

Submission from Diane Johnston



teacher librarian since 1996

Graduate diploma, teacher librarianship, CSU

Chairperson of library teacher librarian group, Penrith

teacher librarian mentor for NSW DET Retraining unit, editor for SCAN magazine,

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Teacher librarians, are information and communication technology specialists

- The title teacher librarian is an outdated stereotype which should be replaced with a title reflecting the 21st century role of information literacy, & digital literacy educator, such as Learning Technologies Coordinator, Information Literacy teacher. Many professionals are not aware that we teach. This was reflected in the comment of Morris Gleitzman on the prime Minister December 2009 blog on reading. Morris mentioned that it was a shame school librarians had to teach lessons. Graduates of Charles Sturt University in certificates & graduate diplomas of teacher Librarianship & Primary TLs place teaching as their main focus amongst the many priorities they manage.
- ASLA (NSW) gained approval from AGQTP in 2009 & ran a Digital Literacy for Educators course which reflected the best practice for teacher librarians.
- I would like to draw your attention to the role of ASLA (NSW) & the awards that are annually given to TL professionals. These can be found at <http://www.aslansw.org.au/awards>
- teacher librarians are isolated within their schools, many are not able to go to network meetings, there is no written role for us, training, role, team teaching, work load, responsibilities, lack or help of clerical assistants, attitude to returning & borrowing books by teachers, time available for stocktaking, administration, all depends on the attitude of the principal who may not be aware of 21st century standards such as ALIA/ASLA, research, guided inquiry, information skills, information literacy, digital literacy & the philosophy of teacher librarians. State Departments do not seem to give information & direction to principals. As a result teacher librarians have a very high level of burnout, stress pro rata. This has been disclosed by the NSW Teachers Federation.

Things the Federal government can do:

- Promote a relevant title for teacher librarians that reflects the 21st century role of information literacy, & digital literacy educator
- collect national data on school library staffing, funding, and scheduling;
- tie funding so that states can and must adequately staff and fund school library programs and services;

- require that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognize the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success;
- develop national school library standards;
- increase teacher librarian training positions in university programs;
- develop and publish a national information literacy curriculum;
- provide research funding on the effect of school library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning;
- provide grants for improving literacy through school libraries;
- facilitate national licensing of online databases for school libraries;
- declare a [national school library day](#);
- and a National Information Literacy Awareness Month!

I would like to include this outstanding article

[Kerry Neary's article for Principals](#)

School libraries: making a difference

Kerry Neary, Cert. T., B.SC., Grad. Dip. TL, B.Ed.

[This article was published in its original form in *The Queensland Principal: the Journal of the Association of State School Principals Inc.*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2007. Some minor changes have been made here to accommodate a wider audience.)

Within schools across Australia there is a learning space of considerable investment. This is the School Library, sometimes modishly titled Resource Centre, Information Centre, Learning Centre and so on, but nevertheless, the Library. In economic terms, the replacement value of a modest collection of 5 000 books starts at \$100 000; include all the other teaching-learning resources that are variously housed in the Library and this can conservatively be doubled. However, this article will focus on the educational investment, which should be, at the very least, equally valued.

U.S. research for over a decade continues to show that the school library plays a critical role in facilitating and enhancing student learning. Of the major factors shown to contribute to improved student outcomes, three are addressed here (if only in part due to lack of space):

- Having a full range of print, audiovisual and electronic resources that provide equal learning opportunities to all students (see ***Print resources*** below).
- Engaging students meaningfully with information that matters to them both in the classroom and in the real world (see ***Information Literacy*** below).
- Being staffed by qualified professionals trained both to collaborate with teachers on quality learning programs and to shape the collection to the curriculum (see ***Information Literacy programs*** below).

For a comprehensive overview of the manifold ways school libraries do contribute to improved student achievement, including language literacy development, refer to the 2008 version of *School Libraries Work!* **(1)**

Print resources

In many schools today, the educational value of ***print resources*** in the library collection (chiefly books) is underestimated by the decision makers. There are some who even see books, which nevertheless form the foundation of most school collections, as an out-dated information and communication technology; but 'the jury is still out on that', as they say **(2)**. This view overlooks the teaching-learning significance of books. Knowledge is a construct; it does not exist without intervention. A model commonly used to represent the construction of knowledge is the *Data-Information-Knowledge* model **(3)**. Books - that is, 'information' books - reflect the construction of knowledge in a way the Internet does not. The information guides of a book, particularly the discrete facts in the index, represent the *data*; these are organized under captions and sub-headings into *information* contexts; finally, main headings and chapters show one way we *know* that information set can be logically processed and compared with similar information.

Searching the Internet involves the use of key words, which are in fact the organizers of information in the model above. Key words (which do not represent discrete facts but rather imply some prior knowledge of the context of the information being sought) are used to follow a trail of links in Internet searching with the objective of arriving at the right place ultimately. Students with a better sense of knowledge construction will achieve more successful Internet searches because they have a better sense of what headings are relevant; their searches are less 'hit'-and-miss.

Sometimes we overlook the fact that students are **novice** learners in searching for information; and that it takes a long time to become 'expert' in the skills and strategies involved. There is the temptation to think that the information found is the important 'outcome'. It isn't. In a return to the 'Process vs. Product' debate, **how** they get to it is the most important. Books are fundamental to teaching students the processes of knowledge construction and should be educationally valued in every school library collection.

Information Literacy

The knowledge construction model above, underpins the notion of ***Information Literacy*** (IL). This, like all literacies, is difficult to define because it is a concept, a notion of a set of competencies which facilitate deliberate but informed choices and actions. Again, an Internet search on the term is very revealing of its meaning and widespread application **(4,5)**. In 1989 (that's nearly 20 years ago) the American Library Association provided this definition:

"To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information". **(6)**

Isn't this what we are constantly asking students to do in their learning? Across all their 'key learning areas'? To build a foundation for their 'lifelong learning'? Why has the significance of this literacy not reached the educational policy makers? Why have school administrators not recognized the foundational importance of this literacy and explicitly included it in their school's learning programs **(7)**? Is it because they haven't been told to?

Information Literacy programs

What has the school library got to do with this? The library has always been the information hub of the school. It makes sense therefore, for ***IL programs*** to be focused on the library. As with all quality school programs and cross-curriculum strategies, though, IL programs are a whole-school responsibility. Cooperative curriculum program planning is one of the major aspects of the role of the Teacher Librarian (TL). If your TL has the recognized qualifications – and they should – then they are trained for this. But it is their specialist knowledge of learning resources, in particular their school's resources, which demands that TLs be included in curriculum planning. Other planning positions in the school, in some systems referred to as Head of Curriculum, may not have this expertise. It is therefore critical to involve the TL in the implementation of a school's IL program.

The research -based evidence

This criticality is not just about fulfilling the stated role of the TL; it is also about improving student learning outcomes. US empirical studies, as mentioned above, have shown that quality school library programs facilitated by qualified TLs with adequate support staff and with the philosophical, fiscal and practical support of school leaders, improve student learning outcomes. These studies began with the work of Keith Curry Lance in Colorado, reported in 1993, and his studies have now been replicated and validated across 19 US states, involving over 25 million (!) students **(1)**. The results have been so compelling that bi-partisan support was given to the *Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries* or SKILLS Act in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate legislation in June 2007 **(8)**.

In Australia, Lyn Hay of Charles Sturt University has based a study on the Ohio Research Study by Ross Todd (an Australian) and Carol Kuhlthau **(9)**. The first reports from the Australian based research are beginning to come through **(10)**, and the results are revealing the same correlations. Clearly, the outcomes are not related to parochial characteristics of unique settings such as 'curriculum priorities, pedagogical methods, technology infrastructures and/or school library' standards; but more generally to the quality of the school library programs.

How has all of this evidence slipped past educational decision makers in Australia?

In fact, the evidence is that Australia generally is falling into habits of 'worst practice' in relation to these research findings. In 2003, Michelle Lonsdale set out to uncover trends in attitudes towards school library staffing, in her research for ASLA/ALIA under the auspices of the ACER. In section 4.2 of her report *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: a Review of the Research*, **(11)** she concluded:

'Anecdotal evidence, and information gained from several State-based surveys, however, indicate:

- a general shortage of teacher librarians (and other specialist teachers);
- the practice of schools using librarians rather than teacher librarians, or having staff with no library or teaching qualifications at all;
- teacher librarians being used in classrooms as subject teachers to fill gaps in staffing;
- an ageing profession, with retirees not being replaced by sufficient numbers of graduates; and
- added responsibilities for teacher librarians in terms of technology maintenance and student use of technology.

In addition, devolution of financial management to schools means that funding for school libraries relies on the resource allocation priorities established by the school community, which might or might not place a high priority on the need for a well-staffed library system."

For the sake of educational outcomes for our students, these trends must be reversed.

Where is the vision? Where is the leadership?

There is no doubt that governments have a responsibility to support the development of school libraries as does the U.S. SKILLS Act. The Federal Government should provide adequate funding to all schools for library development. The various state systems should, on the one hand, provide professional development for school administrators to keep them up-to-date with this kind of research; on the other, they should be using more flexible staffing formulae which would allow schools to utilize TLs more effectively in their role. It is up to school administrators to lobby for these changes. The Federal Government, through its 'Education Revolution', must underwrite this. But first, all levels of educational policy making (government or otherwise) must articulate their vision of quality library programs within schools so that all stakeholders know where they stand on supporting library programs in schools.

Next time you, as a school administrator, might be thinking of no longer funding book purchases for the library, cutting the library budget further, deploying your TL to other roles in the school, not including a TL in your staffing formula, replacing your TL with an unqualified 'library manager' or moving your library into cyberspace, remember that 14 years of replicated and validated research shows that school libraries DO make a difference to student achievement. Such decisions are 'worst practice'. Our students need 'best practice' actions to **improve** schools' returns from this authentic investment in children's learning.

Kerry Neary is a retired Teacher Librarian with 35 years' teaching experience, 19 of which were spent as a TL in Queensland Government secondary schools.

Notes:

1. For succinct summaries of the U.S. research refer to ***School libraries work!*** [2008 edition] at http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf.

Links to most of these studies can be found in ***Every student succeeds*** at <http://www.usd320.k12.ks.us/whs/lmc/succeeds.html>

2. Read <http://www.goethe.de/ins/jp/osa/wis/en1799670.htm> for a philosophical view and <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22183259-28737,00.html> for a pragmatic one.
3. A Google search on these three words will show just how extensively this model is applied.
4. Even Wikipedia has an entry http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_literacy and a very informative and readable one at that!
5. The recent UNESCO sponsored report Towards Information Literacy Indicators (Ralph Catts and Jesus Lau) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001587/158723e.pdf> emphatically underscores the critical significance of information literacy in learning.
6. From the ***Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report***, accessed at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.cfm#importance>. For an Australian view, see <http://www.alia.org.au/groups/infolit/debate.topics/29.08.2003.html>.
7. From the Wikipedia article: 'Since information may be presented in a number of formats, the term information applies to more than just the printed word. Other ***literacies*** such as visual, media, computer, network, and basic literacies are implicit in information literacy.
8. Reported in American Library Association press release of 26 June 2007 at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2007/june2007/skillsactpr.htm>
9. Reported at <http://www.oelma.org/studentlearning/>.
10. These have been published in *Synergy*, a refereed journal of the School Library Association of Victoria. See *Paper 1* at <http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol3num2/hay.pdf> and *Paper 2* at http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol4num2/hay_pt2.pdf.

Paper 1 also provides a useful rubric for identifying effective school library programs.

11. For the full report see <http://www.asla.org.au/research/>. For section 4.2, link from *Teacher Librarian population* on that page

I would be pleased to submit further information and/or to attend a hearing in regard to this inquiry,

Yours faithfully,

Diane