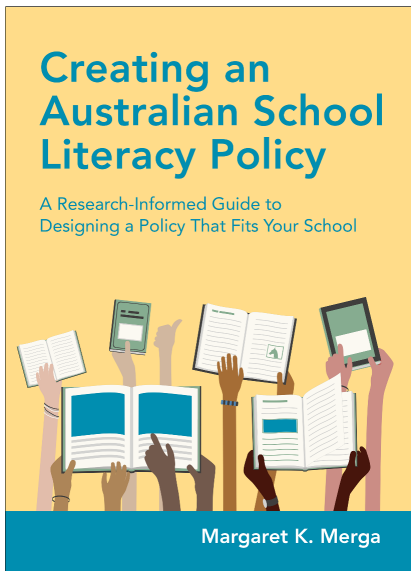


## Creating an Australian School Literacy Policy: A Research-Informed Guide to Designing a Policy That Fits Your School.

Merga, Dr. Margaret K. (2023). *Creating an Australian School Literacy Policy: A Research-Informed Guide to Designing a Policy That Fits Your School*. Melbourne, Hawker Brownlow Education.



**ISBN: 9781760946449**

**268 pages.**

*Reviewed by Mary Manning, Editor FYI*

Dr. Margaret Merga is well-known to the Australian and international school library community for her documented support of the value of the role of school libraries and teacher-librarians. She is an author and consultant supporting schools and professional associations seeking to build school reading cultures and enhance school library advocacy.

This publication regarding the development and implementation of school literacy policies is based on her extensive research and detailed analysis of Australian school literacy policies. It is therefore of great interest.

Merga argues strongly for the development of whole school literacy policies (WSLP) that take into account the school's values and priorities. To assist this, she provides clear discussion of the 'why' and 'what' of the need for a WSLP as well as a close analysis of available literacy policy documents from both Australia and the UK in order to suggest options and possibilities that will inform this policy development.

Whilst we would all wholeheartedly agree on the importance of strong traditional literacy skills in order to thrive in society, Merga's broader discussion of the wealth of additional literacies such as "critical and information literacy in order to make sound decisions in a post-truth world" (p.10), literacy learning beyond English, and digital and health literacies, will resonate with school library professionals as well as teachers and school leaders. Her support, therefore, to position literacy as a whole school responsibility and detailed research-based advice and guidance on how to effectively develop and implement a WSLP is certainly valuable and well worth exploring. The extensive chapter entitled *Features of Australian School Literacy Policies* offers existing examples in order to provide insights into possible WSLP structures and inclusions. It could be argued that the following chapter entitled *Gaps To Consider* is of even greater value to those embarking on

the WSLP journey. Here Merga points out the gaps and issues that warrant attention including the failure to set literacy targets, the lack of tailored and specific professional development planning and little detail on screening and planning for intervention where required. She has consequently identified (and expanded upon) a further fifteen features for consideration – well worth the time to consider.

A further chapter on Managing the development and implementation of whole-school literacy offers much practical and evidence-based advice regarding motivating change, literacy team members, roles, leadership support and buy-in. As with the rest of the publication, this chapter is well-organised, clear and to the point. I can see readers jotting down tips that resonate with them to discuss with fellow team members. You may be tempted to jump straight to the chapter entitled *A possible structure!* This chapter, as the title suggests, offers a clear structure for the development of a WSLP or any whole school policy. Don't skip the prior research and discussion however, as it informs and enables effective policy development and implementation.

Needless to say, I was attracted to the section within the first chapter with the heading 'Leading from the library'. Here Merga asserts that "a WSLP needs a leader heading up an enthusiastic and cross-curricular literacy team" and that teacher-librarians are "up to the job as dual qualified library staff with expertise in both education and library and information sciences." (p.21) This discussion offers an excellent context for the role of the library and much to encourage reflection on the impact that the school library professional can have on the success of a Whole School Literacy Policy.

Dr. Merga delivers what she sets out to achieve. A broad exploration of what existing literacy policies look like and suggestions for "where to from here". The text is accessible and useful and makes for a professional publication that has ongoing value for a range of school personnel. I would highly recommend *Creating an Australian School Library Policy*.

## Collection Diversity Toolkit



**Brooks Kirkland, Anita, Jeffrey, Josephy, & Koechlin, Carol. (2021). [Collection Diversity Toolkit](#). Canadian School Libraries**

***Reviewed by Dr Rosemary Abbott***

In Issue 1, 2022 of *Synergy*, Anita Brooks Kirkland introduced and described, in some detail, the Canadian School Libraries Collection Diversity Toolkit. She set a context of considerable change, particularly in the past two years, and articulated the challenges of collection development that the toolkit has been designed to meet. This review is intended to encourage awareness of the website and its extensive resources.

School library collection development is effectively located within the context of learning, equity and privilege. Canadian Teacher Librarian Sylvia Duckworth's *Wheel of Power and Privilege* is used most effectively in the exploration of issues of equity.

Individual components of the toolkit are introduced in brief and their purpose explained.

### **Components of the Toolkit:**

***Equity-Informed Selection*** provides valuable criteria when assessing resources and suggests the specific questions which should be posed.

***Equity-Informed Weeding*** provides a useful 'how to'. A practical approach is provided via use of the acronym MUSTIE – misleading, ugly, superseded, trivial, irrelevant and elsewhere. Brief but useful mention is made of decolonizing the catalogue, with advice on weeding literature, fiction, picture books and each area of non-fiction.

***Diversity Audit***. This section explores the concept and poses guiding questions. Additional resources are listed

***Guidelines and Procedures*** provides a detailed explanation of selection guidelines. The focus here is on the mandatory requirements for specific parts of Canada but the principles articulated are applicable beyond the Canadian education system. Reconsideration of materials that have been challenged is presented. Additional resources and a list of exemplars is included

***Leading Learning Connections*** unpacks the Leading Learning Standards of Practice which have been used as the guidelines for the development of the toolkit.

***Recommended Booklists and Review Sites***. Here the Canadian focus is strong but the issues raised are transferable beyond Canada.

The website is well designed and laid out, with clear graphics to indicate the various sections of the toolkit. It is very easy to navigate, with hyperlinks located in appropriate places. The focus is Canadian, but the themes around collection diversity and development are universal and deal with the critical issues currently challenging all teacher librarians. It is a valuable resource and is highly recommended.

The Diversity Toolkit was the topic for the SLAV Masterclass in March this year, where Rebeca Rubio and Anita Brooks Kirkland focussed on collection development as a tool for supporting diversity. Given some well publicised issues earlier this year regarding collection diversity and content, particularly in relation to indigenous resources, this is an area of ongoing concern. It is certainly something SLAV is continuing to investigate. There will be a follow up to the March 9 Masterclass at LAMERC in Carlton on July 26 (details will be available at a later date), where collection development will be looked at as a tool for supporting diversity.

# At a Glance

## **Brief listings, with both a local and global focus.**

In this issue, At A Glance provides a brief listing of more resources on collection development and diversity which may be useful.

[\*Going Beyond Diversifying Collections\*](#), by Jillian Heise & Julia E. Torres, from the Follett Community. This article puts forward the view that it is not enough to curate or create a diverse collection. There is a need to support all students and all of society – a considerable challenge!

NSW State Library. [\*Diverse Picture Books Collections\*](#)

This page contains a list of specific appropriate titles, all of which meet the assessment criteria that are contained in a downloadable spreadsheet.

Capraro, L., Lawless, B. and Motti, J. [\*Decolonising a Library\*](#), in *Agora*, 57:3 (2022)

This article considers the role of bias in collection development and how to avoid “perpetuating stereotypes and racism”.

There has also been interesting input from the academic sector on this topic:

University of West England, Bristol (2022). [\*Decolonising and Diversifying Your Library\*](#). This article describes a project involving library and academic staff and students with the goal of broadening individual perspectives and supporting the University’s aim to embed inclusive pedagogies in the curriculum.

[\*Narrative Expansions: Interpreting Decolonisation in Academic Libraries\*](#) (2022), edited by Jess Crilly and Regina Everitt presents 15 essays from library professionals around the world. The essays describe initiatives designed to make collections more inclusive. Despite being published more than a year ago, the book provides relevant and practical information on important issues.

*Embracing Culturally Responsive Practice in School Libraries* (2023), by Elisabet Kennedy has been published recently by AASL. The intention of this US focussed book is to assist school librarians in embracing and encouraging a culturally responsive mindset.

### **Indigenous Focus:**

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2022). [\*A Guide to Evaluating and Selecting Resources\*](#)

This extensive guide is intended for use by non-Indigenous educators to facilitate the selection of resources, “foster trust and build a sense of pride for all”. The structure of the guide and the guiding principles behind its design are clearly laid out.

### **Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education**

This Indigenous organisation “supports schools and early learning services in Australia to develop environments that foster a high level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions” (from the web page). The extensive range of resources includes guides for evaluation

### **Other Publications:**

From AASL is the latest title in the Shared Foundation series, *Curate*, which will be published later this year. The series commenced publication in 2019 and is intended to “help school library professionals deepen their understandings, broaden their perspectives, make connections for personal relevance, and innovate and reflect on their practice”.

### **Softlink Report 2022**

The report is now available as a download on the Softlink website.

Key Findings are summarised first for Australia and then for New Zealand. This is the first time the two countries have been incorporated into a single report. The Australian findings are the more extensive of the two. In particular, the findings on leadership support and engagement with libraries are only included in the Australian section.

In the UK, Great School Libraries has produced a report on a three-year evidence-based campaign to bring back libraries and access to librarians in every school in the UK. [Click here to read the report.](#)

[\*\*National Literacy Trust UK blog\*\*](#) focusses on a wide range of literacy issues, in both primary and post-primary education

*Contributions to this section are warmly welcomed, so please let us know if you discover a wonderful new resource you wish to share with your colleagues. Your review only needs to be a couple of lines.*

**Rosemary Abbott**

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