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Improving reading outcomes for students with dyslexia

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that involves difficulty in learning to read or in interpreting letters and words. According to the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association 2013), it is a developmental disorder that begins by school age, although it may not be recognised until later. The prevalence of dyslexia depends upon the precise definition of the disorder and the criteria used for its diagnosis (Snowling 2013), with dyslexia associations around the world (eg Australian Dyslexia Association 2018)

estimating that it affects between 10 and 20 per cent of the population. Dyslexia does not affect intelligence. Research has demonstrated that while in typical readers intelligence and reading are dynamically linked, readers with dyslexia can have high intelligence, yet read at a comparatively much lower level (Shaywitz & Shaywitz 2014).

Unlike speech, which is an 'innate' ability acquired by humans, reading is a complex task that requires specific instruction. It involves the activation of several auditory and visual processes in the brain at the same time. In an

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alphabetic language such as English, text characters represent phonemes, the basic units of spoken sound. Phonemes make up syllables, which in turn make up words. Words are grouped into phrases and sentences that contain meaning.

The first step in learning to read an alphabetic language is phonological, and involves decoding text characters into phonemes (Adams 1990). The ability to discern the sounds, and the sequence of sounds, in a word, is called 'phonemic awareness'. Readers rely on this phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge to decode words.

Once this decoding is accomplished, the reader internally 'hears' each word. This activates the speech-understanding parts of the brain to obtain the meaning of the words and thereby understand the sentences that comprise them. As readers become more proficient, they start to recognise whole words, and even phrases, by shape. For example, proficient readers can very quickly read and understand a phrase such as 'How are you?' simply by looking at it and recognising the words. This is a function known as 'sight word recognition' that involves the visual processing parts of the brain and enables reading fluency.

Many students with dyslexia have a specific difficulty in automatising word recognition (Vellutino et al 2004). This is likely based on phonological skill deficiencies associated with phonological coding deficits. Research and experience have shown that while there is no cure for dyslexia (since it is neurobiological), it can be remediated with appropriate interventions. These include direct, explicit and multi-sensory programs that include the five essential skills for reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Hempenstall 2016).

Students with dyslexia also demonstrate deficits in rapid automatized naming (RAN). Many of the tests involved in diagnosing dyslexia include RAN tasks that measure how quickly a student can name letters (eg the Test of Word Reading Efficiency, or TOWRE).

A particular problem with the English alphabet is that many letters have similar characteristics, and some are mirror images of each other (see Figure 1). This makes letters difficult to distinguish, and readers with dyslexia often report rotating, flipping and/or reversing letters. These similarities may also contribute to the RAN deficiency mentioned above.

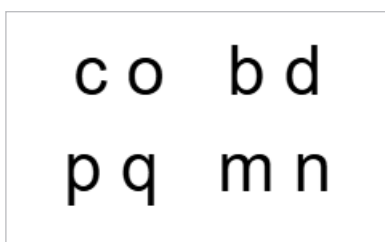


Figure 1. Many letters in the English alphabet are mirror images of each other or have similar characteristics.

How changing the format can improve reading outcomes

There is a growing body of research investigating how changing the format of a text can improve reading outcomes for students with dyslexia. Zorzi et al. (2012) showed that a simple manipulation of letter spacing substantially improved text reading performance of participants, without any prior training. Their results showed that participants read 20 per cent faster on average and made 50 per cent fewer mistakes. They concluded that the extra-large letter spacing improved reading outcomes because students with dyslexia are abnormally affected by 'crowding', a visual processing deficit that affects letter recognition.

Schneps et al. (2013) used eye-tracking to investigate the effect of shorter lines for people with dyslexia. They also looked at other factors, including replicating the results of Zorzi et al. with letter spacing.

Schneps et al. found that participants' reading speeds improved by 27 per cent, and the number of eye fixations was reduced by 11 per cent. An eye fixation is simply the point at which the eyes come to rest on the page in the process of reading.

Pijpker (2013) examined whether the reading performance of participants with dyslexia could be improved by changing the font and background colour of the text. His research included two groups (participants with dyslexia and participants who did not have dyslexia) and compared results when reading in Arial font compared to a dyslexic font (see Figure 2). The results showed that there was a significant main effect for the participants with dyslexia when reading in the dyslexic font. On average, reading in the dyslexic font reduced the number of errors by 16.1 per cent for people with dyslexia. Changing the font for participants who did not have dyslexia did not seem to have a significant effect (a decrease in errors of 5.7 per cent).

What are Dyslexic Books?

Dyslexic Books are specially designed books for readers with dyslexia. Drawing from the research discussed above, the books are formatted to optimise reading outcomes. This includes printing in a larger font size, increasing the spacing between letters, words and lines, and using a specially designed dyslexic font, Open Dyslexic (see Figure 3).

As discussed above, many letters

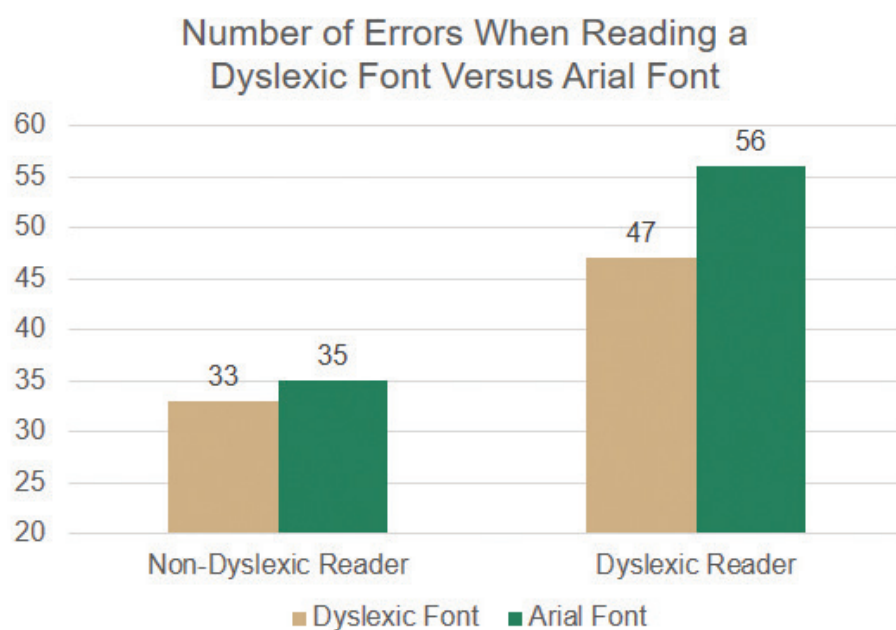


Figure 2. The number of errors when reading Arial font compared to a dyslexic font. Adapted from (Pijpker 2013).

Hi, my name is Andy (moan). This is my friend Terry (groan).	Hi, my name is Andy (moan). This is my friend Terry (groan).
We live in a tree (moan, groan).	We live in a tree (moan, groan).
Well, when I say 'tree', I mean treehouse.	Well, when I say 'tree', I mean treehouse.

Figure 3. Comparison of the Dyslexic Books layout (right) with a regular (Arial) font (left), using an excerpt from 'The 104-Storey Treehouse' by Andy Griffiths © Flying Beetroot Pty Ltd 2018

in English have similar characteristics or are mirror images of each other. The Open Dyslexic font alleviates some of the difficulties typically reported by readers with dyslexia, such as swapping or flipping letters and skipping lines without noticing. It does this by differentiating each letter, using distinctive features and changing letters so that they are no longer mirror images of other letters. Some of the features include:

- bolded capitals
- bolded bottoms of letters
- slanted letters
- larger letter openings

- increased spacing between letters.

Dyslexic Books (through its parent company Read How You Want) has relationships with many of the major publishers in Australia and around the world. This enables a wide selection of titles to be made available in the dyslexic format, usually within a month of publication. Dyslexic Books works with librarians (in both school and public libraries) to encourage a greater selection of writing to be made available in accessible formats in their library collections. As such, discounts are available to schools and libraries when ordering

books through the Dyslexic Books website dyslexicbooks.com.

Image credits

Cover image supplied by SCIS. All other images supplied by Anna Boyle.

References

For a full list of references, please see the online version of this article (scisdata.com/connections).

Anna Boyle

Read How You Want/Dyslexic Books

Anna holds a Bachelor of Psychology from the University of Newcastle. Since joining the Read How You Want/Dyslexic Books team, Anna has applied her knowledge of learning and dyslexia for the business development of the Dyslexic Books product. readhowyouwant.com/au/dyslexicbooks.com

New and revised subject headings

Below is an overview of the new and revised subject headings approved by the SCIS Information Services Standards Committee in 2019.

New headings

Fake news

Use for works on and about disinformation in print and online media that are deliberately written to attract and mislead readers by exploiting entrenched biases.

Anxiety disorders

Use for works on medical conditions characterised by persistent, excessive worry.

Streaming technology

Use for works about transferring data (such as audio or video material) in a continuous stream, including use in education.

Recessions

Use for works on a significant decline or slowdown in economic activity that goes on for more than a few months. For works on a severe decline in economic activity that lasts for many years, see Depressions,

Economic. For works on situations where the value of assets drops off rapidly, causing a collapse in the economy, see Financial crises.

Financial crises

See also names of specific financial crises*, e.g. Global Financial Crisis, 2008-2009.

Use for works on situations where the value of assets drops off rapidly, causing a collapse in the economy. For works on a significant decline or slowdown in economic activity that goes on for more than a few months, see Recessions. For works on a severe decline in economic activity that lasts for many years, see Depressions, Economic.

Global Financial Crisis, 2008-2009

Children--Mental health

Surveillance

Kolkata (India)

Used for Calcutta (India)

Revised subject headings

- Aboriginal peoples – Dreaming
- Anglican church
- Characters and characteristics
- Characters and characteristics in films
- Characters and characteristics in literature
- Child psychiatry
- Church
- Churches
- Creation
- Cults
- Depressions, Economic
- European Union
- Literature – 20th century
- Literature, Medieval
- Literature, Modern
- Methodist church
- Protestant churches
- Sects

The full reference structure for each of these headings can be found in <https://my.scisdata.com/standards>.

Cataloguing team, SCIS

Education Services Australia

SCIS is more

Welcome to 2020, and Issue 112 of *Connections*! We are looking forward to another busy year – look out for upcoming professional learning sessions and webinars (scisdata.com/professional-learning). We love talking with the SCIS community!

When we are out and about at conferences, or in SCIS workshops, we are often asked about SCIS Authority Files, and how they can improve search and discovery in the library catalogue.

What are authority files?

Authority files specify the authorised terms for headings in catalogue records and link these to other, related, terms. This creates ‘see’ and ‘see also’ references behind the scenes so that the user can find all of the resources in the catalogue that are relevant to their search.

For example, if a user is looking for a book on bugs, they can type this term into the catalogue. However, the authorised subject heading is actually ‘insects’. If the library has SCIS Authority Files, the authority file (in this case a Subject Authority File) will link the terms, and direct the user to resources with the subject heading ‘insects’.

The same applies to Name Authority Files; for example, J.K. Rowling has also published under the names ‘Newt Scamander’ and ‘Robert Galbraith’. The references in the Name Authority Files for J.K. Rowling link these pseudonyms to her.

The third type of authority file that SCIS produces is Series Authority Files. These enable titles that are part of a series to be grouped so that students can easily find them all and read them in the correct order. For example, each of the different ‘Horrible’ series, and the ‘Star Wars’ series such as ‘Star wars. Clone wars’ have their own Series Authority file.

What do you get with SCIS Authority Files?

A subscription to SCIS Authority Files allows you to download Subject, Name and Series Authority Files from the SCIS website, and upload them to your LMS.

When you come to download the files, you have a choice for each type of either the full file – which contains every authority record, or the ‘Reference only’ file – which contains only those records with headings



that contain references. Headings will not contain references if there is only one subject topic, name or book in a series. For example, the author Roald Dahl is only known by that name, and so there are no links to be made to pseudonyms, or alternative forms of his name.

Libraries that import all of their catalogue records from SCIS only need to use the ‘Reference only’ authority files, as this will give them all of the ‘see’, and ‘see also’ references to link their records together.

If you do some original cataloguing in your library, such as for a vertical file or for locally produced material, then you may wish to download the full authority files. Then when you assign SCIS headings to the new records that you are creating, you can verify them against the SCIS authorities. This will ensure that the headings you add are consistent with the headings in the records that you are importing from SCIS.

Not sure whether you have a subscription?

To verify whether your school is subscribed to SCIS Authority Files, simply log in to your SCIS account at scisdata.com. Once you have logged in, click on your school’s name at the top right, and select ‘My subscriptions’ from the menu that appears – this will show your current subscriptions.

How do you subscribe to SCIS Authority Files?

First, check that your LMS is compatible with MARC format authority files. Your library system vendor can advise you about that, and which types of authority files they support.

To subscribe to SCIS Authority Files, log in to SCIS at scisdata.com and click on ‘Products’. If you are not already subscribed to SCIS Authority Files, you will see an option to subscribe, and can click on ‘Add to cart’ and then proceed to checkout.

How do you download SCIS Authority Files?

To download the SCIS Authority Files, log in to SCIS at scisdata.com, click on the Authority Files tab and select your preferred version of each authority that you are downloading (full, or reference only) by clicking on the corresponding button in the Download column. Once you have downloaded the files, follow the directions provided by your LMS vendor to import the files into your system.

Happy cataloguing!



Carmen Eastman
Connections editor, SCIS
Education Services Australia

SYNERGY HIGHLIGHTS: THE FIRST 15 YEARS



Synergy, the online journal of the School Library Association of Victoria (slav.org.au), is published twice a year. Articles are written by those in the field and are often practical in nature. The most recent issue is available to members only, but earlier issues are available to all readers. The journal aims to present a wider view of the world of school

librarianship, emphasising current research, directions and ideas in educational practice. SLAV encourages and supports members to have an advocacy role in their school setting and beyond. The *Synergy highlights* ebook is a collection of the best articles since publication of *Synergy* commenced in 2003.

Each year SLAV offers dynamic, inspiring opportunities for teacher librarians, librarians and other library professionals to build their essential role in engaging and developing lifelong learners. An extensive professional program is delivered, and library staff are able to participate in activities through their local SLAV branch network.

The articles in *Synergy highlights* were chosen by *Synergy* editorial board members Dr Robin Zeidler and Dr Rosemary Abbott. Because of the challenge presented by the excellent quality and large number of articles, carefully considered criteria were identified:

- relevance and application for current library practice and issues in school librarianship
- an emphasis on research undertaken in Australia or relevant to the Australian school context
- a wide range of articles ensuring coverage of key areas of contemporary school library practice
- quality of the research methodology, findings and interpretations

- integration of a range of technologies
- identifying the unique and critical role of teacher librarians as both information and education experts.

There was some flexibility in adherence to these criteria to ensure the broadest possible range of informative and engaging material. In the articles chosen, student learning is paramount, and is linked to the crucial role of those working in school libraries. Prominent Australian and international researchers are featured.

Carol Gordon's articles provide wide-ranging ideas on professional practice, including the value of evidence and reflection, and the critical role of advocacy. Her focus on student learning allows practitioners to reimagine what the school library can be.

Similarly, Ross Todd describes the role of the school library as 'empower[ing] learning through creativity, discovery, inquiry, cooperation, and collaboration'. Todd provides supporting evidence from his 2009 research for the New Jersey Association of School Librarians.

Lyn Hay details research undertaken in the Student Learning Through Australian School Libraries project, providing evidence of the role of the school library in supporting student learning.

Other articles present possibilities for school libraries to both embrace and be agents of change and cover the transformative nature of what might and does happen in school libraries. The broad scope of articles is intended to be thought-provoking for library professionals everywhere, giving practical advice, detailing research findings, and equipping them for the future.

Synergy Highlights is available from the SLAV store:
slav.org.au/store

Rosemary Abbott
Synergy Reviews Editor

2020 ASLA Literacy Research Summits

'Capturing research to enable literacy leaders to transform the learning culture of schools'

The Australian School Library Association (ASLA) is proud to announce that Dr Margaret Merga will be the keynote speaker at a national series of Literacy Research Summits to be held in capital cities across Australia in 2020. Literacy expert and Senior Lecturer at Edith Cowan University Dr Merga will present key recent research findings that have strong practical implications for literacy leaders in our schools, particularly in relation to the role of the school library.

During the summits, a range of 'change agents', experienced practitioners, and published children's authors will explore the application of her ideas through facilitated workshops and panel discussions. Delegates will leave the summits equipped with practical strategies to develop robust, research-based programs designed to support and raise literacy levels, with school libraries sitting at the heart of these endeavours.

Please register at asla.org.au. Costs are \$150 for members and \$225 for non-members, which includes morning tea and lunch.

May 2020
— Save the date!

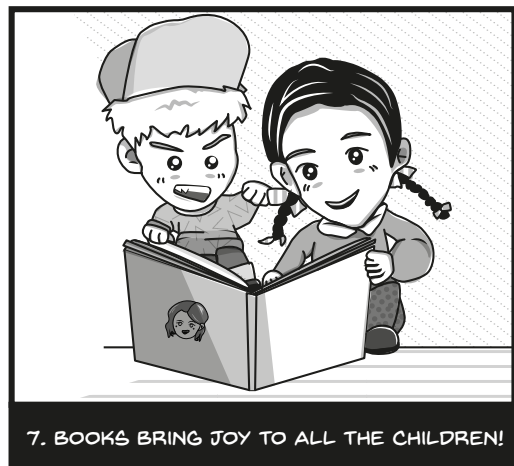
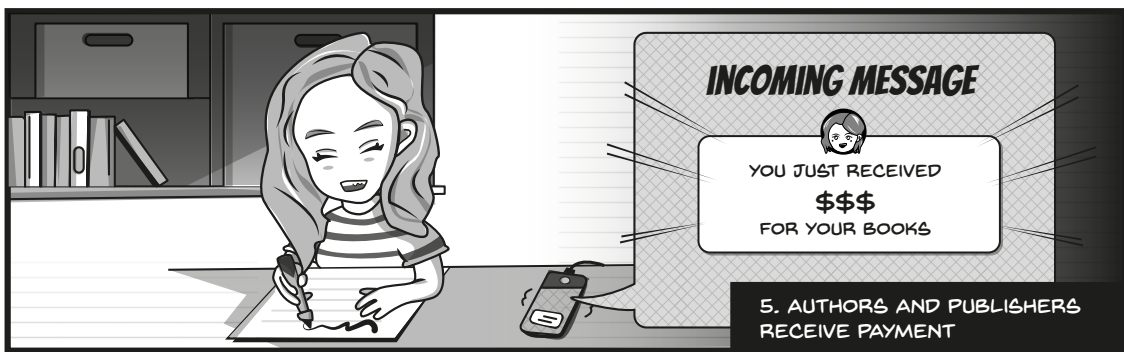
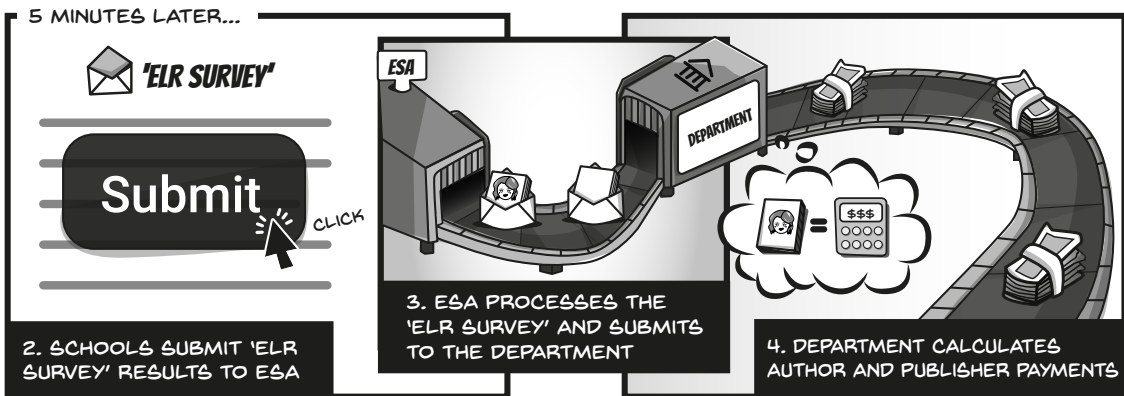
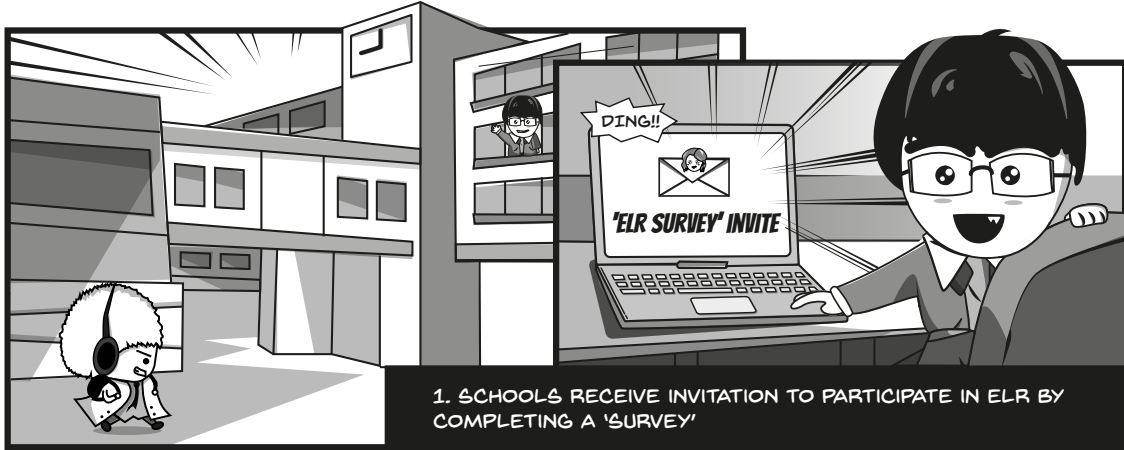
DATES:

- PERTH: 2 May**
— State Library of Western Australia
- ADELAIDE: 9 May**
— State Library of South Australia
- SYDNEY: 16 May**
— State Library of New South Wales
- MELBOURNE: 23 May**
— State Library of Victoria

ASLA is proud to be supported by the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) as the Gold sponsor of the 2020 ASLA Literacy Research Summits.

Supporting Australian book creators

Education Services Australia (ESA) would like to give a big thank you to all the schools who participated in the Educational Lending Right (ELR) School Library Survey 2019-20. To celebrate, we have created a comic to show how you have helped to encourage the growth and development of the Australia writing and publishing industries.



WORKING TOGETHER: COLLABORATION BETWEEN LIBRARIES AND BOOKSTORES

Kristen Proud, the owner/manager of Squishy Minnie Bookstore, explores the variety of ways that schools, teachers and library staff can engage with bookstores.

My partner Lucky and I opened Squishy Minnie, a specialist childrens and young adults (YA) bookstore, just over two years ago in Kyneton, a small regional town in Victoria. Our main aim was to increase the access local children and young people had to quality literature and to literary events.

Prior to opening Squishy Minnie, I spent all of my adult work life in the community sector, working with vulnerable communities. I believed that we could create a bookstore that welcomed everyone, provided a sense of belonging and increased access to exceptional literature.

My vision for Squishy was that any child or young adult walking through the door of our bookstore would see themselves represented in our books, regardless of their skin colour, culture, religion, gender, ability, socio-economic background, family make-up, and so on. This would also ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to gain empathy and understanding from books that might portray characters from backgrounds different from their own.

Engaging with book-loving teachers, enthusiastic librarians and innovative principals is one of the most joyful parts of our existence. For us, we want to ensure that we are getting the right books into the hands of young folk — not just any books — because, even as adults, we know that reading the right book at the right time can be a formative experience. It might be a non-fiction book that grabs them, or it might be a coming of age one that shows someone with similar experiences, and that they are not alone.

Supporting librarians to choose excellent books that kids love and teachers feel enthusiastic about using as teaching resources is a wonderful way of achieving our goal of getting the right books into kids' hands at the right time.

“ Opportunities for schools and independent bookstores to collaborate are vast, varied and rich. ”

Opportunities for schools and independent bookstores to collaborate are vast, varied and rich. Here are some of the programs and events we run with schools:

- We currently organise five book clubs a month in store at Squishy, and have recently started outreach book clubs at a number of nearby schools. These monthly book clubs run after school finishes so that families who may not be able to get their child to the bookstore to participate only need to arrange for their child to get home one hour later. We received a small grant from Puffin, which means there is no cost to the schools for the books. After they have been read for book



club, they can then be used as class sets.

- With the support of our two local high schools, we run a years 10–12 English Study Club after school once per week. This is staffed by one of our bookstore team members who is also a secondary English teacher.
- Recently Penguin offered for well-known author Andrew Daddo, and illustrator Stephen Michale King to visit three local schools. We approached several schools we have existing relationships with to see who was interested.
- We have organised several other author visits to our local schools and even assisted a local youth detention centre to choose the novels most appropriate for them to establish a book club with.
- We offer a 15 per cent discount to schools for our books, and we work with librarians and teachers to create a longlist of suggestions for them if they are looking for books on particular topics. For example, we have worked with a mobile librarian to create a selection of non-fiction books that might be suitable for a wide range of ages, given that the schools the librarian visited were often quite small, with students aged 5 through to 12.
- We've put together lists of books for Catholic primary schools matched to their inquiry units each term.
- We've developed lists of books related to grief, respectful relationships, climate change and Aboriginal Australians.
- We've made suggestion for books to be used in literature circles. We frequently suggest books to be read to whole classes and, more recently, we have made suggestions for texts to be used in secondary schools to meet specific teaching outcomes.
- We work with schools who get their fiction books through standing orders, but then order their non-fiction books through us. We have a broad selection of non-fiction titles and we are happy to provide a list of books (via our website) for teachers and teacher librarians to browse through, related to specific teaching topics.
- There is an annual book fair for local primary schools where we give them back 20 per cent of sales in the form of a credit with Squishy Minnie, and we also assist them in choosing the books they spend their credit on.
- Our ten-seater table is available for schools to use, and we recently had a group of mobile librarians use the table for a planning day. We organised for author and editor Davina Bell to meet with the librarians while she was visiting Squishy for story time.



Author and editor Davina Bell talking with visiting librarians.

- We have had a number of class groups of younger ages visit for reading times, often themed with books relating to specific topics as requested by classroom teachers. This year we had a group look at friendship themes and, the week after, a different school brought a class of Year 2's who were asked to choose a book for their school library and then present to the class why the book is something that their school should have in the library.

There is a huge variety of ways that schools, teachers and library staff can engage with bookstores to not only benefit students, but also to support classroom teaching. For us, the biggest challenge is that schools and school library professionals

sometimes do not understand that we are here to help and that we share their passion for literacy. I have found that the value base of independent bookstore owners is much more in line with teachers, librarians and schools than they might initially think.

If your school is in a town or suburb with an independent bookstore, pop in and introduce yourself and see if there is an opportunity to partner with them. For us at Squishy Minnie, we are more interested in working with schools in a personalised, one-on-one manner (both face to face and via email and Skype etc.), but other independent bookstores may be able to conduct presentations for schools, or similar. Each independent bookstore is different and has booklovers working inside who hold varied expertise and knowledge that might help to make your job a little lighter.

Image credits

Lakshal Perera (lakshalperera.com)

Kristen Proud

Owner/Manager Squishy Minnie Bookstore

You can find Kristen and Squishy Minnie at squishyminnie.com.au, on Facebook at m.facebook.com/squishyminnie and Instagram @squishyminnie.

SCHOOL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT: YARRA VALLEY GRAMMAR

SCIS speaks to Yarra Valley Grammar Principal, Dr Mark Merry, and Head of Libraries, Miriam Meehan, about the development of the innovative new Research Centre with the John Pascoe Resource Centre at its heart.

Dr Mark Merry

Please tell us about the new Yarra Valley Grammar Research Centre and why the school has invested in it?

There was a reasonably shallow view at one stage that libraries were going to go out of fashion because everyone could sit at home and do their research online. That misses the point. Libraries aren't just places where you have to go to look up things. They are actually, particularly in schools, your community hub — where people come together to learn together.

When we designed the Research Centre, we wanted to make it a place of welcome. As clubs, parishes and neighbourhoods are in decline, schools become the new neighbourhood. The Research Centre is where the school administration is located. It is a place where we have our Chapel of the Holy Spirit, which is a significant gathering space in the school.

The John Pascoe Resource Centre was central to the entire design, and is embedded in a broader space — visiting the library is part of a big adventure and I think that's important. It's not, 'Oh I'm going to the library', it's more 'I'm going to the Research Centre where I can go and read a book, and have something to eat and talk to my friends, and then go in and do a bit of research'.

What do you see as the key value or purpose of the Research Centre?

Our vision for the Research Centre is that it's not just going to be a place where our current students are studying. We intend to enter into partnerships with universities, research groups, and consultants where they will come in and work with our teachers and students in joint research projects.

We opened the building at the beginning of Term 2 this year. Already, we have one project underway, run by Monash University. There is also a consultancy group — big thinkers in the area of school leadership and teacher quality and effectiveness — who plan to base themselves in the Centre, and work with the kids and our teachers.

So, the primary benefit of the Centre is



Yarra Valley Grammar Principal, Dr Mark Merry working with students in the John Pascoe Library.

that research is happening and we're going to have academics, teachers and students working together in the same space. That gives our students a long-term view of what education is about. And that's a hugely important thing.

“I think the cultural landscape is changing, and that schools recognise the value of libraries more.”

The secondary benefit is that we're looking to open the Centre in the early mornings and the late evenings so that students, teachers and parents will have access. Our Year 9 students will run a café that provides meals for late-night library users, with the aim of developing small business/entrepreneurial skills for careers education and to help inform their subject selection for Year 10. Senior students can be here after hours, and they might have a light dinner while they're doing their research. So, there's a knock-on effect:

our Year 9's are running a business — they're providing a service — and our senior students who are studying after hours can access the service.

The Research Centre and John Pascoe Resource Centre are actually attached to the Year 9 centre because we think that Year 9 is where a lot of the action is. Year 9 is about skills acquisition in study, research, and motivation.

What was the design process for the Research Centre and the John Pascoe Resource Centre?

Initially, the library was a dark, old and tired space. The kids brought life to it, but it was an uphill battle. So we bulldozed the entire area and started again. I wanted a sense of arrival, and a sense of openness and inclusivity — an open plan space. I wanted to incorporate the chapel, so not only is there the research being done in intellectual, academic pursuits, but there's a space for higher order things, for worship. And, there's also a place where kids get a bit excited about going, such as the rooftop terrace.

So that was my part. Then we called in the experts. The chaplain was involved with the chapel, and the library staff were involved with the library. Our head librarian at the time, Liz Montanaro, worked very

closely with the architects — and with some of the kids — about what it should look like, and how it should work. There was almost a six-month consultation that went on in that space.

It was Winston Churchill who said, ‘We shape our buildings, and afterwards, our buildings shape us’.

I’m a firm believer in the importance of space, and that’s why, when you come to Yarra Valley Grammar, the environment’s very important. If you sit in the reading room, for example, you’ve got this beautiful view over the grounds. It’s just a very positive space. In my own home, I read in my garden. That to me is where I love to read. So, we’ve in many ways replicated that experience here, and I think the kids respond well.

Our secondary school is actually configured like a university. So if you’re studying History, Psychology, English and so forth, you’ll go to the Arts faculty. There’s the Maths and Science faculties, and we’re building a new Fine Arts faculty and a Languages faculty, and so forth. All of the individual faculties surround the Research Centre. It’s a hub and that’s why it’s the centre of all the action. I’ve been over there and I’ve seen classes come in, and they’re doing research with the teacher, and there are good conversations going on, and that’s the way it was designed.

‘How does the research centre enhance learning?’

Study is not something we hope kids only do at home in front of a screen. It is about sitting with your peers and teachers, and observing others. It’s about working and interacting, and talking to teacher librarians as co-researchers, rather than perpetuating that old narrative of ‘Ssh, be quiet!’

One thing you’ll notice about the design of the library is, it’s very open. There’s no security in the library. We looked at our kids’ use of our books over a period of time, and realised they don’t go missing. The library opens up into other parts of the school, so, in the better weather, we open the sliding doors, and kids can study and read in the little courtyards outside.

The rooftop terrace is opening once the weather gets better too, and that’s going to be available for students to have a read, to get together and have lunch. So, we’ve expanded — in a sense — the concept of a library to be the centre focus of the whole school. Expanded it, but also kept it quite

traditional in a lot of ways.

We do have areas where the kids get online, but our library staff are very keen, particularly in the area of fiction, for kids to physically have books. And, so, we have an excellent collection. There’s a whole new area of research that suggests you take in more information if, physically, you’re holding something, or you’re writing something, than if you’re looking at a screen. Our kids are using the physical collection all the time.

I love the Research Centre, and I love the John Pascoe Resource Centre because it’s got a heritage room, it connects to our history. It’s got a reading room, in the very old school sense of the word. And the students, particularly Year 12s, take that very seriously. They go into that quiet space.

I think the cultural landscape is changing, and that schools recognise the value of libraries more. There was a period there where libraries were a bit of a battleground in schools. So, what you had was a dynamic where library staff were having to police the library. Libraries are morphing now into a positive place where kids want to be. And teacher librarians now are seen as a great resource for young people.

Miriam Meehan

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

I am Head of Libraries at Yarra Valley Grammar. My role is multifaceted. I teach a Humanities class most years. I also oversee the operations of the secondary and primary school libraries, coordinate the purchase and processing of resources, and promote reading of all types to classes in years 7–9. I build LibGuide resources for staff and students; teach skills sessions to classes; and collaborate with staff on course development, and the integration of technology into learning. None of this is done by me alone – I have an awesome teacher librarian who runs the primary school library, and I am surrounded by the best team of library technicians, who do all the day-to-day work that keeps us functioning.

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

This is difficult for me to answer. I have been a teacher librarian for over 30 years. Every year, the work is different. I have moved between the government and independent school sectors and, for a while, I worked

with a teacher professional organisation. But, if I had to pick just one thing, I would say people — the ones I work with, the ones I teach, and the ones who teach me. I love recognising the amazing impacts that people have had on me, and I hope that I have made a positive impact on them.

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

The library’s role is multidimensional. Despite the popular misconception that libraries are dinosaurs that are on the way out, the place of libraries in our world is more important than ever. The most important aspect of a library’s role is to be at the heart of any place — school or society — that values culture, learning, multiple perspectives, critical thinking, curiosity and creativity (this is not an exhaustive list!). It is not about perfect order, or showroom cleanliness. Great libraries foster thinking, innovation, change, challenge and inclusiveness. I am lucky to work in a school that values what a great library can offer to its community. You can see the evidence of this in the new space. Liz Montanaro, our previous head of department, had a definite vision for the library design that would encompass these ideas, and you can see how that has become realised in the Resource Centre.

“The most important aspect of a library’s role is to be at the heart of any place – school or society – that values culture, learning, multiple perspectives, critical thinking, curiosity and creativity.”

Are there any current issues or challenges facing your library? How are you working to overcome these?

As with most libraries, we face the ongoing challenge of getting staff and students to recognise that Google isn’t the only, or even

the best, answer. We are working with other heads of department, and with teaching staff, to build strategies that foster authentic learning. The curriculum is always being adjusted to reflect new thinking, strategies and tools, and the libraries, in both the primary and the secondary schools, support and partake in curriculum design. Both Wendy Andrews, in the primary school, and I teach classes for reading, skills development, and curriculum. Working with the staff and students in different modes helps us to forge relationships and create learning environments that suit our users' needs.



Yarra Valley Grammar students enjoying the John Pascoe Library.

How do you promote reading and literacy in your school? Are there any challenges in doing so?

I get to work with all of our Year 7s and 8s, and some of our Year 9s, through our reading enrichment program. Classes come into the library for reading once a fortnight. I have the opportunity to speak with them about new titles, genres and authors, and about tools for finding stories that they want to read.

One of my most successful reading sessions involved the sharing of a book or two that had left an impression on us at some point. I shared how *The diary of Anne Frank* impacted me as a Year 6 student, and how my love of Richard III had been ignited by reading *The daughter of time*. Students then had to come back with something that had reached them. It was terrific — students brought in books from when they were very young, or told us about when a much-loved adult had read a particular story to them. Sometimes, they couldn't remember the exact name of the story, but they absolutely remembered the experience.

I also use special occasions like Valentine's Day to host 'blind dates' with a book as well as 'speed dating a genre'. Now that we are in our new space, we are planning on reigniting our Literature Week activities — guest speakers, poetry, debates, and lots of food!

And this is just a small thing, but I have seen it make an enormous difference — we try hard to support requests from students for additions to our collections. The childhood story exercise enabled us to add titles to our collection that we could show as peer recommendations. It was wonderful to see how the enthusiasm of one student could spark interest in others.

As for challenges, there are quite a few. We have several students who 'don't like reading and so don't do it'. We try to maintain high-interest items in our collections, including magazines, newspapers, graphic novels, audio, e-audio and ebook titles. I try to encourage students to see the library as something of a buffet — you get to try a whole range of different tastes so that you may find one that you like. I also work hard not to say 'no' to a child who wants to read a particular book. I will talk to them about language and scenes that they may encounter in a story, and let them know that they are under no obligation to finish it. In some cases, where a book can be seen to be truly problematic, I will ring the parent/carer and discuss the matter with them, and then act on their advice.

How do you promote an interest in STEAM areas in your school? Are there any challenges in doing so?

STEAM has taken off in the Maths and Science faculties, and we work to support their programs in whatever way we can. We are fortunate to have a makerspace built into our library space, and we are in the process of developing programs that can utilise this area. We have just launched our Lego Club with Year 7s — they are currently building a wind turbine. Ideally, these students will then be able to mentor other students through other building sessions. We want to foster a culture of curiosity and inquiry in all of our library spaces, and this is where we have chosen to start. We will develop problem/challenge scenarios where we can encourage students to find potential solutions to real-world problems. We are in the early stages of this journey, but it is already creating considerable interest among our students.

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

One of Liz's library design ideas was the building of the Heritage Room. It houses the bulk of the History collection. Humanities classes from Years 7 to 12 book into the space to access the resources and library staff. The room has a different atmosphere about it, and both students and staff have commented on how it makes the idea of library use and research seem more tangible.

LibGuides have also been of tremendous help in raising the profile of the library. Staff make requests based on curriculum needs, and I then work with them to design learning tools and scenarios that, at least partially, meet those needs. Most staff will then book their classes into the library for skills work and resource access. This is an ongoing need though — despite students using the guides across year levels and faculties, some still default to 'Do you have a book on ...' This situation does create a great learning opportunity — I get to (re)show them the tools — but I would be so much happier to see them being more independent.

We try to support all users as much as we can so that they feel that they have both a space and a team that are there for them. We welcome students who need a space to 'chill', as well as those who devour books, and challenge us to keep feeding them. We keep a quiet eye on students who may need some TLC, and we welcome staff who want a space to work (or escape to), especially when the pressures are high.

What is your favourite thing about SCIS?

We love how SCIS saves us time. We can download records for our catalogue in no time flat! It's so much better than the old days of original cataloguing of everything! SCIS helps us to stay current. This is so important in a world where our users can access information instantaneously and 24/7.

Image credits

Images supplied by Miriam Meehan



Dr Mark Merry
CEO/Principal of Yarra Valley Grammar School, and former National Chair of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA).



Miriam Meehan
Head of Libraries, Yarra Valley Grammar School.

A NOT SO SECRET GARDEN

Kathryn Williams and Heather Harrison, from Fraser Coast Anglican College, share their experience and the rewards of transforming part of their library space into a storybook garden.

‘Once upon a time’ we had a dream to turn part of the library into a storybook garden. Walk through the doors today and that dream has become a reality. The striking entryway consists of stacked, oversized book sculptures that hold a scrolled sign welcoming people into the space. Central to the garden are four, buttressed strangler figs that clad existing columns, extending out to support a leafy canopy.

Dotted through the fig trees of the storybook garden is an array of Australian wildlife including a ringtail possum, a quoll, a black cockatoo, a kookaburra, a lace monitor, a family of sleeping bats, and various insects. These animals have created the launching pad for the cross-curricular lessons, with sustainability and environment being our first major theme. Reading and storytelling promotes brain development and imagination, teaches a child about language and emotions, and strengthens relationships. Bringing creativity and literature together can be a powerful tool in teaching. It allows children to explore their imaginations. Getting involved in a story reinforces the learning, brings a subject to life and therefore captures a child’s interest.

Dream into reality

What does it take to create such a space? The first six months were spent in discussions, research and meetings. It was never the intention that we put a tree or garden in our library just because it looked pretty — it had to have a purpose, and pitching that to the stakeholders was the first step, as it had to be a shared vision.

After initial discussions with the business/finance manager, we sourced images from around the world of indoor and outdoor storybook gardens and located a local company, NatureWorks, who specialise in artificial indoor trees and entrance statement sculptures. We then presented to our executive leadership team and college council an overview of our vision and the educational values this would inculcate in our students.

Once we received approval in principle for the idea, we sent NatureWorks photographs of our space. They subsequently created several designs that met our layout and approved budget, and staff were asked for input. Once the desired option was agreed upon, another proposal was submitted to council for final approval. Over the next 12 months, we received photographs and updates as the garden and entrance statement took shape.

A new take on the 21st century library

Our library is only 10 years old and was the first in Australia to be created under the Building the Education Revolution program. Former prime minister Kevin Rudd even visited and laid a brick or two. Technology was a firm focus in the facility, which even in the space of 10 years, has undergone some significant changes. However, over the past couple of years, we have observed that, despite all the technology on offer, the students continually gravitate to the traditional board games, LEGO tables, colouring,



Bringing creativity and literature together can be a powerful tool in teaching.

drawing, cutting, sticking, pasting, creating and shared reading of various picture books.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from the college community about our storybook garden has confirmed for us that a 21st century library can be a dynamic place that appeals to young and old alike. Learning in such a space enriches not only the literary experience but provides endless opportunities to develop students’ understanding of their natural and human environments.

People questioned why we needed changes when our facility was still so new, but libraries should never remain static and, when the funds became available, we wanted to bring something innovative and dynamic to our already much-loved space.

I would urge you to have the courage to put your ideas forward about your library space — even if they seem unattainable. Be prepared for obstacles — they’re a given. Ultimately, we needed to show faith in people and belief in our ideas because the rewards are exponential.

Image credits

Image supplied by Kathryn Williams

Kathryn Williams

Library Services Manager
Fraser Coast Anglican College

Heather Harrison

Library Technician
Fraser Coast Anglican College

WHAT IS THE GIST?

Resources to inspire and inform girls, schools and families in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

In 2016, the Office of the Chief Scientist released a data sheet that headlined with 'Australia loses female talent at every stage of the STEM pipeline despite no innate cognitive gender differences'.

This statement is mirrored around the world, particularly for countries that are more likely to hold implicit gender stereotypes (Nosek 2009). It's not an easy time for girls in STEM. Girls are bombarded with messaging that they do not belong in STEM, that STEM is unfeminine, that they do not have the natural capacity to succeed in STEM, and that there is no place for them in the STEM workforce.

As educators, we might not be able to change popular culture, or even influence family perceptions, but we can strive to provide gender-inclusive learning environments, make connections with positive role models, and open dialogue about women in STEM.

In 2018, the Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation and Science engaged Education Services Australia (ESA) to develop a resource to support girls to engage more positively with STEM study and careers.

ESA conducted local and international literature reviews and stakeholder interviews, and sought feedback from expert panels to understand the needs of girls, their schools and their families. The result is The Girls in STEM Toolkit (The GiST) (thegist.edu.au), an online resource that brings together existing resources, programs and opportunities in one location, and provides information, inspiration and tools for girls and their communities.

Girls interviewed by ESA expressed views that were consistent with local and global findings (Chapman & Vivian 2016, Microsoft 2018); they were frustrated and disappointed at the lack of career information, and many simply couldn't see themselves in STEM careers. In some cases, their initial passion or enthusiasm, particularly for technology, had been dampened by unenthusiastic male teachers, a lack of girls in the subject cohort, or a perception that only the very best and brightest girls could be successful on that career path.

As the conversations with the girls showed, it can be difficult for girls to aspire to be something that they can't or don't see



Illustration © Education Services Australia

within the society surrounding them. This is where the resources held by libraries may help to fill the information gap. Libraries can showcase books and resources featuring women in STEM careers, many of them created by women in STEM themselves, and those that encourage women to pursue STEM studies and careers.

Within its Families section (thegist.edu.au/families), The GiST recommends books, films and YouTube channels that girls and families can access, along with other resources such as

podcasts and DIY activities. All of these suggestions can provide librarians with a range of possible options for their work within the school.

Schools play an important role in the careers chosen by girls, and the information and materials they provide enable girls to imagine and aspire to opportunities that they may not have believed accessible.

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Emma Durbridge

Project Manager, Girls in STEM Toolkit (The GiST)

WEBSITE + APP REVIEWS

AUSTRALIAN POETRY

australianpoetry.org

'Australian Poetry intends to do all that it can do to connect with, and genuinely support, contemporary and aspiring Australian poets.' With this in mind, Australian Poetry's website offers information on forthcoming competitions, readings and launches; their publications; mentoring assistance; and details of events for primary and secondary schools.

SCIS no. 1947372

BLOOMIN' APPS

schrockguide.net/bloomin-apps

Prominent educational technologist Kathy Schrock has managed to gather relevant apps to support Bloom's revised taxonomy. Schrock has assembled 'hotspot' apps separately for iPads, Android, Google and online users. Links to related information are also present.

SCIS no. 1574575

BRAIN IT ON!

apps.apple.com/au/app/brain-it-on/id985367692

Students will enjoy the tasks presented in this engrossing, physics-based app. Students can progress through various levels, with tasks that become increasingly complex — yet they can be solved in multiple and unique ways. The app is available for several operating systems.

SCIS no. 1947601

CAWTHRON: THE POWER OF SCIENCE

cawthron.org.nz

This website highlights the history, research and services of New Zealand's largest independent science organisation. Areas of research include aquaculture, food safety, algal technologies, biosecurity and analytical testing. Details of open days, expos and workshops for secondary students are available.

SCIS no. 1947383

CLASSROOM SCREEN

classroomscreen.com

This site offers teachers 12 widgets to project onto screens to enhance management and engagement in classrooms. The widgets include software for sound levels; work symbols; a timer; a random name generator; a calendar; a QR code reader; a drawing tool; an image uploader and, interestingly, an exit poll for students to give feedback on the lesson.

SCIS no. 1947669

ENLIGHT PIXALOOP

apps.apple.com/au/app/enlight-photoloop/id1381206010

This free app allows students to add another dimension to photos by animating them and creating moving pictures. There are many features available, allowing users to control movement, speed, direction and to add overlays. The finished product can be exported in various formats.

SCIS no. 1947616

GEOGSPACE

geogspace.edu.au

The Australian Geography Teachers Association, supported by Education Services Australia, has developed this website to provide resources for primary and secondary teachers implementing the Australian Curriculum: Geography. Classroom-ready resources are found in the core units, while the support units cater for teachers' professional learning.

SCIS no. 1665153

LONG-RANGE WEATHER AND CLIMATE

bom.gov.au/climate

The Bureau of Meteorology uses a variety of data, allied with maps, to predict Australia's long-range weather and future climate patterns. The content includes data from Australian islands and Antarctic sites, agricultural guides, climate change trends and extremes, water outlooks, and statements on current conditions.

SCIS no. 1947547

QUICK, DRAW!

quickdraw.withgoogle.com

Designed to show the capabilities of AI and machine learning this doodling activity invites players to draw an idea or object quickly. The program then uses a neural network to try and recognise the doodle in real time. As more people use the activity, the AI adds to its memory storehouse to increase its ability to quickly identify more drawings in the future.

SCIS no. 1947425

TRELLO

apps.apple.com/au/app/trello-organize-anything/id461504587

Teachers and students can utilise this organisational tool to collaborate on group projects on any topic, anywhere. Students can share ideas, create checklists, assign tasks to peers, upload links and images, and see who is working on what. This free app (additional content may be purchased) is also available for other operating systems.

SCIS no. 1853369

LEIGH HOBBS

leighhobbs.com

Popular Australian author and illustrator Leigh Hobbs has an informative and attractive website that offers students a biography; highlights of the books featuring Old Tom, Mr Chicken, Fiona the pig, and Horrible Harriet; Leigh's artwork; and his latest news.

SCIS no. 1947412



Nigel Paull

Teacher Librarian
North Coast, 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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