



Submission to the Inquiry into Teacher Librarians and School Libraries 2010

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I write this submission as an individual.

I AM A TEACHER LIBRARIAN.

Not only a teacher, not only a librarian, but both.

I became a teacher librarian on purpose, over a quarter of a century ago.

I do not regret it.

I hold dual qualifications as a professional teacher and a professional teacher librarian.

I am passionate about the value of my role and work to the students and teachers and community with whom and for whom I work.

When I completed my qualifications, much of the librarianship had changed little for decades – card catalogues, books as the main source of information.

In the succeeding quarter century, the pace of change has been immense, in librarianship and in teaching. As a teacher librarian in a country school in the 1980s, the library walls corralled most of the information available to the students, unless they physically journeyed to the nearest city. For some years now, a student can read the current headlines in the New York Times or Jerusalem Post without leaving the school grounds. Unthinkable then. Commonplace now.

Technology and the internet haven't made school libraries and teacher librarians obsolete; instead, we are more important than ever. Managing the ever-increasing tidal wave of information, learning, developing and practising the skills and literacies required to find relevant content are crucial to student success. The role we have always had, the teacher librarian with a brief to support and work with all faculties, all teachers, all students, all classes means that in a teacher librarian, every school has someone ideally placed to facilitate and resource the ways of learning, thinking and exploring which are critical to student success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a world of ever-changing content, our students need to master the critical skills and literacies they need for their school life and the rest of their lives. Many teacher librarians are technological leaders in their schools, learning the new and sharing this with colleagues and students.

I'm sure many other submissions to this inquiry will cite the many research projects undertaken around the world which show, over and over and over again, that a school with an effective library program and a qualified teacher librarian is one where students will do better. Not only the physical space, but the 'learning space' of a library, the educational programs and the teacher librarian who develops them and manages the library. In the face of this considerable body of research, it is puzzling that in some Australian states and in some other countries, teacher librarians are being replaced by library technicians, or librarians, or nobody at all. I know that, every day at school, I am a teacher librarian – being a teacher and being a librarian, enriching each role with the skills of the other, and thus providing the best value to my colleagues and students to enhance teaching and learning in my school.

As a country, we cannot afford to not have school libraries. We cannot afford to build school libraries and not staff them appropriately, with teacher librarians. We cannot afford to not offer our students the best possible education, for the sake of their future and for the sake of the country's future.

My day, like the day of most teachers, can range from the mundane to the sublime, with every highway, byway and cul-de-sac in between. Saying hello to the lonely kid. Fixing a computer problem. Showing a student how to search more effectively. Discussing a fiction genre and suggesting reading possibilities (not only vampires...!). Asking questions and answering them. Conversations short and long, with individuals, groups, classes. Planning, writing, preparing lessons and professional development. Tapping into my own personal learning network to discover new resources. Mentoring senior students. Working with a class doing a research project. Re-imagining my school library to make it useful, effective, attractive and above all, welcoming. Challenging the students, my colleagues, myself to make a difference every day. I am busy with so many things each day, and can see over time the positive impact of the contribution I make as a teacher librarian. My blog Skerricks (<http://skerricks.blogspot.com>) is a snapshot/cornucopia of the many details, ideas and possibilities of teacher librarianship.

The alchemy of teaching is a strange thing. What worked yesterday may not work today. But it might tomorrow. The myriad human interactions of the classroom require quick thinking, strategic thinking. It's fun, exciting, dangerous, engaging. Sometimes demoralising, sometimes extraordinary. I approach my librarianship through the critically important lens of being a teacher, and inform my teaching practice with my librarianship skills. I do not believe that this is the same as being only one or the other, and I am certain that my students, colleagues and school benefit from my dual expertise.

I know that across the country, teacher librarians and school libraries make a difference every day. I know that school libraries which are run down by lack of funds or lack of staff affect every student at their schools, and that the impact is also on our nation and our economy. The research clearly shows what we should and could be doing, but it is a matter for great concern that despite this, the role of libraries and teacher librarians is being pushed aside for other school priorities which will (and do) clearly have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the library program and the teacher librarian's work. More needs to be done in pre-service training and in the education of principals

and executive staff so they understand the most effective role a school library and teacher librarian can have, and act to make those things happen, rather than being swayed by the demands of the convenient, the short-term fix, the short-sighted choice.

It is exciting that the government is taking the time to inquire into the purpose, value and future of school libraries and teacher librarians.

We need a school library and a qualified teacher librarian in every school.

We need (in light of what has been happening in the last couple of years) that if necessary this is required by government.

It is unsettling, in the latter half of my career as a teacher librarian, knowing the value of my role, to wonder if my role will exist in two years, or five or ten. Across the US, they are sacking teacher librarians for reasons that cannot stand in the face of research, but are to do with 'economics' or 'local decision-making', even if the economics can't be proven and the local decision making is not evidence-based. The Robin Hood project in New York has shown, over and over, that a vibrant school library is the one change that can be made to a school that will have a positive impact on literacy, achievement and progress. A vibrant school library can counter the negative effects of difficult socio-economic circumstances. Too many Australian schools lack a teacher librarian. What will be the value of the BER school libraries if they do not have the guiding hand and imagination of a teacher librarian to make them more than buildings? Too many teacher librarians are being expected to do RFF, or babysit senior students, rather than plan and work with teachers and students.

Great school libraries and great teacher librarians are an investment of value to Australia. Now and into the future. In the lives of our students, who need us now for the lives that await them, in the future which holds we know not what. In the many literacies which they will need and our country will need.

Thank you for this inquiry and for the opportunity to provide this submission. I hope to participate in the hearings.

(signed)

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