

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

Submission by:

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This submission seeks to show one way of *improving literacy* outcomes in students by increasing the reading for pleasure by students. I am a retired Teacher Librarian working one day per week at Warners Bay High School. I am specialising in promoting reading for pleasure throughout the whole school, years 7-12. In conjunction with our Principal and the full time Teacher Librarian I have formulated a reading challenge in our school called The Principal's Reading Challenge.

In promoting reading I use a variety of methods to make students aware of the books that are available and provide many incentives for reading.

These methods include:

1. Purchasing books which have a high level of interest to teenagers. I particularly choose books which have been on bestseller lists for a good length of time (6 months to years in the case of Twilight).
2. Taking books around to classrooms and promoting the stories contained in the book.
3. Conducting meetings in the library where interested students come along and we discuss new books together.
4. Providing various prizes and written commendations for the students who are involved in our reading challenge.
5. Organising visits to our school by Australian authors. These authors speak to a broad cross section of our students.

The Challenge has been a great success and records are kept regarding the students and the books they read. Tallies are done for individual students, gender and age.

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT ADOLESCENTS AND READING AND ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

1. Contrary to the view that the internet is reducing reading amongst adolescents it seems that the opposite is the case. Students can readily find out which books are considered "great reads" by other teenagers and by using Wikis comments can be left for other students to read.
2. There is an explosion in the publishing sector in regard to books for teenagers. Indeed, many authors of books for adults have crossed over into the adolescent market, eg. James Patterson and John Grisham. As well, adults have now crossed over and are reading books written for adolescents. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/136961> (Newsweek Magazine May 14, 2008 article title "Generation R (R is for reading)."
3. At Warners Bay High School the love of reading has brought students from all years into contact with each other and friendships have been forged which otherwise may not have. A passion for reading has overcome the age barrier for friendship.
4. Students are so individual in their reading preferences that it is good to have as broad a range of reading materials as possible in the library. At website <http://www.newsweek.com/id/136961> a Newsweek article titled "Should High School students be allowed to choose the books they read?" 31/8/09 examines this. This article also refers to an interesting article in the New York Times "Students get new assignment. Pick books you like". It seems that a combination of class novels and free choice of reading materials can benefit students.
5. Sixty plus studies have shown that free voluntary reading is at least as effective as conventional teaching methods in helping children to do well on standardized tests. Reading for pleasure provides many benefits that these tests don't measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improves (Krashen, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Promotion of reading in a school is one of the functions of the professional teaching staff. It is best performed by a Teacher Librarian, who has the dual qualifications of Teacher and Librarian. Much of the promotion of reading happens in face to face sessions with students: either in the Library during lesson breaks, during class lessons, in the Library at meetings, or by other means such as newsletters and displays. The Teacher Librarian's teacher training, Librarian training, experience, expertise, interest and enthusiasm is vital for the success of such programs.

Helen Clarke 16/4/10

Bibliography

Krashen, S. 2004. *Free voluntary reading: New research, applications and controversies*.
<http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/pac5/all.html> [Accessed 15th April 2010]

2. General Comments