



NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

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SUMMARY:

This paper comments on the existing situation within Catholic Education in the Cairns Diocese with regard to school libraries and advocates for the position of Teacher-Librarian in schools under the terms of reference requested in the inquiry.

PLEASE NOTE:

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION that is requested not for publication is presented as a part of an appendix to this document

TERMS OF REFERENCE

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.

Commenting on:

- *the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;*
- *the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;*
- *the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;*
- *the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and*
- *the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.*

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THE IMPACT OF RECENT POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

Our Context

For this information please refer to [APPENDIX ONE](#)

Impact of Building an Education Revolution : 21st Century Primary School Libraries

- 20 primary schools are building or refurbishing school libraries.
- Whilst schools are excited and welcomed the announcement of the building of new library facilities, concerns have been raised about achieving the vision of a 21st Century School Library. In the first instance, schools have had difficulty conceptualizing what a 21st Century School Library should look like, do and be offering students. Most of our schools have had no experience in working with a contemporary teacher-librarian in order to understand what the possibilities could be for 21st Century School Library services and learning opportunities.
- At Diocesan level a range of opportunities for schools to engage with 'finding out' in order to develop a concept and vision for a '21st Century School Library' have been hosted. These events have included:-
 - o **March 2009 – “Contemporary School Library Day”** A day for school teams and architects to listen to input from invited guests and begin some initial brainstorming of a vision for their school libraries
 - **Guest speakers** : Judy O’Connell (award winning, high profile teacher-librarian generously released from St Joseph’s Hunters Hill, Sydney); Kevin Henna (Marketing Consultant – who shared layout and merchandising techniques of a modern library space that tempt and engage student in reading); local invited Education Qld Teacher-Librarians who worked with schools and architects during the brainstorming session with schools and architects. This event was also open to schools across sectors.
 - **Audience**:- School Principals, Leadership, Library assistants, interested teachers, and architects who would be working on these projects. (all our primary schools were represented)
 - o **March 2009 ‘Future Proofing Your School’** – Dr Ken Fisher & Ty Goddard – challenged traditional notions of learning spaces
 - **Audience** – School Leadership & Architects
 - o **August 2009 – “Leading Learning through the School Library”** – Seminar with Dr Ross Todd, Rutgers State University New Jersey (over 100 participants - teachers and principals. Another event open to schools across sectors)
 - o **March 2010 “Envisioning a Preferred Future for Your School Library”** – This day was facilitated by Lyn Hay (Lecturer in Teacher-Librarianship, Charles Sturt University) Format: Seminar; Vignette Presentations by invited guests that demonstrated what learning opportunities can be achieved for students and teachers via the services of a contemporary school library; Panel Discussion and Workshop/ Visioning session for schools. (attended by 1/3 of the primary Catholic school principals and curriculum leaders)

- **Other:**
 - Extensive Information (photographs, video and print) also made available on our intranet – similar information was shared with schools across sectors via a wiki <http://21cschoollibrary.wikispaces.com/>
 - Diocesan Education Officer has :-
 - presented further information at staff meetings for schools
 - been involved in conversations with schools to assist develop plans for their new school libraries.
 - prepared a 'Business Case for employment of teacher-librarians in the Diocese' for consideration by various stakeholders in the Diocese. Whilst 'in principle' agreement has noted, funding this initiative is an issue for this small Diocese.

THE FUTURE POTENTIAL OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS TO CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES, ESPECIALLY LITERACY

- Existing research is irrefutable: Quality school libraries, adequately staffed by quality qualified teacher-librarians and support staff have a measureable, positive impact on learning and student test scores (refer to <http://hubinfo.wordpress.com/background/research/>).
- The potential of the Federal Governments vision for 21st Century School Libraries will only be realised with employment of contemporary teacher-librarians who have a current set of digital information and online and offline collaborative skills; adequate library support staff and funding for resources and equipment. Library assistants currently employed undertake the routine clerical tasks in school libraries. They do not have the teaching background, knowledge or skills or often time to attend realising the services and desired learning opportunities that would be expected of a 21st Century School Library.
- Highly skilled and qualified, enthusiastic, energetic teacher-librarians can offer a range of programs that engage learners and contribute in particular to development of students' information processes (research skills); reading habits and broader literacy
- Skilled teacher-librarians are a 'package deal' for schools - enriching learning and teaching across the whole school in bringing to the positions what should be competencies in ICTs, inquiry learning, critical and information literacy, resource and information management and curriculum.

Teacher-Librarians:-

- work collaboratively with teachers to plan and teach programs, facilitate learning that supports required curriculum;
- assist students to become critical discerning, ethical users of information aware of their responsibilities as digital citizens
- are information specialists who select, organise, create and customize resources for inquiry based curriculum across the school
- are skilled practitioners who enable the provision of a range of information services across a school and into the wider school learning community that can be accessed anywhere/ anytime

Quality Contemporary School Libraries with appropriate staffing levels have the future potential to provide:-

- 'the opportunity for teams engaging in pedagogical experimentation to access and use information and web tools to empower learning through creativity, discovery, inquiry, cooperation, and collaboration.'
- blended physical and virtual learning environments
- 'A learning centre whose primary focus is on building capacity for critical engagement—giving emphasis to thinking creatively, critically and reflectively with information in the process of building knowledge and understanding.'
- 'A centre of learning innovation where teachers and teacher librarians are involved in creatively designing learning experiences by way of testing, trialling, and experimenting with information and tools to bring about the best knowledge outcomes for students.'
- 'A learning environment that demonstrates the power of pedagogical fusion, where pedagogy underpins the decision making behind a school's information architecture—where technology infrastructure and support services, networked information services and provision of access do not restrict innovative and flexible use of space, resources or expertise.'
- '... an important zone of intervention and socialisation process for learning how to function effectively in the complex informational and technological world beyond school.'
- 'support for the intellectual engagement and development of children and young people, and developing intellectual engagement was even proposed as a way of recasting the primary function of a school library of the future'

(The above statements are consistent with the views held by the author of this paper. They are drawn from data collected by Lyn Hay and Dr Ross Todd [School libraries 21C: the conversation begins](#) Executive summary of [School libraries 21C](#) online discussion)

The following video link (27mins) provides an excellent presentation on how school libraries and teacher-librarians can contribute to improved educational outcomes for a school's learning community.

Designed for Learning: School Libraries <http://blip.tv/file/1455517>

"The video aims to contribute to the design and development of visually stunning, fit-for-purpose libraries that support 21st century learning in extended school settings. It shows the contribution an effective library can make to the educational, creative, emotional & reading development of children and young people, and the aspects of design that can enable this."
(produced by [CILIP](#))

THE FACTORS INFLUENCING RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

- **'School Librarian' as a title** – this title suggests that this role does not have to be a teacher. **A teacher-librarian is a teacher first** and is the vital educational link between the school library and the school's learning community
- **Financial capacity** : In this region recruitment of teacher-librarians relies on a school's capacity to make internal arrangements for the employment of teacher-librarian. This is usually only possible for schools with larger enrolments i.e. over 600 students and then only in a part-time capacity, which does not adequately service the school according to the standards documented in [Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services for Schools](#)

- **Staffing schedules** that make provision for a teacher-librarian in the future but make employment of them optional will not ensure that students have equitable access to the educational library services a contemporary teacher-librarian can offer.
- **A lack of understanding the role of teacher-librarian, and particularly how it has evolved with the explosion of digital information** - translates to a lack of advocacy and vision for the role among school leadership;
 - o the majority of schools in our region have never experienced working with a **teacher-librarian** and therefore do not understand the role of a contemporary teacher-librarian or contemporary school library service. Schools that have employed teacher-librarians recently (one being this year 2010) have made their own internal staffing arrangements to facilitate a teacher-librarian position. This has been achieved via increased class sizes up to 30 students, or reallocation of funding for other positions.
- **There is no perceived career path for teacher-librarianship** – with limited positions available in schools for a teacher-librarian there has been limited interest in taking up of study by teachers in this field. This is evidenced by the fact that recently advertised positions for teacher-librarians have attracted few or no applicants with the appropriate qualifications and skills.

THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN PARTNERING WITH AND SUPPORTING SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

School Libraries represented on MySchool

School library collection statistics and staffing standards could be documented on MySchool. The school library in many cases is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. To be relevant in serving the needs of the students, resources need to be carefully selected, and the collection must be kept current and well maintained with adequate staffing to maintain services. Does the public have a right to know how well these expensive collections (both print and digital) are utilized? If the research evidence is anything to go by, over time a correlation will surely appear between the quality of the library staffing, services offered and student results.

Government initiatives such as the [Learning Federation Learning Objects](#) would gain more traction in schools if contemporary teacher-librarians were charged with the responsibility of roll out and promotion such resources in schools. Teacher-librarians can and should have a central role to play in supporting teachers undertaking to resource and teach with new [Australian Curriculum](#).

Governments need to make certain that the vision for 21st Century School Libraries is realized by:-

- Ensuring that educational authorities are well placed (financially resourced) to employ teacher-librarians and support staff.
 - o Teacher-librarians fulfil the educative role of the school library and oversee the support staff providing the clerical and technical services of a 21st Century School Library.
- Supporting and providing incentive for our best and brightest teachers to undertake studies in information science (teacher-librarianship)

- Teacher-librarians often work with and act as model and mentor for many younger teachers. We therefore need to attract our most accomplished teachers to undertake studies in information science (teacher-librarianship).
- Performance Review of Teacher-Librarians
 - The teacher-librarian position is a very central and influential position that requires this capacity to be used responsibly and ethically. The teacher-librarian role needs to be performance reviewed as are other positions of significant responsibility in schools to ensure that this position is adequately addressing [the standards of professional excellence for teacher-librarians](#) and therefore providing the services required by a 21st Century School Library.

Resources of various other Government bodies can and do work in well with school libraries when promoted by teacher-librarians.

For example:-

Public Libraries

- access to guest authors and events

QLD Museums loans

- State Library & National Library online resources and databases

Universities

- University of Queensland Cyberschool – offer support to schools in trialling databases and offer frequent professional development opportunities

Professional Associations provide professional development and professional networking opportunities

- QSITE (Queensland Society for Technology in Education); ASLA (Australian School Library Association); School Library Association of Queensland (SLAQ) – professional associations provide professional development opportunities for teacher-librarians and teachers.

THE IMPACT AND POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE AND SUPPORT THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

- There are two sides to the potential of digital technologies in the school library. First that which supports the delivery of services and work of staff in the school libraries and secondly more importantly the educative role.
- Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to support the work of teacher-librarians with students and teachers. Being able to present students and teachers with opportunities to access real time information, attend virtual information sharing forums online; collaborate with global partners in various learning projects etc are all real possibilities for the 21st Century School Library but are not likely to occur without a qualified teacher-librarian to assist teachers achieve such opportunities.
- The potential of digital technologies for education also brings further complexity to the information landscape for both teachers and students. A teacher-librarian can assist with navigating the continued growth of digital information, resources and collaborative web environments and tools.

- To take advantage of the potential of digital technologies teacher-librarians have a responsibility to keep up to date with and reflect on the educational implications of new and emerging technologies via interaction with their personal professional learning networks. They then have a responsibility to lead and seek opportunities to introduce and demonstrate this potential to other teachers.
- Equity remains at the heart of school libraries. The school library can, for a number of students, be the only access that they have to emerging technologies and resources. It is important that these opportunities exist for such students.

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