

# Creating a community of readers

By Josephine Laretive



## Biography

Josephine Laretive is a F-6 teacher librarian, based at Moriah College in Sydney, who has worked in the profession since 2002. She has worked as a corporate information specialist and is currently updating her Graduate Diploma to a Master of Education — Teacher Librarianship at Charles Sturt University. Josephine is passionate about what libraries can offer to teaching and learning experiences. She is enthusiastic about promoting quality literature, learning and creating with technology, and providing a high standard of service to all.

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## Abstract

Creating a community of readers highlights and explores aspects of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) [Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians](#). The Standards comprise three facets: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Commitment. Within each of these, the focus and importance of reading is prevalent; although detailed separately, reading is interrelated. This article explores the importance of reading as promoted by the Standards, insight from research, and practical tips from engagement with reading and literature-based pedagogy in the F-6 context. Reference to the importance of reading for adolescents is also referred to.

The Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians aim to enrich teacher librarians' professional engagement and develop student learning outcomes. The Standards have been an essential companion to my experience and have assisted greatly with guidance and planning, promoting and strengthening the service of the library, and have provoked professional learning and connections.

## Make reading infectious

A well-resourced school library is not enough to ensure students will read. Our purpose is to make a difference and aspire to influence reading throughout the school community. Research into reading for enjoyment or 'regular recreational reading offers significant benefits for literacy development' (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding,

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1988; Clark, 2013; Mol & Bus, 2011; Samuels & Wu, 2001), and 'enjoyment of reading is associated with literacy achievement' (OECD, 2011a), 'encouraging children to be lifelong readers is an educational imperative' (Merga, 2016, p. 255). In addition to increased academic achievement, reading for pleasure also extends 'knowledge and understanding of the world; language acquisition and development; creativity and imaginative development; [and] social and emotional development' (Staff from Seven Stories, 2013, pp. 103–104).

Although the majority of this article focuses on primary school students, it is important to note that reading for pleasure or recreational reading generally regresses as students move into adolescent years and students tend to have less interest and spend less time reading (Merga, 2015). Therefore, teacher librarians of adolescents 'probably have to work even harder' (Dominguez, Garcia, Martino & Mendez, 2016, p. 240) to ensure reading is a priority.

## ASLA — Professional Knowledge Standard 1.3 Knowledge of the Curriculum

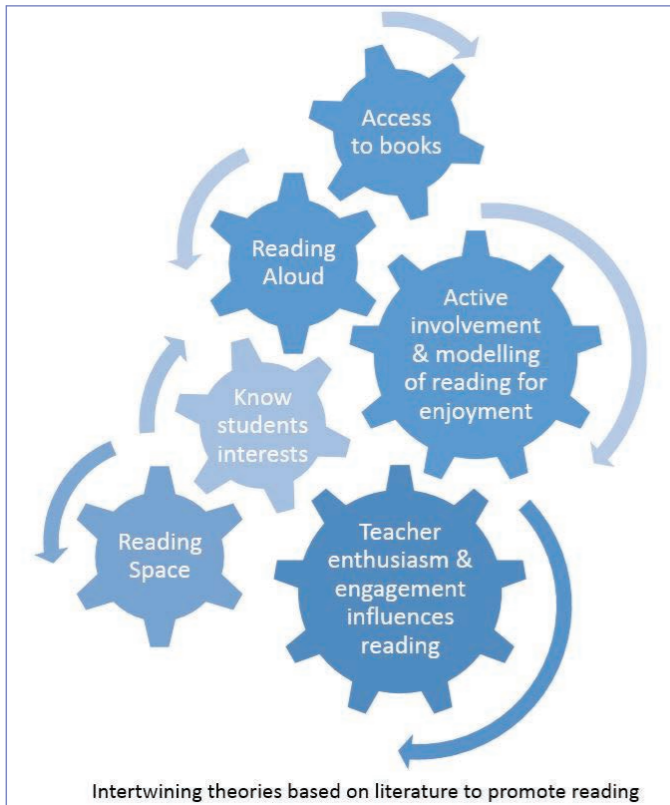
*Have a comprehensive understanding of literacy, literature for children and young adults, curriculum and specific programs in their schools*

Having a comprehensive understanding of literacy, literature, curriculum and

programs takes time to develop. However, as outlined by Baker (2016), the teacher librarian should target literacy and reading by 'demonstrating their knowledge of a wide range of diverse literature to meet the information and personal needs and interests of teachers and students at all grade levels' (Baker, 2016, p. 151).

Knowledge of the curriculum is vital as library resources, both print and digital need to align with the curriculum and school community. School libraries 'have a major role to play in identifying, acquiring, promoting and managing resources' (Mitchell, 2011, p. 11). It is essential that teacher librarians access class programs and engage with the Syllabus Outcomes and Content in order to gain a thorough overview of the teaching, learning and resource needs of the school. Knowledge of the curriculum and school programs ensures the teaching and learning programs planned by the teacher librarian are appropriate, and complement and extend the learning needs of the students. Knowledge of the curriculum also secures trust between the teacher librarian and school community; trust, as outlined by Baker (2016), encourages strong relationships and a sense of connection within the school.

The significance of literacy in the Australian Curriculum is evident as a core element of the English syllabus as well as a General Capability. Literacy in the Australian



### Standard 1.3 Knowledge of the Curriculum

*Have a detailed knowledge of how to promote and foster reading*

It is essential to promote and foster reading in order to create a community of readers. The power of inspiration and influence of the teacher librarian and indeed teachers has a profound effect on encouraging students to read. Recent research by Merga (2015) of teacher attitudes and practices, and the effect on motivating student recreational reading, provides noteworthy guidelines to direct educators to make a difference. Merga (2015) acknowledges the following approaches encourage reading: teacher enthusiasm and excitement about books; active participation and modelling of reading for enjoyment; awareness and active promotion of age-related reading; an understanding of student interests; reading aloud to students; allowing for regular silent reading time; and realistic expectations and purposeful planning for students to read at school and at home.

Reference to reading aloud to children is frequently promoted by research and

related literature and 'the benefits of reading to students on a daily basis cannot be disregarded or downplayed' (Lowe, 2016, p. 38). Trelease (2001, as cited in Lowe, 2016, p. 38) states 'the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children'. Benefits from regular reading aloud to children include: it exposes children to and increases awareness of a wide range of reading materials and genres; encourages an aspiration to read; extends vocabulary and improves comprehension; builds knowledge; provides a reading model assisting with fluency; and incites curiosity (Lowe, 2016).

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The Power of Reading Project, initiated by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), acknowledges reading for pleasure is influenced by 'developing an ethos and an environment that excites, enthuses, inspires and values' reading (CLPE, 2016, Reading for Pleasure). Furthermore, CLPE encourage regular and purposeful reading aloud; being well-informed about children's literature; allowing for opportunities to share responses and ideas about books; encouraging discussion about books and stories; knowledge of the importance of illustrations and pictures in books; drama; author visits and literature across the curriculum as effective approaches to promote reading for pleasure.

Likewise, Layne (2009) devotedly advocates for igniting reading passion and suggests

similar approaches, he outlines practical insight on how to connect with and know students' interests; set up book chats and discussions; successfully read aloud; create reading space, and organise author visits. Krashen's (2004) extensive research into free voluntary reading as a foundation for language education highlights the significance of encouraging and allowing for time to read at school and at home. Advice from Krashen (2004) on encouraging a reading culture includes access to reading materials at school and at home; the importance of libraries; reading aloud, and providing time and a suitable space to read.

Taking risks when choosing books to read and introduce to children is advised by CLPE. They indicate that by sharing a range of authors and genres allows students 'to gain a breadth of reading experience' (CLPE, 2016, Choosing and using quality children's texts), discover and be enticed to try different books. Furthermore, they acknowledge that although we need to extend reading, respecting student choice and supporting popular series and current interests is important.

Recently I have made a conscious plan to increase the introduction of books to students by purposefully selecting, briefly introducing the book, opening the book and engaging by reading aloud the first few pages. This simple practice has created an entry into the story, there has been a vibe

of excitement about the books with most borrowed instantly, reserve lists created and additional copies for some ordered. By taking time to select a range of books to read aloud to different classes has increased my knowledge of the library collection and has also had a positive effect on connection with students.

Earlier this year a progressive Reading Challenge was introduced to students in Years 1–6. The Challenge was designed to introduce students to the wide range of reading materials available at the library and allows for flexibility, for example, 'read a book with a character's name in the title'. However, for some children it is seen as too restrictive; feedback from students has indicated they would rather just find a

offering one way in is necessary, therefore it is important to try different approaches. Obtaining feedback and suggestions from students is very helpful in order to gain opinions and generate new ideas.

### **ASLA — Professional Practice Standard 2.1 Learning Environment**

*Provide access to information resources through efficient, effective and professionally-managed systems*

Ensuring that students learn how the library is set up and how to locate resources is essential. 'The organisation and presentation of books and media is a central part of accessibility in libraries, and a central part of the libraries' presentation of itself' (Vold & Evjen, 2016, abstract). Access to

and whether the physical environment and role of other children or adults may influence their book selection. The study observed children in public libraries and bookstores and noted that, in both, books are generally grouped by the reading age and children tend to 'quickly find a section ... to browse, apparently without reading the signage and certainly without resorting to the online catalogue' (Cunningham, 2011, under heading Finding the Right Area). It is also noted that the physical space in the libraries and bookstores was sectioned through the use of furnishings and colour. Organising books in progressive reading age also allowed children to move between adjacent reading levels. Interestingly, it was apparent that on 'return visits ... children appear to recall the physical location of the shelves and displays ... [and] are keenly aware of the physical layout of "their" section' (Cunningham, 2011, under heading Finding the Right Area). Another interesting fact from the observational study highlights that children most often are with family members, friends or peers when choosing books. Therefore, the opportunity to create in the school library a community of readers that share, recommend, excite and influence others is of utmost importance.

Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016) highlight provision and access to a wide range of reading materials influence reading. 'The importance of choice and volume cannot be overstated here: students who have more choice in what they read will read more' (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, as cited in Fisher, Frey and Hattie, 2016, p. 56). Greater access to reading materials is also promoted by Merga (2016) who discusses the importance of access to books for adolescents, the more books available the greater link to reading for enjoyment.

### **Standard 2.1 Learning Environment**

*Foster an environment where learners are encouraged and empowered to read, view, listen and respond for understanding and enjoyment*

Accessibility and presentation of school libraries should encourage children to feel connected, offer a place which is familiar, inviting and uncomplicated. Allowing for serendipity and encouraging children to discover by chance is also an important factor (Vold & Evjen, 2016). Encouraging and demonstrating browsing with young children in the school library 'enables them to see the variety of choices available to them ... and helps them to become comfortable lifelong users of libraries' (Montgomery, 2014, p. 9). Effective strategies to foster serendipity include regular change of book displays by theme and organising books to face out. The importance of book covers on the influence of children's selection is well researched (Cunningham, 2011); the simple act of a face-out cover is eye-catching and appealing. Serendipity is also provided when books are placed on a 'rotating shelve system ... making users look at the collection from a slightly different angle each time they visit' (Vold & Evjen, 2016, under heading Discussion).

'The importance of developing creative and dynamic environments ... stimulate the imagination' (Bateman-Whitson, 2011; Braxton, 2008; Huertas, 2004; as cited in Dominguez, Garcia, Martino, & Mendez, 2016, p. 237). The environment of the library incorporating layout, displays, designated and flexible space, furnishing and design, signage, and access can determine the success and influence student connection with the library. Setting up the library to showcase new books and displaying books

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book and read. The Reading Challenge has progressive rewards (certificates), and we are mindful that research that suggests rewarding for reading may be harmful (Krashen, 2004, p. 117). However, we are closely monitoring progress and student feedback and refining the challenge as necessary. Another point of consideration is pointed out by Cunningham (2011) who indicates that children enjoy being responsible for their own reading choices, so for some students, the Challenge may not make any difference. Ensuring that we don't restrict students from reading by only

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Physical management of library resources and space to allow for easy access and appropriate flow is essential if students are to feel confident and have a sense of belonging. An observational study by Cunningham (2011) focused on strategies children apply when selecting a book to read for enjoyment

face out and creatively are successful ways to promote reading.

### ASLA — Professional Commitment Standard 3.2 Commitment

*Foster a reading culture through the active promotion of literature*

It is apparent that teacher librarians have a fundamental role and can create significant positive influence on reading for pleasure; however, this is not our only purpose. Our role is complex and requires a high set of skills. Day-to-day responsibilities vary from teaching; resourcing and curating information sources; implementing information and digital literacy skills into the school curriculum (Scholastic, 2016), and advocating for 'social media and technological trends' (Herring, 2017). More recently, teacher librarians have been involved with the Maker Movement (Bonanno, 2016) requiring skills in new technologies exploring design, creativity and problem-solving. As this could all be 'in a day's work', the need to be welcoming, up-skilled, organised, flexible, and able to prioritise is essential.

However, as the dynamics of our role continues to develop, we need to ensure the importance of reading is not undervalued. Actions to confidently promote reading and literature have been provided throughout this article; it is important that we are aware and respond to such direction and lead the way, encouraging all to participate in our schools. We can align literacy and literature within our programs, inform and incorporate quality literature into History, Geography and Cross-curriculum priorities to complement units. We can dedicate time to purposefully engage with literature provided through the CBCA's *Short List books* and celebrate Children's Book Week, dress

up as book characters, and have authors visit and engage with the school community to demonstrate our love of reading.

By fostering opportunities to promote reading through reading aloud, planning literature-based activities that encourage creativity and inspire children, we can make a difference. We should purposefully plan to allow students time to share, discuss and encourage peers to wonder about books and what they may be missing out on — a little social influence goes a long way. It is our purpose to make a difference. We have Standards to guide us and direction on how to influence and make reading infectious. Within our schools, we should strive to create a community of readers.

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