



Att: Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

RE: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian school

Response from: Leanne Tracy Horan
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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.

Specifically, the committee should focus on:

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

1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities:

- Provided formal recognition in local and State communities from the Federal Government of the important link between school libraries and student achievement in literacy, literature and learning. School librarians are specialised educational leaders who teach our students to be 'life-long-learners'. We teach important content, information skills, problem solving, values education and imagination.
- Provided educational equality for 'poor' country schools and small schools some of which previously had only demountables or hallways for libraries. Schools that are small, but do not qualify for special grants have been greatly bolstered. Without this Federal grant and funding – these schools would never have had the funds to build new libraries otherwise. Not since 1969-1971 have school libraries received such significant Federal funding (<http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/alj/53.1/full.text/nimon.html>)
- Raised the topic of school libraries and qualified teacher librarians to operate them effectively in the public consciousness – as so much of the Tax payer's money has been invested.
- Raised the profile of the importance of school libraries in the State education departments including the ripple effect to classroom teachers. Effective use of resources by staff and students is largely dependent upon the professional provision and management of effective and efficient retrieval systems. A library building is a fabulous start! I've worked in some schools where when I first arrived, that very few staff used the library as it was so impractical and ill managed and maintained due to the lack of experienced and fully qualified teacher librarians previously. The first professional task of a qualified teacher librarian in such an instance is to conduct a ruthless weed and cull of the collection, followed by reorganisation of shelving and labelling systems etc.

2. The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

"It was as though I had been dying of thirst and the librarian had handed me a five gallon bucket of water. I drank and drank. The only reason I am here and not in prison is because of that woman. I was a loser, but she showed me the power of reading."

--Gary Paulsen (Award winning author), from the biography by Edith Hope Fine

I am a four years trained Teacher librarian. I am a career teacher librarian in that I have been employed as a teacher librarian for the past 18 years in both high school, primary schools, both public and private sectors. I have worked in the Blue Mountains in Sydney, Mt Druitt, North Coast – Kempsey and Port Macquarie. I have worked in communities with all extremes, including those communities of generous affluence and those communities struggling with devastating poverty and chronic social issues.

What I have learnt in the process of my professional journey is that the secret to children's academic success – despite their socio economic background, is a very simple formula – a formula that can be applied to any child in the country.

Child + Excellent stories + An adult who cares and shares =

A child:

- **With an imagination on fire**
- **Filled with hope and dreams**
- **With an intrinsic hunger for learning**

(A desire for more books, more story which leads to a natural progression of a consuming desire to access literature independently.)

It is once we have ignited children's imaginations through story that the seed to learning germinates and is nurtured in the school library hothouse!

Many educators, bureaucrats and politicians take it for granted that this work is done at home with parents or in the classroom with teachers. Whilst this may be the case with some children, sadly in our Australian culture (where many parents work fulltime and the classroom deals with such a crowded curriculum), much story time has evaporated.

The professionally qualified teacher librarian brings specialised skills and expertise to their school community. They have a deep understanding and knowledge of children's literature including authors, genres, themes, plots, etc combined with the educational pedagogy and knowledge of teaching practise.

Product knowledge is essential to good librarianship. Neither parents nor teachers can be expected to have this expertise.

Bring me any child or adult who is a non reader. Give me some time to build a rapport and earn their trust, and access to a well resourced library, the internet, and I will have

them hooked on books – no fail guarantee. It may be a recalcitrant teenager who has a passion for heavy metal bands, or a child who is interested in a certain football player, there are always books to be found on any topic conceivable. Reading and books should never be limited to just the classroom or English novel studies – books that some children would never freely choose to read. Give children or adults one on one attention with a qualified teacher librarian to show them what is out there in the world of books and they are always totally amazed, thrilled and genuinely excited!

**At the moment that we persuade a child,
any child, to cross that threshold,
that magic threshold into a library,
we change their lives forever,
for the better.**

--Barack Obama

Once children have the hunger and desire, love of books – then the literacy skills and practise that teachers impart become relevant to students. Parents participate in the literacy learning process at home by reading to their children and listening to their children read aloud each day for at least ten minutes. Teacher librarians provide the literacy scaffolding required for students throughout their educational careers K-12 to embed a sound literacy foundation and provide ongoing support and structure to learners.

Teacher librarians as educational specialists in literature understand the diverse learning styles and interests of their clients as they mature with age and ability. We lead and guide students through the progression from picture books, to easy to read chapter books to novels. Teacher librarians know their product and are able to match students to books – books that will switch children on to reading.

When students (of any age toddlers to adult) love books – they want to learn. A whole new world opens to them.

The only difference between children who attain excellence in educational and community outcomes, especially literacy, and children who do not, is that the children who are successful have had the advantage of an educational experience from school and home where stories and books are valued, loved and shared.

**What a school thinks
about its library
is a measure of
what it thinks
about education.**

Harold Howe
Former US Commissioner of Education

Another very important role of the Teacher librarian is collection development – the purchasing and maintaining of a vibrant and relevant collection that supports not only the curriculum but also the independent reading interests of the students. Providing reading materials that have appropriate content and presentation for users to stimulate imaginations, enquiry, discussion and reflection is imperative. For example ‘high interest – low ability’ novels for struggling readers in senior years, or ‘high ability – appropriate content’ for enrichment classes, the Teacher librarian is a constant point of reference for students, teaching staff and parents in guiding and perfecting student literacy.

**Information
is the currency of
democracy.**

- Thomas Jefferson

Teacher librarians not only are the gate keepers to the wonderful world of fiction, imagination and fantasy, but also information. Information is empowerment and freedom.

The developed world with the advancement of technology and cheap international travel knows no bounds to knowledge. We are now raising students to be responsible and contributing members of an international global community. What we need to teach these students then is agreed national base content for every Australian child including History, Geography etc., plus life skills – skills that will empower them to be independent autonomous learners for life. Information skills are as necessary in our age as the air we breathe. Teacher librarians again provide the scaffolding and structure to this learning process.

With the information explosion of the recent decade, no longer can we be expected to know everything; however, we can learn the thinking and technological skills that will enable us to find the answer to anything.

If students are non readers they will be non performers academically, socially and/or morally. They may have difficulty to adjust to the expectations and requirements of society and independent adult living in their community.

Fairytales are classified under 398.2 in the Dewey Non Fiction section of the library under Social Sciences – the study of people because they TEACH us morals and values of our culture. If children don't do books – they may struggle with the concepts of morals, values and respect. Aboriginal culture has taught us this. The only difference is that these stories are traditionally oral.

**If you want your children
to be brilliant,
read them fairy tales.
If you want them to be geniuses,
read them more fairy tales.**

Albert Einstein

A small number of schools in NSW are trialling teaching ethics education instead of scripture classes run by local community volunteers. Possibly in the future the responsibility of teaching ethics education may be left with schools and teachers. A well resourced and balanced library collection of fairy tales and well written fiction from all over the world will be increasingly essential to this end to stimulate discussion, debate and role-play. Formally qualified and trained Teacher librarians are often the only professionals in the school community with the specialised expertise to achieve this end.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

"We cannot have good libraries until we first have good librarians – properly educated, professionally recognized, and fairly rewarded."

Herbert S. White
(Library Journal column, 15 November 1999, pp. 44-45)

The first thing the Federal government needs to do in regards to the issue of improving school libraries and development of school librarians is to conduct a national audit for each school in the country of:

- Teacher librarian qualifications – this should then be recorded onto the Education and Training employment database and used for job placement. No non qualified teacher librarian should be appointed to a Teacher librarian position whilst a qualified teacher librarian may be available.
- Teacher librarian teaching loads – hours per week recorded against pupil enrolment.
- Actual Teacher librarian administration allocations – hours per week recorded against pupil enrolment.
- School library budget for last 5 years – recorded against pupil enrolment specifying any additional special grants or funds.
- Actual school assistant time allocation for the school library - hours per week recorded against pupil enrolment.

NB: This data needs to be real hours and figures submitted by the acting Teacher librarian. Please do not rely on Schools allocating money and staffing to the formula of each State or Territory government. The figures should be signed off and dated by the Principal and Teacher librarian.

This data should be collected and compared with NAPLAN results and other formalised Literacy measures to see if there any links. I know of no such study having ever been conducted in this country or such data collected.

Qualified Teacher librarians are trained to be educational leaders and specialists. In the private sector, where I have taught, as the Head teacher librarian I was included on the staff executive and was able to contribute extensively to the whole school teaching and learning program with my specialised product knowledge, commercial networking and unique whole school perspective. Only the Principal and Deputy Principal shared this unique overview. In a large school, this especially valuable. The Teacher librarian is often a sounding board to other staff as we are 'Switzerland' – neutral with no political agenda.

I believe all qualified Teacher Librarians should be included on the staff executive and be financially rewarded for this contribution. This would raise the value and esteem of teacher librarians in the school community many of whom otherwise may feel undervalued and unappreciated for the large contribution they make to their school communities and student learning and achievement.

Teacher librarians have teaching, administrative and staff supervision responsibilities. Teacher librarians train and supervise administration staff working in the library office, as well as in large school where there is more than a five day a week librarian load other teacher librarians. Often teacher librarians are responsible for training other staff in new technologies, programs and initiatives. Surely this dynamic role needs to be recognised formally as an executive role the same as other teaching/supervising executives on staff.

An increase in kudos in the Education Department combined with remuneration rewards would significantly influence recruitment and the development of professional and excellent standards of school librarians.

In addition to these measures, university students enrolled in teaching degrees need to be educated about the Teacher Librarian option. In my 18 years as a Teacher librarian, because I was formally trained, I have never been out of permanent work – because a highly motivated, formally trained Teacher librarian is so rare and highly sought after by principals.

Geographical isolation in country schools means that training and development is sparse and expensive. Travel and accommodation costs for either Teacher librarians to attend training in major centres or to pay to bring up authors, lecturers etc. are prohibitive. Last year I tried to organise an in-service in Sydney for our Camden Haven/Hastings Teacher librarian collegial network. It would have cost only \$75 for return travel by bus, full itinerary and I couldn't raise 20 people to cover the bus. The Teacher librarian's were all really keen, but their schools wouldn't pay or release them to go, this meant they would have had to pay a casual teacher for the day. One Teacher librarian was prepared to pay out of her own funds to attend on a day that she wasn't employed, and another was prepared to do the same as she was on long service leave.

Country schools are usually small. They have the same budgeting allocation as a big school (per head). Thus they have limited budgets compared to a large school. Traditionally, in my experience, teacher librarian's training and development needs are very low on the school's list of priorities. It depends entirely upon the views and attitude of the Principal. A Principal that is supportive of libraries and the Teacher librarian is the best asset for any school. The Teacher librarian needs to work hard to maintain this respect and support. The better job Teacher librarians do, the more support you generally receive.

Most Teacher librarians are incredibly conscientious and hard working. It is not a profession sought for monetary gains or public accolades, however a little appreciation goes a long way. Some teacher librarians with less than supportive executive and budgets become very despondent and frustrated.

Small schools due to staffing formula per head, often have minimal library lessons. Perhaps they may be only entitled to two or three days per week library lessons. These roles are usually filled by casual teaching staff who lack expertise, knowledge and confidence. These teachers in our collegial network feel isolated and over whelmed by the role and task. The qualified and experienced members of our group support them locally as best we can, but having worked and lived in Sydney, the support we had there compared to the North Coast – is disadvantaged. A poorly managed and under resourced school library is a turn off to staff and students. In most cases where the

Teacher librarian is working less than four days a week, the administration staff or volunteer parents usually end up running the library management tasks including ordering books, cataloguing, processing etc. This has been my personal experience in three schools.

I have 17 years experience as a qualified Teacher Librarian. The last seven years I have spent employed at Tacking Point Public School (TPPS). We are a large school of over 840 primary school students. The library operates on a staffing formula of seven days.

One of the most significant factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians is the attitude and professionalism of principals.

I am very blessed to have a principal Terry Robinson and non teaching deputy principal Glenn Pleasance who both share a passion for children's learning and literature. Both executive treat their staff with the utmost professionalism and respect. We are encouraged use professional initiative and be innovative. Our efforts are rewarded with an attentive ear first and foremost at the brainstorming stage of any new project which then follows funding, administration time and executive and collegial support for successful ideas. Consequently with such support I have been able to implement a whole school reading aloud rewards program and also a Home tutor program for students 3-6 who are either struggling or reluctant readers. Both initiatives have been extremely successful providing measurable results and also have been very well received by the parent community – so much so that funding has generously followed to expand the projects. I would be happy to share these very practical and cost effective programs and see them implemented nationally. They can be used in either primary or high schools.

Our school wins national academic awards and educational awards. Our school has a very strong reputation in the community so much so that new people to the area purchase houses in our zone to ensure their children are able to be enrolled at TPPS. New parents comment to me that never have they been to a school before that the school library and children's literature has such a high profile and is so popular and greatly appreciated by students, staff and parents.

The real measure to gauge the academic success and heartbeat of any school is to walk into their library. If the library is dead, uninspiring and unwelcoming – it is usually representative of the principal's attitude to funding and modes of learning which is then translated to teaching staff practices. The school library is also representative of the students of that school – academic capabilities and attitude to school.

Our children love coming to school. They love learning. They love books and stories. This is the accomplishment of the whole school community of parents, teachers and executive, and also the school library which is the resource centre of the school - the heart of the school in many ways, working closely, respectfully, harmoniously together.

If a school library does not function efficiently and effectively, the rest of the school corps suffers as a consequence and cannot function to either optimum capacity or competencies. School libraries can either give staff and students wings to soar with the eagles or if not functioning with a qualified Teacher librarian, can the school library can shackle staff and students to a life of personal and professional drudgery, dissatisfaction and failure.

4. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians

At the local community level, the Port Macquarie Municipal Library Children's librarian is an integral part of our school community. The Municipal library supports our students and our parents as an extension of the school library's role here at school after hours. The Town library enriches and extends the school's.

The NSW State Government supports Teacher librarians presently by supplying us with permanent support Staff at School libraries Coleen Foley and her excellent staff.

See: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/index.htm>

The Western Australian government and the Tasmanian government also have very useful Teacher librarian support for school libraries. Their websites I use frequently are:

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/index.htm>

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/resources/schoollibraries/guidelines>

Government departments such as the Australian War Memorial are very helpful providing – online student activities/ teacher guides and access to trained education officers.

In regards to government departments supporting schools further – it would be greatly appreciated if government organisations such as the NSW Sydney Museum would waive the entry fees to students who live beyond a certain distance radius as transport costs are so prohibitive. For example for us to get our students to Sydney from Port Macquarie, the bus cost alone return is \$48 per student.

The Federal level of government could support Teacher librarians and student equality by implementing National standards for:

- Role statement
- Recognition of the Teacher librarian as an executive member of staff
- Duties
- Salary
- Qualifications and training
- Teacher librarian staffing
- Minimum school library budget allocations – not to be at the discretion of the principal or P&C

In addition, a nationally consistent automated library computer program would be beyond sensational! It would allow schools all over the country to share resources between schools by forming networks like the municipal libraries. The NSW school library program is OASIS. It is so ridiculously archaic we limp along at best.

5. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the role of school libraries and librarians

With the advent of the digital technological explosion of the past five years, school libraries are a fantastic and exciting place to be!

The impact of digital technologies are broad and far reaching. It allows us as educators and librarians to present stories and information effectively and efficiently in creative, motivational and interactive formats. It also allows students in turn to use technology to tell their own stories. The limits are only our imaginations. The technology will do whatever we want and if we don't know how – together with the students – we work it out and learn together. The children share and teach us!

Online story building, animation and the like are wonderful tools to teach and embed narrative devices and processes.

Digital technology is by far the most preferred method of instruction of information skills. Interactive whiteboards and PCs are an invaluable tool in the modern day classroom.

**In the non-stop tsunami of global
information librarians provide us
with floaties and teach us to swim.**

**Linton Weeks, Washington Post,
January 13, 2001**

With reference to the Information skills model and digital technology in the library digital technologies are as essential as the air we breathe in the modern millennium where our students are global citizens who will need to be life long learners who are able to morph and adapt to future technologies.

The world our students will independently function as adults is increasingly digital. Resumes and job applications are online, Medicare, banking to name a few. Researching and booking holidays comparing and contrasting products before purchase, purchasing online – all these tasks require a higher order of thinking and digital skills performed in a safe and respectful manner as a global consumer. This is what we teach our children in the library beyond basic information skills of defining/ Locating/ Selecting/ Organising/ Presenting/ Evaluating.

Appendix

School libraries in Australia: Foundations/The present/The future
<http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/alj/53.1/full.text/nimon.html>