

To the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Education and Training

**Submission to the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians
in Australian schools**

From the Teacher-librarians and endorsed by the Headmaster of The Hutchins School,
16/4/2010

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Thank you for the opportunity that you have given to provide this submission. It has been prepared by the Teacher-librarians of The Hutchins School with the support of the Headmaster, Mr Warwick Dean.

Introduction

The focus of this submission is two-fold. The first is on the new challenges to the traditional status quo of a school library in terms of its role, purpose, collections, learning spaces and staffing teams. The role of the Teacher-librarian has never been more critical. The second focus is on building capacity through the case study of one independent school's response to the challenge and re-thinking of its role and organization of its three libraries for Kindergarten to Year 2, Years 3-8 with Junior and Middle Schools and the Years 9-12 in the Senior School.

Summary

School libraries can epitomize the shift in thinking and a re-imagination for teaching and learning styles that have been brought about by embracing technological change. New curriculum standards and accountability, the thinking curriculum and growing evidence about how students learn as well as the implications for leadership and resourcing schools underpin a timely new role for school library services and funding

Recommendation

The Federal government will invite the collection of national and state data on the supply and demand, and workforce planning for school library staffing to ascertain potential contributions to improving student achievement and the literacy outcomes for education and the community.

Research background

It was over ten years ago that Abell (1999) wrote that "the school library has become one of the most threatened species in education at a time when technological change is having an enormous impact on schools" and that at the same time, the recent research on reading and student achievement is underscoring the importance of the school library and information literacy. Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies of research on the two areas of reading and literacy (Krashen, 2004) as well as the impact of school libraries on student achievement now exist (Lonsdale 2003). Even though the direct relationship between improving student achievement and adequate resource allocation will always remain part of the '*common sense*' of educational management, the research indicates that well-stocked and professionally led school library instructional programs designed and delivered by teacher librarians have an important impact on the school effects, not just the classroom effects.

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

National policies and investments such as the NAPLAN testing, the Digital Education Revolution (DER) and the Building Education Revolution (BER) have highlighted the critical links between literacy and school performance and resource allocation. Strategic thinking about the role of the school library in supporting the school's improvement programs incorporate areas such as:

- Reading for everyday literacy, pleasure, well-being and school engagement;
- ICT skills, competencies, digital literacy, and technology based learning;
- Self-directed learning and independent study for academic success as well as lifelong learning; and
- Resource allocation for the effective management of learning spaces and assets.

In the Strategic Plan for The Hutchins School 2009-2013 (2009), one of the six strategic initiatives to support the implementation of the plan is to develop an outstanding curriculum to enhance the learning opportunities for boys, a key strategy has been to develop a new school library that reflects teaching and learning innovation.

This new whole school facility, currently being built with the BER library program assistance will incorporate:

- A Library Learning Centre role designed for learning which enables students to develop information literacy skills with a spirit of inquiry, to become effective information users, confident readers and independent lifelong learners;
- An Information and Technology Centre role to support timetabled classes and leading edge teaching, innovative thinking and technology-rich approaches to e-learning, a range of learning spaces, effective administration of 1:1 mobile computing, wireless networking and video-conferencing supported by high speed bandwidth;
- An Archives Collection and Heritage Museum role to ensure the acquisition, retention, preservation and digitization of records of the School for staff, students, alumni and the wider community, including the adjacent aged care centre..

The co-location of the traditional Library staff team, the IT team, the Careers Counsellor and some staff concerned with pastoral care will also enable:

- A Leadership and Learning Centre facility to provide collaborative and flexible spaces hosting the students' planning, production and co-ordination of their leadership programs across the School;
- A Careers Reference Centre to support students' personal pathway planning and transition to work or secondary education; and
- A Learning Commons area for all students with family-friendly extended hours of operation.

The old....



And the new BER facility to be completed in September 2010...



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

The 21st century digital revolution and the knowledge economy with its concomitant demand for digital literacy, new understanding of powerful learning and teacher pedagogy, engagement of genY in their schooling, and online learning 24/7 for the whole community are all fully-laden descriptors which carry new meaning for school resourcing.

In schools and colleges worldwide, teacher librarians play a pivotal role supporting teacher professional development as well as student self-directed learning. School libraries become more than a physical place, as the Library, IT and ICT programs overlap to provide virtual learning spaces as well. Digital resources far exceed physical resources in the school libraries exactly as they do in public, state, university, government dept (health, law, environment, etc) and research library.

Fielding Nair, leading international design experts for school buildings, pose the question, “without a doubt, the school library remains one of them most symbolic, protected, and expensive ‘spaces’ on any campus. But will future designers of school libraries be recreating sacred book spaces of the past or will technology and the ‘consumer’ inspire new design strategies for the future? English researchers, Dubber and Lemaire (2007) found that the discernible trends in school library design are increasingly:

- Personalized learning where the focus is on the individual and small group rather than the traditional classroom group;
- Different learning styles;
- Social learning styles where the whole school community comes together to research and learn in semi-formal ways;
- ICT providing huge scope for delivery of literacy programs; and
- Extended hours and virtual access.

In Australia, Teacher- librarian graduates with varied knowledge and experience play a significant role in supporting current national education priorities within the Digital Education Revolution, especially with the curriculum design and professional development required for the implementation of the 1:1 computer program management.

The essential role of school libraries in exposing children to a variety of reading materials in a way that simply is not possible in the home and so helping them to become confident readers beyond classroom environments. Teacher- librarians are key providers of the literacy programs within schools, ranging from traditional print media through to the sophisticated critical literacy and new media literacy skills needed to navigate complex websites and discern (for instance) facts from advertorial content. They assist students in developing an understanding of the ethics of digital citizenship from basic netiquette through to respecting copyright law and recognizing the nuances offered by creative commons licensing.

As Treadwell (2008) says, “being literate” in the 21st century includes such skills as basic literacy, information literacy, technological literacy, media literacy, cultural literacy [global awareness] critical literacy, scientific literacy and cognitive literacy. If we are going to have schools without walls in our communities, or extend the concept of schooling beyond the physical buildings, Treadwell argues that we also require libraries without walls where learners can access more information simply and easily from any location.

Schools require new systems, services, licenses and permissions that encourage safe and remote access. The technologies that school library information management systems provide allow effective and efficient searching across a vast number of the world’s electronic databases and quality digital educational content beyond the access of the search engines such as Google. Libraries provide a managed gateway.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Human resource planning by school management and workforce planning by the tertiary education institutions and the library industry sectors is required urgently to prevent further skills shortages of dual-qualified teacher librarians. Within both departments of education and schools, the normative approach is to eliminate teacher librarians to provide funding to reduce the teacher to student ratio in classrooms. This common management practice as well as the lack of professional learning pathways has contributed openly to the decline in the number of dual-qualified teacher librarians. Few teachers retrain as Teacher-librarians given the lack of job security, the isolation and the poor status and common practice of using Teacher-librarians as relief for classroom teachers – RFF or “relief-from-face-to-face”

As at The Hutchins School, school library teams are increasingly consisting of a blended team of information professionals: Head Librarian or Information Services Manager as IT Manager, Teacher-librarians, librarians, resource teachers, computer technicians, library technicians, library assistants, teacher aides and archivists/museum curators. As stated in the first reference point above, there is co-location with careers counsellors as well as information technology helpdesk centres.

School librarians have an undergraduate degree in education and a graduate certificate in library and information management or a masters in Teacher-librarianship. After placement in school libraries, education graduates from the general library and information management courses often participate in higher degree studies to support their roles as information literacy specialists. Teacher-librarians and library technicians seek professional learning in IT and library management as they are in daily administration of complex IT equipment such as desktops and laptops and facilitation of ICT support.

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

The partnering programs offered by University libraries, such as the “Step Up’ community grant supported program at the University of Tasmania introduce Year 11-12 students to the University environment as well as fostering academic skills. The program is offered in partnership with Tasmanian schools and colleges.

Nevertheless, joint-use and clustered school-public library partnerships fail to thrive because of the lack of funding grants to support the school’s extension of physical plant, staffing resources and teaching award time. The role of government and local communities involves assistance to schools to breakdown the physical walls and provide integrated learning environments supported by the expertise of virtual or e-librarians.

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

The introduction of digital technologies such as the low cost e-books and diminished markets for expensive print texts in school libraries will allow all teachers and students to have access to the most up to date curriculum material which will constantly be updated and downloadable on subscription bases. The potential for this is increasing as the academic material will be available, just-in-time and 24/7. As books are increasingly digitized, there will be less reliance on low quality and controversial online resources from the internet or the ‘great library in the sky’.

In response to the ‘format shift’ for books and other curriculum resources, the need for an ICT skills continuum and competency frameworks will ensure that school libraries and teacher librarians pay special attention to Information literacy as a cross-curriculum set of transferable skills. Whilst the Australian Curriculum embeds digital literacy, national ICT reports focus on these emerging technologies and new

media literacy skills . A recent and commissioned report from Education.au and the strategic ICT Advisory service (2009) concludes that fluency in the new media literacy skills is not automatic and it requires explicit teaching and development.

The Hutchins School ICT policy is guided by the School's Strategic Plan. The e-learning vision of this plan is one of a learning organization with staff who are ICT competent and have the resources for continuous improvement. Hutchins is a 'school of the future' in using digital technologies and e-learning strategies to engage and empower all students, staff, and its wider community to deliver its strategic initiatives. The Senior School has seven powered trollies of netbooks for classroom use, provided through the assistance of the Commonwealth Government's Digital Education Revolution strategy to bring the computer-to-student ratio to 1:1. Students use their laptops and portable devices on the School's network. Through the *school libraries* incorporating the IT help desks supported by the blended IT and Library team, students are shown how to manage and connect their own wireless enabled devices securely to work on the School's wireless network, integrating in a more seamless way their independent learning between home and School. Personal laptops can be re-charged in the Library during the day when not needed by the students. The ease of use of personal laptops and netbooks by boys at Hutchins represents a significant shift in learning culture and appreciation of the role of the school library and library staff team.

The school library's information services are central to the teaching and learning programs of the school and provides physical access as well as virtual resources 24/7 to the Hutchins community through the library managed intranet. The library staff are proactive in the partnership with classroom teachers to ensure the integration of information literacy, ICT and literature programs to support all students in their research, study, online learning and recreational reading. All members of the library staff are highly qualified in varying aspects of post-graduate librarianship including Library & Information Studies, Information Management, Teacher-librarianship and Education.

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