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Scan

The journal for educators

**Perfectionism in
adolescence**

**Dystopian fiction
in primary
schools**

**Teacher librarians'
impact on reading
engagement**



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Scan is a leading refereed journal, published monthly between February and November. Scan aims to bring innovative change to the lives and learning of contemporary educators and students. Through Scan, teachers' practice is informed by critical engagement with peer reviewed research that drives improved school and student outcomes across NSW, Australia and the world. Scan aims to leave teachers inspired, equipped and empowered, and students prepared.

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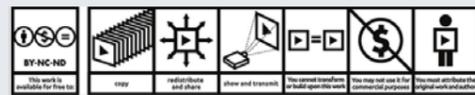
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Pressure to be perfect: How schools can identify, target and reduce maladaptive perfectionism in adolescents



Kelly Rump
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Kelly Rump explores perfectionism in adolescence, and outlines practical strategies teachers can use to support students with perfectionistic tendencies.

What is perfectionism?

Perfectionism can be defined as a striving for flawlessness, having high personal standards, and criticism towards perceived errors or mistakes (Ferrari et al., 2018; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). Individuals prone to perfectionistic tendencies may be conscientious and strive for personal excellence in pursuits such as academia, sport or performance (Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Hewitt et al., 2011; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). Research has indicated that perfectionism is linked with negative psychological and emotional outcomes. These may include

The capacity for schools to identify and regulate negative perfectionistic traits in adolescents is fundamental to promote student wellbeing.

unhelpful tendencies such as rigid thinking styles ('black-and-white' perceptions), distress from mistakes, high self-criticism, and a need for social approval (Stoeber, 2017). Additionally, perfectionism is linked with psychopathological concerns, such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviours, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation (Flett & Hewitt, 2014). Thus, the capacity for schools to identify and regulate negative perfectionistic traits in adolescents is fundamental to promote student wellbeing.

Theories

The dual process model of perfectionism (Slade & Owen, 1998; see Figure 1) posits that there are two types of perfectionists: positive and negative. Positive or adaptive perfectionists have high personal standards and pursue excellence through motivation to achieve their goals (Slade & Owen, 1998; Stoeber, 2017). In contrast, negative or maladaptive perfectionists desire to avoid failure or negative

consequences, with exceptionally high standards that they often cannot attain (Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Slade & Owen, 1998; Stoeber, 2017).

Both types of perfectionism can be reinforced through previous experiences and outcomes. This reinforcement is supported by self-determination theory (SDT), which suggests that individuals experience three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; see Figure 2). SDT identifies that psychological wellbeing relies on an individual perceiving that they have an internal locus of control, can achieve their goals, and belong to a community (Martela & Riekkari, 2018). Research has indicated that when these needs are thwarted, maladaptive perfectionism flourishes (Alodat et al., 2020; Herrera et al., 2021; Stoeber, 2017).

Identifying perfectionism in adolescence

Perfectionistic traits are evident in children and adolescents and may present similarly across school settings. Adolescents who are perfectionistic may positively engage with challenging tasks, receive higher grades than average, and display motivation

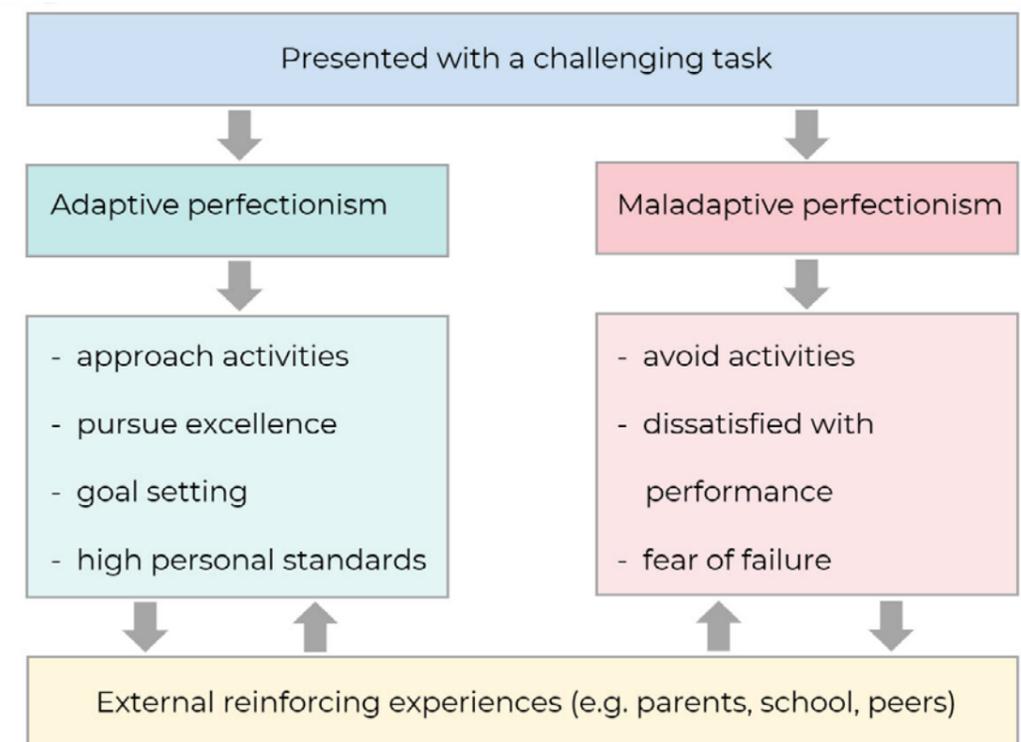


Figure 1. A schematic representation of the dual process model of perfectionism (Slade & Owen, 1998)



Figure 2. A schematic representation of the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

for task completion (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). However, these students may be more likely to become stressed or frustrated when they make mistakes or receive grades that are discrepant to their expectations (Rice et al., 2007; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007; Stoeber, 2017). Further difficulties associated with perfectionism in adolescents include fear of failure, low frustration tolerance, sleep disturbances, and significant associations with depression and suicidality (Ferrari et al., 2018; Flett & Cheng, 2008; Rice et al., 2007; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007; Tucker & Govender, 2008; Xie et al., 2018).

Additionally, adolescents with perfectionistic tendencies may be more likely to engage in unhelpful behaviours in an attempt to manage these emotions. These behaviours can include avoiding risky or challenging tasks, fixations on editing and re-submitting work, and procrastination (Flett & Hewitt, 2014). These students may be unwilling to ask for help, and instead engage in self-handicapping behaviours: actions that allow failures to be excused (Alodat et al., 2020; Flett & Hewitt, 2014). Self-handicapping can present as creating obstacles or justifications for failure, including not studying for a test (Alodat

et al., 2020). The purpose is to maintain a positive self-image whilst attributing failures or shortcomings to an external circumstance. Paradoxically, these students are limiting their ability to achieve due to fear of failure.

In contrast to girls, boys are less likely to reduce maladaptive perfectionistic behaviours through support from friends, and more likely to endorse negative psychological outcomes including depression.

External influences

Adolescents do not exist within a vacuum, and their social worlds play a large role in conveying expectations. Research indicates that the immediate social environment strongly influences perfectionism, including parental expectations, school setting, and peer values (Coren & Luthar, 2014; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007; Tucker & Govender, 2008). Primarily, parental expectations are significant contributors to adolescent adjustment and wellbeing. Students who receive parental pressure to perform highly are more likely to display maladaptive perfectionism at school, including less tolerance of mistakes (Coren & Luthar, 2014; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). This pressure is related to internalising and externalising issues, including adolescent alienation from parents, insecurity, self-blame, and resentment (Coren & Luthar, 2014).

Research indicates that the immediate social environment strongly influences perfectionism, including parental expectations, school setting, and peer values.

School setting

As adolescents spend the majority of their days at school, this setting can ideally be used to identify and support students who present with maladaptive perfectionism. Adolescents are uniquely situated to be influenced by their social setting, with those who perceive that others expect perfection to be more likely to experience psychological difficulties, reduced test performance, and negative emotions after exams (Einstein et al., 2000; Ferrari et al., 2018; Hewitt et al., 2011). Further, adolescent boys appear to experience higher rates of depressive symptoms when their social expectations involve pressure to avoid mistakes and traditional masculine views, including valuing toughness, heterosexuality, and avoidance of feminine traits (Rice et al., 2007; Tucker & Govender, 2008). In contrast to girls, it has been indicated that boys are less likely to reduce maladaptive perfectionistic behaviours through support from friends, and more likely to endorse negative psychological outcomes including depression (Coren & Luthar, 2014; Rice et al., 2007; Tucker & Govender, 2008).

Recommended interventions

It is recommended that schools approach both the broader social setting and smaller year group and class settings to identify and manage students who present with maladaptive perfectionism, to encourage healthy tolerance of mistakes.

Broad school approach

Engage with parents and families

The first recommendation is for schools to facilitate parent information evenings to discuss parental expectations and concerns regarding academic performance (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). Additionally, teaching parents how pressure influences their child and prioritising intrinsic values can assist with healthy goal attainment, as well as modelling acceptance of failure (Alodat et al., 2020; Flett & Hewitt, 2014).

Communicate healthy values to the broader student body

Secondly, through a whole school community focus, schools can encourage students to distinguish between excellence and perfection, and recognise the detrimental impacts of perfectionism on

As self-compassion is negatively related to depression and maladaptive perfectionism, teaching students to be kind to themselves is paramount.

performance (Alodat et al., 2020; Coren & Luthar, 2014; Flett & Hewitt, 2014). This reflects the SDT principle of wellbeing through relatedness.

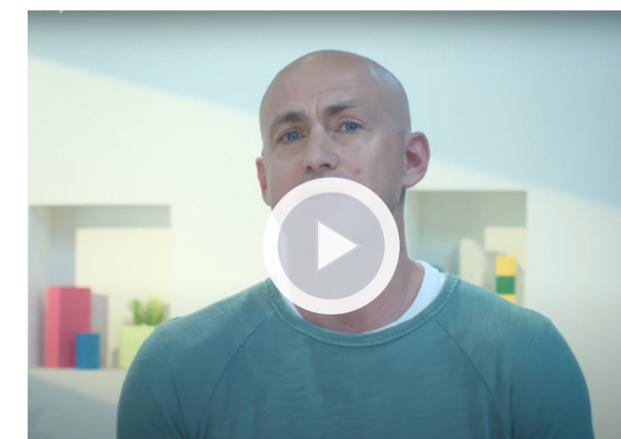
Classroom and year group settings

Teachers encourage autonomy in line with self-determination theory (SDT)

Autonomy is described as having control or independence over oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This kind of autonomy can be developed in students through: teachers listening to student problems and offering alternative solutions; facilitating diverse learning styles through different learning strategies; encouraging students to take safe risks with tasks; and giving students' personal responsibility for task completion (Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Herrera et al., 2021).

Self-compassion is explicitly modelled and taught

As self-compassion is negatively related to depression and maladaptive perfectionism, teaching students to be kind to themselves is paramount (Ferrari et al., 2018). This can be taught by: expressing compassion to others who make mistakes; recognising the commonality of mistakes and flaws across humanity; experiencing negative emotions with kindness; treating thoughts as separate from one's identity (Ferrari et al., 2018; Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Stoeber, 2017).



YouTube video: [Kindness: How to be nicer to yourself](#) by Headspace (2:18)

Stress management training

Students who feel the need to be perfect may experience increased levels of stress and anxiety (Stoeber, 2017). Thus, focusing on ways to manage stress can be beneficial for students who may be overwhelmed. This can be explicitly taught by exploring work/life balance, trying mindfulness strategies, such as the Headspace: Meditation & Sleep app, and considering what is within an individual's control versus what is beyond their control (Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Stoeber, 2017).

It is important to focus on academic difficulties or failures as opportunities to learn... making mistakes develops neural connections within the brain – thus, failure increases the capacity to learn.

Growth mindset focus

A growth mindset is the understanding that intelligence and skills can be learned, whereas a fixed mindset limits an individual to see people as categorically smart or not (Boaler, 2013; Flett & Hewitt, 2014). It is important to focus on academic difficulties or failures as opportunities to learn (Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Stoeber, 2017). Research into brain development indicates that making mistakes develops neural connections within the brain – thus, failure increases the capacity to learn (Boaler, 2013). Teachers can reinforce this mindset by: teaching students that learning requires effort and practice; giving students increasingly challenging work to encourage mistakes; and positively framing mistakes as opportunities to learn (Boaler, 2013).



YouTube video: [Growth mindset](#) by UNC Learning Centre (2:09)

Additional resources

In conclusion, teachers and school staff are well placed to identify students who may be displaying perfectionistic behaviours. If you have identified students that may display signs of perfectionism, the following resources may be useful:

- The head teacher wellbeing, learning and support teacher, and school counsellor/psychologist are good places to start to gain advice and seek resources on mindfulness and managing stress.
- [Parent Line](#)
- [Smiling Mind School Program](#)
- [Psych4Schools](#)
- [Centre for Clinical Interventions](#).

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A case for dystopian fiction in primary schools



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Jenner Beeche advocates the inclusion of dystopian fiction in library collections for upper primary school students.

Facetious memes aside, current world events show that dystopian fiction is not only welcomed in primary school libraries but also needed. Primary age students are confronted with disasters such as drought, flood, fires, climate change, global pandemic and lockdown, and growing wealth inequality in the news every day. By upper primary school, students are grappling with concepts such as their rights and responsibilities, the causes and effects of change on society and factors that influence how people interact. Dystopian fiction written for an upper primary audience can provide a means of investigating and navigating these such concerns.

Key issues and trends

The popularity of series novels like 'The Hunger Games' by Suzanne Collins (2008) and 'Divergent' by Veronica Roth (2011) demonstrate how strongly

the themes of dystopian fiction resonate with young adult readers (Hodge, 2015). The embracing of these texts by younger readers indicates that such themes are no longer just for teenagers.

A current trend with Australian dystopian fiction is an increasing focus on the effects of climate change. This is evident in various publications including 'Mechanica' by Lance Balchin (2017), 'The Feather' by Margaret Wild and Freya Blackwood (2019), 'The Dog Runner' by Bren MacDibble (2019) and 'New City' by Deborah Abela (2014). These books demonstrate the effects of cataclysmic changes to the environment as a result of global warming. Scholars such as Elaine Ostry (2013) investigate whether unresolved endings in environmental dystopias, such as those in 'Mechanica' and 'The Feather', might direct young readers toward environmental activism. Addressing the balance between contrived happy endings and the stark narratives that preface them, Ostry wonders whether 'despair and inconclusiveness may encourage adolescents to face inconvenient truths' (2013, p 111).

A New Zealand author, Elizabeth Kirkby-McLeod (2020), posits the opposite and asks writers to consider what happens if children see inescapable climate breakdown and the accompanying greed, selfishness and hate as the normalised future state for humanity. She compares MacDibble's 'The Dog

Runner' with 'How to Bee' by the same author to demonstrate the differences in approach between the bleak and individualistic outlook of the former and the message of kindness and self-sacrifice as a means of working together to survive in the latter. In a podcast titled [Communicating Climate Change](#) (2020), Michael Rosen argues similarly, proposing that narratives that are hopeless and apocalyptic do not motivate people towards collective change, instead they distance the reader from the actions they need to take and sometimes push them into despair.

Another trend of twenty-first century dystopian fiction is the shift in the protagonists of the books and their intended audiences. Well known dystopias of the twentieth century, including 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley, 'Fahrenheit 451' by Ray Bradbury and '1984' by George Orwell, feature adult protagonists and, although they frequently appear in senior high school reading lists, their target audience is adults. In contrast to this, recent dystopian fiction, featuring teenagers or children as the protagonists, is written for a much younger audience. These books share similar themes and conventions with the classics of the genre but play a special role for children and young adults as they wrestle with moving from childhood to adulthood (Scholes and Ostenson, 2013).

The books mentioned above follow this trend, both 'The Dog Runner' and 'New City' feature upper

primary age students as protagonists. In Bruce Whatley's 'Ruben' (2017), both the titular character and Koji, the girl he finds in Block City, are upper primary aged children. Two even younger children, Maria and Nico, are the main characters of 'The Feather' by Margaret Wild and Freya Blackwood. Even 'Mechanica', a multimodal dystopian narrative, created in the guise of being a field guide and historical



record, shows that the destruction wrought upon the world by adults is countered by 16 year old Chen Su and 15 year old Liberty Crisp.

Dystopian fiction can act as a gateway for students to start developing a sense of humanity and justice.

Value of the genre to a library collection

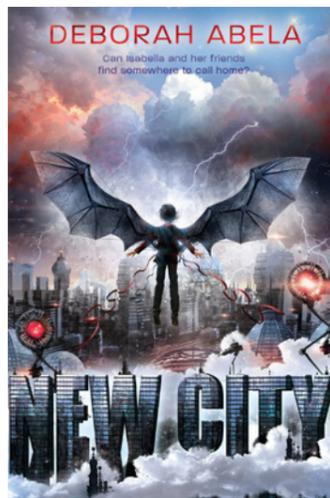
Upper primary aged students are often eager to read dystopian fiction. While enjoyment alone is enough to make a case for their value to a library collection, dystopian fiction also offers more than simple enjoyment. Dystopian fiction in general, and the examples given above in particular, can support students: to explore the role of importance and power of governments, to develop a sense of responsibility for justice and humanity, and to illustrate the rights of children to make decisions. As is noted in the foreword to 'Teaching towards Democracy with Postmodern and Popular Culture Texts' (Paugh, Kress and Lake, 2014): '... it is becoming increasingly apparent that the students in our classrooms are inheriting real world problems of economic instability, ecological damage, social inequality, and human suffering'. The texts mentioned here provide ample fuel for classroom discussion about the role governments and other institutions play in our lives, and the responsibility individuals hold for making sure justice and humanity are maintained by those in power.

Dystopian fiction can address cross-curricular connections between English and history, with thematic units exploring the purpose and role that government should play (Sholes & Ostenson, 2013). In New South Wales Stage 3 history, students are asked to trace experiences of democracy and citizenship over time, along with 'the struggles for rights and freedoms in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (HT3-4). In the English curriculum they are expected to respond to themes and issues within texts, consider how 'different viewpoints of their world, including aspects of culture, are represented in texts' (EN3-8D, ACELT1613)

and justify interpretations by referring to their own knowledge, values and experiences. Comparing fictional instances of political repression with current or historical events helps students more firmly grasp the protections governments should uphold (Barbour, 2019).

Dystopian fiction can act as a gateway for students to start developing a sense of humanity and justice. This political potential could be the genre's most

important and enduring influence. Dystopian fiction has spurred legions of readers towards promoting social justice (Hentges, 2015). Teaching and learning around sustainability in particular can be scaffolded by carefully chosen dystopian narratives. 'The Dog Runner' has already been mentioned for how it addresses the topic of climate change, but more specifically it can be used to introduce the idea of sustainability, especially Aboriginal sustainability practices. In the NSW geography Stage 3 syllabus, students are expected to explain interactions between people, places and environments and identify factors influencing interconnections. In science and technology, they are tasked with examining how environmental conditions affect the growth, adaptations, structural features and survival of living things. They must explain how food and fibre are produced sustainably in managed environments. Concepts of social justice and sustainability can be taught together by incorporating Ambelin Kwaymullina's 'Tribe' (2012) series, which uses Country as a multifaceted way of understanding the Australian landscape, especially considering how 'unlike Indigenous people, who had lived in cooperation with Country for so many, many years, the British would cause the rapid extinction of numerous plants and animal species. This devastation was itself a product of a worldview in which land was, and could only ever be, an inert possession' (Kwaymullina, 2010, ix).



Vivian Howard (2011) reports on research conducted with upper primary and early teenage readers and how their choices when reading for pleasure can shape values as they age. During their pleasure reading, older children and teenagers gain important understanding into relationships, personal values, cultural identity, physical safety and security, aesthetic preferences, and understanding of the physical world, all of which aid them in the transition from childhood to adulthood (Howard, 2011). In the NSW personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE) syllabus, it outlines the requirement of upper primary students to examine the influence of people and places on identity. They must practise skills to establish and manage relationships and to access and interpret health information and apply skills to seek help to enhance their own and others' health, safety and wellbeing (NESA).

Role of teachers

Like Mr Alvie Moore, in the opening pages of 'The Dog Runner', who passes a copy of 'Lord of the Flies' under the door to Ella, the role of primary school teachers and teacher librarians is to provide young people with engaging reading material. However, this mission is rarely straightforward. To put books in the hands of all students, be they eager, indifferent, or reluctant, primary school teachers must navigate thorny academic issues like a student's right to read, censorship and quality in children's literature.

All students have the right to read, to read for pleasure and to read books that 'mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world' (International Literacy Association). Because the skill of being able to read is so integral to all learning, teaching those skills is often prioritised in schools, to the neglect of reading for pleasure (Stower & Waring, 2018) despite research showing that students who regularly choose books to read daily for their own pleasure have the equivalent of 18 months more schooling than those who do not (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

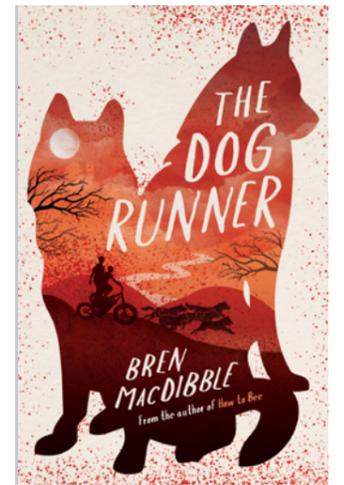
Quality literature

Who defines 'quality literature' and how do primary teachers and teacher librarians balance their duty

of care to young students while avoiding censorship? Censorship and duty of care are issues particularly prominent in relation to the dystopian fiction genre, as narratives in this style often present a bleak world view. For example,

when Ella returns home from Mr Alvie Moore's door with 'Lord of the Flies', her dad places it out of her reach, telling her she's too young. While at the beginning of the book she may have been too young to read such a dystopian novel, Ella soon demonstrates she is not too young to take charge while travelling cross country after Emery gets injured, a heroic journey that echoes many of the decisions faced by Ralph, the protagonist of William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' (1954). Was Ella's father right to keep the book from her? Or did he censor important lessons it may have taught her? As well as dealing with unique censorship issues, teachers and teacher librarians face an extra complication as adults appraising the quality of children's literature, since they are judging the worthiness of books for an audience that they are not part of (Stevenson, 2006).

However, throughout the books discussed here, the common theme beyond the dystopian is hope. The hope Ella feels at the existence of a seed bank. The hope Isabella and her friends feel when the camp is destroyed, and they find a home. The hope Maria and Nico feel as they watch the feather fly away. The hope Ruben and Koji feel when they board the train. The hope Liberty writes of when she discovers a living butterfly. Thus, it can be argued that hope is the most important part of the primary teacher's role. Hope that through books there is a chance for a better world, just as there is in most children's dystopian fiction. This genre can provide hope for young students, but none of this is possible without passionate and knowledgeable teachers who, like Mr Alvie Moore, are always trying to put the right books into the right hands.



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How teacher librarians impact students' reading engagement: A NSW case study



Lauren Ryder
Teacher Librarian, Wadalba Community School

Teacher librarians can play a key role in engaging students in literature, which can improve their literacy skills and attitudes towards reading. Margaret Merga (2019) suggests that, although some teacher librarians are being recognised for their value in schools, there is a good deal more to learn about the contributions they make in supporting reading habits and skills. The purpose of this paper is to examine ways that teacher librarians are engaging students in reading to foster growth in their literacy development and to create a reading culture within schools. The aim of all school libraries is the same, no matter the size, funding, or staffing. They are all dedicated to supporting student learning and encouraging students to become lifelong learners and readers (Daley, 2019).

Overview: the problem in Stage 3

Conversations with fellow teacher librarians suggests a potential pattern across primary schools – as students reach Stage 3, they lose interest in reading and are often disengaged in the library program. This is a significant concern and merits investigation, since reading for pleasure supports literacy learning and improves educational outcomes and job opportunities (Centre for Youth Literature, 2009, p 12). Not only does the amount a student reads provide a good indication of their academic attainment, it also informs students about the world, enriching their lived experience. Students who stop reading for pleasure around the age of 10-13 are likely to lose the brain connections that support reading attitude as adults, thereby making reading feel more of a chore. This also affects the ability to study at a higher educational level (Centre for Youth Literature, 2009, p 12).

Study population and sample

The study involved 8 NSW public schools, drawn from across the NSW Central Coast. The schools' 8 teacher librarians also agreed to be interviewed about how they support literacy for Stage 3 students.

The schools shared similar demographics and all but one was in an area of low to medium socio-economic status. The percentage of students from language backgrounds other than English was consistently under 20%. The student population across all schools, except one, included a slightly higher percentage of male students.

Conversations with fellow teacher librarians suggests a potential pattern across primary schools – as students reach Stage 3, they lose interest in reading and are often disengaged in the library program.

Research process

By using a case study approach with 8 different schools in the local area, I aimed to gain insights into students' reading interests and attitudes, and to understand each teacher librarian's approach to building a reading culture. To probe the reasons that Stage 3 students remain engaged or become disengaged in reading and literacy, I arranged to observe each of the teacher librarians' lessons with Stage 3 classes and review elements in their programs that engage students in literacy. In addition, the students from each class would complete questionnaires about their reading interests and habits. By analysing students' circulation statistics, and comparing these to both the students' questionnaires and the teaching methods and programs, I could determine if a connection exists between these factors.

Data collection methods and instruments

A case study approach was used to collect and consider the data. This methodology is valuable in developing understanding and determining standards for best practice in teaching (Timmons & Cairns, 2010, p 1).

Student survey

Across the 8 schools, 502 students in Stage 3 responded to a survey related to their literacy interests and capabilities. A cross-case analysis was completed to compare and understand the result of these questionnaires.

This quantitative data offered insights into how students are feeling about reading, how often they are exposed to literature (whether inside or outside school), and factors which may be impacting their feelings about literature, including ability and accessibility.

The aim was to determine whether students' feelings and experiences have any connection to borrowing rates and/or the teacher librarian's program and other school-based implementations.

Research questions

Overarching question

How do teacher librarians impact student's literacy in relation to their reading development and attitudes?

Additional questions

- Is there a relationship between students' attitudes towards reading and the teacher librarian's program?
- Are there outside influences impacting students' interest and attitude towards borrowing?

In the student survey, students answered the following multiple choice questions:

How often do you usually visit the library?

This question was asked to gauge how often students were visiting the library outside of their usual lessons (and thus potentially engaging with literature).

How much do you like reading?

This question helped to evaluate whether students' reading interest correlated with their borrowing rates. It was also valuable to examine the difference in reading interest between Years 5 and 6.

When I want to read a good book, I most often get the book from...

This question helped to determine whether students who were not visiting or borrowing from the library were accessing books elsewhere.

How do you choose what you read?

This question was designed to explore how students are selecting books to read and who may be influencing these choices – for example, friends, parents or teachers. It also helped to gauge how many students were unsure how to find books that interest them – a barrier to literature engagement.

How would you rate yourself as a reader?

This question was designed to understand if there was any correlation between how students felt about their reading capabilities and their interest in reading and literacy.

Do you use other libraries?

This question also helped to understand if students were accessing books elsewhere.

Is it easy to find the resources you are looking for?

This question was formulated to understand if reading interest was impacted negatively by students being unable to easily locate suitable books.

Teacher interviews, teaching programs and student borrowing statistics

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 8 teacher librarians. This qualitative data adds colour and context to the results of the quantitative survey data. Questions were asked about the ways that the teacher librarians support literacy learning within Stage 3. To further understand this situation, the teacher librarians provided their programs, and each had a lesson observed. These practices helped to understand what students were being taught and how literacy was (or was not) being incorporated in lessons. Statistical reports from Oliver, the school library system, were also provided for Terms 3 and 4 in 2020. Using a combination of these techniques allowed for some triangulation of the research data, in order to provide detail and thoroughness.

Results and discussion

Student survey

502 Stage 3 students responded to the survey: 54.7% of respondents were in Year 5, with 45.3% in Year 6.

When viewed collectively, the data confirms a significant drop between Year 5 and Year 6 in the number of students who said they strongly enjoyed reading. While 38.4% of Year 5 students said they 'enjoyed reading a lot' (Figure 1), only 22.6% of Year 6

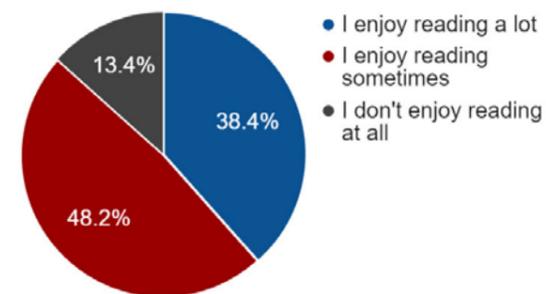


Figure 1. Student survey results (Year 5) – 'How much do you enjoy reading?'

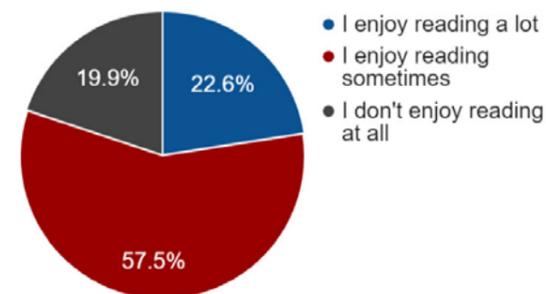


Figure 2. Student survey results (Year 6) – 'How much do you enjoy reading?'

students felt this way (Figure 2). Similarly, while 13.4% of students 'didn't enjoy reading at all' in Year 5, this figure was higher for the Year 6 cohort at 19.9%.

In contrast, students' self-perception as readers does not change significantly between Year 5 and Year 6. Students in both grades had 55% of students stating that they can read easily, while only 1-4% in both grades reported reading difficulty, and the rest felt they were OK readers. This indicates that students' perceptions of their reading ability is not what is impacting their interest and enjoyment in reading.

Interestingly, many Year 6 students continue to visit the school library regularly outside of scheduled lessons – even as their enjoyment of reading reportedly declines.

Interestingly, many Year 6 students continue to visit the school library regularly outside of scheduled lessons – even as their enjoyment of reading reportedly declines. This strong, ongoing use of the library space could possibly be attributed to the availability of engaging leisure activities, including LEGO creation, board games, computers and colouring. As Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate,

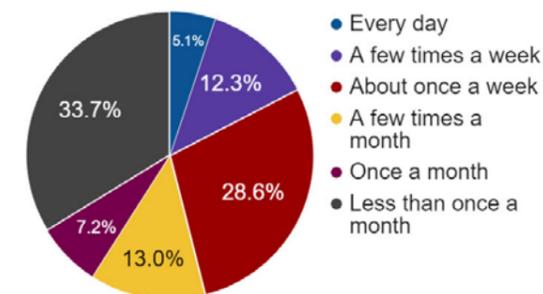


Figure 3. Student survey results (Year 5) – 'How often do you visit the library, apart from library lessons?'

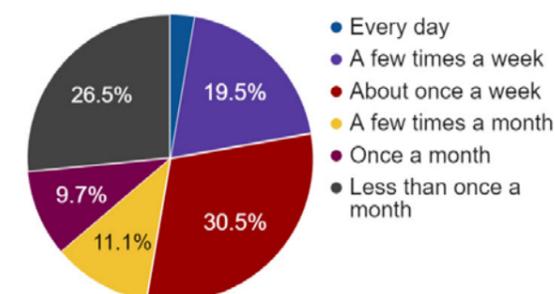
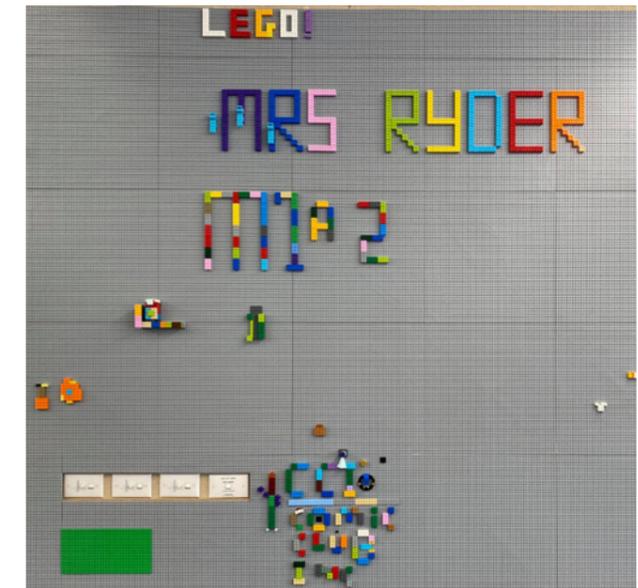


Figure 4. Student survey results (Year 6) – 'How often do you visit the library, apart from library lessons?'



Wall-mounted LEGO creation space at one of the surveyed schools

approximately half of Stage 3 students visit the library at least weekly, outside of their regular library lesson. The frequency of these visits is fairly consistent across Year 5 (Figure 3) and Year 6 (Figure 4), with students visiting slightly more often in Year 6.

When choosing books to read, students select their own resources the vast majority of the time. Recommendations from the teacher librarian/teacher or friends are the next most influential factors, followed by suggestions from parents (Figure 5).

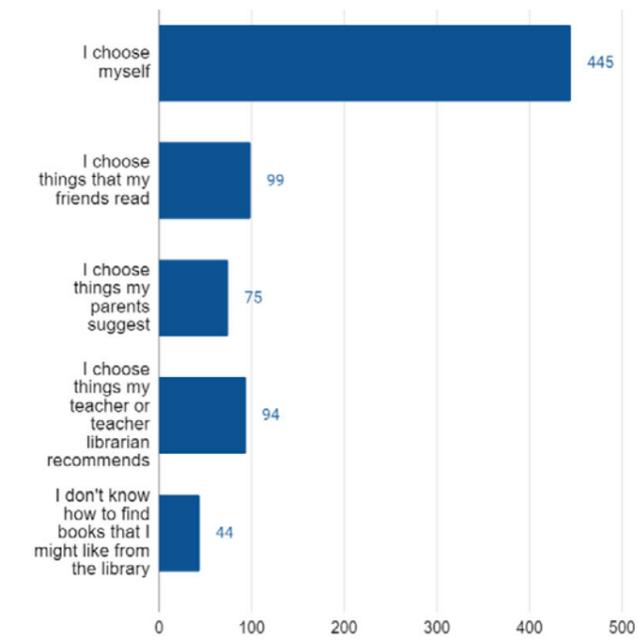


Figure 5. Student survey results (Years 5 and 6) – 'How do you choose what you read?' (Multiple options permitted)

In the majority of the schools, the most popular place to access books is the school library, followed by either home or the shops (Figure 6). Only 33% of Stage 3 students are accessing resources from other libraries (with most of those still relying predominantly on the school library).

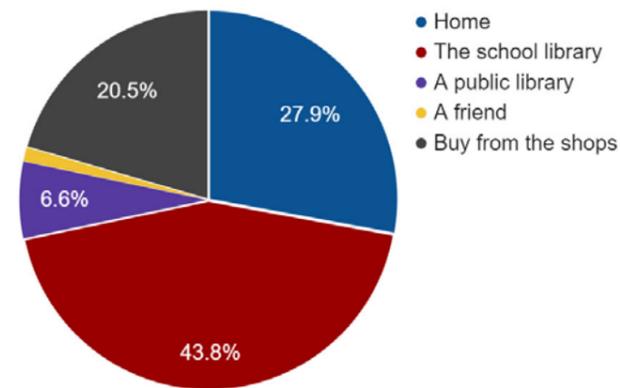


Figure 6. Student survey results (Years 5 and 6) – ‘When I want to read a good book, I most often get the book from...’

Worryingly, one-fifth of students reported experiencing difficulty locating resources, as shown in Figure 7. Students were more likely to experience confidence in locating resources when they had been explicitly taught how to use Oliver to search for different types of books using genres, reading lists, keywords and authors, and had practised locating these resources on the shelves.

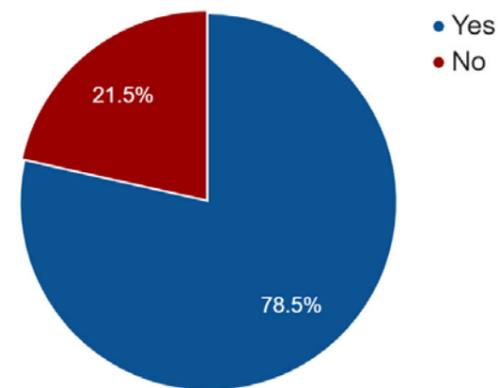


Figure 7. Student survey results (Years 5 and 6) – ‘Is it easy to find the resources you are looking for?’

Teacher interviews

The teacher interviews were firstly transcribed from recordings and then analysed to find common themes that emerged across all the interviews.

The recurring themes included:

- one-to-one matching
- book promotion
- students using Oliver to support access to texts
- students reading for pleasure
- events that celebrate literature
- classroom support
- whole school reading culture
- information literacy skills
- knowing the collection and keeping it current and relevant.

These categories are explained below.

One-to-one matching

One-to-one matching occurs when the teacher librarian engages with a student to understand their reading interests and needs. The pair explore these interests through conversation about what the student has liked reading before or what things they are interested in. Equipped with this information, the teacher librarian suggests similar texts and expands on the student’s interests to encourage exploration of a variety of suitable texts. The teacher librarian supports students to find books that are at their personal reading level, possibly in consultation with the classroom teacher. Alternatively, s/he might ask the student to read a page of a book that interests them to check that they are able to access the text. Some teacher librarians discussed ways in which student consultation and book requests inform purchasing decisions.

Book promotion

There are many ways that a teacher librarian promotes books to students to engage them in reading and learning. Book displays are used to present particular themes, new books, or particular resources, like graphic novels. Teacher librarians promote books through author talks or visits. Some teacher librarians preview new book releases before

... strong relationships between the teacher librarian and classroom teacher greatly impacted students’ attitudes towards reading and the library ...

each lesson by either reading the blurb or playing book trailers, and some read books aloud over the term. Others ask their students to write reviews or discuss the books they have read, since these peer endorsements can often be persuasive. Many teacher librarians also select a variety of books related to current units of work to extend students’ interest and understanding of topics they are learning about in class.

Students using Oliver to support access to texts

Teacher librarians commonly teach their students to use Oliver to find books of interest. They explain different features and search strategies, including locating resources via author, genre and subject. Supporting students to use Oliver helps them to select relevant books independently and confidently. Reading lists can also be utilised in Oliver for reading challenges or to assist students.

Students reading for pleasure

Some teacher librarians ensure that there is time in each lesson for reading for pleasure. This provides opportunities for students to explore texts which they may not usually be exposed to. In some schools, this time is provided in class as silent reading or buddy reading.



An eye-catching fiction display at one of the participating schools

Events that celebrate literature

Teacher librarians host events that celebrate literature, such as Book Week, book parades, National Simultaneous Story Time, Library Lovers’ Day and book fairs. These entertaining whole-school events engage students in a diverse range of books.

Author and illustrator visits both celebrate reading and explore the craft of writing. Some teacher librarians have attended luncheons held by the Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Others hold competitions around CBCA’s award-winning



Book Week display, prepared by one of the interviewed teacher librarians

books. One school celebrates books by having a day dedicated to giving free books to all students, through donations and weeding.

... students' interest in books increased when teachers made time for students to read for pleasure ...

Classroom support

The teacher librarians in the study frequently collaborate with or support classroom teachers. The nature of this support varies across different schools, and could include providing resources matched to the given class, or team teaching inquiry-based units of work.

Many interviewees noted that strong relationships between the teacher librarian and classroom teacher greatly impacted students' attitudes towards reading and the library. Teacher librarians also frequently indicated that their students' interest in books increased when teachers made time for students to read for pleasure with books aimed at their level and interest. It was also mentioned that when teachers actively encouraged their students to borrow, borrowing rates increased significantly.

Whole school reading culture

Teacher librarians across the schools interviewed had a mixed response to whether reading was being valued across the whole school. Those who felt that their school had quite a strong reading culture reported that school leaders and classroom teachers valued and prioritised reading for pleasure. The impact of this was visible when students came to the library.

A few of the teacher librarians said they noticed that when the classroom teachers had not allowed time to read, for whatever reason, library borrowing dropped considerably. Some interviewees commented that there were inconsistencies across the school, in terms of teachers valuing reading and therefore making time for reading for pleasure in their classrooms. They reported that students' attitudes were impacted by the significance their teachers placed on reading. Often, teacher librarians observed reading being embraced in the early years of schooling but said it dwindled as students got older.

Information literacy skills

Many teacher librarians mentioned teaching information literacy skills, and this was reflected in their programming. This included teaching skills associated with summarising, note taking, avoiding plagiarism, preparing bibliographies, and evaluating websites. Building these skills helps to support students'

transition from primary school to high school, and develops students' capabilities for undertaking assignments independently.

Knowing the collection and keeping it current and relevant

An important focus of many of the teacher librarians interviewed was knowing their collection and keeping it updated to meet the needs of their users. The interviewees spoke about how creating sections for popular authors or types of books (such as graphic novels) has encouraged more interest in reading. One teacher librarian spoke about the importance of spending money on resources for the library and making sure it is always relevant and current.

Drawing the data together

When looking closer at each school's student survey results, there were a few sites that stood out. In one school, only 16% of Stage 3 students reported reading enjoyment. This was also clear from their low borrowing rates, with 66-96% of students not borrowing in the second half of the year at all. Analysis of the teacher librarian's program and interview comments revealed that digital literacy was a substantial focus in Stage 3 at this school. The teacher librarian felt that promotion of reading and library resources was lacking. This was, in part, due to a perception that it was hard to engage these older students in texts, with interest quickly fading during read aloud sessions. The teacher librarian also reported that classroom teachers were not consistently encouraging students to read, but when teachers did get on board, circulation rates improved.

In contrast, the school which had the highest percentage (91%) of students who enjoyed reading either 'a lot' or 'sometimes', also had the lowest rate of students who never borrowed (3-7%). The teacher librarian felt that reading was highly valued by school

leaders and that most of the teachers within the school encouraged reading and created time for silent reading. The principal and Stage 3 teachers also described how reading was an expectation and was both heavily celebrated and supported across the school. The teacher librarian noted that when classroom teachers actively encouraged borrowing and reading for leisure, borrowing rates improved significantly:

'I can directly see the difference in borrowing levels when students silently read in the classroom. When their teachers encourage reading at the student's own interest and level in the classroom, and actively encourage students to borrow from the library, the borrowing rates for that class are significantly raised.'

Teacher librarian

Lesson observations and interview responses also strongly demonstrate that literature promotion is a very significant part of this teacher librarian's teaching practice. This individual engaged students through book trailers and discussions about a variety of texts and, most importantly, was visibly excited when discussing texts. S/he spoke about bringing an energy to the library and making it a joyful and exciting place to be. In the interview, s/he talked about building a socially acceptable reading culture in the school by prioritising fun, building connections with students, understanding what they like, and really knowing the collection.

Curiously, one school demonstrated exceptionally mixed results in their students' interest in reading, with the survey revealing the highest number of students reporting reading enjoyment, as well as the highest portion of students who did not like reading. (In all other schools, the majority of students reported liking reading 'sometimes'.) At this school, the number of students who never borrowed in the second half of the year varied significantly from 14% to 86%, depending on their class. This is possibly linked to differences between classroom teachers,

in terms of their encouragement of borrowing and reading for pleasure.

Analysis of the teaching programs, interviews, and lesson observations reveals that teacher librarians are focusing on more than just engaging students with quality literature. Seven out of the 8 schools were teaching programs that were solely focused on teaching technology, such as coding, or teaching inquiry units centred on research for history or geography topics. They often lacked time to cultivate a reading culture where students had opportunities to enjoy literature. One of the schools that had the most students borrowing books from the school library supported inquiry units by teaching information literacy skills and using quality literature that matched the units. They displayed books in themes that connected to their learning, extending students' interest in the topic. The teacher librarian also reported that whole school reading is a clear priority at the school, with all students participating in DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) at some point each day.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for teacher librarians emerge from analysis of the research data. They reflect some core actions associated with the effective growth of reading culture and love of literature within these schools.

When reading is noticeably valued by school leaders and classroom teachers, it can strongly impact the significance that students place on literature.

Build a reading culture – a whole school approach

Creating a reading culture requires the active support of all staff. When reading is noticeably valued by school leaders and classroom teachers, it can strongly impact the significance that students place on literature. The teacher librarian must drive this push for a whole school reading culture by working collaboratively with colleagues, and informing them of their potential influence. Classroom teachers should actively convey their own love of reading, consistently encourage reading and borrowing, and allow students time to read for pleasure each day.

Against such a backdrop, school events like Book Week and book parades are celebrated as genuine community initiatives, with a deep, shared appreciation of literature. Rewards and certificates also have their place in a whole school approach, but they are not the most significant element.

Read beyond the early years

In infants classrooms, it's common to see heavy text use in programs and teachers enthusiastically reading books for pleasure, each day. Through these moments and modelling, students' attitudes towards reading are positively shaped. Recognising the potential for slippage in the older years, teacher librarians can help maintain the momentum. In addition to working with colleagues to highlight the impact of regular reading for pleasure (especially when it is valued by classroom teachers), teacher librarians should also continue vigorously exposing students to a variety of engaging, quality texts.

Know the collection

Knowing the library collection is critical in order to effectively connect students with compelling texts that meet their interests and needs. Given the large number of students in the study who are selecting books independently, there is potentially scope for more proactive guidance by teacher librarians in Stage 3.

To support this, teacher librarians can:

- regularly update the collection, with a variety of new and popular texts
- promote a variety of texts, to appeal to diverse tastes
- host a [book tasting](#)
- capture students' interest with engaging book trailers (and encourage students to create and share their own)
- read aloud a suspenseful book extract, creating a hook for borrowing
- call on other students to share what they have been reading, enhancing the social position of the book
- equip students with strategies to discover books which match their interests and the skills to locate them
- reduce obstacles to book selection. For example, for easy access, consider placing themed displays or 'hot picks' on the circulation desk or in high traffic areas.
- provide one-to-one matching for all students, not just the avid readers who seek recommendations. (As we know, even students who say they don't like reading, often readily engage with the right books.)
- create a culture where reading for pleasure is cultivated by speaking passionately about books, and making time to discuss literature and students' reading interests

- leverage students' lunch time library visits to make connections, build relationships with them as readers, and suggest different books.

The way the teacher librarian promotes books within the library can make all the difference to whether a student is borrowing and reading.

Manage the balance

Obviously, teacher librarians cannot devote their entire program to promoting and reading literature. However, given the significant impact that literature has on learning, it must be a significant focus. As always, the approach depends on the needs of learners and the school context, and some flexibility may be needed. For example, this could mean teaching information literacy skills or coding, or another program, for two terms of the year, while teaching a literature-based program during the other terms. Or the focus could change across alternate weeks, throughout the year. In addition, teacher librarians could seek opportunities to consistently value literature and encourage reading across the year, even if this forms only a small proportion of some lessons. In any case, monitoring changes in borrowing and students' engagement will provide useful feedback. Be prepared to swap around a lesson to build excitement in new literature, or spark students' curiosity again.

Conclusion

It is clear that teacher librarians can have a significant impact on students' literacy in relation to their reading development and attitudes. Indeed, teacher librarians are ideally positioned to build a reading culture within the school by working closely with classroom teachers and enthusiastically cultivating a love of literature. Leveraging the ongoing popularity of school library spaces among Year 6 students, they can tap into students' reading interests and teach them how to access relevant, accessible literature. Teacher librarians can also encourage a



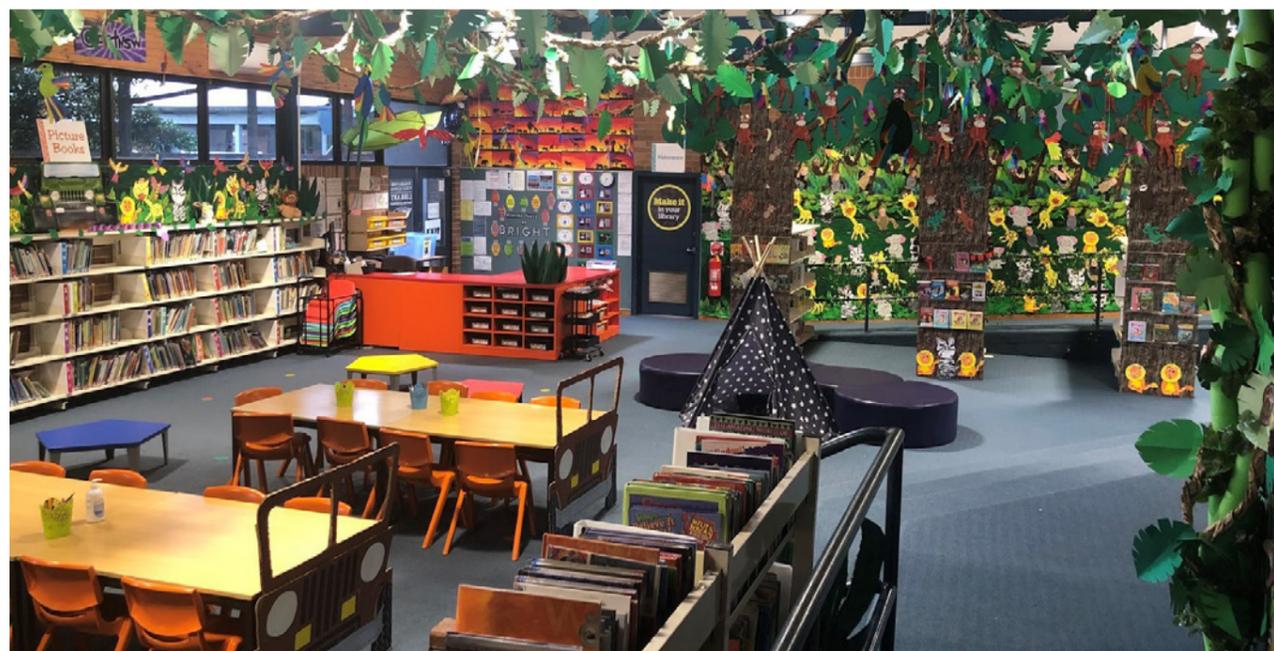
Celebrating stories in the school library

love of reading by enhancing the social position of books through text promotion, reading aloud, book trailers and other reading engagement strategies. By knowing their collection and keeping it current and relevant, they can cultivate an energetic library space where students' love of literature is able to flourish.

When starting this research, I was interested in whether there was a relationship between the teacher librarian's program and students' feelings about reading. It has become clear that at schools where literature is not being emphasised in such programs, students' interest in reading and borrowing is significantly lower. This is an interesting finding, since teacher librarians are inevitably involved in teaching and leading other valuable skills, such as information skills and coding. As such, it points to a need for balance. And challenges teacher librarians to actively create ongoing opportunities to support students' engagement in reading.

Future research could investigate more thoroughly whether other external influences are impacting Stage 3 students' attitudes towards reading and borrowing. For instance, parent support for reading can play a part in developing and nourishing reading motivation in children (Klauda, 2009), and future research could explore the specific ways schools can work in partnership with families to nurture

reading engagement. It would also be fascinating to drill down on students' reading habits. For example, those who are reading but not borrowing from their school library are mostly sourcing books from home or the shops – why? How can school libraries



An inviting library space at one of the participating schools

... at schools where literature is not being emphasised in such programs, students' interest in reading and borrowing is significantly lower.

better cater for these readers? There is also a lot more that could be learnt in terms of what Stage 3 classroom teachers are doing – how much time they devote to reading (silently or aloud) and how (and how much) they foster a love of reading within their classrooms. With this study as a starting point, such questions could be pursued via more research to further expand our understanding of reading attitudes in Stage 3, and to consider additional ways school libraries and communities can avert reading disengagement.

Note

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of the schools and teacher librarians who kindly allowed me to enter their spaces, observe their teaching, survey their students, and access their programs and Oliver data. Sincere thanks also to June Wall for facilitating this valuable professional exercise. Finally, it should be acknowledged that, given the diverse and dynamic role of teacher librarians, many amazing things were being taught in the libraries I visited – beyond this study's specific focus on reading habits and attitudes.

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Writer biographies



Kelly Rump

Kelly Rump is an AHPRA-registered psychologist who currently practices as a full-time school psychologist across primary and secondary schools. She completed her Honours in psychology in 2018, and received a scholarship with the Department of Education to complete her Masters of Professional Psychology in 2019. Prior to her psychologist role, Kelly worked as an English and History teacher. She also has experience teaching in special education and behaviour settings.



Jenner Beeche

Jenner Beeche is a teacher librarian at Mount Brown Public School, on Dharawal land. She has been teaching since 2004 and a teacher librarian since 2017. She is inspired by dystopian fiction for children and argues passionately for the inclusion of this genre for upper primary students in school libraries. Jenner is a strong advocate for students' right to read, to read for pleasure, to read without limitations or censorship.



Lauren Ryder

Lauren Ryder is a teacher librarian at Wadalba Community School. After teaching for 8 years, her passion for literature and its impact on education have inspired her to complete a Masters in Librarianship. Within her learning environment, Lauren seeks to create a space where curiosity and creativity flourish, information literacy is explored, and stories are shared and celebrated.

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