# Book review

**Murray, C. 2025. Book review of Merga, M. 2023. Creating a reading culture in primary and secondary schools. London: Facet Publishing.** *Journal of Information Literacy, 19*(1), pp. 114–115.

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This practical, eminently readable book empowers educators in primary and secondary schools (teachers, senior leaders, school librarians) to embed a whole school reading culture. It is judiciously supported by extensive research undertaken by the author whilst working with schools, professional associations and government departments to develop schools' literacy culture. School staff will appreciate the clearly set out structure, comprehensible language, and the range of options provided to enact this culture change, that allows facilitators to pick a solution that will fit their means and their student body. Chapters are divided into discrete, digestible sections. Research is presented concisely, with the clear purpose of supporting each stage of the proposed project.

The author shares evidence on why a whole school reading culture is so important (providing useful extra clout for convincing school leadership if necessary) and details a range of potential research-supported practices to choose. There is advice on how to engage relevant stakeholders, resource the project, and manage change. There is also a clear explanation on the value of evaluation and reporting. No specialist, technical, or theoretical knowledge is required to read the book, enabling access for a wide audience, including parents who may be empowered to ask meaningful questions about reading in school. Guidance is equally applicable for schools who do not employ a qualified librarian, though the author does emphasise the significant contribution they play in developing and maintaining a whole school reading culture (pp. 39–43).

The first two chapters focus on proposing and designing a transformative project, supplying evidence for how a whole school reading culture supports literacy development in all learners, but particularly those labelled as struggling literacy learners (this terminology is usefully qualified and reflected on, pp. 98–99). Chapter one covers the impact of reading frequency, gender

reading disparities, benefits for cross-curricular learning, and real-world advantages of high literacy levels, such as critical appraisal of digital sources. This is certain to be of increasing significance in a world challenged by mis- and disinformation. Chapter two lays out various ways schools might drive the reading agenda, including sustained opportunities to read for pleasure during the school day (for some students, potentially the only time they have for this activity), teachers and parents who model and talk about reading, and the significance of a staffed, well-resourced school library space with evolving collections that are properly aligned to its students' needs. It coalesces the research into best practice to-do lists that schools could adopt.

Chapter three advises on engaging the whole team of educators, including school leaders whose buy-in will be crucial to a project's success. It also offers practical suggestions on applying for grants to support initiatives and a 15-step plan to successfully secure a grant, if time and resources permit. Chapters four and five continue in this pragmatic vein, advising on viable goal setting, modes of evaluation and ensuring fidelity to best practice (that ideals match the reality!) A helpful table describes possible roles and distribution of responsibility in project delivery. Chapter six focuses on showcasing and celebrating results, whilst adhering to ethical standards of research such as subject anonymisation and data protection laws. There is advice on the benefits and potential pitfalls of sharing findings through social media, conferences, professional journals, and mainstream media.

Self-described as "a tool to inform rather than dictate your choices" (p. 179), the book manages to acknowledge the unique needs of schools, staff, and students and yet provide a concise guide to the whole process. Whilst Merga's extensive research is primarily conducted in an Australian context, there is much here that could be applied to other regions. A final section in the concluding chapter acknowledges the need for and invites further research contributions. It is hoped that this book finds its way into the hands of educators around the world, and that it invigorates schools to take the lead in promoting and celebrating the vital importance of establishing a lifelong love of reading in school children.