CONNECTiONS

40 years of SCIS

Forty years ago, the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) was born out of a need to support library staff in their role of bringing order and accessibility to educational resources. This year SCIS celebrates four decades of innovation and service.

Today, SCIS serves almost 80 per cent of schools across Australia, about 40 per cent of schools in New Zealand, over 1,000 schools in the United Kingdom, and many more around the globe. Altogether, over 10,000 schools worldwide benefit from SCIS's offerings each year – services that have grown to encompass more than cataloguing and now include professional learning, our free journal (which you're reading right now), and our additional library data service, Authority Files.

As SCIS reaches its 40th anniversary, the milestone offers us a chance to reflect on why cataloguing support is so vital for school libraries. And, how the innovations SCIS has pioneered have had enduring benefits for schools around the world. To explore this, we have spoken to two key figures who were a part of pivotal moments in SCIS's history: Doug Down, who helped shape the proposals that led to its founding, and Lance Deveson, whose work in the 1990s helped drive some of SCIS's most enduring innovations.

Library staff working at SCIS in the 1980s.

Part 1: A new chapter for school libraries

Although SCIS was formed in 1984, its roots stretch back to the late 1960s, where a growing movement highlighting the lack of library services in schools coincided with a change in the way education was approached. The concept of 'information literacy' emerged, focusing on teaching students to find, evaluate and use information critically. This resulted in an education shift in Australia from traditional didactic methods towards empowering students as active participants in their own learning. Educators focused on teaching students research skills that foster lifelong learning and problem-solving capabilities (Nimon, 2004).

Of course, teaching methods intent on fostering critical thinking and independent inquiry demand an abundance of information to be explored. As a result, there was a surge in demand for resourcing for school libraries and their collections along with the need for skilled librarians to help cultivate students' information literacy.

During this era, Doug Down was working in school libraries before his 1972 appointment as a lecturer at the Melbourne Teachers College, one of Australia's leading training institutions for school librarians at the time. As he tells it, state education departments were beginning to establish library branches that '... were giving advice

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

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SCiS Schools Catalogue Information Service

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

Celebrate our anniversary with us

In celebration of our 40 years of delivering quality services to school libraries, we're taking you inside some of the key areas that have shaped SCIS's legacy. Join us for two insightful webinars.

Free Professional Learning Webinars – Term 4 2024

Consistency Matters

Tuesday November 5 | 10 am AEDT

Join us for a webinar exploring the key changes in cataloguing standards over SCIS's 40-year history, how these changes have impacted SCIS records, and what the future may hold. This session is ideal for school library staff with some understanding of cataloguing, but newcomers to the field will also find it a useful introduction.

Serious about Series

Tuesday November 12 | 2 pm AEDT

In celebration of SCIS's 40 years of supporting school libraries, this webinar will explore the evolution of cataloguing series titles and the challenges it presents. We'll discuss how SCIS has provided series title access points throughout its history and introduced series authority lists in 2018 to improve resource retrieval. Whether you're familiar with cataloguing standards or new to library work, this session will offer valuable insights into managing series titles in your school library.

Find out more and register now

www.scisdata.com/free-scis-webinars | help@scisdata.com

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to, and sometimes providing services to school libraries, such as cataloguing records for new resources that had been bought.'

Outsourced cataloguing services were immediately integral to the operation of school libraries where teaching, not administrative work, was the focus for librarians managing them. Down emphasises this, noting, 'It provided the opportunity for teacher librarians in schools not to devote half of their time to processing items that came into the library, but to doing the teaching that was required to develop their [students'] resourcefulness.'

While these early services made an impact, they were duplicated across different areas of the country, leading to cost inefficiencies that were quickly recognised after the Whitlam government's 1972 election. Down, assisting his colleague Wesley Young, helped conduct studies commissioned by the government, which laid the groundwork for a national cataloguing service.

The studies showed how a national approach would bring a multitude of time and cost savings, both within schools and government departments, as well as better information integrity within school libraries. After years of planning and preparation, The Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS) was formed in 1984. This service would later be renamed the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) when New Zealand joined in the 1990s.

Part 2: A new frontier for library technology

As the 1980s became the early 90s, Lance Deveson, a former student of Doug Down, was working as a teacher librarian. When he landed a job in the library at Golden Point Primary School in his hometown of Ballarat, he convinced the school to purchase a computer to assist with his cataloguing. It was then that his interest in library technology was sparked. Deveson reminisces, 'I thought I was very cool, because I was automating my library.' From there, Deveson completed a computer studies program at Ballarat University and found himself working at SCIS in the early 1990s, a time of rapid technological change.

'We started to think about how we could move school libraries on a bit,' he says, 'because the demand for information was stronger, and schools needed it faster.' At that point, school library staff relied on microfiche–small, transparent sheets of film containing miniature images of

documents–for catalogue records from SCIS. To find cataloguing information, staff would magnify and scroll through these images on a special reader with a screen, and then manually copy out the details onto a catalogue card. This time-consuming process had to be completed before books could be borrowed, causing delays in getting new titles to eager students. As Deveson tells it, despite the economies already achieved by the creation of SCIS, library staff still needed about one day a week to manage their catalogues. What's more, primary school librarians, usually working solo, often had to rely on parent volunteers to complete cataloguing work.

Deveson was part of the team that introduced *SCIS on Disc*, a biannual, disc copy of the entire SCIS database that was sent out to schools. This allowed library staff to simply insert the disc into a computer and instantly search for cataloguing information, replacing laborious microfiche scrolling.

Revolutionary though this change was, perhaps the most significant SCIS innovation was to come. Deveson was part of the SCIS team who worked with US company Endeavour Software and Australian company Ferntree Software, to develop a software module called Voyager, that allowed SCIS to catalogue directly into an online database, which school librarians could then download from. Online cataloguing brought enormous efficiencies for schools and completed the transition to fully digital catalogues. Incredibly Deveson notes, that the software module SCIS developed with Endeavour is used by the US Library of Congress to this day.

Part 3: A new age of information

In today's world, cataloguing with SCIS is simpler than ever. However, as information is now easily accessible using internet tools like Google and ChatGPT, the role of school libraries is often questioned, no longer being seen as the primary gateway to information. Despite this, their value remains rooted in the concept that sparked their growth, and SCIS's creation, over 50 years ago: information literacy.

More than ever, information is central to learning, and the quality of content students encounter during their formative years shapes the adults they become. School libraries, their staff and catalogues serve as crucial filters between students and the ever-growing noise of misinformation. Access to curated, quality resources–books, websites, apps, eBooks, and audiobooks–

and the expertise of library staff helps guide students toward becoming informed, critical thinkers who can assess the quality of information they encounter. Without such help and curated access, we risk losing ground in the fight against misinformation.

Catalogues stand as vital tools in this arena, working in tandem with libraries and librarians to make credible information accessible and engaging, and in doing so helping to foster lifelong learning capabilities in students.

SCIS's mission today, as it was 40 years ago, is to cultivate information literacy by supporting the delivery of quality library services to schools. We are the only service in the world that specialises in cataloguing for education. And so, while the challenge of teaching information literacy renews itself in the age of digital information, the answer to teaching it well remains unchanged: well-resourced school libraries, librarians and catalogues, supported by another 40 years of SCIS.

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SCIS is more

SCIS Product Manager Anthony Shaw hit the road in Term 3, attending key conferences and sharing insights on AI and library support, while inviting stories for SCIS's 40th Anniversary celebration.

Just like that and we're in Term 4 and thinking about summer reading and the school holidays.

Term 3 saw the SCIS bus hit the road again. We attended the SLANSW Professional Learning Summit, ConnecTech: Inspired Futures for Information Technology and Digital Literacy Professionals, held in the wonderful library space at PLC Sydney. The bus then flew across the ditch, to Ōtautahi Christchurch for the 2024 SLANZA Conference, He Puāwaitanga: Growing communities, developing knowledge and building confidence. The conference venue was the beautiful Christ's College Ōtautahi Christchurch. As I walked around the school I did hear the *Chariots of Fire* theme music in my mind. You'll be happy to know that I resisted the urge to recreate the Great Court Run.

For me, SLANSW provided practical examples and application of how school library professionals and teachers are navigating the complex world of AI. Seeing how AI can be used to support better outcomes for students and perhaps freeing up educators from administrative tasks was extremely heartening. It was a pleasant change from the doom and gloom we often hear when AI is being spoken about. I was also introduced to Huey the book bot – look out for a school library spotlight featuring Huey in a future edition of *Connections*.

The SLANZA Conference was a wonderful opportunity to connect with school library staff from across Aotearoa New Zealand. It's great to be immersed in the culture and passion of our colleagues who work tirelessly to support better outcomes for students in Aotearoa.

SCIS's Catalogue Content Manager, Renate Beiharz, presented the preliminary findings of our SCIS survey: Ngā Upoko Tukutuku/Māori subject headings in school library catalogues. As you know, SCIS has been working to enhance SCIS Data to cultivate respect, through culturally appropriate subject headings, descriptive cataloguing and presentation of data. To continue the important work that our

Product Manager Anthony Shaw at the SLANZA 2024 Conference in Christchurch.

cataloguers do we asked all school libraries in Aotearoa New Zealand to provide their thoughts about the value of Ngā Upoko Tukutuku subject headings in catalogue records. In *Connections* Term 1 2025 we will share the findings of the survey and SCIS's plans.

Speaking of AI, I may have also used GenAI to create a song celebrating SCIS's 40th Anniversary – confirming that AI can be used for good. If only AI could improve my singing voice, it would confirm that AI is good for humanity.

As part of SCIS's 40th Anniversary celebrations, we're inviting those who've

used or worked with SCIS – whether recently or in years past – to share their stories. We're gathering real-world examples to build an online archive showcasing how SCIS supports library staff in their day-to-day work. If you'd like to contribute, please reach out to us at SCIS40thAnniversary@esa.edu.au. Your experiences can help highlight the vital role SCIS plays in school libraries across Australia.

Did someone say survey? In the last edition of SCIS is more, we shared some key statistics from our 2024 SCIS Customer Survey. Here are a few more statistics: We had a total of 1,210 responses, up from 888 in 2023.

The breakdown of responses by market was: Australia 83.3%, New Zealand 12.8% UK 4.5% and International 0.5% respectively.

Of the 996 Australian responses we had: VIC 274, NSW 272, QLD 187, WA 134, SA 89, ACT 19, TAS 15 and NT 6.

58% responses were from government, 24.1% from Catholic and 17.9% from independent schools.

Not surprisingly, given the make-up of the school community, most respondents were from primary schools (47.3%), followed by secondary schools (32.7%) and K–12/composite/combined (18.7%).

76.2% of respondents are qualified library staff. Non-trained library staff or library assistants made up a further 12.4% of respondents, other school staff 4.9% and two bulk deal administrators.

As mentioned in SCIS is more in Issue 130 of *Connections*, customers overwhelmingly indicated their high satisfaction with SCIS products and their overall experience with SCIS and *Connections*.

We introduced a new metric into the survey, the Net promoter score (NPS). According to Wikipedia, 'NPS is a market research metric that is based on a single survey question asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a company, product, or a service to a friend or colleague.'

Generally, an NPS of over 50 is considered excellent. The SCIS NPS is 63.8%, which suggests that we're better than excellent but not yet exceptional (scores over 80 are considered exceptional). As a team, SCIS is very proud and thankful that customers feel that we are better than excellent and we're committed to striving for exceptional.

Thanks again to the many SCIS customers who completed the 2024 SCIS Customer Survey. We look forward to hearing from you in future, shorter surveys (we hear you, the survey was a little long).

Remember, if you don't have a subscription to SCIS Data, you can set up a free trial. You'll need your school email address, a library management system and access to the internet. Go to www.scisdata.com and click on the Free trial tab (www.scisdata.com/free-trial/) to start your 10-day free trail and download 20 SCIS Data records for free.

A final personal admission: despite the teetering stacks of books on my bedside table and my dressing table, I refuse to wait to dive straight into Tim Winton's latest release *Juice* (ISBN: 9781761344893, Publisher: Hamish Hamilton, Published 1 October 2024). It has been too long between releases and despite the slight twang of guilt for the books that are going to be passed over, my love of Tim Winton's writing wins out. I trust that they, the *other* books, won't hold this against me, and become a chore to read – a risk I am prepared to take!

Happy reading everyone.

Anthony Shaw
Product Manager, SCIS
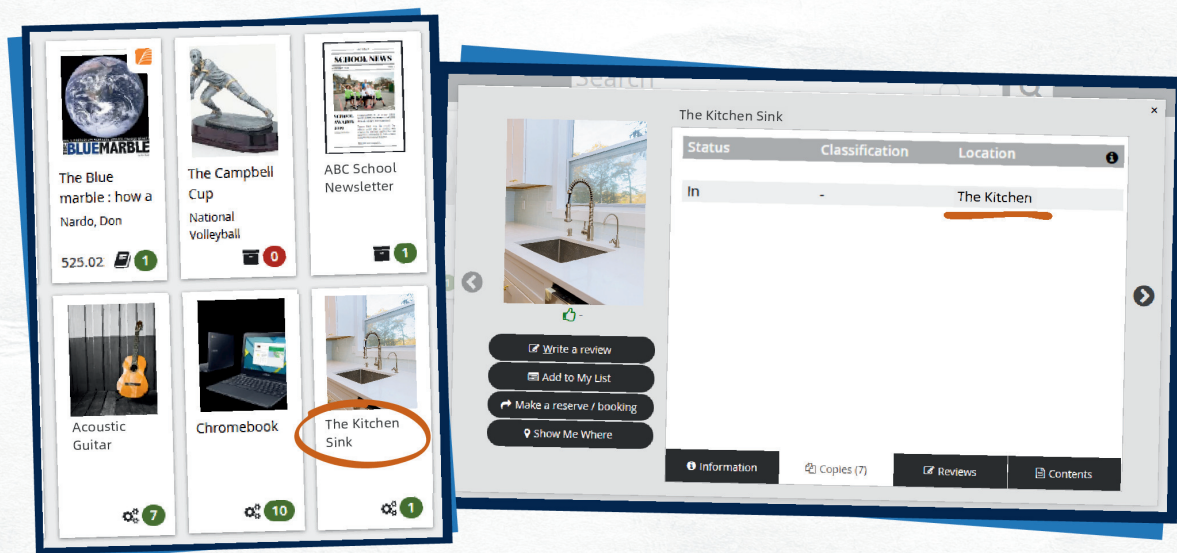
SCAN'S JOURNEY COMES TO AN END
AFTER FOUR DECADES

Scan recently published its final issue after more than 40 years of supporting educators and school librarians in New South Wales. We reflect on the journal's remarkable legacy, its role in advancing educational thought, and the enduring impact of its contributions to teaching and learning practices.

It's with a bittersweet sense of admiration and sadness that we report the closure of *Scan*. For more than 40 years, *Scan* has served as an authoritative journal for NSW teachers and library staff, offering thought leadership, evidence-based practical advice and curriculum guidance. Volume 43, Issue 2, published in July 2024, marked its final contribution to a distinguished legacy that has shaped educational discourse in NSW (and beyond) for decades.

Throughout its history, *Scan* provided a space where topical issues and education practices could be explored and did not avoid addressing difficult topics. It represented the courage of the NSW Department of Education to push teaching and learning forward by bringing together articles by a diverse range of qualified experts, from academics, to educators, to policymakers and administrators.

The journal began its life in 1982 as a collection of curriculum resources published by the Library Services Division of the NSW Department of Education. Like a well-curated library, its value grew with time and resourcing, and its role expanded to become a vital repository of knowledge for NSW educational communities.

By 1992, the influence of *Scan* had grown so much that an editorial committee was formed, and its content was broadened to include articles on educational theory and practice. This change in content agenda demanded stronger links with academia and, in 1996, a research strand of *Scan* was formally created. This solidified the journal's position at the nexus of educational theory and practice in New South Wales.

Creating strong links between often disparate strands of educational thought and everyday practice allowed *Scan* to drive important programs focused on elevating NSW education standards. One exemplary program is the Lighthouse Schools project, an initiative that identified and supported schools demonstrating outstanding educational practices, enabling them to serve as models of innovation and excellence for other schools to follow.

More recently, *Scan* has been pivotal in driving the introduction of the Information Fluency Framework (IFF) in NSW. This framework is the first of its kind in Australia and provides a structured approach for teacher librarians to guide students in developing critical skills to locate, evaluate and use information effectively. Moreover, it puts library staff at the centre of digital literacy and ethical information practices within the school environment. (Exactly where they should be!)

At SCIS, we reflect on the closure of *Scan* as the end of an era of thought leadership that emanated first and foremost from library services. *Scan*'s archive of 42 years of articles serves as

Scan was published by the NSW Department of Education for over 40 years.

a testament to the power of such services to act as a conduit for bringing together wider initiatives that drive innovation and influence teaching, learning and policy. When given opportunity, resources and time, *Scan* demonstrated that library services can be the lifeblood of quality curriculum teaching and thought leadership.

The value of journals can never be understated. They serve as a means to connect educators, help them develop best practice together, debate topical issues together, and foster a sense of community through sharing professional passions. *Scan*'s impact in NSW has been far-reaching and felt by many. We thank all who have contributed to its success over the years and hope that its legacy lives on through continued use of the wonderful archive of educational articles it leaves behind.

References

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Article by the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS).

TRIGGER HAPPY OR TRIGGER UNHAPPY?
TRIGGER WARNINGS, CONTENT NOTES AND YOUR LIBRARY CATALOGUE RECORDS

SCIS Cataloguing Team Leader Ceinwen Jones discusses the complexities of adding trigger warnings and content notes to library catalogues.

What are trigger warnings and why have they become a thing?

Trigger warnings, content warnings or content notes are alerts about upcoming content that may contain themes related to past negative experiences (Bridgland et al, 2024). Nowadays, they are almost exclusively used in the context of trauma, although content warnings have long been around (think of TV and movie ratings that families might use to make decisions about what to watch). The term 'trigger' in relation to psychological trauma equates to a sensory reminder that causes symptoms or negative memories to resurface (Pederson, 2022); the sensory reminder could be anything from smell or sound to visual or other stimuli. Triggers can be a visceral reaction to an event or situation – or the cause of worsening mental health symptoms such as OCD.

The idea of including trigger warnings for books, films, lectures and other content is based on the intention of allowing consumers to make decisions to prepare themselves or avoid content that is potentially upsetting or triggering; and examples of this content may be things like:

- Sexual violence
- Hate
- Abuse
- Mental health
- Alcohol and drugs
- Blood and medical depictions
- Death and loss
- Violence
- War

(Trigger warning database, 2023)

Even though the term 'trigger' is often bandied about casually, '… it's important to note that there's a difference between being uncomfortable or offended, and having a true mental health symptom.' (Pederson, 2022).

True reactions to 'triggers' are strong responses that can seem out of proportion to the stimulus.

In the academic world, trigger warnings received considerable exposure because lecturers started using them to warn their students of potentially triggering content in their coursework (Laguardia, 2017). In the library world, trigger warnings or content notes may be used by staff for making decisions about collection development and acquisition of resources; and to inform librarians and users about the content of resources.

So, adding trigger warnings to resources seems like a pretty easy and respectful thing to do – what's the issue?

There have been two main waves of backlash against trigger warnings since their rise in popularity in the early 2000s. When feminists first began using them for warning about content relating to sexual assault and violence, the idea was to convey the seriousness of the topic and the practice soon became *de rigueur* for writings about any potentially distressing content (Filipovic, 2023).

The first wave of backlash accused those using trigger warnings of wrapping people in cotton wool, and the practice was viewed as antithetical to the stiff-upper-lip mentality of previous generations. While the use of trigger warnings in the 2010s went a long way toward normalising and promoting thinking and discussion about mental health, it also garnered a lot of cynicism in opponents – and even advocates – when they were invoked by individuals to complain about, for example, lecture content they disliked or disagreed with, or even content that may *potentially* harm or distress (Filipovic, 2023).

Trigger warnings became almost synonymous with political correctness, and the debate became a left vs right affair: people who use trigger warnings are accused of being 'snowflakes' at best, and infantilising and anti-intellectual at worst; people who oppose their use are accused of being ignorant of mental health and the effects of trauma, and of having no perspective about the privilege inherent in possessing robust mental health (Gust, 2016).

To a certain extent, this is still the case in 2024; although the debate did settle into a somewhat stable middle ground, where trigger warnings are still used, but not to the extremes they once were, like an article containing a comment that something was 'so awful it made me want to throw up' requiring an eating disorder trigger warning (Filipovic, 2023).

Now, we are used to seeing trigger warnings in social media posts and at the beginning of books and presentations; and although there is some fear that they contribute to a culture of avoidance, their use does seem like a small thing that comes down to respect for others:

> " Is it really that taxing on you to have to see a trigger warning, comparing to someone else being catapulted back into the worst moments of their life without warning? "
>
> (Clarke, 2024)

Seems like a no-brainer, right? And yet, there are still those who are not fans – and this time they've got scientific evidence.

In 2022, Bridgland et al published 'A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Trigger Warnings, Content Warnings, and Content Notes', and this has been used extensively by journalists to explore the idea that trigger warnings are useless at best, and actually damaging at worst. Spoiler alert: the conclusion is that 'Trigger warnings should not be used as a mental health tool' (Bridgland et al, 2023).

> " What the scientific evidence tells us is that trigger warnings do not help people to
> - Reduce the negative emotions felt when viewing material
> - Avoid potentially distressing material
> - Improve the learning/understanding of that material "
>
> (Bridgland, A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Trigger Warnings, Content Warnings, and Content Notes, 2023)

Furthermore, the results of this study show that 'trigger warnings in their current form are not beneficial, and may instead lead to a risk of emotional harm' (Bridgland et al, 2023) – for example, the study showed that trigger warnings reliably increased anticipatory anxiety in participants, and in some cases, that individuals may be *more* drawn to engage with negative material.

Extrapolating these conclusions for the purposes of looking at the issue through the lens of a school audience, one can see that there is certainly a risk that adding trigger warnings will encourage some students to seek out these materials rather than avoid them – it is, after all, a form of tagging.

Well, what's this got to do with SCIS, anyway?

As cataloguers of items for schools, making decisions about describing, tagging, labelling, censoring, advising and warning about resources is most definitely in our field of interest! And we have registered an enduring popular desire from school libraries that we add metadata about content to records for the resources we catalogue.

Currently, when we catalogue resources, we add SCIS and ScOT subject headings. These are controlled terms – terms from a set list – which provide consistency for users searching for particular topics. Some records will already have metadata – via the subject headings – about potentially problematic content: for example, the subject headings Depression (Psychology) or Racism. But we do recognise that some schools use tags or other labelling to identify resources containing certain content, and this an enhancement to our records we are discussing making at SCIS.

The current debate among SCIS cataloguers includes questions like:
- How do we reconcile the evidence about trigger warnings with the desire of school libraries to add tags and metadata about content in resources?
- Who makes the judgement about what content requires a warning or a tag? What qualifications do they need?
- Do we just add warnings if they're actually on the item?

- Do we add warnings if we find or look for metadata about the item elsewhere?
- Do we want set statements, or free text?
- What about adding a consistent warning note for resources with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content?
- What about consistently adding controlled target audience (age level) data?

Trigger warnings vs content notes

One of the big challenges for us is that we are qualified librarians and information specialists – but most of us are not qualified teachers. Making value judgements about content and age-based target audiences sits outside our current comfort zone. Adding metadata about content and target audiences which we've sourced from outside the item itself takes time; and we would have to agree on guidelines to ensure that we're all cataloguing consistently.

Given the evidence about trigger warnings, and the psychological definition, the pragmatic thing for SCIS to begin doing is to enhance our records with more metadata about content. Content notes are more congruous with our aim to describe content objectively, rather than making value judgements about it, as far as possible.

This is not to say that it's impossible! In the meantime, we will endeavour to reach a middle ground where we can provide enough rich information for the final decisions about labelling and classifying to be made locally at the school library level, where the most appropriate assessment of item and audience can be undertaken.

Watch this space for the next enhancements to SCIS records!

References

For a full list of references mentioned in this article, please see the online version of this article: scisdata.com/connections.

Ceinwen Jones
SCIS Cataloguing Team Leader

WEBSITE + APP REVIEWS

Nigel Paull reviews the latest educational websites and apps you can use in your library. Use the QR code to download the app or navigate to the website. Use the SCIS number to find the catalogue record.

APPLE DESIGN AWARDS

developer.apple.com/design/awards/

The annual Apple Design Awards 'recognize innovation, ingenuity, and technical achievement in app and game design'. Although not specifically related to curriculum areas, teachers can investigate the apps and games that use Apple technologies to promote inclusivity, social impact, and spatial computing.

SCIS no: 5498622

BALARINJI

www.balarinji.com.au

Balarinji is an Australian Indigenous design and strategy agency, whose stunning work is featured on a variety of projects, including Qantas planes, Reconciliation Week posters and the built environment. Secondary teachers could use the examples to showcase Indigenous art and design and its connection to place and Country.
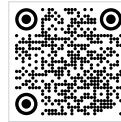
SCIS no: 5498630

GREAT START

greatstart.tas.gov.au

Emanating from the Tasmanian Department of Education, Children and Young People, this resource focuses on the development of children from birth through to age 8, and provides parents with activities for their children, as well as advice and resources around school readiness.

SCIS no: 5498660

CARBON MAPPER

carbonmapper.org

A coalition of partners, including NASA and Harvard University, has deployed satellites to capture worldwide methane and carbon data, in order to facilitate science-based decision-making. This site's interactive data content allows secondary students to detect, monitor and quantify greenhouse gas emissions.

SCIS no: 5498638

OPERA AUSTRALIA: SCHOOLS PROGRAM

opera.org.au/events/schools-programs/

Opera Australia's Schools Company provides opportunities for students in metropolitan and regional schools to attend opera performances in their schools or at performing arts centres. The site also features resources for teachers.

SCIS no: 1947562

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

scootle.edu.au/ec/acSubject?name=%22V9Digital%20Technologies%22

This Scootle resource provides Digital Technologies content mapped to the Australian Curriculum for students from Foundation to Year 10. Content covers digital systems and data representation, including related process and production skills.

SCIS no: 5498649
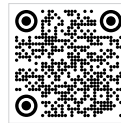
TIME TOOLS

abc.net.au/education/time-tools-12-hour-to-the-minute/13801920

Students in years 3 and 4 can play this game to learn and practise how to tell the time using digital and analogue clocks. Links are available to additional time-related games.

SCIS no: 5498792

SUPPORT FOR REMOTE LEARNING

education.apple.com/learning-center/R003200-en_EMEIA

Contains materials to support remote learning using iPads or Macs. Topics covered include video tutorials, creative activities, student resources, teacher tips, IT support, and how to create instructional resources.

SCIS no: 5498752

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.

Nigel Paull
Teacher Librarian
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ENGAGING RELUCTANT READERS: GAMIFICATION THROUGH AN INTERACTIVE DETECTIVE CASE FILE

To engage reluctant readers, St Augustine's College in Sydney implemented a long-running Murder Mystery game that transforms reading into an interactive adventure.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, engaging students – particularly those who are reluctant readers – poses a constant challenge. At St Augustine's College in Sydney, we implemented a long-running Murder Mystery game to captivate students who resist traditional reading methods, leveraging interactive, highly visual, multimodal narratives to transform reading into an adventure rather than a chore.

At St Augustine's, we sought to create a pathway to reading offering different access points outside of traditional reading methods. By leveraging gamification and multimodal storytelling, the initiative captivates students, making reading a dynamic experience. Transforming the process of reading into an adventure rather than a chore creates a highly positive experience for students.

Gamification in education

Gamification, increasingly common in educational settings, refers to using game-design elements in non-game contexts (Singh, 2023). This approach harnesses the motivational power of games – such as earning points, solving puzzles and overcoming challenges – to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Wulan et al., 2024). While the concept dates back to the 1980s, it wasn't until the digital revolution that gamification truly began to flourish, enabling educators to create more sophisticated and immersive learning experiences (Lacovides et al., 2015). Today, gamification is used in various educational contexts, from simple classroom activities to complex digital platforms, all designed to make learning more engaging and effective.

The power of interactive narratives

Central to the success of gamification in education is the concept of interactive narratives. Unlike traditional stories where the reader is a passive consumer, interactive narratives allow students to become active participants in the storyline, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. This engagement – deeply connected to Reader Response Theory, which suggests the reader's interpretation of a text is influenced by their personal experiences, emotions and level of engagement (Berger, 1996) – can be particularly powerful for reluctant readers. By involving students in a narrative where they can influence the outcome – such as solving a mystery – they are more likely to connect with the material on a personal level, enhancing both enjoyment and understanding.

St Augustine's observations: Tapping into the appeal of crime fiction

At St Augustine's College, we noticed a strong interest in crime and thriller fiction among our students in Year 9 and above, particularly during their Year 9 unit of work on crime fiction. Recognising this trend, we saw an opportunity to build on their interest by introducing a Murder Mystery game that would both engage and educate. We partnered with Case Dog, a UK-based company that designs online mystery games, to modify an existing detective game 'The Author' for a school setting. Their support was invaluable, and we encourage any school library interested in similar projects to consider reaching out to them (https://thedetectiveexperience.com).

The Murder Mystery project: A multimodal and drip-fed approach

The Murder Mystery game at St Augustine's was not a one-time event but a sustained, immersive experience designed to keep students engaged over a period of time. We adopted a drip-fed approach, where clues and narrative elements were released incrementally, maintaining student interest and encouraging active participation.
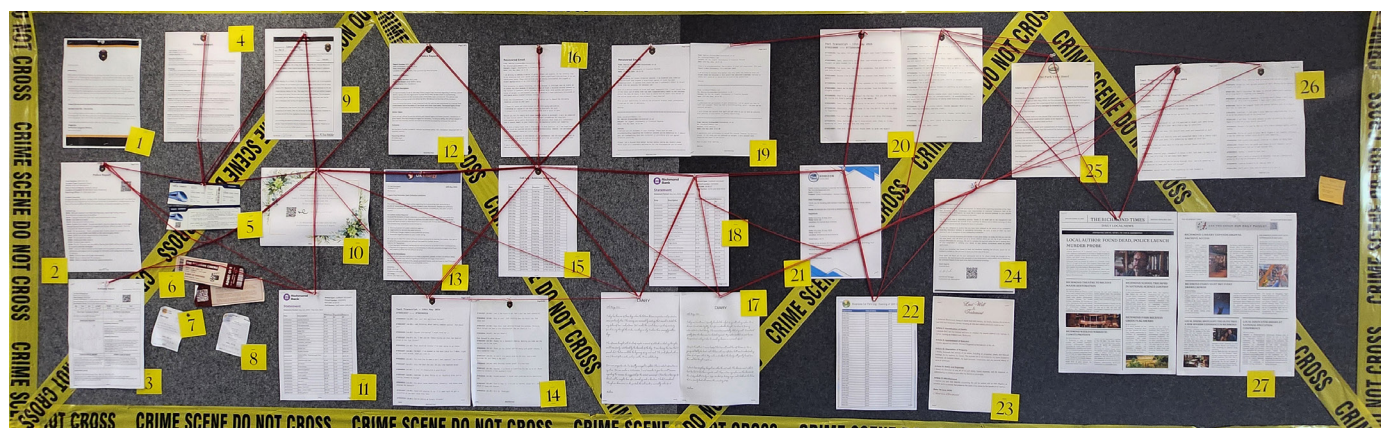

A gamified literacy display wall.

A key strength of this project was its multimodal nature, incorporating various forms of media – textual clues, visual displays, digital content and physical artifacts. This rich, layered experience appealed to different learning styles, providing alternative pathways to engagement for students who might struggle with traditional text-heavy reading (Measles & Abu-Dawood, 2015). The ARC library was pivotal in supporting this initiative, recognising its potential to offer a holistic and engaging literacy experience that bridged the gap between reluctant readers and the joy of reading (Gee, 2003).

The power of a non-static display

Supporting the narrative was a non-static display in the library, which evolved as the mystery unfolded. This display was more than just a visual aid – it was an active, integral part of the game. As new clues were revealed, the display changed, reflecting the progress of the mystery and providing students with a constant, tangible reminder of the game. This evolving display kept the momentum going and served as a focal point for discussion and speculation among students, further deepening their engagement (Hamari et al., 2014).
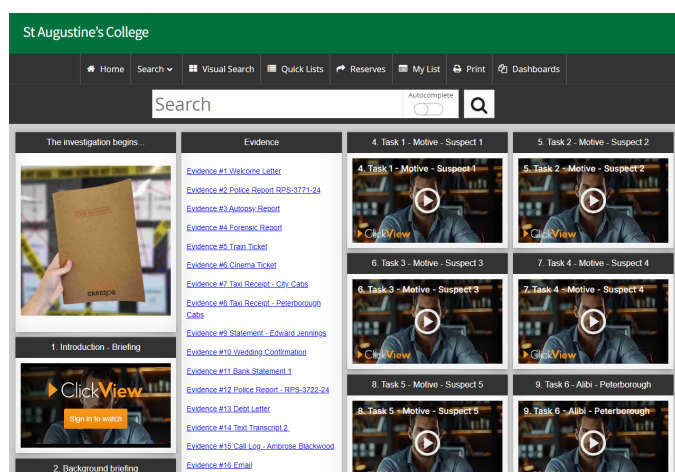
A digital dashboard for an author.

Challenges and reflections

While the Murder Mystery project was largely successful, it wasn't without its challenges. Ensuring that all students, regardless of their reading ability or interest level, could participate meaningfully in the game required careful design with multiple entry points and varying levels of difficulty. Additionally, maintaining the momentum of the game over an extended period demanded meticulous planning and coordination from our library staff.

Reflecting on the project, it's clear that the benefits far outweighed the challenges. The Murder Mystery game not only succeeded in engaging reluctant readers but also fostered a sense of community and collaboration among students and staff. It demonstrated the power of gamification as a tool for literacy education and provided valuable insights into how we can continue to innovate in our approach to teaching (Finkelstein et al., 2016). And although some students plugged all the information into ChatGPT, in this case AI failed miserably, suggesting names that hadn't even appeared in the clues!

Success through gamification

The Murder Mystery at St Augustine's College stands as a testament to the potential of gamification in a library setting. By creating an interactive, multimodal and visually stimulating environment, we were able to draw in reluctant readers and foster a deeper appreciation for literature. This project highlights the importance of innovation in our libraries and the need to meet students where they are, using creative approaches to make learning both enjoyable and effective.

As librarians, we must continue to explore and embrace new methods to engage our students. Gamification, with its ability to turn learning into a dynamic and participatory experience, offers a powerful tool in our ongoing efforts to inspire a love of reading and learning in our students.

References

For a full list of references mentioned in this article, please see the online version of this article: scisdata.com/connections.

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SCHOOL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT SPECIAL:
SUPPORTING THE CAMBODIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

For 20 years, the Cambodian Children's Fund has uplifted Cambodia's most vulnerable children through education and community support. Central to this transformation is the Neeson Cripps Academy library, a hub for fostering leadership and lifelong learning.

For two decades, the Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF) has been a beacon of hope in one of Cambodia's most destitute areas, the former Steung Meanchey landfill, where entire families historically survived by scavenging. The CCF's mission is to transform the lives of the most impoverished, marginalised and neglected children in Cambodia through high-quality education, leadership training and direct support programs. Its work is grounded in the belief that education serves as the most effective means by which to dismantle entrenched cycles of poverty and neglect.

One might ask how can such radical change be achieved purely through education? The answer is that the CCF has a holistic approach to education that sees it more as an ecosystem of support for communities, rather than something that is confined within the four walls of a classroom. It's an approach designed to nurture a child from a community-centred perspective, providing healthcare, safe housing, leadership development and family support. It's rooted in a deeper belief that transforming communities whose histories have been shaped by generational poverty requires equipping children with the practical tools provided through education, as well as the social frameworks that support them to use those tools to thrive.

Children enrolled in CCF's programs aren't just students. They are being shaped into the next generation of leaders who will spearhead further change in their communities. Leadership training is interwoven with education, furnishing students with academic skills, confidence, moral integrity and practical experience needed to tackle the deep-rooted issues of poverty and inequality. Through leadership camps, volunteer projects and global opportunities, CCF students are prepared to apply their learning in real-world contexts,

Children in the Neeson Cripps Academy library.

making them active participants in Cambodia's future.

A key resource that supports this leadership development is the CCF library at the Neeson Cripps Academy. The library serves as a hub of learning and imagination, housing more than 10,000 books, short story videos, and e-books. For many students, it is their initiation into the world of stories, knowledge and research materials, and has a central role in fostering academic curiosity, as well as the critical thinking necessary for leadership.

In mid-2023, SCIS was approached by a partner library management system (LMS) vendor, Softlink, offering an opportunity to support the Neeson Cripps Academy with catalogue records. Softlink were donating their Oliver v5 LMS and asked if SCIS would provide access to SCIS Data.

> "At Softlink, we've always believed in the power of libraries to transform lives, so when we heard about the amazing work being done at the Cambodian Children's Fund, we knew we wanted to help. We approached SCIS because the seamless integration between SCIS Data and Oliver v5 makes cataloguing easy, ensuring the Cambodian Children's Fund library can manage its resources efficiently and give students access to the best possible tools to support their education."
>
> – Softllink Education

Om Pisey, Grade 12 Student at Neeson Cripps Academy

The SCIS leadership team concurred that the CCF is a worthwhile cause and aligns with our parent company ESA's broader strategy of 'supporting excellence and equity in education'. We agreed to provide an ongoing complimentary subscription to SCIS Data to enable the CCF to continue their incredible work.

Alongside SCIS, StoryBox Hub also donated a free subscription to its services.

> **StoryBox believes every child should have access to quality literature and stories. We were delighted to be able to gift Cambodian Children's Fund a subscription to StoryBox Hub and to know that the children are enjoying watching our stories.**
>
> – StoryBox Library

The central role the Neeson Cripps Academy library plays in the CCF's work serves as a reminder of the powerful role libraries can play in reshaping the social fabric of communities. Unconfined by geography or culture, they remain timeless catalysts for positive social change and educational uplift.

Yet, for libraries to realise their full potential, they must offer more than access to resources. Beyond the physical presence of books, much of a library's impact is derived from the quality of the services it delivers to its community.

At the centre of this are the staff who work tirelessly to develop collections and engage students, helping them to find their curiosity, passion for learning and sense of belonging in the world of knowledge. Alongside this are the systems that allow school communities to search for and discover the resources, knowledge and insights that fuel academic growth and personal exploration.

A recent case study on the Nelson Cripps Academy library, published by Softlink, shows the CCF library's success is driven by committed librarians who keep it operating and open to students six days a week. Supporting this is the presence of a well-managed library management system (LMS), containing quality catalogue data that enables students to quickly and efficiently locate the materials they need. This access empowers students to explore subjects in depth, advancing their academic progress while nurturing a love for learning and independent research.

Om Pisey, a Grade 12 student at Neeson Cripps Academy, illustrated this point in SoftLink's case study, saying that the library's systems have '... helped me discover new books and stories by offering features such as personalised recommendations based on my reading history. It's easy to do research by myself'.

The Neeson Cripps library exemplifies how thoughtful, well-resourced educational initiatives can empower communities and spark change far beyond the classroom. It serves as a reminder that fully realised libraries are and always will be engines of transformation.

At a recent celebration marking the 20th anniversary of the Cambodian Children's Fund, which was attended by the King of Cambodia and the Cambodian Prime Minister's wife, tribute was paid to the charity and the thousands of lives it has lifted out of poverty. A message of thanks to SCIS from the CCF encapsulated the magnitude of their work: 'It is hard to believe that all the people, including children in this community, were scavenging and living on a rubbish dump not so long ago. What a quantum leap has occurred.' This reflection highlights the extraordinary transformation that has taken place, driven by the power of education and community support.

SCIS, along with Softlink will continue to support the CCF.

Learn more about the education solutions that the CCF provides for Cambodian children: www.cambodianchildrensfund.org/how-we-work/education

Article by the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) and SoftLink education

Building capacity for Australian book creators

Did you know that every year the Australian Government support Aussie book creators and publishers with compensation for potential loss of income as a result of their books being available for loan in public and educational lending libraries. ESA assists the the Australian Government's Office for the Arts by delivering the Educational Lending Rights scheme through Australian school libraries.
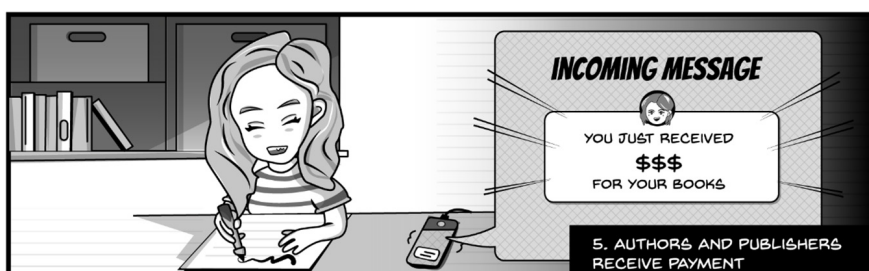
The Educational Lending Rights scheme is a survey that invites around 1,000 schools in Australia to participate by providing a list of how many copies of specific book titles your library holds.

The easy part is, you don't need to do the count. We work with many library management systems to create a simple automated report generated. All you need to do is download the report and attach it to the survey link provided, if you are selected to participate. Last year, 91% of those who took part in the survey told us that it took them less than 10 minutes to complete!

As many Australian authors, creators and illustrators have testified, Educational Lending Rights has a significant role to play in ensuring that they can continue to do what they do best. If you are selected to participate this year, we have streamlined the process to allow you to submit your results and complete our feedback survey on the spot and because we really want your support, this year your school library will have the opportunity to win one of three prizes: a $150 voucher, or one of two book hampers!

ELR is currently underway, and whilst not every school is required to participate each year, we encourage you to keep an eye on your inbox to ensure you haven't missed your invitation. Let's work together to help continue the fantastic work of educational libraries across Australia!

Here's how in 10 short minutes, you can help Aussie authors in a big way:

1. SCHOOLS RECEIVE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN ELR BY COMPLETING A 'SURVEY'

2. SCHOOLS SUBMIT 'ELR SURVEY' RESULTS TO ESA

3. ESA PROCESSES THE 'ELR SURVEY' AND SUBMITS TO THE DEPARTMENT

4. DEPARTMENT CALCULATES AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER PAYMENTS

5. AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS RECEIVE PAYMENT

6. AUTHORS ENCOURAGED TO CREATE MORE BOOKS

7. BOOKS BRING JOY TO ALL THE CHILDREN!