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Cultivating student engagement - Part 1

Robert Stevens, Tracey Cronley, Ann Eckert, Mary Kidd, Natasha Liondos, Gillian Newall, Mark Pilkington, Ben Rekic, Liliana Ructtinger

What is engagement?

What is student engagement?

Trowler (2010) defines student engagement as being 'concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution' (Trowler, 2010).

> Engagement can also be seen as a sense of connection with what you are doing or with a place (a sense of belonging).

Why is engagement important?

Cultivating engagement is part of the purpose of the NSW Department of Education. The department's purpose is 'to prepare young people for rewarding lives as engaged citizens in a complex and dynamic society' (NSW Department of Education, 2018). A Departmental goal is that 'every student is engaged and challenged to continue to learn' (NSW Department of Education, 2018).

Engagement in teaching and learning is a prerequisite to success. A student is not as likely to succeed in learning if they or their school are not invested in their learning. Disengagement, by definition, is a form of alienation from what you are doing or where you are. Alienation does not feel good and, by definition, is inimical to functioning well. It thus is inimical to one's wellbeing. Positive psychologist, Martin Seligman, sees engagement as one of five elements of wellbeing. The five elements are: **P**ositive Emotion; **E**ngagement; Positive **R**elationships; **M**eaning; and

Accomplishment (PERMA) (Seligman, 2011). Seligman sees engagement as being 'about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an adsorbing activity' (Seligman, 2011).

> Flow is an unusually deep sense of connection with what you are doing.

Types of engagement

School and task engagement

A distinction is often made between school and task engagement. Munns and Martin (2005) make a similar distinction between 'big E' engagement and 'little e' engagement.

'Big E' engagement is engagement with school – 'it is a sense among students that "school is for me"…This means that students have a sense that school is a place that works for them and education is a resource that they can deploy in the present and the future'. It involves a sense of connection or belonging to a place – school.

'Little e' engagement involves 'the daily "e"ngaging experiences in classrooms that provide opportunities and support for students to think hard (high cognitive), feel good (high emotional) and actively participate (high behavioural)'. It involves a sense of connection to what students are doing. These experiences 'build to the more powerful "school is for me" relationship' (Munns & Martin, 2005).

Geographical engagement

To Munns and Martin's cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement Cleveland adds 'geographical engagement'. He defines this as 'associated with students' affinity for their surroundings and the sense of place that they feel in connection with their school learning environments. Geographical engagement involves students' ownership and mastery of their environment (including the resources and materials that are contained within)' (Cleveland, 2011). Geographical engagement relates closely to school engagement and the sense that 'school is a place for me'.

Preventing disengagement

Engaging pedagogies

Recognising that teaching and learning is work for teachers and students alike, and that the education industry involves the division (or better, combination) of labour (Connell, 1985), allows pedagogies to be seen as tools to achieve the goals of education.

New pedagogies emphasise a focus on the relationship between students and teachers in a proactive learning partnership to promote a balance between the teacher's role as a 'guide on the side' and the 'sage on the stage' (Fullan, 2013) – the spectrum of student-centred and teacher-centred philosophies. This is a 'work' partnership, one in which 'student labour' involves students helping teachers with technology, helping fellow students as co-learners, and helping themselves by taking on a greater share of learning as partners.

Pedagogies, then, can be understood as a particular combination of labour between teachers, learners and technology in which specialised skills, tools and production operations are combined into an organised system.

People learn through activities such as: reading; writing; listening; discussing; experimenting; modelling; designing; making. Pedagogies can be seen to consist of combinations of these learning activities, and can be distinguished by the activity they give emphasis to. An activity-centred approach to the design and analysis of learning situations views activity as a mediator between tasks, tools and resources, interpersonal relationships and learning outcomes (Goodyear & Carvalho, 2014).

While it cannot be claimed in any absolute sense that one pedagogy is better than another (it depends what it is used for), it can be argued that some pedagogies are more engaging than others.

For example, Socratic pedagogy may involve stimulation by a question asked by a student, a current news story, a picture book for younger students or a short film clip. Children are invited to say whether anything interested them or puzzled them about the stimulus. From this, a whole class discussion ensues relating to life's big questions. Students learn how to respectfully disagree because the focus is explicitly on taking issue with a claim rather than taking issue with a person: 'I disagree with your argument' rather than 'I disagree with you' (Jensen & Kennedy-White, 2014). The lesson may move from whole class discussion to break-out groups and reporting back (Limpan, 2003; Cam, 2008; Chesters, 2012).

Direct/explicit instruction may involve learning by listening and watching, for example a lecture. A presentation, of course, may be highly engaging and entertaining. Socratic pedagogy engages more in the sense that it involves more than listening and watching. It intrinsically involves dialogue and discussion rather than listening to a monologue.

Socratic pedagogy involves practising oracy and at the same time, creative and critical thinking (generating ideas, and evaluating them). It involves learning by listening and discussing.

Socratic pedagogy demands more of students than direct instruction. It is more challenging. It demands greater investment by students in their learning, by inviting students to contribute their own ideas. In a sense, students invest more of themselves in their learning by engaging in dialogue. Socratic pedagogy certainly provides opportunities and support for students to think hard and actively participate.

Any pedagogy involving a community of inquiry, such as project-based learning, will be similarly engaging. As Goss, Sonneman and Griffiths have noted

> Student participation is a critical part of effective teaching and learning. Without opportunities to speak, problem-solve and work with others, students may quietly disengage or become restless – and teachers may not know if those students are learning... Opportunities to collaborate with peers and do group work also improve a student's achievement, interpersonal relationships and attitudes to learning (Goss, et. al., 2017).

Conclusion

Engagement is a sense of connection with what you are doing or where you are: a sense of belonging – 'school is a place for me'. Engagement in teaching and learning is a prerequisite to success. A student is not as likely to succeed in learning if they or their school are not invested in their learning. Engagement is a significant element in wellbeing.

Fundamentally, students engage with schooling and what they are doing through participating in engaging pedagogies – though engaging assessments, engaging spaces, engaging curriculum and engaging school cultures all contribute to engaging pedagogies. In Part 2 of this article we examine the contributions of assessment, spaces/places, curriculum and school cultures to student engagement.

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Engaging students in historical inquiry

Utilising objects and living history experiences.

<u>Gaye Braiding</u>, teacher at the NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education, explores the role of objects and living history experiences in historical inquiry in the K-6 setting through a case study of the <u>NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education</u> ⧉.

'It's cold!' is the typical response by students when they are passed a slate board, followed by a gasp when a rock is used to mark it, then 'wow' when they use their own slate pencil and board. This is evidence of the wonder and awe that is generated when students interact with historic objects, particularly in the context of living history experiences.

Definitions

In this article, 'object' will be used interchangeably with 'artefact'. While NESA (2012) defines 'artefact' as 'something made or given shape by humans', the context is usually historical and the term is often applied to smaller, moveable items. 'Object' is generally a broader term that includes artefacts and any items that make an experience authentic, including reproductions and costumes (Mayne, 2017). Large, immovable remains are referred to as 'immovable heritage' and include monuments and buildings.

The role of objects and immersive experiences in historical inquiry

Objects can provide a conduit into stories of the past. Artefacts are tangible relics of the past which arouse curiosity and can be scrutinised and discussed with peers. However, it is difficult for young history students to create meaning from objects examined out of context. Mayne (2017) suggests that objects need to be part of an 'assemblage' or recreated historical experience to provide context, making the objects more meaningful and aiding interpretation of the past. Anderson, Piscitelli, Weier, Everett and Tayler (2002) highlight the importance of selecting objects that relate to students' own experiences and recommend they be embedded into story and play to provide a medium to building understandings.

The NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education, located at North Ryde in Sydney, has both immovable heritage in its set of early public school buildings and moveable heritage in its collection of historical objects relating to primary level public school education in NSW. The collection dates back to the 1870s and includes student exercise books, handiwork, readers, text books, school furniture and teaching resources. The buildings are North Ryde Public School's first buildings - the earliest built as a single sandstock schoolroom in 1877.

The museum runs a popular excursion program ⬀ available to all schools that immerses students in recreated 1880s-1960s school experiences and provides opportunities for first-hand investigations of objects and artefacts. The museum's website contains links to information about the history of schooling in NSW and a project is underway that will make some of the museum's collection accessible to rural and remote schools.

Objects can ignite wonder and curiosity

A favourite experience of staff at the NSW Schoolhouse Museum involves receiving personal deliveries of donated objects. The anticipation of opening a package to unveil its treasured contents is palpable, as is the excitement of gently removing the first layers of objects for close scrutiny. There is always something inside that triggers a memory, something that surprises and something highly valued, passed through generations of teachers. But it is the stories surrounding the objects that are the most precious. Passionately told by the donor, they breathe life into the treasured collection.

This element of anticipation and surprise is recreated at the NSW Schoolhouse Museum in the unveiling of a mysterious object wrapped in a lace handkerchief. It can also be created in classrooms with artefacts packed into a mystery box and slowly unwrapped within a story. Or parts could be revealed as an introduction to a mystery of the past.

Living history at the NSW Schoolhouse Museum

The focus of student visits to the NSW Schoolhouse Museum is interaction with objects in contextual settings. These authentic contexts have been created by scouring historical photographs, student exercise books, readers and textbooks, early syllabus documents, education gazettes and oral histories.

The museum has a restored 1877 schoolroom, twin 1910 classrooms, a 1960s demountable and outdoor playground spaces. Each is used for creating living history experiences.

Whilst seated in the restored 1877 schoolroom, students sit tightly perched on backless benches at long timber desks - 'long toms' - and participate in aspects of recreated 1880s lessons. They quickly understand the necessity of sitting still and steady in order not to slip off the bench or bump their neighbour. Once slate pencils and ink pens are used at the cramped desks, the practicality of right-handed writing is realised. In using slate boards, ink pens, blotting paper and pen wipers, students experience technologies of the past and begin to understand the continuities and changes in writing technologies. Interestingly, a common comment when handed a slate board is 'It looks like an iPad!'

Outdoors, students stand spaced in rows and undertake military-style drills using wooden dumbbells or 1.3 metre dowel rods - 'wands'. They undertake simple exercises as prescribed in the Department of Public Instruction's booklet, 'Wand or Bar-bell Exercises', issued in 1900, and in so doing understand the order and discipline of the time. Simple maypole dancing, circle games

such as 'drop the hanky', and playground games such as 'fly' and skipping all immerse students in activities that students of similar ages undertook at school in the past. Stories are woven into each activity to provide context via narrative that connects to students' own lives and experiences.

Students learn a 1900s wand drill. © NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education

The NSW Schoolhouse Museum's twin 1910 classrooms hold an array of themed artefact displays. In this setting, students peel off a map from a gelatin hectograph (jelly pad) and stamp rubber stamps of clockfaces and numbers for tracing - as infants teachers once did into their students' number books. Students use magnifiers to notice details in early school photographs and play with lamb knucklebones, spinning tops and hand-made toys. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively so they can converse and apply their individual experiences and understandings to their shared interpretations. Class teachers and parent helpers also relate their personal experiences and memories triggered by the objects in the museum, generating rich object-based dialogue.

Whilst a visit to the NSW Schoolhouse Museum is brief, the communication received from students after their visit provides evidence of its impact. Students note intricate details in the objects they have used, highlighting the importance of touching and doing. If writing in the voice of a student from the past, they demonstrate empathetic understanding in expressing their feelings about the rigour, skills and expectations of the time. Even the most basic recounts demonstrate understanding of aspects of school days from the past and identify similarities and difference to the present.

A student prints a map from a gelatin hectograph (jelly pad). © NSW Schoolhouse Museum of Public Education
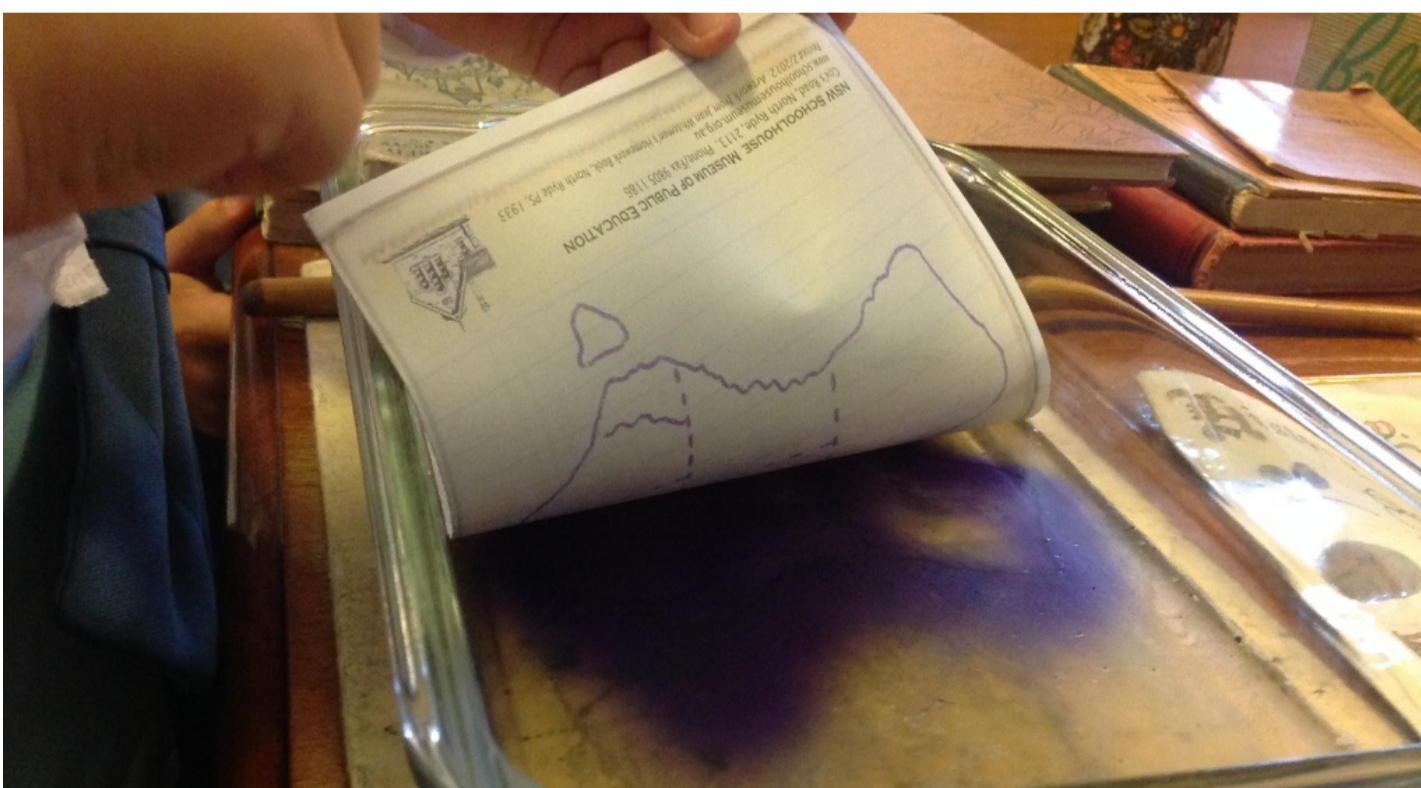
Living history experiences at school

Immersive living history experiences that embed historical objects can be facilitated within schools or locally. These experiences could be initiated by the teacher with assistance from community members or by students as the final step in communicating the results of their historical inquiry. For instance, a series of 'daily life of the past' activity stations could be set up for Stage 1 students investigating the topic 'Present and past family life' or for Stage 2 students investigating change and continuity in daily life within 'Community and remembrance'. Each activity station, or living history experience, should be based on evidence from photographs and other sources and include authentic objects where possible, either for use or to help 'set the scene'. Donning costumes will add a greater depth of authenticity.

Past daily life activity stations could include:

- a housework station - sweeping with a straw broom, fluffing up feather pillows, and hanging up small loose rugs and beating out the dust with a stick

- a kitchen station - hand-beating cream into butter, kneading dough for bread and washing, wiping and stacking dishes

- a laundry station - handwashing tea towels, handwringing them and hanging them on a rope line using 'dolly pegs', with the line supported by a clothes prop (pole)

- a yard-work station - collecting and breaking sticks into smaller pieces for kindling, weeding and digging a vegetable garden or creating plant protectors or short garden fences from found sticks

- a school station that provides glass or ceramic inkwells, ink pens and reproduced copperplate or cursive alphabets to copy or trace.

Objects relating to daily life could include original or reproduction galvanised iron buckets, watering cans, tubs, timber or metal wash boards, Sunlight soap bars, wooden 'dolly pegs', old wooden-handled trowels and spades, and old kitchen tools such as metal whisks, hand beaters, enamel bowls, wooden breadboards, spoons and rolling pins. Such items could be borrowed from personal collections or acquired cheaply from op shops or re-use shops at local waste depots.

Recreated goldfields camp site in local bushland for a living history experience. © Gaye Braiding

Conclusion

Multisensory interactions with objects and immersive living history experiences can develop understandings about the past and historical inquiry skills. Historical learning contexts that connect to students' own lives and provide for shared investigations, conversations and interpretations are the most memorable and enable empathetic understanding to be built.

Teachers are encouraged to provide living history experiences for their students and to embed historical objects into these experiences. They are invited to create their own contexts at school or tap into local living history and community museums, historical sites and the experiences and memories of older community members. These immersive experiences provide rich and engaging learning opportunities for students, enabling them to create historical narratives that demonstrate different perspectives and interpretations and a deep level of empathetic understanding.

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School libraries matter!

The missing piece in the education puzzle.

<u>Holly Godfree</u>, teacher librarian at Lake Tuggeranong College in the ACT, and <u>Olivia Neilson</u>, teacher librarian at Lyneham Primary School in the ACT, examine the skills students will need for the future and how school library staff and services support these skills.

For some time now, there has been rising concern about the steady decline in the performance of Australian students in international testing such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the stagnation or decline in various aspects of our National Assessment Program. At the same time, staffing levels of qualified teacher librarians (TLs) are dropping. The results of an ongoing study into library staffing levels in Australian Capital Territory (ACT) schools are shared and discussed. Future implications for the library profession are identified.

Introduction

There is widespread dismay (Hardy, 2016; Karp, 2016; Riddle & Lingard, 2016; Bickers, 2017; Singhal, 2017) about Australia's declining results in reading, science and mathematics in comparison to students from other OECD countries (Programme for International Student Achievement [PISA], 2015; Thomson, De Bortoli & Underwood, 2017). Simultaneously, national tests have shown a 13% decline since 2011 in the number of Year 10 students reaching a proficient standard in information and communication technology (ICT) literacy (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015). These students perform well when given instructions for how to complete a task, but are weak in researching (finding, analysing and synthesising) digital information for a specific purpose. Furthermore, internationally, 89% of Year 8 students 'feel confident to find information on the internet', but only 2% of them actually use critical thinking when searching online (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, n.d.). This disparity between self-assessment and actual application of skills is even greater in Australia, where 94% feel confident to find information on the internet while only 4% use critical thinking when searching online (Fraillon et al., 2014, p. 157).

Groups like the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) (2016; 2017) and the New Media Consortium (NMC) (2017) offer evidence-based predictions outlining the skills young people will need to succeed and the educational trends needed to support them. Skills like problem solving,

multi-disciplinary learning, critical thinking, and the need to use technology well (not just to use technology) feature prominently in these projections. An essential component to reversing these trends, solving many of these problems and preparing today's young people for their futures is the reinvigoration of school libraries.

School libraries: the missing piece of the puzzle

Abundant data show the positive impact qualified teacher librarians (TLs) have on literacy outcomes (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005a; Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005b; Francis, Lance & Lietzau, 2010; Kachel, 2011; Hughes et al., 2013; Scholastic Library Publishing, 2016; Softlink, 2015; Softlink, 2016; Softlink, 2017). This impact is significant and independent of socio-economic status (Lance & Hofschire, 2012; Pennsylvania School Library Project, 2012; Scholastic Library Publishing, 2016, p. 9). TLs also specialise in differentiated, inquiry learning, which is a strong focus in the Australian Curriculum (Lupton, 2013; Nayler, 2014; ACARA, 2018) and the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

TLs help students and teachers improve their digital literacy skills, which, contrary to stubborn, popular belief, do not come 'naturally' to anyone (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). We are naive if we expect students to become information and digitally literate without a comprehensive program of learning (Fraillon et al., 2014, pp. 24–25). School library services provide tailored resources and skills-based lessons for each particular community, saving time, filling 'gaps' and reducing workload for classroom teachers who are then able to spend that extra time and energy planning better lessons.

Australian school libraries' staffing and resources have been in decline for many years now, particularly in primary schools (Tarica, 2010; Hay, 2013; Mitchell & Weldon, 2016; Softlink, 2015; Softlink, 2016; Softlink, 2017). This decline raised such alarm that there was a senate inquiry held in 2010-2011 to investigate school libraries and TLs (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2011). The inquiry concurred with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in recognising that it is 'essential to have a well-trained and highly motivated staff' (IFLA, 2015, p. 25) and, among their 11 recommendations, highlighted the need to identify staffing levels of qualified staff and to conduct a workforce gap analysis.

Anyone working in a school library would likely be familiar with feelings of frustration when reading reports of these international studies highlighting the importance of students having skills such as evaluating the relevance and credibility of digital information and accessing information efficiency (such as Fraillon et al., 2014). We know that school library staff teach exactly these things (and more). Yet, inexplicably, school libraries are rarely mentioned in these articles and, in too many schools, continue to suffer from cuts to staffing and resources.

Skills for the future

Various skills and trends have been identified as necessary for young people in an increasingly automated and globalised world (Tables 1 and 2). Consider how these skills are addressed by school library staff and services.

Skills for the future	How school library staff and services address these skills

Problem solving	Solving problems is inherent in all aspects of the research process. e.g. Where do I find the answer to my question?
Critical thinking and judgement	Critically evaluating websites. Taking and making notes. Synthesising information.
Learning on the job	Knowing how to learn e.g. developing questions, pulling out the most relevant facts from the best sources, strategies for what to do when stuck. Seeking and identifying the best information.
Working with people	Collaborating on inquiry projects. Maximising opportunities offered through rich literature. e.g. 'walking' in another's shoes, seeing different perspectives
Getting the most out of technology	Employing smart search strategies. Using databases efficiently. Applying knowledge of intellectual property laws. Creating content to contribute to the wider community. Online safety and digital security.
Project and time management	Planning and managing personalised and group research projects. Understanding the stages of the information and digital literacy processes.

Table 1: Skills required in the future workforce (Foundation for Young Australians, 2017a, 2017b) and how they are provided by school libraries

Projected trend	Role of school library staff and services
Teachers needing to become facilitators of self-directed learning	TLs do this by helping students and teachers when they are stuck and supporting them to continue to the next stage of their projects.
Creating more inter- and multidisciplinary learning opportunities	TLs do this by collaborating with teachers and students from all curriculum areas. The 'process' skills TLs teach are applicable to all disciplines. TLs have a 'bird's eye view' of the school.

Long-term trend: Deeper, more authentic learning	TLs are trained to support inquiry models which are personalised for students (e.g. Guided inquiry and project-based learning). The best practice for TLs is working within a flexible timetable to team teach just-in-time lessons for specific skills.
Theme of educational change: Technology alone is not enough to mitigate various issues of potential disadvantage	TLs do this differentiation by catering to each individual person and each specific learning community as the core business of the school library.
Theme of educational change: Improving digital literacy	TLs know that being digitally 'fluent' is much more than just knowing how to use ICTs. Teachers learn ICT skills from watching other teachers (Fraillon et al., 2014).

Table 2: Projected trends for K–12 education identified by the Horizon Report (NMC, 2017) and how they can be met by school libraries.

There is an extremely high overlap of the lists of skills young people will need and the skills which qualified TLs teach. The problem is that this potential match is not realised because increasing numbers of school libraries are being run by unqualified staff, who cannot teach these skills because they are not teachers and/ or are not qualified librarians. Even though many of these are passionate people who care deeply about the library and the students, without the relevant training, the full range of library services cannot be offered, and there all-too-frequently develops 'an atmosphere where libraries are perceived to have no intrinsic value' (Johnson, 2007, p. 132) and become even more vulnerable to cuts.

While many individuals have personally witnessed the decline in library staffing through lower attendance at conferences and professional learning events, national data show a substantial decrease in recent years. A comparison of data from the annual Softlink school library surveys for the past four years (Hay, 2013; Softlink, 2015; Softlink, 2016; Softlink, 2017) shows an overall drop in library staffing for 17% of Australian schools in 2013, 19% in 2014 and 12% in 2015. The 2016 data show an overall increase of 6%. However, even if this positive trend were to continue, given the substantial drop in previous years it would take some time to reach staffing levels equivalent to five years ago.

School library staffing data: Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

In the past six years we have conducted a series of staffing surveys about school libraries in Canberra. Each survey has been slightly different, and so we will briefly summarise the scope of each (Table 3) before sharing highlights of the results.

Year	Scope	Response rate

2012	All government schools in ACT (P–12)	59%
2013	Australian Education Union members, ACT branch	16% (487 members)
2014	All government schools in ACT (P–12)	67%
2016	All government schools in ACT (P–12)	83%
2017	All ACT primary schools (government, Catholic, independent)	Government = 84% Catholic = 52% Independent = 87%

Table 3: Overview of library staffing surveys in ACT.

Terminology

For the purpose of these surveys, the following definitions have been used:

- Teacher librarian: a person who has completed OR is currently in the process of completing a specialist qualification in this area (for example, dual qualifications in education and librarianship).
- Early childhood school: with students from preschool to Year 2
- Primary school: with students from preschool to Year 6 (the 2017 survey was 'with some or all students from preschool to Year 6')
- P–10: with students from preschool to Year 10
- High school: with students from Year 7 to Year 10
- College: with students from Year 11 to Year 12

Online surveys were conducted each year. With the exception of 2013, all surveys were distributed via our local email listserv for school library staff in the ACT (and surrounds) and then individual follow-up was attempted for any schools who had not responded. In 2013, the AEU ACT office distributed the survey to all members.

Library staffing across age groups

These data (Figure 1) confirm anecdotal evidence in showing a decline in qualified TLs in government schools up to Year 10. Of high concern is that, despite the common knowledge that early intervention is a vitally important way to address inequity and raise student learning outcomes, students and teachers in P–6 schools are the most severely understaffed.
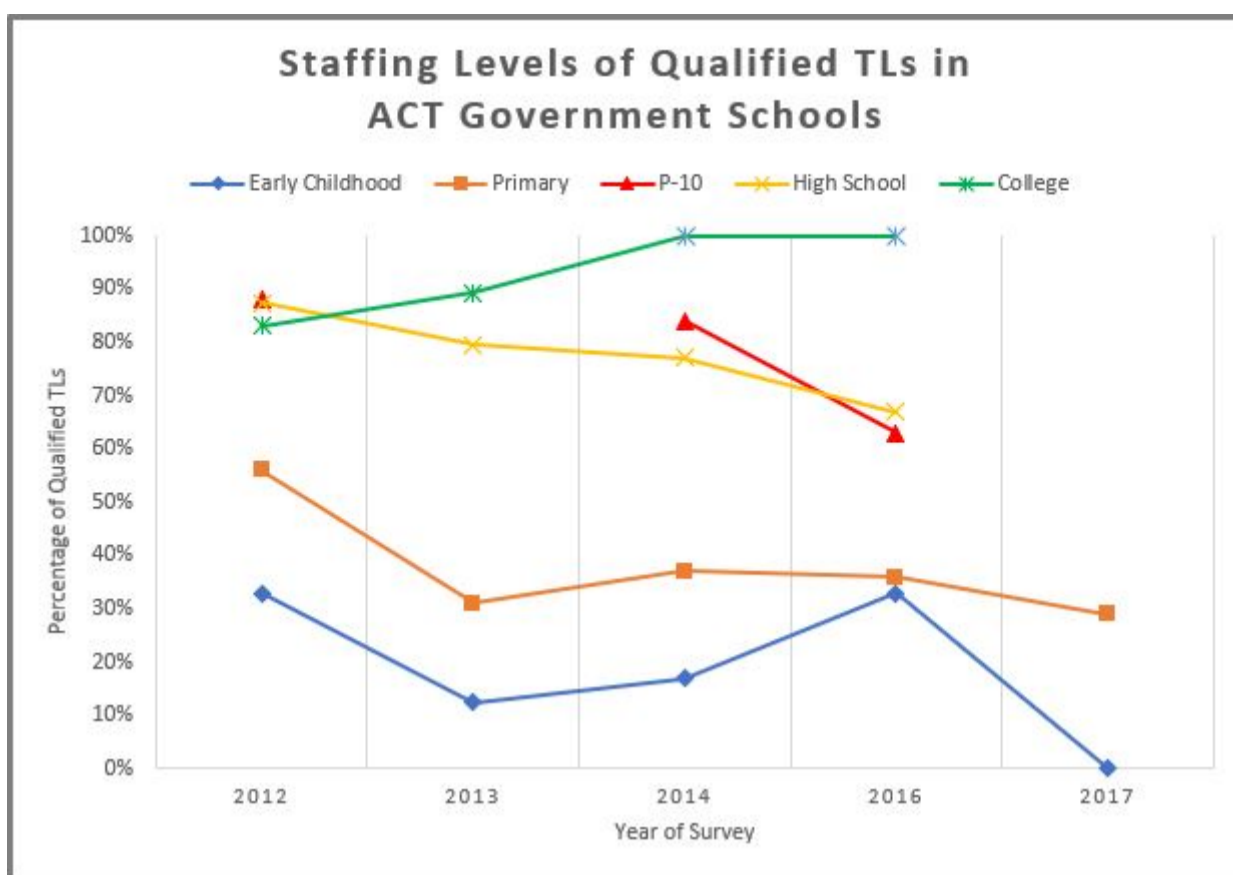
Figure 1.

Library staffing across sectors

Data from 2017 (Figure 2) highlight the difference between library staffing levels in independent, Catholic and government schools. On average, independent schools have one full-time TL and one full-time library support staff member. In contrast, Catholic schools have one half-time TL and one half-time support staff member and government schools have a TL for 1.5 days a week and a library support staff member for three days a week. Over half of Catholic and government school

students and teachers had no TL at all.
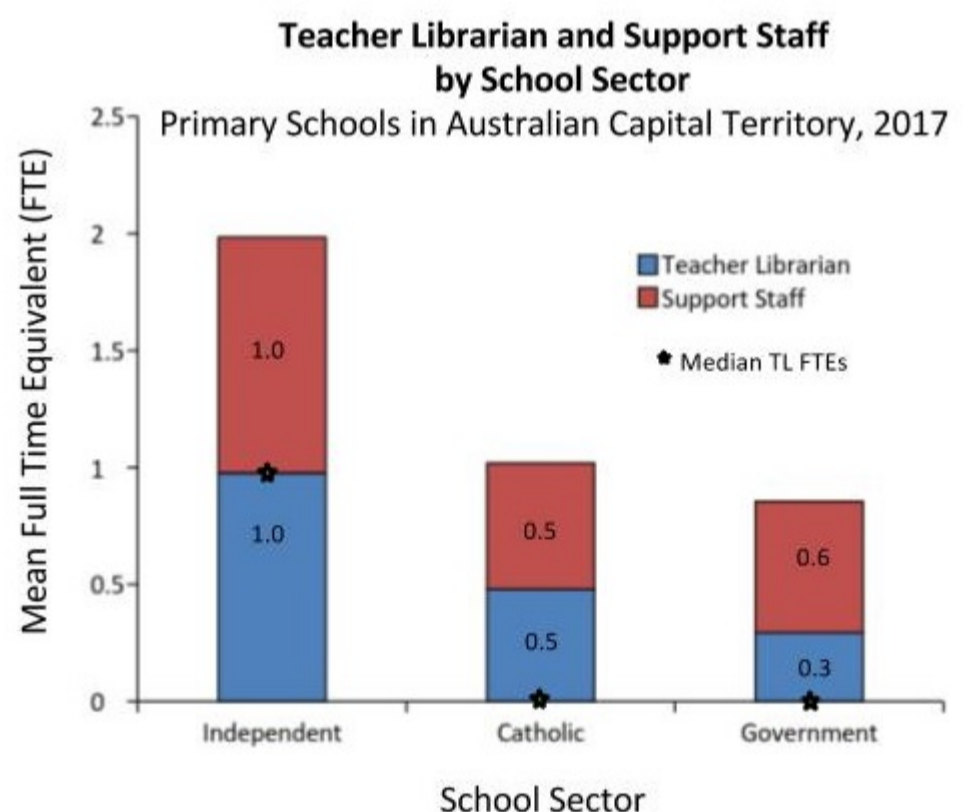
Figure 2.

Importance of library staffing team

'The richness and quality of a school library program primarily depends upon the human resources available within and beyond a school library' (IFLA 2015, p. 25). While it is simple (and important) to talk about qualified TLs, the importance of qualified library support staff must be emphasised. The best school libraries have a combination of physical and digital resources in their collection and, consequently, there are a range of physical and digital tasks involved in providing high-quality library services. Care and maintenance of technology and the physical collection are vitally important, but can sometimes be misunderstood to be the only things required in a library. A school library with only a TL will hobble what the TL can do because s/he will have to manage

the physical collection as a necessary, practical priority. In contrast, a school library run by a school assistant will likely be tidy; however, fewer digital resources will be in the collection, no information or digital literacy skills will be taught and no collaborative teaching and planning will happen. To reach their full potential, school libraries must have a team of qualified staff.

Each school makes decisions

Staffing level data from 2017 (Table 4) show that library staffing varies across sectors but also across schools within sectors. In Canberra, both government and Catholic schools typically have lower library staffing levels than independent schools, with Catholic schools having a slightly higher proportion of TLs. Two limitations of the 2017 survey are that we do not know the number of students at each school and that it is highly likely that the schools who did not reply did not have any TLs. If so, the percentages of TLs in all sectors could be lower than the survey indicated.

Sector	Percentage of schools with a TL	Highest staffing level of TLs	Lowest staffing level of TLs	Highest staffing level of all library staff*	Lowest staffing level of all library staff*
Independent	77%	3.1	0	6.7	0
Catholic	53%	1.0	0	1.7	0.5
Government	40%	1.0	0	2.8	0

* 'All library staff' refers to any paid staff regularly working in the library (including TLs).
Table 4: Staffing levels of teacher librarians and all library staff in 2017.

As Table 4 shows, there are well-staffed and under-staffed libraries in individual independent, Catholic and government schools because the decision about school library staffing is vested in each individual school community. Importantly, Figure 3 shows that principals have a high level of appreciation of the skills and expertise of TLs. Despite this, library staffing levels continue to fall in government schools except colleges (Figure 1).
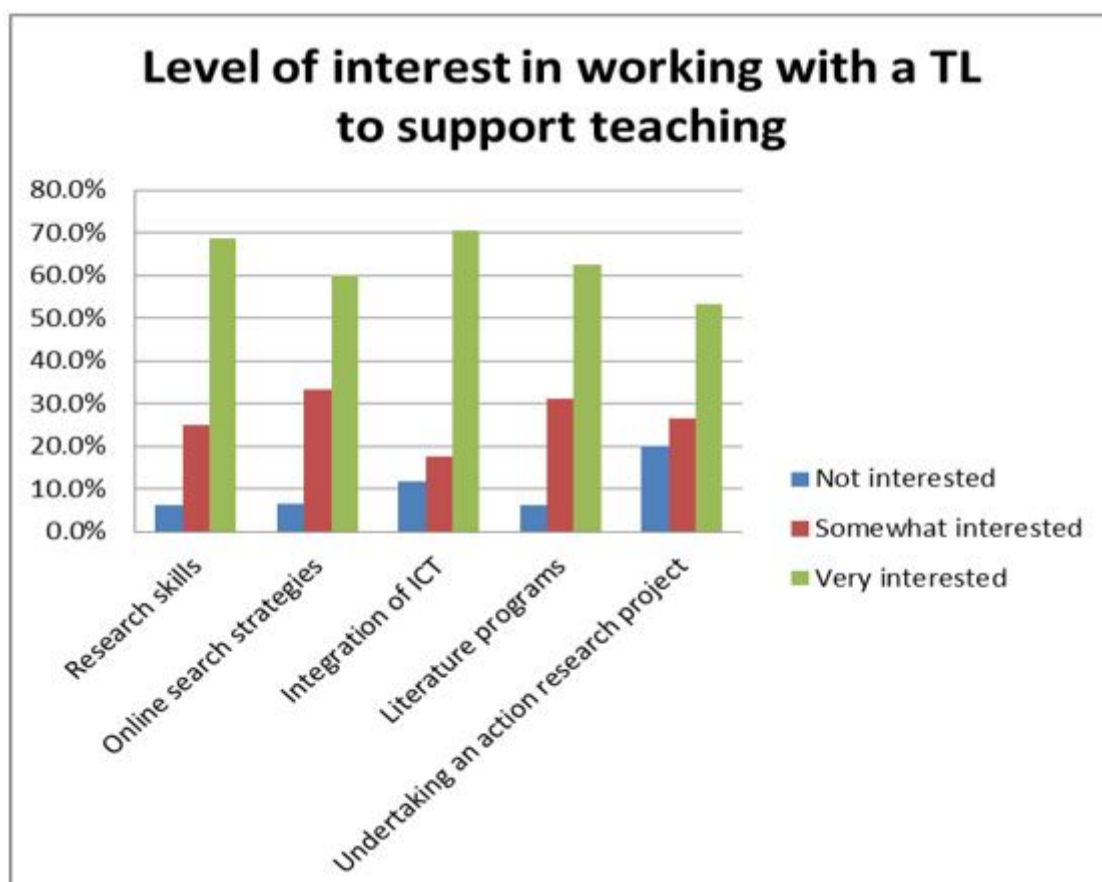
Figure 3.

Collectively, many years of data show a decline in qualified TLs in many schools in the ACT at the same time that student learning outcomes in the three Rs and in digital literacy have also declined for all Australian students. The early years of education and the government and Catholic sectors appear to be the hardest hit by library staffing cuts. Many principals are very interested in having a TL work with their students, but the decline has continued. We find ourselves in the very bleak situation where large numbers of students, teachers and communities have been operating with low-level library services for so long that they may not even realise what they are missing out on.

School Libraries Matter!

There is a growing movement of interested individuals and organisations working towards a shared goal: that all students in Australia have equitable access to quality school library services delivered by qualified school library staff. The School Library Coalition, which comprises the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Australian School Library Association (ASLA), School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW), School Library Association of South Australia (SLASA), School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV), Queensland School Library Association (QSLA), and Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA), is leading this effort with their advocacy group coordinating the national School Libraries Matter! campaign, to be launched this year.

Around the world, there are other visionary groups working to reinvigorate their school libraries to address the needs of their students (Digital Promise, 2014; Flood, 2017). Some efforts have been made in Australia to target principals and politicians (Godfree & Neilson, 2014), but the Students Need School Libraries campaign will target parents in the hope that they will become empowered to ask informed questions and apply pressure to improve school libraries in their local communities.

What can you do?

- Join and support the Students Need School Libraries campaign

- Check out and promote the <u>Students Need School Libraries website</u> [↗].

- Read the blog post – <u>To supercharge student success: start with a great school library</u> [↗].

- Like and follow the Students Need School Libraries campaign <u>Facebook</u> [↗] or <u>Twitter</u> [↗], and:

    - Personally Invite your friends to like and follow. People are more likely to accept If you send them a direct Invite or message rather than just sharing.

    - Ask your friends to Invite their friends. The aim Is go get the #StudentsNeedSchoolLibraries to trend on the evening of the 16th October. This will only happen If there are lots of people sharing/posting/tweeting at the same time.

- If you are a teacher librarian, hold information/digital literacy sessions for teachers and parents.

- This is a concrete demonstration of your skills and usefulness. Consider offering these at a school which does not have a qualified teacher librarian.

- A few (of many) topics that might generate high interest include: Smart searching online, website evaluation, creating a positive digital footprint.

    Gather library staffing data in your area. Ideally, teacher librarian and support staff data will be collected from each state/territory. But even if it's only in your district, something is better than

- nothing. We are happy to be contacted to share questions we've used in our surveys.

It's time

There was a surge in public support for school libraries after Sara Fenwick's 1966 report into school and children's libraries in Australia which ushered in a golden age for library services for young people (Johnson, 2007). Globally, nationally and locally, the elements are present for a new outpouring of informed interest by the public today. As library professionals, it is our job to spark and light that fire.

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