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Libraries and learning

For almost a year the Association has eagerly awaited the release by the Federal Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) of the guidelines for grants for national literacy strategies and projects. The objective of the grants is to research and implement strategic national initiatives and developments in literacy and numeracy identified by the Minister. The latest anticipated release time is late July/early August. The scheduling of the second National Literacy Week for 28 August to 1 September (3–10 September in Victoria) [see p29] gives hope for their release soon. The rumour is that the guidelines will favour funding for community groups such as ALIA.

Our interest in the funding grants stems from a concept proposal developed in 1998 for co-operative research with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) into the relationships between student use of school libraries and student learning outcomes. ALIA has a long association with ACER going back to the 1930's and 1940's through the Carnegie Corporation. ACER has internationally acknowledged educational research expertise and high standing as a research organisation.

The proposed research aims to identify and measure the impact of school libraries and resource centres on the student learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools in Australia. If a positive relationship between the two is identified, this could influence the commitment of funding bodies and the school to supporting good learning resources programs, particularly given the federal government's push for government and non-government schools to meet national targets for literacy, and a new funding model which aims to distribute more funds to those schools most in need.

It is based on two studies:

1. A study undertaken by Keith Curry Lance, Lynda Welborn, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell of Colorado, USA, in their report *The impact of school library media centers on academic achievement* (Castle Rock, Colorado: Hi Willow Research and Publishing, 1993). This study provides evidence of the positive impact of library media centres on academic achievement in 221 Colorado public schools during the 1988–89 school year. Academic achievement is measured through the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) in Junior and Middle Years. In our 1997 submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers we recommended that this research be replicated in Australia to consider the relationship between school libraries and student learning outcomes. The study findings indicate the importance of library media expenditures, the availability of quality staff, and access to collection resources to promoting academic achievement. The importance of the library media specialist's instructional role is also verified. The study demonstrates that 'students at schools with better funded libraries tend to achieve higher average test scores, whether their schools and communities are rich or poor and whether adults in the community are well or poorly educated'.(p.93) I understand that work is underway to update the findings.

2. *Mapping literacy achievement.* Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey undertaken by Geoff N Masters and Margaret Forster of ACER for the Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey. The report maps the broad range of literacy achievements of Year 3 and Year 5 students in Australian schools. The findings indicate that 'where teachers made greater use of a school library or school computers, students' achievements in most strands were higher.'(p205) Extensive use of the school library was the most significant school and teacher variable, with a difference of as many as 27 points to students' literacy achievements when compared with non-use of the library.

The initial proposal was for the research to follow up on the schools in the ACER mapping research and add secondary years, as in the Colorado. It would be developed based on the standards measures applied in the two studies and methods available within the Australian education system.

The proposed outcomes were to:

1. Identify the provision of library and information services within the school as a positive factor in achieving literacy and information literacy standards, as measured by profiles or national benchmarks.

2. Demonstrate the significance of library and information services within the school to student achievement in literacy and information literacy.

3. Demonstrate the importance of library and information services and staff to the teaching and learning program.

Now we wait to see what opportunities the guidelines provide for research such as this or other eligible proposals. ∎