

# **Education and Science Committee Inquiry into Reading**

## **SLANZA Submission, 5 September 2000**

To the Education and Science Committee on the Inquiry into Reading / The Teaching of Reading.

1. This submission is from Jan Foote, Teacher Librarian, Otahuhu College, and the Steering Committee of the School Library Association of New Zealand/Aotearoa (SLANZA) Te Puna Whare Matauranga a Kura.
2. I wish to appear before the committee to speak to my submission. I can be contacted at Otahuhu College, P.O. Box No. 9377, Otahuhu, Auckland City, telephone 09 2701170, fax 09 2760522, e-mail: stanley\_foote@xtra.co.nz.
3. SLANZA was launched in May 2000. Its mission is to strengthen and promote the role of school libraries to enable all school communities to become information literate.

The goals of the organization are to;

- Provide a national voice for the school library community.
- Advocate the critical role of school libraries in teaching, reading and learning.
- Represent all school library staff
- Lobby for improved funding to provide better library facilities and services.
- Create opportunities to recognize excellence within the school library field.
- Improve the professional standing, working conditions and qualifications for all staff involved with school libraries.
- Support professional development through biennial conferences, regular newsletters and a web site.
- Develop links with associated national and international professional organizations.

It currently has a membership of 250, drawn from all the groups - Librarians, Teacher-Librarians, Teachers with Library Responsibility and Voluntary Staff who work in school libraries.

In preparing this submission, I consulted with other Steering Committee members (who represent these groups and the National Library Services to Schools) and members of the National Library advisory and research staff.

We wish to make the following comments to the inquiry to the Teaching of Reading:

1. SLANZA believe that the effective teaching of reading makes use of a broad continuum of teaching strategies ranging from phonics to whole language. Children need to understand phonic and sound clues, but equally they need to be able to use context and prediction. They need to exposure to narrative and story to develop imaginative experience and to factual information to build up their knowledge of the world. These elements form a spiral rather than a hierarchy; each one feeds into the other and increases a child's ability to obtain meaning from a text.

2. The teaching of reading is not something that happens only in the early primary school. A knowledge-rich environment where a huge amount of information is transmitted electronically means that students must not only be able to decode text Students must also be able to locate information independently; synthesize information from a number of sources and to evaluate such information. We teach children to read so that they become literate. To be truly literate in our society, students must be information literate. They need to control the mass of information open to them rather than be controlled by it the teaching of such literacy continues throughout the primary and secondary schools.

3. School libraries are essential to both the teaching of reading and of information literacy. Stephen Krashen's *The Power of Reading* (Libraries Unlimited 1993) explores the power of free voluntary reading, (i.e. reading a child chooses rather than is assigned to do) and concludes that it is the best predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling ability, grammatical usage and writing style. He also points out that 'where the print environment is rich, more reading is being done' - and that in order to increase children's access to books and electronic reading material it is vital to have well stocked school libraries. This holds true for NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) children as well as native speakers of English. Ideally NESB children should have access to collections in their own language and English.

Access to large book collections in comfortable and friendly school libraries, where children have time to select from a variety of books, affects achievement in reading. School libraries are able to 'capture' and offer this experience to large numbers of children who are less likely to use public libraries.

4. The research now suggests that it is possible to provide direct correlation between success in reading achievement and schools which have school libraries with trained staff and developed collections. In a Colorado Study (Lance, Keith Curry, L. Welborn and C. Hamilton-Pennell, *The Impact of School Library Media Centres on Academic Achievement* 1993) student reading scores in the Colorado State Assessment correlated with the quality of the library media programmes. In elementary and middle schools with the strongest library programmes students scored 15% higher than their counterparts

in schools with the weakest programmes. An Alaskan Study (Lance, Keith Curry, Christine Hamilton-Peimell and Marcia J. Rodney, *Information Empowered: The School Librarian as an Agent of Academic Achievement in Alaska Schools*. Juneau, Alaska State Library, 1999) showed that in elementary schools with well developed library media programmes, 86% of the students scored proficient or above on state reading tests compared with 73% of schools with less-developed school library programmes.

5. 'Well-developed' school library programmes were characterised by the following:

- trained staff, preferably full-time
- library staff who taught information literacy to students, planned with teachers and provided in-service training to teachers.
- the library was open for longer hours.
- the school library had a co-operative relationship with the public library.
- the library provided access to the Internet
- the library had a collection development policy, supported by a good budget

6. If these are the criteria for good school libraries, which can be actively said to increase success in the reaching of reading, how do these models relate to NZ practice?

The NZ experience can best be described as patchy. The assessment of School Libraries 1999 carried out by the researchers at the Policy Group of the National Library in 1999 looks at assessments provided by Library Advisors of a randomly selected sample of school libraries throughout the country. 31% of school libraries were considered by advisors to be 'best practice' or 'of good standard', 28% were known to be 'developing', 10% were known to need work, and for 31% advisors were not able to provide assessment. Small and rural schools were over-represented in the last group, and it was felt that the 'unknown' libraries were more likely than the 'known' libraries to need work.

A survey of primary school teachers in 1998 carried out by the National Library's Curriculum Information Service asked how important the school library was for learning outcomes for students. The percentage saying the library was very important or important were 94% for reading/language programme, 92% for development of information skills/literacy and 95% for topic/learning support. However, the National Library's Assessment of School Libraries shows that secondary schools were more likely than primary schools to be rated as best practice. Small and rural primary schools had the lowest percentages of best practice/good standard school libraries, and primary schools had poorer funding and fewer staff. There was enormous variation in budgets -primary school budgets ranged from \$3 - \$87 per student. Primary library staff ranged from a median of 1.5 hours in schools with

a roll of below 58, 4 in the roll range 59 - 153; 10 in the roll-range 154 - 291, and 16 in those with a roll of 292+. The median number of library assistant hours in the primary schools was 10.

We have a situation where we know school libraries are both proven and desired components of the successful teaching of reading and information literacy. Yet there is no agreed baseline standard for staff and funding of school libraries in NZ.

Small primary schools, usually in rural areas, are the ones where the need to provide print-rich environments for children is most acute. Yet the evidence suggests that they are the most deprived of resources.

#### 4. Recommendations

SLANZA recommends that this Committee;

1. Recognise the vital part played in the teaching of reading and information literacy by the school library.
2. Provide support for the increased funding so that all school libraries can be staffed and resourced to support the teaching of reading and information literacy.