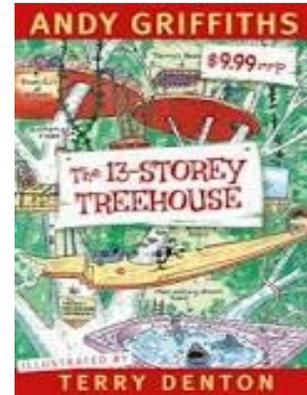


Reading for Pleasure in Australia: Where is the pleasure? Laura Scholes

As an educational researcher in Australia I spend a lot of time talking with children about their experiences as readers. The boys and girls that I talk with are generally in Year 4 attending schools across a range of contexts. These children may be attending a school in an affluent 'leafy green' community or a school in a high poverty community. While there are differences in school contexts there are similarities in what children tell me about reading for pleasure.

Affinity with books

Australian children are very knowledgeable about Australian authors and book series. They seem to have an affinity with specific writers and even refer to them on a first name basis. For instance, Jasper told me he loved reading and was a '*big, big fan of anything by Andy and Terry*'. Jasper was referring to the Australian author Andy Griffith who has had a long-standing collaboration with the illustrator Terry Denton. Together they have produced a host of wildly popular series for young people.



The focus on Australian literature is promoted through classroom teachers who engage their students in whole class novel studies through the year levels. It is also supported by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Established in 1945, the CBCA promotes the best of Australian literature for children and young people through events such as Book Week. For links to winning Australian books for children see - <https://cbca.org.au/>

The importance of the library

Access to high quality class and school libraries is very important for Australian children. Children however often tell me that they cannot find their desired reading materials at school and that they have to look more widely. For children from affluent homes this often means buying books to add to their collection at home. When children come from homes with less financial resources, the search for desired reading materials often leads them to the community library. Wyatt, for example, explained to me that sometimes at lunch time he has to '*run to the school library*' to compete for his favourite book from the *Land of Stories* series.

Funding for government school libraries in Australia is inconsistent, with libraries in more disadvantaged communities often impacted on by budget cuts. Private schools however have more financial resources with some sensational new libraries recently constructed. The Australian Library Design Awards recently showcased the best in contemporary library interiors and exteriors in Australia within three categories – public libraries, academic libraries, and school libraries. For links to winning school libraries see - <https://www.alia.org.au/anglican-church-grammar-school-churchie-centenary-library-winner>

We need more time for self-directed independent reading at school

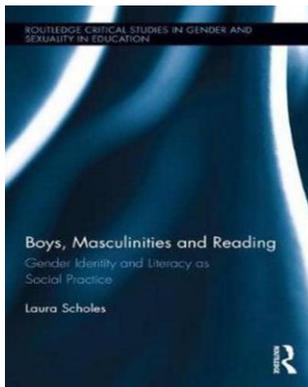
A focus on standardized testing of reading in Australian schools has narrowed the school curriculum. Due to pressure to teach to the test, many educators offer a limited range of reading activities with little time in the cramped curriculum for independent, self-directed reading. Unlike schools in the UK, Australia does not have Reading for Pleasure pedagogies embedded within the national curriculum. This lack of freedom to read has been identified by children. As Sophie explained, '*I love reading but we don't really get much time to read at school.*'

As an advocate of Reading for Pleasure I am concerned that the current performativity focus in Australia is constraining many children's reading experiences and their developing reading identities. I am not alone in this concern. Children however are seeking out pleasurable reading experiences outside the classroom – along with their quests for desired reading materials at community libraries and book stores, they are also sharing books and engaging in less traditional platforms such as reading online. One of the most promising things I have noticed talking with children about their reading experiences is the value both boys and girls see in such endeavours.

Now we just need to get Australian policy makers and curriculum developers to also see the value in Reading for Pleasure.

Links: Laura Scholes (2018) *Enjoyment of Reading, Not Mechanics of Reading can Improve Literacy for Boys*.

<https://theconversation.com/enjoyment-of-reading-not-mechanics-of-reading-can-improve-literacy-for-boys-91321>



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