



Secretary
Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians,
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021, Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600.

▪ **Inquiry Point 1: The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;**

Recent investment in school libraries through the BER money, I believe, has given a real impetus to school libraries. Planners have spent time considering the multiple uses of the library in the modern school curriculum and libraries have been planned with an eye to developing multiple spaces for different needs.

Consideration has been given to flexible Emphasis is given to the role of both electronic and print materials in teaching and learning. I believe this is encouraging a shift in the approach to the school library.

My school has been very fortunate to receive grant money to revitalise the inside of our library. We have lowered the shelves, freshened the paint work, installed gallery quality hanging for student work, improved the furniture, installed new computer tables: in general we have lightened and brightened and "future proofed" the library.

This has lead to improved student use of the facilities and a change in the way the students are using the library: for example, small group discussions, individual research, planning, following individual interests, individual reading, peer tutoring, creative pursuits, whole group work and teacher directed instruction.

This has lead to improved involvement of students in their learning.

However, I am concerned that the BER money does not seem to extend to furnishins, book stock and electronic equipment for the library and most of all, professional staff for the library.

I believe that the key to the educational use of the library is a qualified Teacher-Librarian supported by paraprofessional assistants and I believe that these roles need to be retained into the future.

▪ **Inquiry Point 2: The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;**

Digital technologies are certainly changing the ways teachers and students operate within schools. Web 2.0 tools and on-line data are expanding the horizons of what we can know and how we can communicate. Students are fascinated by the ever increasing and improving technologies. However, these new tools bring with them new challenges which teachers and teacher-librarians need to address.

The teacher-librarian is a specialist information broker. One of his/her roles is to be able to guide and direct students to the best source of information for their needs. This does not involve finding

the information for them but collaborating with them to guide them in their thinking about the task and their searching.

As a teacher-librarian, I stay well informed about information literacy theory and share this with my teachers and students. In addition, I maintain a current knowledge of educational pedagogy so that I can work co-operatively with teachers in planning and presenting units of work. Bringing these two sets of skills together gives me a unique perspective with which to build an effective library and information programme within the school.

One of my special interests is in differentiating the curriculum for all learners. I provide guidance to obtain information at all required levels and in a format appropriate for students' reading levels and learning styles and the emphasis within their subject area.

Another of my interests is literacy. I work with teachers as they develop their understanding of literacy and model lessons using various literacy strategies. These literacy strategies are imbedded in the units of work and together the teachers and I show the students the key literacy requirements of various units of work.

However, my great love is literature and I develop literature programmes within the school to encourage students to enjoy reading for pleasure, for curriculum needs and for general interest. I keep up to date with trends in literacy, in the literature for young adults and continually evaluate and develop the literature programmes within the school. In this way, I promote and foster reading and build a reading culture within the school.

The work of a teacher-librarian is very varied and is becoming more interesting as new ways of working are offered to us by technology. Our cross curriculum focus, our wide knowledge of the school community and our specialist knowledge of information, ICTs, resources and library management give us an invaluable perspective to add to the curriculum mix in the school (particularly a large high school such as mine). *Learning for the Future* (2001) suggested that a school such as mine be staffed by 3.3 teacher-librarians and support workers for 126 hours a week. Unfortunately, our staffing falls well short of those figures and often the job seems overwhelming. There are so many aspects of education that a teacher-librarian can support. Sometimes the staffing is so poor in some libraries, that the Teacher-Librarian has no time to effectively do any of the truly professional duties. This is a real pity.

▪ **Inquiry Point 3: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;**

The number of teacher-librarian courses within Australia has reduced dramatically and this is impacting on the number of teacher-librarians being trained. In the early 2000s we trained several teacher-librarians in their field work components at my school but we have not been called on to do this for some time. This is, for us, a real concern for succession planning and for staffing recently set up schools. This seems to be a time in which many private schools are increasing (or at least maintaining) their school library staffing but many public schools are seeing a drastic reduction in the staffing allocation. In this information age, the presence of an

information professional is as important as at any previous time. The skills to sort through the internet and find the gems that are often hidden in the mediocrity of the web are very important. Students are good at using the internet for the tasks they use regularly (e.g. games, social networking, general information) but I have found that they need guidance in using the internet for research tasks. Indeed, we do not want to nurture a digital divide in which some students can use technology effectively and others have no opportunity to learn.

- **Inquiry Point 4: The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians**

I am a big promoter of the Brisbane City Council library service because their funding base enables them to provide many resources which we could not afford. The databases that they provide are very helpful to our students and I encourage them to use them. The online resources offered by this organisation, the State Library and the National Library really open up the options for students. However, it does not replace in any way, the need for an immediate resource within the school. They are an adjunct to our operations not a replacement.

- **Inquiry Point 5: The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.**

As a teacher librarian I try to develop an information-rich learning environment firmly grounded in the school community. Digital technologies have provided increased opportunities to do that. They have allowed me to add style and panache to our operations, give teachers new ways of working, offer, at no cost, programmes that once quite expensive. (through Web 2.0 applications), introduce new communication opportunities for staff and students (blogs, wikis, podcasts, etc). The technologies are a wonderful support to libraries and teacher-librarians. However, they are only a support and not a replacement. The most important technologies of learning are the probing question, the insightful comment, the "just in time" help, the coach and guide. These are the roles that the teacher-librarian plays.

I believe that school libraries play a pivotal role in education. The ways of working of libraries may be altering, resources are becoming more diverse, spaces that the students are needing may be altering. However, students are still novice researchers, still grappling with higher order thinking, still needing guidance with literacy, information literacy and decision making. Teacher-librarians have a leadership role in providing these services to our students.