

Supporting literacy and learning – on and off campus

There's no doubt that the Library is the hub of learning and information literacy at University of Wollongong's (UOW) campus. Attracting close to a million visitors each year, the library provides hands-on information literacy training to almost 20,000 clients. However the staff's commitment to literacy and learning extends beyond the campus and into the broader community; participating in fundraising and contributing to local, national and international causes, all with a focus on literacy and learning.

In 2007, the UOW Library's Wellbeing Committee fundraising efforts were directed towards the Books in Homes Australia (BIHA) program.

BIHA aims to alter the journey of young children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances in Australia, working on the premise that being born into a disadvantaged or isolated community should not exclude any child from achieving their potential.

Children living in less privileged circumstances often lack ready access to books. A love of books is something that lasts a lifetime and can make a significant difference in the lives of disadvantaged children. Once given the chance to develop confidence in reading, it is well recognised that children gain greater benefit from their schooling and more opportunities to live a productive and rewarding life.

There are currently 10,000 children in the BIHA program, encompassing 107 disadvantaged school communities across New South Wales. Every participating child is able to select a number of quality books each year, allowing them to build their own home libraries and share the experience of reading with their families. BIHA also donates a Preview Pack to each school library involved in the program. The packs consist of 48 titles provided over three terms, of which 25% are titles by Indigenous authors.

Money raised by UOW Library was allocated to nearby Kemblawarra Public School, which burned down in 2002 and was rebuilt by late 2004. This small school, consisting of only four classes and about 85 children, draws students from diverse backgrounds including low socio-economic and often disadvantaged or troubled families. The school community also includes the traditional caretakers of the Wadi-Wadi people as well as children from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The UOW Library is eager to offer continued support to Books in Homes Australia, and staff are delighted that their fundraising efforts are helping needy children in the Illawarra region.

More information on Books in Homes Australia is available <http://www.biha.com.au/>

**Fran Pinkerton
Claire Collett
University of Wollongong
collett@uow.edu.au**

Roving learning and literacy at VU library / learning commons

University students are faced with a plethora of information systems and technologies which underpin contemporary tertiary study. Their world is an often confusing array of logins, systems, web pages, e-mail communication, printing and copying issues as well as copious guides and other documentation designed to provide useful information and advice on using the various systems and technologies available. Whether these learning supports effectively intersect with their actual learning needs, learning strategies and help-seeking behaviours, it can be all be rather 'hit and miss'.

In terms of learning needs, cognitive psychologists tell us that we should think of learning as a matter of mobilising two kinds of memory: a short-term working memory and long-term memory. Basically, we take in new information with our short-term memory and we have successfully learnt it when its fully lodged in our long-term memory.

Two problems arise. First, short-term memory can only cope with 5-7 bits of new information at a time; any more and we are 'in overload' and start tuning out or getting confused. Secondly, new information has to be processed consciously 7-10 times in short-term memory in order to ensure that it is successfully transferred to long-term memory. Gaining enough fluency with information technologies so that they disappear from consciousness and become automatically transparent skills takes practice.

As professionals who design, understand, and care about underlying information systems, and the principles upon which they are designed, we may be dismayed that students do not first read the instructions or manual. We may feel in our hearts that it is important for students to go back to first principles and understand the underlying logic and structure of the systems they are using, before actually using them. In truth, however, good pedagogy means starting from where the student is at in terms of their knowledge, skills and experience. Today's students are encouraged by the technologies in which they live their lives - including predictive text on their mobiles - to rely on 'trial and error' as their basic learning strategy, rather than analytical approaches, only falling back on the manual or analytical thinking when completely stuck and nothing seems to work.

How to implement appropriate learning supports that intersect productively and efficiently with today's students is an important consideration for universities. As such Victoria University has redesigned three of its libraries to be part of a Learning Commons structure: places where students feel more comfortable and have easier access to support services. One of the new services is the Student Rover Program where students who are now comfortable with all the tools of study at VU are employed to assist their fellow students who are stuck or confused, by providing active intervention and offering an approachable, visible presence. For more specialist or in-