

Growing information fluency in the Early Years

By Brianna Metagesha

Text, talk and playful thought in the lower primary library

As a teacher-librarian working with Prep to Year 2 students, I see information fluency as something that begins long before children can read independently or conduct formal research. In my practice, information fluency is about building dispositions: curiosity, confidence, and an understanding that information helps us make sense of the world. The library is a powerful space for this work because it brings together story, talk, play and exploration in ways that feel natural and engaging for young learners.

In the early years, my focus is not on turning students into researchers. Instead, I am helping them learn how to wonder, how to look closely, how to ask questions, and how to share ideas. These behaviours form the foundation for later information skills and are best developed through shared experiences rather than isolated, explicit instruction. My practice is informed by the NSW Information Fluency Framework, which positions learners as social, literate, innovative, critical, and ethical users and creators of information. These

elements align strongly with early childhood pedagogy and with the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities, particularly Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, and ICT Capability.

Creating a library environment that invites inquiry

When my youngest students enter the library, I want them to feel that this is a place where they belong and where curiosity is valued. I intentionally design the space to support early information behaviours. Books are displayed face-out wherever possible and grouped by broad themes rather than strict genres in the junior non-fiction section.

We are in the process of arranging our fiction collection to follow a child's learning journey sequentially — from pre-readers to confident readers — with picture books placed alongside early chapter books, followed by junior fiction of increasing complexity, and a Year 6 shelf for more advanced and mature readers. Displays are refreshed regularly to reflect classroom learning, in consultation with classroom teachers. This helps students browse with purpose and begin to make decisions about texts based on interest and need.

Browsing is not a passive activity. I talk explicitly with students about choosing books and encourage them to explain their thinking: "What made you choose this one?" or "What do you think you might learn from this book?" These conversations help children understand that information has a purpose and that readers are active participants in the process.

They also support Literacy, particularly oral language and comprehension, while strengthening Personal and Social Capability as students practise turn-taking, listening and respectful sharing of ideas.



Students begin to understand that information is something we engage with together.

Embedding information skills through play and inquiry

The *Innovative* element of the Information Fluency Framework emphasises curiosity, idea generation and creative thinking. Rather than teaching information skills in isolation, I embed them within playful, inquiry-focused experiences. After a shared text, students might sort books by topic, match images to ideas, or compare how different texts explore a similar concept. These activities feel like play, yet they support important information behaviours such as organising ideas, noticing patterns and making connections.

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These experiences explicitly support Critical and Creative Thinking, as students generate ideas, explore possibilities and make connections. They also strengthen Personal and Social Capability through collaboration, negotiation of meaning and building on each other's ideas. Responses are deliberately multimodal – talk, drawing, movement, and role-play – recognising that young learners express understanding in diverse ways.

Oral language is particularly important at this stage. When students explain their thinking, ask questions or build on a peer's idea, they are practising the foundations of information fluency.

I am also intentional with the language I use. Simple prompts such as “*How do you know?*”, “*Where could we find out?*”, and “*What do you notice?*” gently introduce metacognitive thinking without over-

whelming students. Over time, I hear this language echoed back to me, signalling growing confidence and awareness.

Fiction as the foundation of Information Fluency

Storytime sits at the heart of my work with Prep–Year 2 students and supports both the Literate and Critical elements of the Information Fluency Framework. Through shared reading, I model how information and ideas are conveyed through words, images and structure. Picture books provide rich opportunities for students to practise visual literacy, notice detail and make connections between text and illustration.

I deliberately slow down read-alouds to make thinking visible. I wonder aloud, revisit pages and invite students to share observations and predictions. In doing so, I explicitly model Critical and Creative Thinking, particularly analysing, reasoning and reflecting. These moments also reinforce Literacy, as students learn to articulate ideas using increasingly precise language.

Books such as *Strictly No Elephants* by Lisa Mantchev and *Walk of the Whales* by Nick Bland support discussion about feelings, actions, and cause and effect, encouraging students to articulate ideas and listen to others' perspectives. Texts that explore comparison and contrast are particularly effective for early information thinking. *Same, But Little Bit Different* by Bronwyn Bancroft invites students to notice similarities and differences, laying the groundwork for classification and descriptive language. Similarly, *This & That* by Mem Fox encourages pattern recognition and connection-making through rhythmic, layered text.

Many fiction texts act as powerful provocations for deep wondering, while others provide a gentle entry point into sensitive topics. *Gone* by Michel Steich of-

fers a thoughtful starting point for discussions about death through the story of a bird's passing. On a more playful note, *What Is a Dot?* by Johanna Bell challenges students to question their assumptions and justify their thinking, while *What Do You Do With an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada encourages confidence in developing and nurturing ideas – strongly supporting Creative and Critical Thinking.

Introducing non-fiction in meaningful ways

Non-fiction plays a crucial role in developing early information fluency, but it must be introduced thoughtfully. In Prep–Year 2, I focus on helping students understand that non-fiction texts are designed to help us learn through information, and that they look and function differently from stories, which often support learning through imagination.

We explore non-fiction texts together, noticing features such as photographs, labels, diagrams, headings and contents pages. I do not expect students to use these features independently at first; instead, we examine them collaboratively and talk about how they help us find information.

High-quality, visually rich non-fiction texts are essential. *I Wonder: A Book of Questions with No Answers* by Philip Bunting beautifully bridges fiction and non-fiction, supporting inquiry and creative thinking. For more traditional information texts, the *Big Questions Answered* series (Hungry Tomato Publishers) mirrors the kinds of questions young children naturally ask. Students also enjoy being read to from *Quarks, Sparks and Quantum Mysteries* by Lisa Harvey-Smith, which introduces complex scientific ideas and invites inquiry into unseen forces. Animal inquiry is especially popular in the early years, and texts such as the *DK Find Out!* series pro-

vide accessible facts supported by clear visuals, allowing students to practise extracting information from both images and text.

Using paired texts to deepen understanding

One strategy I regularly use is pairing fiction and non-fiction texts around a shared topic. With Prep students, for example, I might pair a simple narrative such as *Sea* by John Canty with a factual text about oceans. This allows students to compare how information is presented in different ways and supports early critical thinking. Similarly, when exploring natural phenomena with Year 2, I might read *Ella and the Ocean* by Lian Tanner alongside a non-fiction text about weather and drought.

Through guided, conversational comparisons, students begin to understand that stories and information texts serve different purposes, yet both help us learn. The goal is not for students to label text types perfectly, but to notice differences and articulate understanding in their own words.

Developing information behaviours and responsibility

At this stage, information fluency is closely tied to routines and behaviour. I explicitly teach students how to care for books, return them to the correct place, and respect shared resources. These actions may seem simple, but they reinforce the idea that information is valuable and communal.

To support this learning, I use an interactive piece of digital literature I created that allows students to “choose their own adventure” around library routines and expectations. Created using Twine software, the text includes photographs of our own library to make it relevant and relatable, as

well as audio options so emergent readers can participate confidently.

I also encourage students to see people as information sources. Classroom teachers, peers, family members and community members are all positioned as people who can help us find out more. This broad understanding lays important groundwork for later inquiry learning.

Collaboration with classroom teachers

Strong collaboration with classroom teachers is essential. I plan library sessions in alignment with classroom inquiries, ensuring that information skills are reinforced across learning contexts. Working with Heads of Learning, we identify key lines of inquiry, shared language, and opportunities for students to revisit ideas through different texts. When students encounter familiar concepts in the library, they are more confident to engage, question and contribute. The library becomes an extension of the classroom rather than a separate learning space.

Building confidence, not independence

My primary goal for lower primary students is not independence, but confidence. I want students to feel comfortable asking questions, exploring texts and sharing ideas. When children leave a library session excited to talk about a book or eager to learn more about a topic, I know strong foundations are being built.

Information fluency in the early years grows through small, intentional moments: a shared story, a thoughtful pause, a question asked aloud. By designing library experiences that honour curiosity, play and talk, I aim to support young learners in developing a positive, lasting relationship with information. In these early years, the library is not just a place to borrow books — it is a space where thinking is modelled, curiosity is celebrated, and the journey toward information fluency truly begins.

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