Institution: Robert Gordon University
Unit of Assessment: UoA36
Title of case study: Impact on literacies and learning in schools.

1. Summary of the impact

Research since the late 1990s has developed an evidence base on the role of school libraries in developing information literacy and learning. The research has impacted on policy (social and education) and decision-making at governmental level; policy, strategy and advocacy in professional bodies and NGOs; policy, practice and service delivery in individual school library services; and practice of individual school librarians. The research has helped state the case for the contribution of school libraries to learning and has been used to develop the professional role of school libraries and librarians across the world.

2. Underpinning research

Information literacy (IL), the ability to find and use information effectively, has been an important research focus at RGU for 30 years. The Making Connections programme of research which began in the late 1990s has focused on understanding and developing IL in schools, as a foundation for lifelong learning, effective problem-solving, decision-making, and resilience in a knowledge society (www.rgu.ac.uk/informationliteracyresearch). The research team is led by Professor Dorothy **Williams** (1983–present) with Research Assistants **Wavell** (1999–2007, 2013), **Coles** (1998–2006), **Morrison** (2007–present), and **Bloice** (2012–present).

Making Connections includes significant research on a) the role and impact of the school library and librarian on the development of IL and learning, and b) teachers' perceptions and experiences of IL, both strands contributing to a more rounded understanding of the complexity of IL development and the relationship to learning. This case study focuses on wide-ranging impacts of this research. The programme has also included doctoral studies by practitioners supervised by Williams (Sutton's work on the development of critical reading in upper-primary age-groups, PhD 2001; Turriff's research into school librarians' engagement in evidence-based practice, PhD 2008; and Cunningham's current DInfSci on perceptions of IL in an international-school context).

While the research in schools continues, the group is expanding its research into workplace contexts to deepen understanding of the challenges of transfer of IL beyond school. Examples include on-going research into IL in SMEs (Williams, Bloice, Morrison), recent work with Burnett exploring relationships between information use and knowledge processes in organisational learning (see REF2, Williams 3 and 4), and doctoral studies supervised by Williams, e.g. IL and knowledge management in an NHS context (O'Farrill, 2008) and Morrison's current study of IL practice in decision-making in a large energy sector company.

This case study focuses on Making Connections research in schools. A foundation study of the impact of school libraries on learning funded by Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, 1999-2001, was undertaken at a time when the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), curriculum authority and government were developing guidelines for self-evaluation by Scottish school libraries of their impact on learning. Working closely with teachers and librarians, the research identified school library impacts on achievement and learning within the secondary school curriculum. Case studies showcased approaches that librarians could adopt, and indicators that could be developed and tailored to specific learning contexts.

Dissemination of findings from this study (**UR1, UR2**) led to a commission by DfES in 2001-2002 to conduct a critical review of available international evidence on the impact of school libraries on learning and achievement (**UR3**) to provide an evidence base to support on-going DfES consultations with professional bodies on the support and staffing of school libraries in England. The value of this work to policy discussions was evidenced by a further commission, by DfEs and

Resource in 2002, to provide a review of evidence of the impact of primary school libraries (**UR4**). An Ofsted (2006) report confirms the importance of this research (**UR3**, **UR4**), alongside the work of a DfES Task group, in influencing developments in the years up to the REF period.

These studies pointed to the importance of teacher-librarian collaboration in developing the information literate learner and led to the team's research into teachers' perceptions and experiences of IL, revealing the complexity of differing understanding of IL within schools. This includes ESRC-funded research (2002-2003, ESRC Award Number: R000223842) into teachers' own IL in their professional learning, later published in the *Journal of Documentation* (**UR6**), and a Society for Educational Studies-funded study (2004-2005) of teachers' conceptions of their pupils' IL, published in the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (**UR5**).

Making Connections research has been disseminated in the information and education professional literatures (e.g. *The School Librarian*, *Connected*) and through user-focused conferences and workshops, e.g. Scottish Education and Teaching Technology, 2002; Learning and Teaching Scotland/NGfL Masterclass, 2004; Scottish Learning Festival 2005, 2013; Making Connections workshops, Glasgow, 2001; Aberdeen, 2005; London 2007; invited keynotes at Gulbenkian Foundation Seminar, Portugal 2006, LILAC 2006, Information Literacy Network, Stockholm, 2006. The outcomes of **UR3** and **UR4** were presented to DfES, Resource, and the National Literacy Trust (NLT) in invited meetings (2001-2002).

3. References to the research

UR1 – Williams, D.A. and Wavell, C. (2001) *Impact of the School Library Resource Centre on Learning*. Library and Information Commission Research Report 112. [Available at: http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/files/SLRCreport.pdf]

UR2 – Williams, D. A. and Wavell, C. (2001) Evaluating the impact of the school library resource centre on learning. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 7(1), 58–71. [Available at: http://www.iasl-online.org/files/jan01-williams-wavell.pdf]

UR3 – Williams, D, Wavell, C and Coles, L. (2001) *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning*. Report for Department for Education and Skills and Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Information Management Research Report No. 10. [Available at: http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/abs/research/page.cfm?pge=5248]

UR4 – Williams, D, Coles, L and Wavell, C. (2002) *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning in Primary Schools*. Report for the Department for Education and Skills and Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Information Management Research Report No. 11. [Available at: http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/abs/research/page.cfm?pge=5931]

UR5 - Williams, D and Wavell, C. (2007) Secondary school teachers' conceptions of student information literacy. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 39 (4), December, 199–212.

UR6 - Williams, D and Coles, L. (2007) Evidence-based practice in teaching: an information perspective. *Journal of Documentation*, 63 (6), 812–835.

4. Details of the impact

The research has provided clear evidence of: the positive role and impact of school libraries on learning, including reading and IL, academic attainment, and attitudes to learning; and key factors that contribute to the impact of school libraries on learning: effective professional staffing; quality and flexible access to resources; and effective librarian-teacher collaboration. These messages have been used by professional groups to advocate for better school library provision and in literacy initiatives, government-policy initiatives, and CPD for library and teaching professions. Examples below show research impact on three levels: impact on high-level policy and decision-making (government, education depts); impact on policy, strategy and advocacy by professional

bodies and NGOs; and impact on library development, practice and CPD in schools.

Government and education departments
The School Library Commission, chaired by Baroness Estelle Morris, established a joint initiative between the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the NLT, to "set a national agenda to ensure school libraries are delivering exceptional services to help young people reach their potential". Following an open call for evidence the Commission's 2010 report (**CE2**) recommended "wholehearted" support by the Dept of Education and key actions by decision-makers in making school libraries more effective in support of educational objectives. It cited **UR3** as evidence (**CE2**), while the SLA's open response to the Commission (**CE3**) had also cited **UR4**. In Ireland **UR1** and **UR3** were influential in decisions by the Junior Certificate School Programme (JSCP) to ensure their school libraries moved beyond a focus on standardised attainment tests to look at wider learning, when evaluating achievements (**CE1**). The JCSP Demonstration Library Project, part of Ireland's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, is funded by the Dept. of Education and Skills (DES) to improve educational provision and equality of opportunity in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The first 10 of 50 JCSP school libraries sanctioned by the DES were operational from 2007 indicating ongoing social and educational impact in the REF period (**CE1**).

Professional bodies, Independent Advisory Bodies, and NGOs
UR3 and **UR4** have continued to be used to the present day to raise awareness of the role of school libraries and their impact on learning and literacy. In a blogpost (**CE3**) response to the Campaign for the Book's 2009 call for school libraries to be made statutory in England, Jonathan Douglas, Director of NLT, cites **UR3** and **UR4** as supporting evidence to argue that it is not simply a school library that is important in developing the learner, but the presence of a skilled librarian and integration of the library in the school's teaching and learning strategies. Douglas also uses a further outcome of **UR3** and **UR4** as evidence of the need to fill a gap in UK data to enable better planning of school libraries.

A number of UK and international advocacy tools have drawn on the research and/or recommended it as a resource for practitioners in their own advocacy and development work. An example with wide international reach is the IFLA School Library Advocacy kit (**CE4**), where **UR3** and **UR4** are the only examples of recommended research undertaken outwith the US, Australia and Canada. Within the UK, CILIP Scotland recently cited **UR4** evidence to back up its response to North Lanark's budget proposals (**CE5**).

SLIC reports that it has continued to use **UR3** and **UR4** to the present day "to inform its strategic approach to school library services and to share good practice with practitioners" and that the research has "given practitioners a credible source of information to demonstrate the value of library services" (**CE6**). The on-going impact and value is evidenced by SLIC's commissioning in 2013 of an updated critical review of evidence to cover the period since **UR3** and **UR4** (**CE6**). Preliminary findings, reinforcing the impact of school libraries in IL, reading, attainment and learning, have already been the subject of an invited presentation to librarians, teachers and policy-makers at the Scottish Learning Festival, Sept 2013, with a public commitment by SLIC to use the research as launchpad to improve on-going data collection.

School libraries and librarians, CPD and practice
Invitations to give keynote presentations to practitioners and policy-makers (e.g. Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 2006; Scottish Learning Festival, 2005, IL Network, Stockholm 2006) enabled reach into teaching as well as librarianship professions, using evidence from a range of Making Connections studies (**UR1, UR2, UR3, UR4, UR5, UR6**) to develop international awareness of the relationship between IL, learning and the role of school libraries. Following the Gulbenkian event a self-evaluation framework, influenced by **UR3,** was developed to improve the impact of school libraries in Portugal (**CE7**). Examples of impact beyond the library profession are the inclusion of research in literacy guidelines for elementary educators in the US (**CE8**); and collaborative teacher-librarian IL initiatives at a Scottish secondary school, stimulated by teachers' involvement in UR5, and in turn shared widely by the school (**CE8**).

UR3 recommended that pre-service training and CPD of both teachers and librarians should address the need for greater understanding of their roles in learning in school libraries. In her professional journal article (**CE9**) school librarian Lynn Barrett uses this to support a call for more effective staff development for librarians in their professional role in developing IL. Other examples of CPD use of the research include Saskatchewan School Library Association's recommendation of **UR3** for teacher-librarian development in their role as "instructional leader" (**CE9**); and its use in a practitioner-led CILIP workshop (**CE9**). Activity on librarian blogs (**CE10**) provides evidence that the research (**UR4, UR5**) is changing librarian thinking.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

CE1 JCSP Support Service (2008) "More than a room for reading" (2008), pp 1, 2, 14
http://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/390_More_Than_a_Room_for_Reading_-_Final.pdf

CE2 School Library Commission evidence:
- "School Libraries: A plan for improvement" (2010), pp12,15
  www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/5718/School_Libraries:A_Plan_for_Improvement.pdf
- School Library Association (2010) submission to the School Library Commission.
  http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/policy/school_library_commission

CE3 Jonathan Douglas, National Literacy Trust, 2009 blog post.
www.literacytrust.org.uk/blog/1233_school_libraries-a_childs_right

CE4 IFLA School library advocacy kit (first published earlier, but most recently updated on 24th November 2012) http://www.ifla.org/publications/school-library-advocacy-kit

CE5 CILIP Scotland (2012) Consultation Response to North Lanarkshire Council Savings Options 2013-14 to 2015-16 Learning and Leisure Services. http://www.cilips.org.uk/advocacy-responses/

CE6 Statement from SLIC on file, 2013

CE7 Portugese Ministry of Education: School libraries Self-evaluation model, 2008
http://www.rbe.mec.pt/en/np4/?newsId=32&fileName=self_evaluation_model.pdf

CE8 Impact on teaching and development of information literacy:
- "The compendium of research (campaign for grade-level reading) 2012" p.8
  http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/SCCGResearchCompendium.pdf
- Caldervale High School: letter to Williams, 2008; their Professional Development Group report "Supporting pupils in developing information skills" is available at:
  http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/sharingpractice/s/supportinginformationliteracy/

CE9 Impact on CPD and the role of the librarian:
- Barrett, L. (2010) "Effective school libraries: evidence of impact on student achievement" *The School Librarian*, 58(3), pp 136-139 www.sla.org.uk/dwl.php?doc=sla-tsl-sample-issue-58-3.pdf
- Saskatchewan School Library Association (2008) "50 ways to love your library", p.13.
  https://bctf.ca/bctla/pub/documents/libraryprogram/50%20Ways%20To%20Love%20Your%20Library_cwalter_fall08.pdf
- "From old school to new profession", presentation for CILIP Careers Development Group/Diversity group, 6th July 2009 by Hazel James, Assistant Librarian in Dame Alice Owen's School, Potters Bar. http://www.powershow.com/view1/174a70-NmI4N/From_old_school_to_new_profession_powerpoint_ppt_presentation

CE10 Librarian Blogs*: UR4 in School librarian in action, Friday, 29 June, 2012. http://lovealibrarian.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/school-libraries-and-student.html; UR5 in The Librarian's Portal, 10 June 2008. http://kfigdore.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/what-is-right-and-wrong-with.html*