

CONNECTIONS

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Ten ways to transform your library into a flexible learning space

Warners Bay High School is a large co-educational comprehensive state high school, south of Newcastle. The school library serves around 1,300 students and 100 staff. Like many schools, it has a building known as the multipurpose centre or MPC. While it is true that its uses may vary among assemblies, exams and PE classes, generally each use takes place sequentially rather than concurrently. Libraries are the true multipurpose centres. The library at my school can be hosting a farewell ceremony for visiting Japanese students, providing a place for seniors to study for their trial HSC exams

and allowing junior history students to walk around the Terracotta Warriors, all at the same time. It has always been a busy library but, since my appointment as the teacher librarian five years ago, I have worked on creating a more flexible space and a more appealing atmosphere to encourage different uses.

1. Analyse the space

When I arrived, the L-shaped library could hold two classes. There was an area of study carrels, a bank of 15 desktop computers, and two seminar rooms. In addition, there was a corralled area of partly dismantled shelving that still

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housed a collection of legacy media and stacks of chairs, and gave the library a furniture storage ambience. The non-fiction collection ranged the length of one wall and took up four bays of shelving, five bookcases deep. Five filing cabinets, a large rusting newspaper storage unit and photocopier completed the cluttered floorspace. There was nowhere for students to sit and read comfortably and a hodgepodge of mismatched desks fronted one of the teaching areas.

2. Formulate a plan

I made a plan to move all the shelving to the periphery, to maximise the flexibility of the floorspace and address the lack of comfortable seating.

The judicious injection of some colour was also seen as a way of making the library more attractive and inviting. One of the earliest actions was to move the new fiction display to a face-out unit opposite the library entrance with a newly created sign made of purchased wooden letters, at a total cost of eight dollars. Red was already a key colour, but the sign introduced two others — deep blue and mint green.

A major renovation was out of the question, but the bland brick walls and beige pillars were given a pick-me-up by painting the pillars alternately in these key colours. Students and staff liked the effect.

3. Cull resources and furniture

In 2013, it was known that the Department of Education was going to replace OASIS Library, the DOS-based library management system that departmental schools had been using for more than 20 years. This was another incentive to cull the non-fiction collection that was already needed to clear the floorspace of shelving and filing cabinets. The process of culling was also an opportunity to prepare the catalogue for the changeover, ensuring that older non-standard entries were removed and, overall, records conformed to SCIS standards. Weeding the out-of-date video collection meant that it could be removed from the leg of the library housing the fiction collection and, with it, the visible clutter of the shelving and spare chairs.

Although it would take a couple of years to complete the transformation of the non-fiction collection, the reclaimed space allowed me to address one of the outstanding needs of the library: a place for students to sit comfortably to read. Shopping around locally, I purchased lounge furniture on a two-for-one deal in comfortable cord of red, blue and green to coordinate with the library colours. A new area for reading was created and has become popular for small groups of teachers and senior students as well. Any furniture that was not needed was offered to staff outside the library.

4. Move to the edges

As already noted, the aim was to have most of the shelving around the walls. Removing duplicated and out-of-date resources reduced the non-fiction so that all the free-standing shelving, which took up half of the space in this area, could be removed or rearranged against the wall. When completed, the non-fiction collection was arranged in a U-shape around the edges of a newly created additional place with the final leg of the 'U' providing an effective barrier between the collaborative space and the quiet study area of the study carrels.

5. Introduce flexible-use furniture

The original furnishings consisted of standard fixed-leg, rectangular, four-seater library tables — eight in each teaching area. There was constant movement of furniture to accommodate theatre-style set-ups, debates and video conferences. The tables were bulky and heavy to move and the library staff members were only going to get older! We needed furniture that was easier to move, and settled on mobile fliptop tables — still rectangular, but seating up to six students. This meant only six tables to move and they could just be shifted to the sides of the area, forming a barrier to the shelving and even, at times, additional display space. Rectangular tables were chosen because they could more easily accommodate seniors with large folders, as well as create larger boardroom-style tables or U-shaped groupings, while allowing groups of up to six without any rearrangement. The red colour chosen for them gave a stimulating vibrancy to the whole library.

6. Work with others who can help you

There was no additional budget for renovation, so most improvements had to be paid for from the library budget. Working closely with the site manager and general assistant kept costs to a minimum. Double-sided bookshelves were converted to single-sided ones by cutting back the footings and bolting them to the walls. Tatty noticeboards were recovered with upholstery fabric (red again) to match existing endboards. Stools were cut down to fit under benches. The mismatched desks were replaced with a bench running the length of a wall. This was made by the general assistant from purchased wooden shelving. Gluing fabric to the back of a magazine storage unit and using timber moulding as a frame created a giant noticeboard.

7. Repurpose

Many of the successes of the library reorganisation came about by repurposing existing areas or furniture. The placement of the bench mentioned above created a popular area out of previously dead space under windows looking out of the library workroom. The other aspect of this project was creating privacy for the staff (and hiding workroom clutter) by installing window-sized custom graphics that were cheaper than blinds and still gave staff vision into the library. They branded the library and made students comfortable sitting up close. Powerpoints for charging devices and network connections for computers completed the so-called technology bench. Colourful material was used to rejuvenate stools, benches and chairs — all proving popular with students.

The biggest repurposing has been the former AV room. Reorganising the storage of AV equipment and giving away furniture no longer used has opened up the space to provide a green-screen film studio. Clearing clutter allowed for further repurposing, working with technology staff.

8. Work with subject teachers

Working with other teachers to provide areas that they can use differently from their classroom spaces has encouraged new users of the library facilities. The green-screen room was earmarked for use as a project-based learning space. Computers and virtual reality hardware were purchased out of the technology budget. The studio is now used extensively by art and textiles teachers who had previously not used the library.

NON-FICTION: THE ELEPHANT IN THE LIBRARY

Rebecca Tobler writes about the need to rethink non-fiction collections, and consider providing engaging resources that spark students' imaginations.

Having recently completed my retraining as a teacher librarian, I have spent a great deal of time contemplating what to do with the non-fiction section. During my extensive research, I became increasingly frustrated that, as I'd initially discovered during the retraining, the only guidance was that the teacher librarian resources the curriculum and that the non-fiction section should be reflective of the community (ACT Education 2016; Beilharz 2007).

Unfortunately, if we were to actually do this, there would likely be either a tiny non-fiction section, or none at all. Today's youth are more interested in finding and reading information online. Their first instinct is to search Google, and the first website they look at will likely be Wikipedia. This is not a ridiculous oversimplification, but what generally does happen (Kennedy 2013; ALIA 2017).

In this environment, I had to ask myself, 'Where does non-fiction fit?' The case for keeping a good fiction section is easily made. We want to promote reading for pleasure and, for many of us, nothing beats sitting back with a good read. Add to this that research has shown that reading online texts stresses the brain more and may actually require more literacy skills (Liu 2005; Fabr 2013), and the case for a physical fiction section is clear. This can of course, and is in most cases, supplemented by an ebook collection.

So what about non-fiction? This collection is easily the most expensive, and the one that has to be updated more often. When I attempted to research this conundrum, I found very little information. As has been argued many times, the library seems to be simply 'fighting against the tide' when it comes to student research habits and, quite frankly, it is losing (Oddone 2016).

I ultimately decided that I was looking at the problem all wrong. As school library professionals we consistently try to find out what will draw students to books, what they will be interested in, what they will need — only for them to insist on researching it on the internet. Indeed, the role of the school library professional itself has changed so that a large portion of it is to guide and instruct on the use of technology, online research strategies, and study techniques. This, of course, varies from school to school, but the role itself is no longer focused on books.



Colour artwork and stools helped to create an engaging technology bench in the library.

9. Create zones within the library

A success of the reorganisation of the library space has been the thoughtful grouping of various zones of use within the overall floorplan. Shelving is used to help block noise from more collaborative zones that might disturb the quiet study area, which is located nonetheless as far as possible from the entrance and the fiction collection where wide-reading classes enthusiastically choose books. The cosy reading area is at the end of the fiction collection. New collaborative furniture caters for small senior groups as well as the overflow from the green-screen room, and is in the area adjacent to it.

10. Look for extra funding (and furniture bargains)

Most of the rejuvenation has been low expense and funded directly from the library budget. Paint and material are cheap, and the library assistant is handy with a staple gun. The fliptop tables were paid for by the P&C after I wrote an application for funding. Negotiation with other stakeholders led to the sharing of expenses with other areas of the school.

The project is not finished. A library is a dynamic place, constantly changing as needs change. There is still a fixed block of computers that I hope to make more flexible, but we have come a long way, and the library is, more than ever, a multipurpose centre.

Image credits

Photos supplied by Liza Moss



Liza Moss
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Here, I suspect, is the beginning of the solution. If the role of the school library professional has changed, the role of the library resources must also change. Instead of fighting against the internet, we need to re-establish the position of books within the information process. In discussions with my principal, it was decided to focus non-fiction purchases on books that would inspire. We foresaw non-fiction filling the void when students have been given an assessment, but do not know what to focus on. The library could provide books with small pieces of information on many topics that would provide a launching pad for student research. These non-fiction books, such as *Books that Changed History*, and Randall Monroe's *What If?* and *Thing Explainer*, would become the first stop before students researched the topic further online. Thus, a niche role would be created for them. This, then, seemed like the perfect solution. The physical non-fiction collection could be decreased, as could the cost of maintaining it. However, unfortunately, I had one more surprise in store for me. Discussions with colleagues from various schools and fields illuminated a growing sentiment — that we didn't need non-fiction at all!

I was understandably floored by this turn of events. Most school library staff will not disagree with the notion that we are 'fighting a losing battle', but have we already lost, and simply not noticed yet?

Instead of admitting defeat, I decided simply to change the rules of engagement. How do we fight to keep a collection that students and teachers, generally, do not see the value in — especially when the information contained in books is often a number of years old and students can access up-to-date information in seconds? Schools will not pay to maintain a collection that is not valued, and school library staff cannot spend vast amounts of time trying to convince teachers and students of that value when teaching them how to find the same information digitally is much more useful (Combes 2009).

Where does this leave non-fiction, and how do we change the rules? We look to the fiction section. It is generally believed that when it comes to fiction, digital books will not be replacing physical ones (Jabr 2013). There will always be people who prefer to read a physical fiction book. It is also more beneficial when teaching literacy.

Why not apply this same argument to the non-fiction section? We are in the education profession and the school library professional's role is to promote reading and reading for pleasure. Not everyone enjoys reading and not everyone enjoys reading stories. There are those students who would prefer to pick up a non-fiction book and learn about a new or interesting topic. Just as the role of school library staff has shifted from simply curating a physical collection and teaching students how to access it (Hutchinson 2017), our collection should reflect this new focus. We no longer need to resource the entire curriculum — that's what subscription services and other online repositories can be for. However, we can and should resource our libraries with fiction and non-fiction books that spark the imagination and create interest in reading.

References

For a full list of references, please see the online version of this article (www.scisdata.com/connections/issue-107/non-fiction-the-elephant-in-the-library).

Image credit

Photo supplied by Rebecca Tobler



Rebecca Tobler
Teacher librarian

THE LIBRARY, THE CHILD, THE BOOK CREATOR: ELR AND ITS ROLE IN THE STORY CYCLE

When I was very small, books were my world.

When I got bigger, they were still my world — only perhaps a little richer, more nuanced and complex.

Now that I'm biggest of all, books are not only the richness, nuance and complexity that comes with the sheer enjoyment of reading — they are my every day and my livelihood. They are who I am.

Anyone (and children know this concept well) can enthusiastically throw themselves into their greatest passions and experience that remarkable curiosity where acres of time compress into minutes.

But for writers and illustrators of children's works, most especially in a book market as small as Australia, career sustenance is fraught. The desire to ditch our passion for better paid work might consume us if we weren't sustained by what drives us.

And what drives us is children.

Literacy. Art appreciation. Visual literacy. Self-awareness, compassion, growth, aesthetic development. Entertainment, education, enlightenment, enchantment. And of course, the concept of story, which is so deeply essential to the human condition.

This is what books do for children. And this is what the people who create books *want* for children; this is why we do it.

When children's book creators talk about their work, they often focus on the creative process. They obsess, worry and pine over it, and much on this is shared and spoken. What's not spoken about so much, is survival.

If book creators cannot create books, there will be none. Revenue from book creation is notoriously tiny, and even a bestselling book can sit snugly inside the minimum tax bracket.

On top of that, to carve out a slice of our tiny kids' market, books are sometimes rushed or suffer budget cuts. All books have value, of course, but the works that take time, focus and dedication are the ones that have the power to truly impact children's lives. Creators need time and a wage to produce such works.

Librarians are an extraordinary breed of people, as are school teachers, because they



totally 'get it'. They daily cast a literary spell over kids that changes the way they think and feel about themselves and their place in the world.

Creators create. Children consume. Without libraries, children's books would never receive the kind of exposure and sharing required to keep the dance of creation and consumption alive. When librarians partake in ELR surveys, book creators and publishers receive one of the most well-appreciated payments of their year. And, more often than not, this provides the funds for them to nut out the next book.

I was fortunate to have books at home when I was a child, and my children are similarly lucky. But many children have the barest handful of books at home, and some have none. It doesn't even compute. I cling to the knowledge that school librarians and teachers are on a mission to bring magic into the life of every child through the pages of a book.

ELR surveys are a crucial step in the support of book creators and the children who devour their work. It is a vital, endless cycle that connects us all in the literacy process. Creators love creating, librarians love sharing, kids love consuming. And

perhaps no one more than teachers and librarians can truly appreciate the richness, nuance and complexity of this harmonious dance.

Australia has one of the few ELR programs in the world. I always knew we were a bright country. Let's keep shining.

Image credit

Photo by Martin Ollman

Tania McCartney

Author, illustrator, editor
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The Educational Lending Right (ELR) scheme is an Australian Government cultural program that makes payments to eligible Australian creators and publishers.

Every year, SCIS works closely with the Department of Communications and the Arts to conduct a survey of book holdings in Australian school libraries. This is the ELR School Library Survey.

The survey produces an estimate of book holdings in Australian schools, which, combined with the results from TAFE and university libraries, is then used to recompense registered book creators for having their work freely accessible in educational libraries. There is also a similar scheme operating for public lending libraries.

We have commenced inviting 1,000 Australian schools to participate in this year's ELR survey. Schools are randomly selected and must have enrolments of over 100 and an LMS that is compatible with ELR survey software.

This survey does not ask you to complete a questionnaire; rather, participants are asked to run an automated survey within their LMS that extracts a count of their total book holdings, and can be completed in just a few clicks.

We require a minimum of 300 schools to participate, so if your school has been selected, please spare five minutes to support our Australian book creators.

ALL TOGETHER NOW: RECOGNISING THE WORK OF ALL SCHOOL LIBRARY STAFF

Karys McEwen writes about the importance of being inclusive in our advocacy for school libraries.

There's no doubt that school libraries in Australia are facing challenges. You only have to pick up a professional publication or attend a conference to hear the widespread discussion about how shrinking budgets and staffing cuts are affecting the industry. But amid all the debate, school library staff are working hard to show how valuable they are to the communities they service. There are countless ways in which we are proving to be resilient.

However, there is one key thing missing from the conversations that take place in library journals, at professional development days, or in email chains where colleagues from across the country share ideas on how to keep school libraries funded and thriving: in order to persevere, we need to recognise that we are stronger together, not divided. We need to go into battle for each other.

Among the most important factors to consider is how school library staffing is changing. Up until a few years ago, the teacher librarian role was more prevalent in school libraries. Nowadays, there are primary and secondary libraries that are run by librarians or library technicians. However, there are also some instances where libraries are being managed by those without any library qualifications at all, or they are completely unstaffed. More troubling are those schools without libraries at all. As a profession, we should always advocate that, at the very least, every school needs a library. We should also never lose sight of how valuable qualified library staff are to a school community.

How many times have you heard a librarian describe themselves as 'just' a librarian? I am personally guilty of this — not because I am ashamed of my position title, but because I am well aware of the stigma that is sometimes attached to non-teaching staff. As the library manager in a secondary school where there hasn't been a teacher librarian for nearly a decade, there have been times where I have felt looked down upon by people both from within my school and from within the wider industry. Fortunately, attitudes are beginning to change.

When it comes to secondary schools in particular, it is not always essential to have a teacher librarian running the library. Miffy Farquharson, Head of Libraries at Woodleigh School, describes one school in Melbourne that has appointed a librarian as the manager, keeping their teacher librarians for teaching. 'It seems to work reasonably well, and has freed the teachers from the management side, whilst keeping the library systems working smoothly,' she says. 'The staff know what they are and are not responsible for and there is room for discussion within the team.'

This set-up has also been working successfully in other schools across Australia. Of course, it is always up to the individual school to appoint the right staff for their library, and allow the team to adapt as needed. Sue Osborne, Head of Library at Haileybury Brighton, argues that qualifications in collection

curation and development, as well as a deep knowledge of literature trends, is vital. 'Librarians can always instruct on the use of library resources — they do it in a public and specialist setting all the time — and there is no need for teachers for that,' she says. 'While it is important to have knowledge of curriculum and methods of instruction used in schools, information management expertise is the most important thing.'

Ruth Woolven, Librarian at Kew Primary School, says that 'if a school cannot have or chooses not have a teacher librarian, then a librarian will still work with teachers towards delivering a program that complements the curriculum'.

While nobody in the library world would actively argue against having teacher librarians in schools, sometimes in the fight to preserve these positions that are currently being eroded, advocates can fail to focus enough on the wide and vital roles of other staff and, in particular, the loss of qualified library staff in schools.

'School library advocacy groups are mostly represented by teacher librarians and schools from the independent and Catholic sectors. I absolutely applaud the work they do and I completely understand their view on maintaining the best practice of having a teacher librarian,' Woolven says. 'However, I do think it has the potential to impede the school library sector if there is not equal consideration given to the other models being used, particularly in the public sector. If the only focus is on the erosion of teacher librarians, many other very capable library staff may be unsupported.'

I was recently in communication with an author who is a strong advocate for school libraries. During our conversation, they acknowledged, with apology, that their advocacy had often focused on teacher librarians, who they had erroneously equated with qualified library staff. The author realised how this seemingly insignificant use of language could dismiss the work of other staff within the library, and promised that future advocacy on their part would always be broadened to all qualified school library staff.

Semantics are important, and inclusive language is the first step towards positive change. The School Library Association of Victoria recently released a new edition of 'What a School Library Can Do For You'. This document was reworked in order to expand the focus to school library teams rather than just the teacher librarian. These updates better reflect the diversity of roles in school libraries, and this inclusivity goes a long way towards recognising the contribution of all school library staff.

Similarly, several industry bodies, such as the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), have now begun using the term 'school library staff' when advertising their professional development. This is especially significant because it has been

WORKING WITH PUPIL LIBRARY ASSISTANTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Lucy Chambers shares ideas for running successful pupil library assistant programs that empower students, build their confidence and create lifelong readers.

Background

I am a member of a team of professional primary school librarians in the Schools Library Service (SLS) in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is in central London and has a mixed demographic, ranging from some of the wealthiest people to some of the poorest. My schools are made up of more than 50 per cent Pupil Premium students (a measure of poverty), and many EAL students.

Introduction

Pupil library assistants (PLAs) assist the librarian: they are not, as is sometimes thought, a cheap way of running the facility. PLAs' work provides genuine benefits to the school library, the wider school community, and themselves. PLAs:

- act as positive role models to encourage others to read
- develop 'ownership' of the school library and a sense of pride in its facilities and opportunities
- raise the profile of the school library
- help the librarian with tasks including shelving, tidying, book-processing and library promotion
- learn skills that are useful for the future such as responsibility, organisation, communication, and teamwork
- grow in self-esteem and confidence, and feel empowered
- may gain an improved attitude toward education.

Each year, the UK School Library Association and CILIP School Libraries Group run a national competition for secondary schools called the Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award. A nominee acknowledged the mutual gain of the PLA experience: 'Being a pupil library assistant has had a phenomenal impact on me; not only as a pupil but also as a person. I love unlocking new doors for others but some have also been unlocked for me' (cited in Finch 2015).

PLAs in Tower Hamlets primary schools

I work with PLAs in all my schools, as do some of my colleagues. How I manage them and what they do depends on communications and expectations within the school, how much time they can commit, and how much training I can give them. I find that the job develops gradually, depending on the children involved and school management factors.

When talking to the head teacher about PLAs, I say that it is not just about helping in the library, but also about students developing aspirations and citizenship skills for use in class and beyond.

How to recruit PLAs

PLAs complete application forms and have a job description. I select children who offer statements such as 'I like reading', 'I like helping tidy at home/in class', or 'I like organising'. I also talk to the class teachers about any children they think would rise to the challenge. These are often the ones who don't write a brilliant application form or won't apply due to low self-esteem. PLAs come from years 4 and 5 (eight- or nine-year-olds) and work in the library for the whole school year. They commit to attending one session a week to work, and regular team meetings. I have a dedicated message book so that they can write down queries and problems to discuss.

I train PLAs in basic library tidying skills, and issuing and returning books using the LMS. I also give them tasks where they can use their initiative to promote reading. The PLAs suggest ideas, which I encourage them to undertake. These have included book and author posters, competitions, displays, a Lucky Dip box to widen children's reading choices, Top Ten reads, book talk at assemblies, reading books to younger children, and displays about their roles.

In some schools, I work with the PLAs once a week, but in others I am unable to



do this. In the former, I follow a training program for wider librarian skills. In the latter, PLAs have specific jobs, such as tidying the shelves and returning books.

Challenges

There are a couple of challenges we face in delivering the PLA program at our schools. The first revolves around data protection. There is currently debate about whether students should be able to log in independently for fear that they access confidential information. The other is related to health and safety rules. While some schools do not encourage children to walk around the school with no teacher present — let alone work in the library independently — others do.

Rewards

I offer rewards to students in the form of new books, bookmarks, and stickers, which are usually acquired free from publishers, exhibitions, or review websites. If I organise an author visit, I ensure that my PLAs also attend and assist. All PLAs have been given a special badge to wear.

Case studies

Columbia Primary School

I am only in the school 3.5 hours per week,

and I rely on PLAs to keep the library tidy during the week. Before they started, I received no help with shelving and the library was constantly messy. I spent too much time tidying up and was unable to strategically manage the library or plan events. Users complained that they could not find books on the shelves. The school could offer me no teaching assistant help. I chose three PLAs at a time to attend the library independently to shelve books, replace book displays, and tidy up.

Activities, challenges and outcomes

There were initial school organisational issues with children visiting the library without a teacher. The library is locked when no classes are in. The head teacher resolved this by talking to the lunch staff and assigning playground buddies (also children) to accompany the PLAs, unlocking the library for them himself.

Teachers commented that the children are now excellent reading champions in class, and that they encourage everyone to tidy up the library. The PLAs feel empowered, enjoying the responsibility and challenge of the role. They operate the message book system well, sharing problems and making suggestions for books to buy. Some children do not turn up, but the team has taken it upon themselves to find new, more reliable PLAs. Over the year, the PLAs have gained confidence and self-esteem.

Globe Primary School

Globe Primary School has a long-established system of pupil responsibility to develop independence and citizenship skills, with jobs ranging from office helpers, to the FAB anti-bullying team, to bankers (who count money), to assembly ushers. PLAs are included in this system, which is fortunate as I am only present in the school seven hours per week.

Activities, challenges and outcomes

For the past three years, the PLA team of 9- to 11-year-olds has run the library independently for regular KS2 (students from years 3 to 6) drop-in sessions. An anticipated problem was behaviour management, but the PLAs have developed the confidence to deal with this effectively, knowing where to get adult help if necessary.

I run a library skills training session weekly. Topics include cataloguing and classification, and bibliographic data for ordering books. So that they could gain experience ordering, the PLAs completed

an order from beginning to end, over a couple of weeks.

The group has had many ideas for library development and I encourage them to put these into practice, following staff liaison and approval. One such idea was running a World Book Day quiz in class where the PLAs read out questions and marked the answer sheets.

The literacy coordinator works with the PLA team to help with whole-school reading events, such as book swaps, family reading promotions, and book sales.

The PLAs at Globe Primary School were the only primary school team taking part in a CILIP SLG-run PLA training event in a secondary school, and were very inspired by it. They discussed how they would handle different difficult library problems and presented a brief description about their role in front of 300 students.

Teachers comment that the PLAs are increasingly confident in class and are also excellent at promoting reading to their peers. Their self-esteem has risen as their sense of independence has been nurtured in a safe environment. They have become confident at sharing their ideas with school staff and in other scenarios. Not least, they have become skilled PLAs, winning the Tower Hamlets primary school PLA award for the past three years — the national offering is for secondary schools only.

Conclusion

Gillian Harris, Head of THSLS, and I have developed a training module specifically for primary school PLAs, to encourage more schools to open libraries and offer students opportunities to assist in order for them to develop practical skills and become reading champions.

I recommend starting a program of PLAs in your school. They are not a threat to the school library professionals, but rather an enhancement, as the more independence and specific training you give students, the more they feel empowered to take responsibility and help you develop the library.

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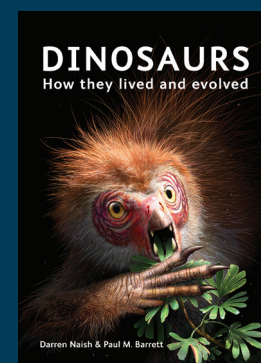
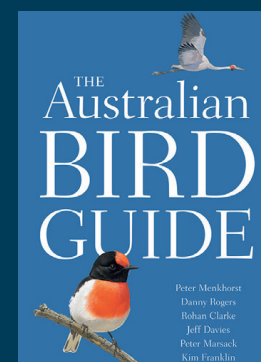
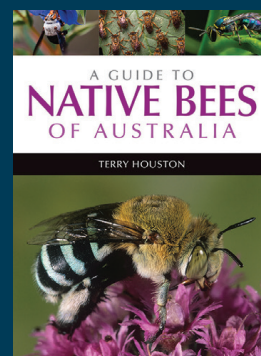


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SCHOOL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

SCIS speaks to Jade Arnold of Galston High School in New South Wales about what's happening in her school library.

What is your job title, and what does your role entail?

My official job title is teacher librarian. My role within the library is multifaceted. As the manager of the library, I am responsible for acquisitions, resource management, and research services, and I manage two school administrative and support staff who job-share one part-time role. Additionally, I teach information literacy classes to years 7 and 8, run 'wide-reading' lessons with every year 7-10 English class once a fortnight, and team-teach with teachers across all subjects at their request. I coordinate all students undertaking courses via distance education, provide basic technology support for students and staff, and manage and coordinate the student librarian team — a new arm of our student leadership body that has 26 members from years 7-11. I juggle these roles along with other responsibilities outside the library, including being 2IC of the English faculty and the year 12 advisor.

What is the most rewarding aspect of working in a school library, and why?

Like any teacher, the most rewarding aspect of my job is the students I work with both in formal and informal settings. I've been teaching at Galston High School since 2013, but only took on the role of teacher librarian at the end of 2016. My transition from the classroom to the library has opened my eyes to students in informal, unstructured environments during break times, which has enriched my understanding of students' needs and affected my teaching practice. My moments of joy when teaching are dramatically different to those during my time as a classroom teacher. It's those tiny moments of wonder that I relish as a teacher librarian — seeing teenagers impatiently waiting outside the glass doors of the library in the morning and the smiles they crack as I unlock the door; connecting a student with a book they enjoyed; having students recommend books they enjoyed to me; watching my student librarians take ownership of the library by suggesting and implementing ideas.

What do you see as the most important part of the library's role in the school community?

I believe that our library has two key roles within our school community. The first is to create literate students by instilling a lifelong love of reading and providing them with the skills and resources to confidently navigate an information-saturated world. The second is to support students' education in 'just-in-time' ways by directing them to an appropriate source of information, providing guidance with referencing, or even helping them submit assessment tasks. This will hopefully help them remember that there is always someone who can answer their questions, and that the library is often the best place to go for that help!

Are there any issues or challenges facing your library?

Our library was completely destroyed by fire in 2014 and took over three years to rebuild. The initial shock to the school and community was foreseeable, but the impact

this had on the status of the library was less obvious. During the long process of designing and constructing a new library, the library resources were housed in a small demountable at the back of the school. Underused, under-resourced, and hidden away, the library slipped from the minds of staff and students, so making the new library a relevant centrepiece of the school was always going to be a big challenge. Providing tours for every class prior to our official opening helped pique student interest, which I maintain through regular announcements at assembly and social media posts. I also present at staff meetings and email staff regularly to remind them of the services offered by the library.

The greatest challenge I now face is collection development, as establishing a collection from scratch while running a library is extremely time-consuming. To address this, I encourage requests from students and staff, which has helped create a new, vibrant and extremely relevant collection that is constantly growing.



How do you promote reading and literacy in your school?

I believe the most effective way to promote reading and literacy within the school context is to provide students with ample time to read for leisure, and I'm fortunate to work at a school where the members of the executive understand this need. Our school was targeted for the Bump It Up initiative for literacy two years ago, which coincided with an adjustment in our timetable that resulted in the loss of roll call. The existing wide-reading model that operated during roll call wasn't working in the vast majority of classes for a number of reasons, so the head teacher of English and I saw this as a perfect opportunity to trial a new model of wide reading. Every year 7–10 English class visits the library once a fortnight. I provide a 10-minute 'book chat', then assist students in finding reading material that they will enjoy. The rest of the lesson is dedicated to quiet reading. This initiative has been extremely successful and has had a profound impact on the number of students borrowing and reading regularly.

How do you promote an interest in STEAM areas in your school?

I run a Makerspace club during break times, where students have the opportunity to learn to code robots, play with Makey Makey, and create and print 3D designs in a fun and collaborative environment. The biggest hurdle is finding the time to learn and plan new challenges for students, as I had no coding knowledge prior to retraining as a teacher librarian.

How do you encourage students to make use of the library?

Fortunately, our library is at the heart of the school and is also a major thoroughfare for staff and students, as the print room, attendance desk and sick bay are all located there. This means that signage is particularly effective, but I also run regular competitions to encourage less-frequent users to visit the library. These are advertised by hanging posters around the school, making regular announcements at assembly, and through the school library Instagram account, @galstonhslibrary.

What is your favourite thing about SCIS?

I love that SCIS provides consistent high-quality metadata that links in seamlessly with Oliver, our library management system. I find the genre and subject headings particularly useful as our collection is genrefied, and this makes accessioning new books considerably easier.

What would you like to see SCIS do more of?

I would love to see greater coverage of Marvel and DC comic titles, as they are phenomenally popular. Being able to request SCIS records is extremely helpful, but the sheer volume of titles requested means it's often hard to keep up with student demand!

Image credit

Photo supplied by Jade Arnold.



Jade Arnold
Teacher librarian
Galston High School

SCIS is more

Welcome to issue 107 of *Connections*!

Authorities

Authorities are a very important part of SCIS record creation. Libraries that subscribe to SCIS authorities can download the SCIS Authority Files, and import them to use in their catalogues.

An authority record is the authorised form of a heading, and provides 'see' and 'see also' references that create links between records. If a library catalogue contains authority files, and these are consistently applied in the records, then users will be able to find all the records that are relevant to their search because the authority record will direct them to the preferred term, even if they use a non-preferred term in their search. For example, if a user is searching for 'bugs', they will be directed to resources with the subject heading 'insects', which is the preferred term.

SCIS has traditionally provided subject and name authorities, giving users a reference structure to link authorised terms to related terms for subjects and author names. This year, for the first time we are

making available a set of series authorities. We hear a lot of feedback from libraries that inconsistencies in series statements are a source of frustration. For example, quite often the series title for works within a series will appear differently on individual works. You can read more about the complexity of series cataloguing at www.scisdata.com/connections/issue-100/let-s-talk-seriously-about-series.

The SCIS cataloguers have been working hard to manage the many challenges that these inconsistencies present. We have now created a set of series authorities that will group titles within the same series together in a consistent way.

Series authorities will bring together all the works from the same series under a single preferred series title, even if the series title appears differently on individual works. Series titles can be for either fiction or non-fiction. This first release of series authorities will cover all series for which a title has been published from 2015 onwards. SCIS cataloguers are working to include older records in future authority releases.

ELR

Every year, the Australian Government runs the Educational Lending Right (ELR) survey of school libraries. SCIS manages this on behalf of the government. The survey counts the number of copies of listed titles that are held in Australian school libraries, and uses the counts as a basis for payments to the book authors. This is important to authors, as they rely on these payments to continue to create Australian books.

One thousand schools across Australia are selected to participate in ELR each year. SCIS contacts the schools from September and requests that they send us the data files for the survey.

You can read more about the importance of supporting Australian book creators on page 5 of this issue of *Connections*.



Caroline Ramsden
Manager, SCIS
Education Services Australia

PRESERVING THE PAST: BECOMING THE ARCHIVIST IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

Teacher librarians Naomi Heyman and Nigel Paull explore the potential for librarians to take on the role of school archivist.

School archives are an essential and important element of every school's history. The archives may contain records, uniforms, realia, photos, building plans, videos, and furniture. These are important cultural, social, historical, legal, and educational items. The school's archivist may range from a volunteer working a few hours a term to a qualified archivist employed several days a week.

In many schools, the role of the archivist is often delegated by the principal to library staff. Although perhaps few teacher librarians and trained library staff may have studied specific aspects of archives administration within their formal training, most would have studied subjects that overlap with it. These core subjects might include the topics of collection development and weeding; resource selection and management; cataloguing; conservation of resources; staff management; working with all school community members, including volunteers; awareness of ethical and privacy considerations; computer literacy; developing and implementing policies and procedures; proficiency in the use of websites, apps and social media; and using primary sources in different curriculum areas.

An example of the importance of maintaining and managing school archives is highlighted by South Grafton Public School, which recently celebrated its sesquicentenary. Many months of planning and preparation by the teacher librarian, current and ex-staff, parents, and community volunteers were needed to prepare the school archives for the sesquicentenary display in the library. It was important that the school library was chosen to display the archives as it is a dynamic space for all members of the broader school community to come together for education, research, information, innovation, and enjoyment.

On the day the sesquicentenary was celebrated, the library was a hive of activity as numerous guests gathered, reminisced about their time at the school with friends and teachers, and walked back in time among the displays of photographs, memorabilia and realia. The school community particularly enjoyed browsing through old photos, 1950s school uniforms, artworks (including a large 1959 original by book illustrator Pixie O'Harris, *Spirit of Jacaranda*), a timeline which circumnavigated the library walls, and examples of old teaching materials and student books.



The sesquicentenary preparation resulted in an archives overhaul, enabling efficient preservation of the entire archive collection, which is housed in the library and managed by the teacher librarian. The archives can now be easily added to and maintained, utilised for teaching opportunities and accessed by community members when required.

Digitisation and future-proofing of the school's archives were essential elements of the archiving overhaul prior to the sesquicentenary, and are things all school library staff and

archivists should consider. Adequate and safe preservation of precious items for enjoyment well into the future is an important responsibility for school archivists and school library staff.

Undertaking the role of archivist is a responsibility that library staff could embrace, as they often possess the most suitable skillset within the school community. Library staff who are also school archivists are recommended to undertake professional development; visit schools with extensive archives; liaise with local and state libraries and museums; discuss archives at collegial group meetings; and invite an archivist, preferably a member of Australian Society of Archivists, Schools Archives Special Interest Group, to address their meetings.

Utilising and enhancing this skillset for an event like South Grafton Public School's sesquicentenary was a truly rewarding experience for the teacher librarian as archivist. Before the overhaul, the archive's various materials were all stored together. A policy and procedures manual specifically for archives, and separate from the library policy, was written. The collection of memorabilia, realia, photographs and other valuable resources, which everyone needs to experience for educational and social benefit, is now safely stored and categorised by the teacher librarian. These unique and valuable archives are preserved for the future and are available for easy reference and retrieval by the school community.

Image credit

Photo supplied by Nigel Paull



Nigel Paull
Teacher librarian



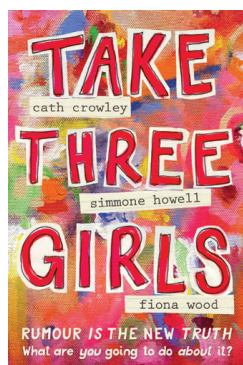
Naomi Heyman
Teacher librarian
South Grafton Public School

STORIES THAT MATTER

Young adult novels have seen a shift in the last five years, exploring issues once considered taboo but that affect teenagers worldwide. Helen Stower and Krystal Gagen-Spriggs review four contemporary realistic fiction titles that help young readers make sense of their world.

Contemporary realistic fiction is a trend in the current young adult (YA) book scene. Some of these books provide insight into issues such as gender and sexual identity, mental health, grief, drugs, suicide and violence. These issues present new horizons for those involved in the care and education of young people. The insight provided by these stories is valuable for students questioning their own identity, health, and relationships. Furthermore, both young people and adults who know people struggling with these issues will find such books can assist them to understand the issues facing many teenagers. These stories have the power to provide a guide and build empathy.

The big issues for young adults have changed in the last five years. Previously, coming-of-age novels dealt with becoming independent of parents and adults, the confusion of adolescence, rebellion, sex, pregnancy, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug issues. Recently published coming-of-age stories encompass sexuality, first sexual encounter, consent, digital issues including access to pornography, gender identity, mental health issues, suicide, and self-harm. The taboo subjects of the past are very prevalent in modern stories and young people want to read about these experiences because it is either their own reality or that of peers and they want to understand such experiences. While some call this 'grim fiction', YA stories have also been known for presenting a light at the end of the story, which offers hope for young people and suggests that resilience is possible in the face of big issues. This article will review Australian and international titles released in recent years that examine such issues and make recommendations about how they might be utilised in secondary school collections.



Take Three Girls

Crowley, C., Howell, S., & Wood, F. (2017), *Take Three Girls*, Sydney, Pan Macmillan Australia

Overview

Take Three Girls is the story of three girls from three different social circles at an all-girls boarding school. Ady, Clem, and Kate are thrust together by their wellness class teacher, Dr Malik, and develop an unlikely friendship. The girls end up relying

upon each other to sort through some personal issues, as well as working together to bring down a local, and dangerous, website called PSST.

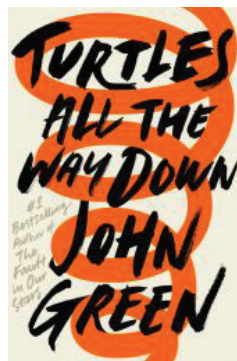
Themes

This novel deals with a range of themes that are relevant to all teenagers. A particularly strong theme and message from the story is that the standard you walk past is the standard you accept.

The girls explore this through their reactions to the cyberbullying occurring on PSST. Additional themes include identity, family, first love, pressure and expectations, and friendship.

Strengths

Set in Australia, this novel is a breath of fresh air in YA fiction that deals with the dramas of high school in a modern world. Australian teenagers will appreciate the setting, pressures, and language. Due to the fact that the novel is written from three different perspectives, important events are explored from the three different points of view. The combination of multiple perspective narratives, wellness program materials and diary entries breaks down barriers between reader, characters and setting, making the story and characters very real. Rebecca Sparrow, an author and prominent figure in promoting healthy teenage relationships, recommends this book as one that all teenage girls should read. However, it should be noted that — due to the nature of the cyberbullying and the language used — parents, carers, and educators should be aware that the content is quite mature at times.



Turtles All the Way Down

Green, J. (2017), *Turtles All the Way Down*, Penguin Books, London

Overview

When a local billionaire, Russell Pickett, goes missing amid rumours of fraud and bribery, a \$100,000 reward is offered. The main character, Aza Holmes, and her best friend Daisy decide they are going to find Russell, solve the mystery, and pocket the reward. Their investigations quickly

lead them to Pickett's mansion, where Aza meets his son, Davis. Aza and Davis strike up a friendship that develops into a love interest. Aza and Davis are, however, complicated characters and their relationship is never going to be straightforward.

Themes

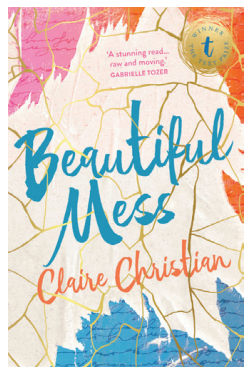
Turtles All the Way Down is disguised as a mystery novel but is essentially an exploration of what it can be like living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Aza suffers from the torment of thought spirals that on a bad day will dominate her every waking moment. The obsessive thoughts impact both her life and her relationships. The novel dispels generalisations and romanticised notions of OCD and the reader is left with no uncertainty about the pain Aza experiences.

Strengths

A strength of this novel is John Green's ability to portray the life of a teenager, complete with ambitions, troubles,



insecurities, and humour. Also, when it comes to the key issue in the book, OCD, John Green knows what he is talking about. In a vlog entry in July 2017 (<https://youtu.be/jNEUz9v5RYo>), he described his life with the illness and how it provided inspiration for the novel.



Beautiful mess

Christian, C. (2017), *Beautiful Mess*, Text Publishing, Melbourne

Overview

Beautiful Mess is the story of how Ava and Gideon meet and help each other through their personal struggles. Ava has recently lost her best friend to suicide and is travelling down a dark and destructive path. Gideon has been dealing with depression, anxiety, and living inside his head for

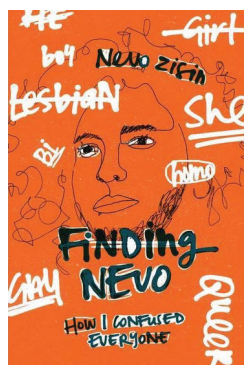
a long time. When Gideon takes on a job at the late-night kebab store where Ava works, they strike up an unlikely friendship and together they battle their demons.

Themes

This novel primarily deals with the following themes: mental health, teenage sexuality, LGBTQI issues, suicide, and friendship. The concept of Kintsugi, employed by Japanese artists, is prominent in the novel. Kintsugi is the practice of mending broken things with lacquer and gold dust, and signifies that there is beauty in mended things. Christian is clearly telling readers that 'broken' can still be beautiful.

Strengths

Beautiful Mess is set in Australia and told from both Ava's and Gideon's perspectives. Both characters have a depth that allows readers to empathise with them and understand their struggles. The way in which Christian deals with the mental health issues that arise in this novel shows a mastery and understanding that some authors struggle to achieve. The emphasis on getting help is a particularly powerful and positive message. Perhaps the greatest strength for *Beautiful Mess* is the fact that the author does not shy away from the more difficult and challenging aspects of grief and depression. This book has been described by many fans as beautiful, and the characters are definitely in a mess. It is highly recommended to teenagers looking for a story that deals positively with mental health — however, younger readers should be aware of the mature content.



Finding Nevo: How I Confused Everyone

Zisin, N. (2017), *Finding Nevo: How I Confused Everyone*, Walker Books Australia, Newtown

Overview

This book is a non-fiction memoir. It tells the story of Nevo, who has questioned their gender since the age of four. Nevo first came out as a lesbian at age 15, then as transgender as a 19-year-old. Nevo has undertaken breast removal and testosterone

therapy. Nevo now identifies as non-binary and enjoys being queer. Describing themselves in an interview for the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Morris, 2017), Nevo says: 'I'm a person, I'm an activist, I'm a speaker and it's not just about the sensational story of "look at the transgender", as if I'm in a zoo cage. I'm actually a person, a flawed person, and I find other people's gender just as fascinating as mine.'

Themes

The subtitle of this book is a clue to the themes explored in the memoir. Nevo's message is that transgender is confusing but, essentially, we are people first, and our gender and sexuality come second. Understanding others is another important message that comes through the book, and Nevo's relentless attempts to explain and articulate the landscape of the transgender person provides the reader with wonderful insight and moves us toward a place of understanding. Nevo also presents being queer as beautiful and desirable.

Strengths

The first-person narrative makes this story accessible for readers who want to understand gender issues and what the personal experience is for young people experiencing gender confusion. Nevo is very articulate throughout the telling of their story and this clarifies both societal attitudes and the personal experience of being transgender. The glossary, resources, and suggested reading also provide wonderful tools for those wishing to better understand gender fluidity.

Conclusion

The power of YA fiction is that young readers are able to explore themes such as those mentioned in this article, and many more, in a safe environment. The number of stories that matter is growing, and these stories are becoming more and more accessible to readers of all ages. Although it is vital for all readers to be able to access these stories, it is important to note that some are more appropriate for older readers. While there is a need to protect middle years readers from mature content, it is also our job to allow them this safe space to explore. There is the belief among many library staff that a reader will get out of a book only that which they are ready for. However, it is heartening to see that there is an increasing number of stories that matter being written for middle years readers. The list of stories reviewed and recommended in this article is certainly not exhaustive; however, it is our hope that we have provided a range of stories that matter and shown how they might be utilised in your collections.



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WEBSITE + APP REVIEWS

2018 SAE ATOM AWARDS

<http://atomawards.org>

The annual Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Awards showcase the finest film and media content from Australia and New Zealand, created by both industry professionals and the education sector. Of the 34 categories, many pertain to primary and secondary students and their teachers.

SCIS no. 1535908

360CITIES

www.360cities.net

An impressive array of 360-degree video and image panoramas of cities and landscapes are available from this searchable, interactive website. The content, which is also available as an app, can be used as a supplementary teaching resource or simply for browsing.

SCIS no. 1403729

CLASS TIMETABLE

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/class-timetable/id425121147?mt=8>

Applicable to secondary students, this colourful and easy-to-use weekly or multi-week timetable allows users to schedule classes and room locations, and keep tabs on due homework. This app is also available for Android users from Google Play.

SCIS no. 1886880

COSMIC WATCH

<http://cosmic-watch.com>

This award-winning website and app are an 'astronomical instrument which visualizes the cycles of Earth and the solar system, helping to understand how we measure and experience time since thousands of years'. Teachers can explore the comprehensive content that includes tutorials, education resources, and links. The app is available to purchase for both iOS and Android.

SCIS no. 1825470

EDPUZZLE

<https://edpuzzle.com>

Ever wanted to insert your own questions or voice into a video? This app allows teachers to crop videos and add questions and multiple-choice answers. Thus, they can determine the effectiveness of the resource for individual students.

SCIS no. 1772324

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

<https://climate.nasa.gov>

Created by NASA, this authoritative website contains an array of information on climate change and delves into its causes, evidence, effects and solutions. Content includes images, videos, news, resources, and links to other NASA apps and websites.

SCIS no. 1487361

HUMAN LIBRARY

<http://humanlibrary.org>

Human libraries, or living libraries as they are also known, have gained popularity in recent times. Teacher librarians could use the ideas presented by this organisation to explore the concept with a view to cataloguing members of their school community and local area.

SCIS no. 1886905

2019 – INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

<https://en.iyil2019.org>

There are now approximately 7,000 languages spoken around the world, with almost one-third in danger of disappearing. To preserve the cultural and historical significance of these languages, UNESCO has declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages. School library staff will find a variety of material on this website to resource the topic for the 2019 school year.

SCIS no. 1886905

LORAX PROJECT

www.seussville.com/loraxproject

Primary-aged students will be enchanted by this Dr Seuss offering featuring the Lorax.

Students can undertake games and activities, and gather information — all of which encourage them to protect forests and endangered animals.

SCIS no. 1886933

PENCIL CODE

<https://pencilcode.net>

Pencil Code was developed to advance 'computer science education by making programming as simple and as universal as using a pencil'. Students can program in blocks or text to create music, games, stories, and art. Teachers are catered for with specific materials and a manual.

SCIS no. 1823979

SCHOOL LIBRARIES — VIDEOS

<https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/school-libraries/videos>

Emanating from the National Library of New Zealand, this collection of short videos focuses on school libraries, digital literacy, and reading engagement. The videos are of a professional nature and can be filtered by learning type.

SCIS no. 1886942

SCHOOLS — SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

www.sydneyoperahouse.com/schools.html

Specifics of events and programs for primary and secondary students visiting the Sydney Opera House are available on this website. The site also features details of the exciting live interactive opportunities that students can access from their own classrooms, including performances, workshops, and tours.

SCIS no. 1886925



Nigel Paull
Teacher Librarian
NSW

The websites and apps selected for review are often of a professional nature and should be initially viewed by teachers and library staff to determine suitability for students. The links, content and address of these sites are subject to change.

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Educational Lending Right

‘Please, for the sake of every children’s book author you admire, and for every child who needs inspiration: join the ELR surveys if you are given the chance so that we can keep on writing.’

— Jackie French

If your school has been invited to participate in the Educational Lending Right School Library Survey, please spare five minutes to support the Australian writing and publishing industry.

For any enquiries, please contact elr@esa.edu.au.

**Find out more
on page 5
of this issue!**



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