that that's such a big one. As for you've got the entire Internet where you can find any version of the truth you like, but you want kids to be literate in- to have Internet literacy, I guess.

**Lena Crowley:** Yeah, the critical literacy skills, and that's one of my favourite lessons, is going in and doing a one- Am I allowed to say Google?

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yeah!

**Lena Crowley:** Google search-

**Rebecca Levingston:** ‘Google it, mate’-

**Lena Crowley:** Google search with the boys, and because, the way most of us Google is just to type in a natural sentence. And the first thing I do is I demonstrate that when I Google it and they Google it, we get completely different results. And so I explained to the boys, Google's trying to make me happy, and Google knows that I, you know, like I use my Internet searches for a lot more academic purpose, whereas Google's throwing you up YouTube videos and... trying to make you happy. So you have to adapt some skills to get around that algorithmic- I don't know- trying to make you happy. And I teach the boys how to use some Boolean operators too. We refine their searches and just showing them how, as you put in the Boolean operators, and you watch the number of hits go from, you know, 26 billion down, down, down and like until it becomes a searchable and a credible, more credible source of information. Yes, the one that really gets them is when you- I show them how to do site colon and put in .gov, .au and so you only get returns on your Australian government websites. Rather than having to scroll through six pages to try to find-

**Rebecca Levingston:** I might need a lesson from you too, Lena at this rate. So that's a Boolean search. Is it?

**Lena Crowley:** Yeah. Boolean operators-

**Rebecca Levingston:** How you spell Boolean?

**Lena Crowley:** B, double O, L, E, A, N. He's a mathematician. And if you just think of those, the intersecting circles, ad it's like finding- so putting in terms so that you're only getting that call bit in the middle rather than all of your search terms.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yes, super valuable, which I think, yeah, people might do without even necessarily knowing that they're doing it, but again, when we talk about a generation of digital natives, not only do I hope that they are, you know, smarter and faster about the way they can access things; that I hope they can also, weed out a lot of information that's not credible, that is problematic. I mean you want to take in a bunch of viewpoints, but you also want kids to not go down the, you know, the tunnel of conspiracy sort of thing.

**Lena Crowley:** Well, I think that's I think that's for everybody too, is to realise sometimes you've accidentally placed yourself in a filter bubble and you need to physically break out of your filter bubble to make sure you're getting both sides of the information and then to actually know how to read a website or read the information to find out if it is a credible source, which is another thing we teach our students a lot to do and through lateral reading. You know, actually looking at who the author is, what the company is who paid for the information- because that could sway the author's perspectives. Teaching all of those skills, and it's something everyone has to when you're looking at information; the Internet, you have to do to really make sure you're understanding the credibility of the source you're reading.

**Rebecca Levingston:** We need more teacher librarians, not just in schools, but in life, that's the conclusion I'm coming to this morning. Lena Crowley, who's from Marist College Ashgrove, also a member of the Queensland School Libraries Association. What's your story, Lena? If I went to the Lena Crowley Library in Action Centre, why did you, why did you end up in the library?

**Lena Crowley:** Well, I actually started out as primary school teacher and I got married young had kids. And so by the time I moved to Brisbane, I was here... had no support, waited for my kids to go to school and started doing supply teaching. And when I was teaching, I always made sure I used the library. I always loved having someone else to support me in the classroom. So I always, I gravitated to my kids’ school library and I'd help out as a parent, and things like that. So when I started doing supply teaching, I just found myself being asked to come, and if the teacher librarian was away, do the contracts. And then I sort of fell into doing a similar role at Marist College Ashgrove. And so I by 2017, I was ready to commit to what is adult learning and completed my Masters of Education in teacher librarianship, so.

**Rebecca Levingston:** That's interesting. You have to do a Masters in order to get that teacher librarian qualification.

**Lena Crowley:** Yeah, there is. There's various masters you can do. Like all teacher librarians are dual qualified. So what I did is I did a Masters of Education with teacher librarianship, but if you've got your teaching degree, you could then do a Masters in Information Literacy, or there's various forms you can do. But all teacher librarians must have teaching qualifications, number one, and they must have shown that they've had a few years being a teacher before they can go back and do their masters of Teacher Librarianship.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Does every school in Queensland have a qualified teacher librarian?

**Lena Crowley:** No, and that is one of the things- there's a big campaign at the moment called School Students Need School Libraries, and that's one thing that we want, that a coalition from all around Australia want to be put in place, that all school libraries should have qualified staff running their school library. Because-

**Rebecca Levingston:** How is that- sorry to jump in- How is that even something that requires a campaign?

**Lena Crowley:** Well-

**Rebecca Levingston:** I just, I just, I can't understand whether it's public or private education, but that is not a really obvious element in the system.

**Lena Crowley:** You are exactly right, Rebecca, but there are schools out there even now... and they say, oh, we've got a qualified TL, but they're running a library by themselves. They are timetabled for multiple lessons and so... they're looking after students before school, at lunch, after school. So they've really got no time to do even half of the programs that we- and because I'm at a well-resourced library. Our past principal, our current principal, have always supported our school libraries, so we've got quality staff, we've got flexible timetabling so we can go in and help support teachers and students at point of need rather than being restricted by only being able to see someone on Monday period 5. Whereas some other schools, they don't have that flexibility and they are sometimes, then will not have, for instance- we have a library manager who's, I don't know how we could operate without. Because her knowledge of the back end of cataloguing and making sure the operational side of the library just flows allows us teacher librarians to focus more on the curriculum side of how the library flows. Whereas some schools don't have that.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Given that we have a national curriculum, again, I don't, I just don't understand how this is not a part of the various spokes of the fundamentals of an education system.

**Lena Crowley:** Well, I think it's generally, from what I can understand, it's generally down to principals’ discretion on how the funding is spent. And so a lot of schools are seeing a drop in their library budget, so they just simply can't afford, they're seeing a shrinking in their space... which is such a, to me, such a crime, because school libraries, we work collaboratively with everyone. We’re really on the, I think, the forefront of embedding the general capabilities across all departments and within the school.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yes. OK, I might just put in a question to the Education Minister in Queensland, because I'll be interested to know what the approach is in in public schools, because I've been having a lot of conversations recently with the Federal Education Minister, with various other groups who are pushing for a greater investment in funding. I just wonder where teacher librarians fit into that that process. You talked about that, that moment, Lena, where you have the joy of turning a non-reader into a reader. The idea of, you know, getting boys to read, asking them what do you watch and then trying to find those crossover, given that you work at a boys’ school in particular. And I hear from, I’ve fot two boys, they’re both big readers at the moment and they’re still young and I’ve heard about, you know, families where kids will read early and then sometimes it drops off. But I do hear anecdotally, boys always are harder to get to start reading and keep reading. Any other tips there?

**Lena Crowley:** Well, I really think- I always said to the boys, ‘talk to your mates’, because there's been studies that have shown boys are more receptive to take a recommendation from another boy. Apparently mums don't know anything-

**Rebecca Levingston:** Well, what?

**Lena Crowley:** I know. Well, not shocking but so, I'm trying to get those discussions happening and finding out what other boys say or when the recommendation- and I think this is in life with children generally- when the recommendation comes from someone else, it seems to have more validity than if it comes from you.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yep, that makes.

**Lena Crowley:** Yeah, yeah. Finding, finding that sort of gap, that recommendation would be the thing to do, yes.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Question without notice for you, Lena. Sue’s called in from Eaton’s Hill. Let's see what, Sue information Sue was seeking. Hello, Sue.

**Sue:** Ohh hello.

**Lena Crowley:** Hi Sue.

**Rebecca Levingston:** You wanted to ask about research, are you talking about, well, online courses?

**Sue:** Yes, I have two daughters that are local high school here and they're bot- one's in grade 8 and one’s in 9. I just wandered if they offered any courses for kids to learn how to negotiate the Internet for a school assignment or research projects.

**Lena Crowley:** Well, I don't know what Eaton Hill does, but we, our school, definitely does that. We have research guides for all assignments that have a research component, where we step the boys through, and they're very scaffolded, to the point where when it gets to year 11 and 12, they become more like portals. But in those earlier years we teach them and lead them more towards credible sources so they know what it looks like. But I'm pretty sure actually, because I follow the State Library of Queensland. And I'm pretty sure that they do run some like little mini courses which- because that’s a shame, because that's what the school library should be doing, but if you don't have that, then I'm pretty sure the State Library of Queensland do run some mini courses like that.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Okay, Sue, maybe call the SLQ, yeah. It's a great question though, Sue and it's a question that probably lots of parents and carers should be asking as well. Is there another story that you can leave us with? I don't know, a moment- on the bean bag – I mean, are there bean bags in your library? What are the seats like?

**Lena Crowley:** Yes, well, we've got very flexible seating. We've gone for- which I think every school needs, because you never know if you're going to be holding 500 students or small groups. So we've got very movable furniture. We've gone for like a cafe sort of feel in some parts. So we've got couches with mini tables or little square tables with just two chairs, the high coffee benches, but... there's always the boys who just want to lay on the floor and put their feet up on a chair. Go lie down.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Yeah, why not?

**Lena Crowley:** And it's beautiful when, at the end of the term and you see some of them and they're nodding off into their books and you have to you have to refrain yourself from taking photos because it's probably invasion of privacy. But yeah... it's lovely being in the library seeing- because I think school libraries have always traditionally been a place of safety for students who don't feel connected and don't have someone, and they’ll often retreat to the school library. And it's beautiful to see over the year and maybe even over the years, little friendships bloom where all these individuals end up becoming a quirky little crew who will take them all the way through the school, and hopefully outside of school as well.

**Rebecca Levingston:** What a beautiful space you create. Lena, it's so good to meet you this morning. Thank you for the tour of your library.

**Lena Crowley:** Thank you, thank you, Rebecca.

**Rebecca Levingston:** Lena Crowley, teacher librarian from Marist College Ashgrove. Also a member of the Queensland School Libraries Association.

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