

My name is [REDACTED] and I'm a bestselling children's author with 67 titles published in Australia and internationally. Before becoming a full-time writer, I was a teacher, Deputy Head of Junior School and Director of Development working in education for over 20 years. I have been an ambassador for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for 11 years and have recently been appointed to the board.

I have great concerns about the declining rates of reading and literacy in Australia. It is something that I have seen firsthand both during my teaching career and even more so in the past ten or so years in my work as a writer.

A key problem is equitable access to books and reading programs across Australia. School libraries should play a central role in this but in many areas, they are closing or being repurposed. How do we expect kids to be excited about reading if we are taking away the very thing that will support this ambition? All schools need a library and a trained librarian. Teachers must also be educated in the numerous benefits of reading. It may seem hard to believe, but there are many teachers in our schools who are not readers and whose ability to teach writing is negligible. There must be programs in place to raise standards across the board.

Reading needs to be seen as not only important for literacy but also desirable as an escape from screens and the opportunity to use our brains and imaginations. Greater support of Australia Reads to create effective campaigns, underpinned by extensive research would help spread the word about why reading is cool for kids.

I have huge concerns about the use of AI – and the fact that some students see it as a shortcut to success (without actually learning anything). Humans need to 'use it or lose it' and the fact that young people are being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at a greater rate than ever must have some correlation with screen time and the lack of development of neural pathways. There needs to be policies around AI that are workable and enforceable to ensure that we aren't dumbing down humanity.

Authors should be compensated for all of the work that has been stolen to train the AI large language models. The preservation of copyright and ensuring that writers are paid for their creative output is imperative to a thriving industry. Any work created with the assistance of AI should be declared as such.

Author income is also critical. To ensure greater returns, there should be a three-month period during which all new release books must be sold at RRP (instead of heavily discounted). This would support publishers, authors and bookstores. Ensuring that ELR/PLR/DLR are continued and able to grow and greater opportunities and access to grants (without the nepotism and bias that is currently evident) would go a long way to increasing opportunities for writers to have successful careers and not have to juggle jobs to make ends meet.