



Allison Hall

Teacher-Librarians as Tech Wizards: Myth or Reality?

When I was a kid, the coolest technology I remember being in the library was a tiny, manual filmstrip projector. I would search the card catalogue for the desired filmstrip, thread it through the projector and eagerly watch the blurred image on the wall of a study carrel. If I was lucky, there would be a cassette tape companion that would not only narrate, but also let me know when it was time to advance the film.

These days our libraries are bursting with technology. We have iPads (with numerous apps), Chromebooks, robots, circuit kits, 3D printers, you name it. How can we be knowledgeable about all these tools? The answer is: We can't. Even if we could find the time to study and explore tech tools every night and on weekends, becoming an expert on all of them is an impossible task. So, what can we do?

Fortunately, modern learning allows us, as educators, to act as facilitators and become co-learners in our classrooms. The "sage on the stage" of the past is no more. We're all in this together. Our students have grown up using technology; it's part of their everyday lives. We will never know more about technology than they do.

As teacher-librarians, we understand the curriculum, ask good questions and provide exciting opportunities for our students. Integrating technology, where appropriate, can enhance the library program. And even if we're not confident in our tech skills, learning alongside the students is a great way to connect and build relationships. Am I ever afraid of looking like I don't know what I'm doing? Absolutely! Once I put aside the discomfort and dive in, the result is confident, enthusiastic and engaged learners.

Here are some simple ways to embrace new technology in your library learning commons:

Time for Exploration

Give students time to explore new tech tools and figure out how they work. This year, I started an animation club. We began with Google Slides animation, something I learned about at a conference. My students got the hang of it right away and were ready to move on to something new. I introduced them to Adobe Flash CS4, and by introducing I literally mean showed them how to open the program and where to find support material. Then I let them explore. As I walked around the LLC, I could tell that some students were struggling while others were progressing quickly with their animation skills. I directed the struggling students to the ones who had figured things out. The students worked together as co-learners and soon all members of the club were able to begin a simple animation.

Co-learning with Students

When I first heard about the importance of coding for all students, I was mystified. To me, coding meant typing pages of commands and symbols. How could elementary students be expected to do something like that? After a little research, I learned about block coding, discovered code.org (code.org), found some simple step-by-step tutorials and figured out how to code together with my students. We used collaboration and problem solving to work through the challenges and the students soon surpassed my very basic skills and moved on to Scratch (scratch.mit.edu), where they taught me how to make video games.