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# Impact of School Libraries on Learning

DOROTHY WILLIAMS, CAROLINE WAVELL, KATIE MORRISON

Robert Gordon University  
Institute for Management, Governance & Society  
Aberdeen, Scotland  
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A full copy of this report can be downloaded at: <http://www.scottishlibraries.org/school-libraries/>

or at the Tiny URL: <http://tinyurl.com/n5dsmls>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the report is to identify and critically evaluate the available evidence of the impact of school libraries on learning, including attainment, skills and attitudes. The report, commissioned by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), is based on a critical review of UK and international evidence published since 2001 linking school libraries to educational achievement, attainment and learning in secondary education.

The objectives were to:

- Identify, evaluate and summarise evidence in relation to a number of key questions identified by SLIC;
- Assess the applicability of the findings to the potential of Scottish school libraries to impact on Curriculum for Excellence;
- Identify gaps in the evidence and suggest areas for further research in relation to Scottish school libraries.

The research was designed as an update of the previous review of the impact of school library services undertaken in 2001 by the same team (Williams, Wavell & Coles 2001).<sup>1</sup>

The outcomes will inform SLIC strategies in support of school library provision in Scotland and should be of interest in other countries. The outcomes should also be of value to policy and decision makers in local authorities and individual schools in their

future planning for school library provision, and to individual school librarians in their own strategic planning. The work was conducted between the months of May to October 2013 and the outcomes presented at the Scottish Learning Festival held in Glasgow in September 2013.

The findings reveal a considerable body of international evidence showing that school libraries impact on:

- **Higher test or exam scores equating to academic attainment:** this includes academic attainment in the form of higher standardised test scores in reading, language arts, history and maths, and better grades in curriculum assignments or exams;
- **Successful curriculum or learning outcomes, including information literacy:** this includes higher quality project work, the development and practice of information literacy, increased knowledge and reading development; and
- **Positive attitudes towards learning:** including increased motivation, improved attitude towards learning tasks, self-esteem, and wider reading for pleasure.

Examination of Curriculum for Excellence documents, including experiences and outcomes for a sample of curriculum subject areas showed links with all three types of learning indicators. Not surprisingly, the closest links were found in cross-curricular Literacy Across Learning, and

<sup>1</sup> WILLIAMS, D., WAVELL, C. and COLES, L., 2001. Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning. Aberdeen: School of Information and Media, The Robert Gordon University.



## GRAPHIC NOVELS

## GOOD GUYS?

Johns, Geoff, and Gary Frank. **Shazam!** DC Comics, 2013. 192p. \$24.99. 978-1-4012-4244-2. Grades 7 and up. Back in the early comics, Captain Marvel was Superman's, chummy and noble as only a naïve boy in a superhero's body can be. But with the kickoff of DC's New 52, Cap gets a makeover that keeps the magic without the naiveté. Here, Billy Batson is still an orphan kid in need of a good family, but this time, his aw-shucks demeanor is a sham, and the arrangement he has with his caseworker smacks of disdain, not the admiration Billy won from the adults around him fifty years ago. Still, Billy isn't a bad person, and when he stumbles into the role of Shazam, he begins to suspect that his power will grow the more that he is willing to open his heart. The sentimentality is earned because of the contrast with Billy's initial skepticism, and the book provides a surprisingly fresh cast of supporting characters.

Jolley, Dan, Leonard Kirk, and Robin Riggs. **Bloodhound Vol. 1: Brass Knuckle Psychology.** Dark Horse, 2013. 232p. \$19.99 Trade pb. 978-1-61655-125-4. Grades 10 and up. Travis Clevenger is in jail for killing his partner, but now the cops want him back. He's the best tracker of super-powered criminals they've ever seen, and even if he is a ruthless monster, surely round-the-clock surveillance and a monitoring collar will keep him in check. But even though everyone hates Clev—the other prisoners, the other cops, absolutely everyone—his new partner starts to realize that even Clev's extraordinary violence always has some role to play in catching the real bad guys. Clev is a complex and original character, the kind of hero that superhero comics almost never use.

good links were found between the evidence of impact and the Guiding Principles and Four Capacities for Learning.

In addition, the evidence clearly identifies the elements of the library which contribute to the impact on learning:

- A qualified, full-time librarian, who is proactive and has managerial status;

- The availability of support staff to undertake routine tasks enabling the librarian to initiate instructional, collaborative and promotional activities as well as professional duties to support collection development;

- A library that supports physical and virtual access to resources in the library, classrooms and at home, during school hours and beyond;

- An adequate physical and virtual collection that is current, diverse and supports the curriculum as well as appealing to students' leisure needs;

- Networked technology to support information access and use, and knowledge building and dissemination;

- Instruction that supports individual and curriculum needs of students and teachers, encompassing subject content, information literacy and voluntary reading interests;

- Collaboration with teaching colleagues, senior management, librarian colleagues and outside agencies, including central schools library services, to ensure the most appropriate services are delivered in support of learning.

The majority of the available evidence was found to be from the United States with some significant studies from Australia. Smaller studies at the school level were more widespread. The UK is beginning to lay the foundations for evidence building and a potential source of evidence in the form of shared practice was highlighted. The methodologies used to gather data have been reviewed and their advantages and disadvantages outlined.

The major gaps in evidence and implications for further research were found to be:

- A lack of evidence about the links or impact between school libraries and the community;

- The need for appropriate data to be collected to enable the variety of library contributions to be correlated with national examination results;

- The need to identify a way of collating and systematically reporting the evidence found in shared practice or self-evaluation portfolio documents;

- The need to identify ways in which head teachers can be made aware of how a school library can contribute to student learning and their role in recruiting appropriate staff and supporting their collaborative and instructional activities.

Inspired by the work of Keith Curry Lance, the findings of this review of evidence are summarised graphically on the centerfold as a quick reference and advocacy tool, showing the difference that a school library can make to the learner.

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Professor Dorothy Williams is Director of the Institute for Management, Governance and Society (IMaGeS), Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen and has led a number of studies into the sphere of school libraries and information literacy under the 'MakingConnections' programme (<http://www.rgu.ac.uk/informationliteracyresearch>).

Caroline Wavell is a Research Assistant for IMaGeS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, contributing to research into school libraries and learning.

Katie Morrison is a Research Assistant for IMaGeS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, researching information literacy, information behaviour and the impact of information.

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