

**Focus:**

**EFFECTIVE USE OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY IN SUPPORTING  
INFORMATION LITERACY DEVELOPMENT**

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Sabbatical Report

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**Rational and Background Information**

In 2005 the Education Review Office released a report entitled *Student Learning in the Information Landscape*.

This report highlighted some good practices which were happening. It was encouraging to see the positive attitudes being developed towards reading in primary schools. However the report also indicated that we have some way to go in achieving optimum outcomes from a resource that most schools invest heavily in, not only in terms of finance but also personnel and time.

From my personal perspective, our school was fortunate to build a new library in 2000. Leading up to this we took part in the National Library Focus programme. The support we received from the Library Advisors was invaluable and helped us to achieve a dream of an attractive, student centred, well resourced facility. Being a relatively small school we are unable to afford the staffing we would like. However we are very fortunate in having a teacher aide with a teaching background. Our Teacher with Library Responsibility is very hardworking and keen to develop the library but unfortunately the small amount of release time she has does not enable her to work with students.

Our current situation is that most of the staff who were at the school when we participated in the Focus programme have now moved on and our Teacher with Library Responsibility is soon to travel overseas. We have a predominantly young staff and from talking to them it appears that the school

library is not something which gains much mention in current Teacher Training programmes. My assumption that all teachers know how to use and gain maximum potential of this valuable resource seems to be ill founded. It is my personal belief that many teachers underestimate the potential of school libraries and trained teacher librarians in raising the achievement of students. It seems timely therefore that we look in depth at our current use of the school library, look at good practice in other schools and study research highlighting the possible directions of school libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Armed with this knowledge, we will then be in a position to develop a plan for the future.

### **Methodology**

Activities undertaken during the period of the sabbatical included:

- Visited a number of school libraries – mixture of contributing, full primary and intermediate schools
- Studied research – in particular the results of research carried out in 16 states of America
- Attended course provided by National Library of New Zealand – *Making a Difference – Evidence Based Practice and the School Library*
- Conducted survey of staff and students at my own school
- Discussed findings and way forward with staff

### **Student Learning in the Information Landscape – ERO - 2005**

Findings documented in this report were:

- Most schools were making progress in providing an appropriate infrastructure that enabled students to connect with the information landscape.
- In many schools, information and communication technologies (ICT) and the school library were being developed without effective links between the two.
- In three-quarters of all schools, the content of each school's information resources supported the needs, interests and abilities of the students effectively.
- Few schools collected achievement data to show improvement in student information literacy skills.
- Developing students' positive attitudes to reading was an area of particular strength in the primary schools, but not in the secondary schools.

For continued development ERO recommended:

- Taking a whole-school, cross-curriculum approach to fostering a reading culture and to developing information literacy
- Strengthening the role of the school library in supporting teaching and learning
- Aligning the various parts of the school's information infrastructure to support learning
- Improving assessment practices to measure student achievement in information literacy and attitudes to reading
- Improving assessment practices to measure the impact of the school library on supporting student achievement

## **Research**

There is obviously a growing awareness of the need for evidence based practice – documentation of the difference which school libraries make to student learning.

The United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science has released a research paper detailing comprehensive studies of school libraries carried out in sixteen states.

A summary of these studies states:

*“A multitude of evidence strongly supports the connection between student achievement and the presence of school libraries with qualified school library media specialists. When library media specialists work with teachers to support learning opportunities with books, computer resources, and more, students learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized test scores than their peers in schools without good libraries.”*

Common themes emerging were:

- A positive relationship exists between the number of hours a library is staffed by qualified personnel and the performance of students in standardized tests.
- Schools with flexible scheduling of the library show significantly higher test scores than those with less flexible scheduling.
- Student achievement is related to school library spending.
- Scores tended to increase when libraries had newer books and were open more hours.
- Teachers from schools with highest test scores were more likely to plan collaboratively with colleagues, including library staff.
- Libraries staffed by qualified personnel play a critical role in contributing to learning in general, and information literacy in particular.
- Students need computer access to resources stored both in the library and elsewhere in the school.

The overwhelming theme to emerge is the importance of libraries being staffed with fully qualified personnel.

*“Every classroom should have a library of materials that is large and diverse enough to provide daily opportunities for students to read self-selected materials. In addition, every school should have a fully funded library that meets the highest of state and/or national standards and a licensed, full-time library media specialist.” - Report of the NEA Task Force on Reading, 2000*

*“A substantial body of research since 1990 shows a positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement. The research studies show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement – whether such achievement is measured in terms of reading scores, literacy, or learning more generally. A school library programme that is adequately*

*staffed, resourced, and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the community.”*

*School Libraries Work*

*– Research Foundation Paper*

*–Updated 2006 Edition*

In New Zealand the National Education Monitoring Project 2005, Information Skills, found:

- *Most year 4 students, but particularly girls and Pasifika students, were enthusiastic about looking for information.*
- *Most year 8 students showed that they were able to use computer catalogues and find information in a reference book.*
- *Few year 4 and year 8 students could describe a coherent process or strategy for finding and using information for a research or study topic.*
- *The internet is seen as the most preferred source of information for students. The declining use of libraries is a concern given the value of resources they can provide.*

This project recommended:

*Information skills have relevance across the curriculum. Students would benefit particularly from teaching, modelling and guided practice in the process of finding and using information within authentic contexts of science, social studies, technology and health at all levels.*

The survey carried out in my own school addressed issues relating mainly to access, library skills, attitudes. No attempt was made to determine the influence of the library on student achievement. This will be the next step in the process. The results of this survey, and staff discussions, have shown the importance of raising the profile of our library in the school and encouraging teachers to use it as an important tool in planning learning programmes.

### **School Visits**

During the period of my sabbatical I visited a number of libraries in the lower North Island. These ranged in size, decile and type – contributing, full primary and intermediate. I am particularly grateful to those schools for welcoming me and responding so readily to my questions. The enthusiasm shown by the library staff in these schools was inspirational. They were generous in sharing ideas and resources.

The main findings of these visits were:

- All libraries visited were attractive with good promotions such as new books, themes, authors.
- Staffing was an issue in most schools. Smaller schools tended to operate with the services of a part time teacher aide. Teachers with Library Responsibility had little or no release time in these schools. Staffing increased according to the size of the school. Some schools made sacrifices in terms of class sizes in order to provide library staffing.
- Schools which had participated in the National Library Focus programme had a clear rationale for the role of the library.

- Most schools taught library skills but there was generally a lack of a school-wide, sequential approach.
- Student use of the Web for research purposes was lower than I had expected.
- Only two schools assessed the impact of the school library on student achievement.
- Those schools attempting to link ICT and the library in terms of developing information literacy were still in the early stages of doing so.
- Most schools sought feedback from students and staff on the quality of resources, accessibility, attitudes to the library.

### **Looking to the Future**

The importance of staffing the library with qualified personnel has emerged as one of the key findings of my study. In the absence of Ministry funding for such a position, decisions need to be made about priorities. Would the provision of a full time teacher/librarian justify the addition of two to three children to each class?

The use of more voluntary assistance to perform administrative duties could help to release library personnel to work more directly with students.

A school-wide, progressive library skills programme appears to be of critical importance if students are to develop the necessary skills to locate and process information effectively. Library periods need to be more than just an opportunity for exchanging books.

Flexible timetabling of the library is a challenge which must be continually addressed. Solutions need to be found so that students have access to the library before and after school, and lunch periods, as well as when necessary during the school day.

The library needs to be promoted as having a significant contribution to teaching and learning programmes. It needs to be seen as an extension of the classroom.

Opportunities for the library to become a resource for our community need to be explored. Parents who are comfortable in using a library, can readily access information, and have a positive attitude to reading and knowledge acquisition are more likely to be able to assist their children to develop the same skills.

The content of the library needs constant monitoring to ensure it is meeting diverse cultural needs.

While there is an obvious need to integrate ICT programmes with the library, I believe e-learning needs to be viewed as a tool through which learning is assisted, rather than an end product.

Libraries are obviously under pressure to provide data based evidence of the contribution they make to student learning. The amount of money tied up in

school libraries across the country justifies such an approach. However caution should be taken to ensure that disproportionate amounts of time are not spent on measuring effectiveness when schools have such limited resources.

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