



Jan Richards

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Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

Email: feedback@alia.org.au with your comments.

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I'm a big fan of the bumper sticker "if you can read this thank a teacher". However I've often wondered if there shouldn't be a companion sticker along the line of "if you enjoy reading, and know how to find information thank a teacher-librarian". As partners in the education community teacher-librarians are in a unique and trusted position to maximise the opportunities for their students.

"What do you remember about your school library?" This was the question I posed to colleagues, family, and friends when writing this column. My most productive was the tried and true tea room, "vox pop" formula. Reminiscences from Tasmania, the Gold Coast, Sydney, country NSW, and Kentucky, USA all told the same story of a warm, supportive atmosphere that encouraged learning and the joy of reading.

Although my family went to the public library every week, it was the school library that was central to the development of my love of reading and my independent lifelong learning and decision-making skills. In reality I can remember little about my time at primary school other than the memory of the library and the excitement and promise that it held. Some years ago a friend from Wollongong City Library, Rosemary Worley, and I made a trip back to our former school in Newcastle expressly to visit the library. We were overwhelmed by the smallness of the space, especially when we were told that it would have been expanded since 'our time'!

That this small space had such an influence on both our thinking is testament to the passion of the staff. Last month I contacted my old school to see if they were able to provide me with the name of the teacher librarian(s) who played such an important role in my formative years. Unfortunately within my tight time frame they were unable to assist me but if you were the teacher librarian at New Lambton South Public School between 1960 and 1965 a huge thank you. *

Sadly the results of two new research studies undertaken by Edith Cowan University and released in May this year demonstrate that Australia's school children are in danger of not getting what they need to support development of critical skills in information and reading literacy. The studies reveal that 50% of Australian school libraries surveyed are trying to do their job on an annual budget of under \$10000 per year, while teacher librarians are under pressure to spend more and more time outside the school library.

The two studies, *Snapshot of Australian School Libraries* and *Snapshot of Australian Teacher Librarians* also show that Australian teacher librarians are highly committed with over half actively involved in further professional development, but infrastructure is failing to cope with issues as basic as adequate seating for the student population, let alone access to information and communication technologies.

Many of you will be aware that in a 2007 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Australia had slipped from second to sixth place in reading literacy, outperformed by Finland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Canada, and New Zealand. Teacher librarians and school libraries can be the catalyst for improving

reading skills and information literacy given effective resourcing and these in turn are the building blocks of a thriving national economy and culture.

This is the first time we have had reliable national data to work with and it tells a story of what we have to do to 'future proof' our nation and ensure Australia's children get the resources they need to develop their lives and go on to contribute to our nation's growth and prosperity. That means ensuring there are enough qualified teacher librarians as well as maintaining and improving infrastructure.

In early October (probably about the time that this will be arriving in your mail box), I will be attending the Australian School Library Association Conference in Perth. I look forward to meeting with colleagues and discussing ways in which we can work together to ensure the vigour of the school library sector.

**I was having one of those frazzled afternoons when I first attempted to contact my old school and I emailed New Lambton Public School rather than New Lambton South. The Principal of New Lambton kindly forwarded my message but took the opportunity to assure me that they too have a great library service too and had just met the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge for the third consecutive year, emphasising the importance of reading in the school community. Great news.*

I am finalising this column sitting at the kitchen table in my sister-in-law's London flat, relieved that in my final week of a month in Europe I finally have reliable internet access. As a result I can send my copy to the *inCite* editor, Kate Cuthbert, with some surety that it will arrive. Coming from a profession which is so focused on connectivity there is the presumption that public internet access and or wi fi is widely available, but this is not necessarily the case. Or perhaps more correctly the directional clues as to where it is available are not obvious. This turned my thinking to our own libraries. How well do we advertise the availability of internet access within our own communities to residents and visitors? Is it widely known and recognised or treated as 'insider knowledge'?

One of the libraries I visited in England this week had a blackboard outside their front door proclaiming 'Wi fi Zone, Free!'. When questioned, my British colleague admitted that it had been a fight to find the funding, but the decision point had been reached when all the local pubs offered free wi fi and the library didn't. As someone who has more than her fair share of pints over the past few weeks in order to avail herself of this facility I can attest to the reality of the situation. Food for thought!

Cheers
Jan

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