

DO SCHOOL LIBRARIES REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Karen Bonanno, Executive Officer of the Australian School Library Association says personnel in the departments that oversee our education system may not be up-to-date with the facts – but school library staff are. And the answer is a resounding yes. Karen tells us how.

During the House of Representatives Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools, the principals and personnel from the State and Federal Departments of Education were asked if they were aware of the research. The definitive answer was, no.

I find this staggering, especially when it is these decision makers who espouse either the 'Google it' approach or 'everything is available online' so we don't need school libraries. Obviously they do not practice what they preach, as a simple search – "school libraries make a difference" - results in over 16,000 hits and, with a filter for Australia only, brings this down to approximately 2,500 hits.

The international and national research provides strong evidence that school libraries do make a difference to the educational outcomes of students. Decision makers need to take the initiative to engage in an evidence-based approach to consider the question; do school libraries make a difference?

School libraries make a difference to literacy results

One of the main findings from the 1996 national school English literacy survey was "students in schools where teachers make greater use of the school library with their classes tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement" (*Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey, 1997*). School libraries continue to support literacy learning with specific connection to the *National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) and corresponding teaching and learning activities to develop these skills. School libraries ensure all students have access to a wide range of reading material and encourage students to love reading. Research has shown that school libraries and teacher librarians are related to better reading achievement.

School libraries make a difference to inquiry based learning

An inquiry learning approach is evident in the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history. School libraries provide students with access to a variety of rich information sources and teacher librarians engage students in the inquiry process to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world within which they live. The joint ASLA & ALIA *Statement on Guided Inquiry and the Curriculum* (2009) addresses the full extent of what it means to learn in a 21st century environment and the crucial need to develop essential skills to not only survive, but thrive. As Kuhlthau and his co-authors write, guided inquiry "is grounded in sound research findings and built on solid professional practice."

Making the case – want to know more?

Find more resources at
www.alia.org.au/schoollibraries/ and
www.asla.org.au/advocacy/

School libraries make a difference to the development of ICT capabilities

School libraries advocate for and practice the integration of information literacy across the curriculum. Even though the Australian Curriculum does not explicitly refer to information literacy, the 'general capability' of information and communication technology (ICT) competence (ACARA) endorses the strong positioning of school libraries and teacher librarians as curriculum leaders in this field. The profession has the opportunity to pursue the potential scope for and extension of information literacy in this general capability which embraces digital global citizenship.

School libraries make a difference to information and learning

With over 3,000 new and refurbished school libraries built through the *Building the Education Revolution (BER) Primary Schools for the 21st Century*, some principals are reconsidering their staffing mix to address their vision of a curriculum and technology leader. The emergence of the *iCentre* as what has been described by Hay as a "central facility within the school where information, technology, learning and teaching needs are supported by qualified information and learning technology specialists" (Shift happens, ACCESS 2010) provides an opportunity to re-engineer school libraries within the context of 21st century learning. The 'one-stop-shop' brings together the facilities, technology, resources, curriculum and human personnel to create what Kuhlthau calls the "third space" (*Guided Inquiry; Learning in the 21st Century, 2009*).

School libraries make a difference to staff professional learning

During the Inquiry examples of informal professional learning being delivered by the teacher librarian during a teaching session with the students and the teacher in the library were presented. Pre-service teacher training has not included courses related to information literacy or digital media literacy.

School libraries make a difference to student enrolment

To end on a wildcard, I would propose the statement that, under the BER, school libraries are education real estate. In the majority of cases I'm sure the parents are taken to the 'new' school library as part of the tour when considering a suitable school for their child.

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