

Supporting literacy and learning – on and off campus

There's no doubt that the Library is the hub of learning and information literacy at University of Wollongong's (UOW) campus. Attracting close to a million visitors each year, the library provides hands-on information literacy training to almost 20,000 clients. However the staff's commitment to literacy and learning extends beyond the campus and into the broader community; participating in fundraising and contributing to local, national and international causes, all with a focus on literacy and learning.

In 2007, the UOW Library's Wellbeing Committee fundraising efforts were directed towards the Books in Homes Australia (BIHA) program.

BIHA aims to alter the journey of young children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances in Australia, working on the premise that being born into a disadvantaged or isolated community should not exclude any child from achieving their potential.

Children living in less privileged circumstances often lack ready access to books. A love of books is something that lasts a lifetime and can make a significant difference in the lives of disadvantaged children. Once given the chance to develop confidence in reading, it is well recognised that children gain greater benefit from their schooling and more opportunities to live a productive and rewarding life.

There are currently 10,000 children in the BIHA program, encompassing 107 disadvantaged school communities across New South Wales. Every participating child is able to select a number of quality books each year, allowing them to build their own home libraries and share the experience of reading with their families. BIHA also donates a Preview Pack to each school library involved in the program. The packs consist of 48 titles provided over three terms, of which 25% are titles by Indigenous authors.

Money raised by UOW Library was allocated to nearby Kemblawarra Public School, which burned down in 2002 and was rebuilt by late 2004. This small school, consisting of only four classes and about 85 children, draws students from diverse backgrounds including low socio-economic and often disadvantaged or troubled families. The school community also includes the traditional caretakers of the Wadi-Wadi people as well as children from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The UOW Library is eager to offer continued support to Books in Homes Australia, and staff are delighted that their fundraising efforts are helping needy children in the Illawarra region.

More information on Books in Homes Australia is available <http://www.biha.com.au/>

**Fran Pinkerton
Claire Collett
University of Wollongong
collett@uow.edu.au**

Roving learning and literacy at VU library / learning commons

University students are faced with a plethora of information systems and technologies which underpin contemporary tertiary study. Their world is an often confusing array of logins, systems, web pages, e-mail communication, printing and copying issues as well as copious guides and other documentation designed to provide useful information and advice on using the various systems and technologies available. Whether these learning supports effectively intersect with their actual learning needs, learning strategies and help-seeking behaviours, it can be all be rather 'hit and miss'.

In terms of learning needs, cognitive psychologists tell us that we should think of learning as a matter of mobilising two kinds of memory: a short-term working memory and long-term memory. Basically, we take in new information with our short-term memory and we have successfully learnt it when its fully lodged in our long-term memory.

Two problems arise. First, short-term memory can only cope with 5-7 bits of new information at a time; any more and we are 'in overload' and start tuning out or getting confused. Secondly, new information has to be processed consciously 7-10 times in short-term memory in order to ensure that it is successfully transferred to long-term memory. Gaining enough fluency with information technologies so that they disappear from consciousness and become automatically transparent skills takes practice.

As professionals who design, understand, and care about underlying information systems, and the principles upon which they are designed, we may be dismayed that students do not first read the instructions or manual. We may feel in our hearts that it is important for students to go back to first principles and understand the underlying logic and structure of the systems they are using, before actually using them. In truth, however, good pedagogy means starting from where the student is at in terms of their knowledge, skills and experience. Today's students are encouraged by the technologies in which they live their lives - including predictive text on their mobiles - to rely on 'trial and error' as their basic learning strategy, rather than analytical approaches, only falling back on the manual or analytical thinking when completely stuck and nothing seems to work.

How to implement appropriate learning supports that intersect productively and efficiently with today's students is an important consideration for universities. As such Victoria University has redesigned three of its libraries to be part of a Learning Commons structure: places where students feel more comfortable and have easier access to support services. One of the new services is the Student Rover Program where students who are now comfortable with all the tools of study at VU are employed to assist their fellow students who are stuck or confused, by providing active intervention and offering an approachable, visible presence. For more specialist or in-



depth help, the Rovers will refer students to other Learning Commons services (i.e. the Library, Teaching and Learning, IT and Careers).

As well as providing targeted just-in-time assistance to 'stuck' students, the Rover Program provides experiences and skill development in a student leadership framework that is invaluable for the Rovers themselves, for their own studies and academic skills, their personal and social development, and for their future careers. All in all, it's proving to be a very beneficial component of learning and literacy as offered to students within the VU Library / Learning Commons.

Dr Rob McCormack
Learning Support Services
VU College
Victoria University

Janetta Mascilongo
Marketing and Information Literacy Librarian
Victoria University
Janetta.Mascilongo@vu.edu.au

Alter ego: To change your self worth

In response to the growing needs of the community, the Gold Coast City Council library service approved a pilot program for the Beenleigh Branch Library that combined literacy, multicultural and children's services. The outcomes and ongoing work associated with the program have enabled the public library to have an important and positive effect on the surrounding community.

During 2007, the Young Persons (YP) team at Beenleigh Branch Library created an interactive literacy program named Alter Ego, designed to promote information and computer literacy for children aged between ten and twelve years. The program includes elements that proactively support the settlement of migrant and refugee children within the community, addressing social and cultural concerns.

The impetus to develop the program was due to staff of Beenleigh Branch Library identifying an increase in disruptive behaviour by children visiting the library during the after-school period, with the children exhibiting a lack of engagement with library resources.

The main objective of the Alter Ego program was to give all children the confidence to learn how to read, and how to support one another to realise their individual potential. Designed to assist in the settlement process of the migrant and refugee children who had recently moved into the area, it was hoped that the program would give the children a sense of belonging in the community.

A bi-weekly literacy based program, Alter Ego consists of a literacy session that includes book chapter readings, craft and other activities that require participants to read and comprehend instructions. Another session focuses on computer literacy that includes one half hour tutorial and free time on the computers.

During the 2007 sessions, the YP Team worked hard to facilitate the building of relationships between all participants regardless of their background. As the sessions progressed, specific areas of low literacy were identified, and the 2008 program now includes flash cards and word picture associations that address particular literacy areas.

The Beenleigh Branch Library has experienced many positive outcomes since the commencement of Alter Ego. Participants have been practising their writing and typing outside of Alter Ego sessions and speak to staff respectfully. Staff have also witnessed an increase in racial tolerance. Non-English speaking parents now visit the library to obtain library membership cards for their children through a translator and some children have encouraged their friends to join up, acting as translators for their friend's parents; the parents becoming aware of library services and the as a positive environment for their children.

The success of the program has enabled the library to partner with the neighbouring primary school. By using the much appreciated resources and knowledge provided by the school, the library has been able to support school programs by engaging in cross-curricular activities.

Alter Ego has proved to be a highly successful program based firmly on respect, acceptance and literacy. Programs such as Alter Ego identify the library as a place for everyone in the community through its support of social interaction, cultural diversity and education.

Alicia Thiang
Young Person's Librarian
Beenleigh Branch Library
alicia.thiang@redland.qld.gov.au

90% student satisfaction with the Curtin library's services

Curtin University of Technology's most recent student survey reveals a 90% satisfaction rating with the Library's provision of service; an impressive validation of how the library has embraced new communication and social technologies to assist clients.

Helping clients at point of need is the essence of librarianship and it is what the Curtin University Library model is all about. Whether based on campus or off, all clients can receive help through Ask Online, the library's chat service; by email, telephone or SMS queries. Other services and resources include online tutorials, podcasts, i-lectures, e-reserve, e-journals, e-books, databases, library workshops and roving assistants to help at points of need within the Library.

A continuous referral network is very much an integral part of the Curtin model and its success is supported by the latest Curtin Annual Student Satisfaction survey results.

Daisy Tyson
d.tyson@cutin.edu.au

