SUBMISSION TO

Parliament of Australia
House of Representatives

House Standing Committee
on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and
teacher librarians in Australian schools

By Jeanette Harpley, School Librarian
April 2010

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1. INTRODUCTION

Firstly, I congratulate the Government and the Minister for Education for calling this enquiry. I also thank the committee chair and her committee members for the time they will spend considering submissions and eventually preparing their report to the House.

I believe the time spent will be well rewarded by a vast improvement in Information Literacy in Australia should the recommendations flowing from this report be taken up by Government.

In establishing an appreciation of the viewpoint from which this submission is presented, I will give a short description of my teaching career and some personal observations made throughout that time.

My teaching career began in 1971 when I started my first full time teaching position after completing Teachers College. Over the past almost forty years I have seen many of the 'latest developments' come and go - some of them more than once. One thing has remained a constant - the value of a good school library.

During 1985 I completed an available Library course and began a career as a Teacher Librarian while still doing some 'classroom' teaching. The library I then 'administered' one day a week was two joined but dividable classrooms converted to a library by installing wooden shelving around three walls. The extent of 'technology' was a couple of overhead projectors, a chalkboard and several 'audio stations'. The library is now a purpose built facility comprising the ground floor of a classroom block built in 2003, and I am a '3 day' Teacher librarian, again with 'classroom' duties at other times. The six year old computers are showing the strain of continual usage and are now struggling to run current applications.

Though definitely not imminent, I can see retirement on the horizon, and wonder where a replacement will come from. My observations at conferences and personal development courses, backed up by research quoted and referenced later in this submission, clearly indicate that Teacher Librarianship is an aging profession. Where will the new Teacher Librarians with their drive and professionalism come from?

Again, my personal experience is backed up by published research quoted in the body of this submission, shows that by and large, teachers and principals are unaware of the role and value of Teacher Librarians in the school community. This does not come as a surprise to me. My youngest son completed a four year teaching degree at the University of Wollongong in 2006 and the concept of a teacher librarian, let alone the words, were not mentioned once during the four years. How is this possible? Are our teacher educators this far removed from the reality of teaching in a school? In the body of my submission I will argue that this situation cannot be allowed to continue.

The school I am in has been fortunate that successive principals have seen the value of the library and its importance in much of the school curriculum. They have maintained and improved the library within their budgetary constraints.

The fact that 'budget' is apparently the main consideration in almost all educational decisions is unfortunate. I believe that the pendulum of decision making has swung too far in the direction of finance, to the detriment of education imperatives. Obviously the

cost of any provision must be considered. In my opinion, it is time the accountants took a back seat and for educational needs to come to the fore.

For Australia's education system to flourish and to help develop literate and responsible citizens, we have passed the point where it is responsible for the accountants to tell educationalists, "Here is $XX. Do what you can with it." We have reached the point where the educationalists should be telling the accountants, "We need $XXXX to do our job. You earn your keep and go find it!"

You will also detect what I call a "healthy scepticism" about how administrative hierarchies deal with funds distributed by governments. It seems that each department/level/office through which funds pass deduct their ten percent, such that, at the grass roots level, very little of what governments believe they have given is actually available for its intended use.

I present the following submission for your consideration.

Jeanette Harpley.
April 15, 2010.

2: Terms of Reference

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

    a. Combes, B. The Australian School Libraries Research Project, A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1,[1] shows at p8, that over 55% of school libraries facilities across Australia are over 15 years of age. A small number reported new (5.531%) or refurbished facilities (8.588%)

    b. Combes, B. Australian School Libraries Research Project: Australian Teacher Librarians, Report 1[2], shows at p10, that 88.888% of all Teacher Librarians are aged 40+ years, 77.28% are aged 45+ years, 55.058% are aged 55+ years and 10.116% are aged 60+ years. Only 3.15% are younger than 30 years. Only 1.25% of Teacher Librarians are under25 years of age. Teacher Librarianship is an ageing profession.

    c. Infrastructure investment in school libraries in 2009/10 through the Government's Building the Education Revolution program has been significant. Worldwide, research shows that school libraries and Teacher Librarians play a significant role in educational achievement by individual students and by schools overall. That can only happen if school libraries are adequately staffed. However, Combes, Australian Teacher Librarians, Report 1, Figure 18 shows a marked decline in Teacher Librarians graduating. Who will professionally staff these new libraries?

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

    a. As the volume of globally accessible information expands, so too does the need for developing sophisticated 'information handling' skills. These skills are now essential for learning, working and participating in society. These skills must be developed throughout the whole learning spectrum, both in schools from K-12, and in post school education and training. The school library is the focus of these competencies, and the Teacher Librarian the relevant professional to coordinate the necessary programs and impart these skills to students and staff.

    b. This requirement to impart these 'information handling' skills, which are more formally known as *Information Literacy*, is a growing obligation for all levels of education, but is an essential component during years K-6. If the basics of these newer *Information Literacy* skills are not developed before the student reaches high school, then high school education and further learning will be drastically impaired in a similar manner to the plight of those who formerly reached high school without sufficient reading and writing skills. In the twenty-first century and beyond, those without these 'information handling skills', - or *Information Literacy* - will

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[1] Combes, B. Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1. *Australian School Library Research Project*, ASLA, ALIA & ECU. Retrieved from http://www.chs.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php

[2] Combes, B. Australian School Libraries Research Project: Australian Teacher Librarians, Report 1. *Australian School Library Research Project*, ASLA, ALIA & ECU. Retrieved from http://www.chs.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php

be in a similar situation to those who in previous times were unable to read and write.

Information literacy encompasses a wide range of competencies from evaluating the quality of information to the effective use of information technology, which supports accessing, organising and communicating information.

It can be seen from this definition that the term *Information Literacy* adequately encompasses the 'older' meaning of *literacy.* The source or sources of the information to be evaluated or used are more often than not in a written form, even if that writing is on a computer screen or other electronic device rather than in books. So the ability to read is an almost essential skill, though there are many technologies available for converting the written word to speech.

Information Literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. Information literacy is a set of skills which supports independence in the practices of identifying, accessing, evaluating, organising and communicating information. It is relevant to all learning environments and to all levels of education and training.

c. Some find it easier to understand the concept of **Information Literacy** when it is defined by listing the competencies an *Information Literate* person will have.

   Information literate people[3]:

   i. recognise a need for information;

   ii. determine the extent of information needed;

   iii. access the needed information efficiently;

   iv. evaluate the information and its sources;

   v. incorporate selected information into their knowledge base;

   vi. use information effectively to accomplish a purpose;

   vii. understand economic, legal, social and cultural issues in the use of information;

   viii. access and use information ethically and legally;

   ix. classify, store, manipulate and redraft information collected or generated;

   x. recognise information literacy as a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

d. The Teacher Librarian is the professional with the necessary competence to coordinate and conduct **Information Literacy** programs in schools. It is essential that the Teacher Librarian work cooperatively with classroom teachers to incorporate **Information Literacy** skills throughout the K-12 curriculum.

e. **Information Literacy** is **not** a 'stand alone' subject, but is *an essential component of all curriculum areas*, therefore requiring the above mentioned cooperation between the Teacher Librarian and classroom teachers.

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[3] Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework - principles, standards and practice, Second edition. Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy 2004.

Unfortunately, as Miller, p12[4] reports "The research I have cited seems to indicate that neither teachers nor principals have a very clear idea of the role of the Teacher Librarian."

Until this indefensible situation is rectified, and Teacher Librarians are effectively utilised, the successful development of *Information Literacy* skills in schools will be inadequate to meet the needs of students and the expectations of their parents.

Both parents and students rely on professional education administrators to provide an adequate and relevant education experience. In the instance of *Information Literacy*, these expectations are, in most schools, not being met.

This will be further addressed in the section 'The Way Forward'.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

a. As mentioned in Section 2 above, there is a general ignorance from teachers, principals and administrators about the role and relevance of Teacher Librarians.

b. An Australian study, Hallein & Phillips[5], though old, shows an ongoing problem in observing that, in spite of wide promotion in the professional literature and at workshops, classroom teachers and Teacher Librarians are not co-operatively planning and teaching. They attribute this to a lack of understanding - on the part of the classroom teacher - of the role that Teacher Librarians can play, and they note that graduating teachers are as unaware of the potential role of the Teacher Librarian now, as they were fifty years ago. This was from a 1991 publication, and Miller's observations in 2008 show the situation has not improved.

c. Miller at pp13-14 reports, "Generally, it would seem that many administrators have neither accepted nor understood the changes in the role of the teacher-librarian, as it is outlined in *Achieving Information Literacy*[6]. To rectify this situation, it has been suggested that, in addition to their other duties, teacher-librarians should make it a priority to communicate with their administration, ensuring that the principal is aware of, and supports, the aims of the school library media program."

d. This added task for already time poor Teacher Librarians is not realistic. Do other subject coordinators such as a Maths Coordinator need to blow their own trumpet and persuade teachers to come to them regarding mathematics? Will it be necessary to include self-marketing in Teacher Librarian courses so other teachers know what Teacher Librarians can do for them?

Surely the correct solution is that teacher educating bodies take up their thus far neglected responsibility by ensuring new teachers graduate with a full understanding of the assistance available from a Teacher Librarian.

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[4] Miller, K. (2004). Novice Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of the Teacher Librarian - http://tldl.pbworks.com/f/Miller.pdf

[5] Hallein, J., & Phillips, J. (1991). Australian primary schools: Is CPPT working? Emergency Librarian, 19(1), 29-31.

[6] Asselin, M., Branch, J. L., & Oberg, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Achieving information literacy: Standards for quality school library programs in Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Canadian School Library Association and The Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada.

e. Ensuring that school principals, administrations and teachers know the function of and necessity for Teacher Librarians is clearly the responsibility of Education Departments and their equivalents in private or independent schools. These bodies could perhaps use the resources of the various professional associations which cover Teacher Librarians, and so are intimately aware of their competencies and value, to provide awareness training to principals and school administrators, including their own administrative staff.

f. Miller further adds, "Despite almost two decades of discussion and research, it appears that an understanding of the concept of information literacy is restricted almost exclusively to teacher-librarians and researchers in the field of school librarianship".
Education departments and school principals who do not understand the concept of Information Literacy and the Teacher Librarian's role in its integration into the school curriculum should be considered as negligent as those who would ignore the relevance of writing or oral skills at K-12 level.

g. Whelan (2003) cites more examples of the lack of understanding of the role of the Teacher Librarian. She found that classroom teachers may view Teacher Librarians as inconsequential because they don't assign grades. Additionally, some elementary teachers tend to view the Teacher Librarian as a baby-sitter, while secondary teachers tend to take ownership of what they do, to the exclusion of the Teacher Librarian.[7]

h. "It is obvious that there still exists considerable confusion around the role of the Teacher Librarian. The changing nature of the job, due to information technology, seems to be partially responsible for this lack of definition. Additionally, many teachers do not seem to recognize the teacher and instructional partner aspect of the role of Teacher Librarian. Nationally and internationally, it appears that teachers are unsure what to expect from the Teacher Librarian." Miller p10.

i. Considering the above points it is not surprising that recruitment of Teacher Librarians is not occurring at a sufficient rate. When a profession is not seen as worthy and/or skilled, recruitment will always be difficult.

j. A decline in recruitment is quantifiable. Combes, in Australian Teacher Librarians, Report 1, p16, states: "Figure 18 illustrates an emerging trend in graduating TLs, which indicates a fall in the number of TLs being graduated. This is of particular concern when viewed in conjunction with the aging of the profession discussed earlier."

k. Also, Miller states at p30, "Clearly, the universities, on the whole, are not educating the pre-service teachers about the role of the Teacher Librarian." This means that new teachers generally do not seek the services of a Teacher Librarian, because often they do not even know they exist. This is plainly an indefensible failure of teacher educators to fully inform trainee teachers of an important resource which is at their disposal. Teachers who are not aware of the extensive support available to them by working cooperatively with Teacher Librarians over the whole curriculum, will neither use them nor aspire to that profession.

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[7] Whelan, D. (2003). Why isn't information literacy catching on? School Library Journal.
http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA318993

l. Haycock (1995)[8] noted that "school libraries and Teacher Librarians will survive and thrive in the twenty-first century only if educators understand their importance in the educational enterprise" (p.14).
It should be a priority of this committee to ensure that educators <u>do</u> understand the importance of Teacher Librarians.

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

    a. Several government and local government institutions partner and support school librarians and school libraries.
    In NSW the Premier's Reading Challenge is well supported by primary schools and is given substantial newspaper coverage. The newspaper coverage is a very useful support and the exposure further enhances the venture.

    b. Many local or municipal libraries provide resources and space for use by local schools. Writing competitions are held, usually as part of Book Week, and in some instances as a separate annual event promoted by local government. Unfortunately these local library events are at the whim of successive councils and head librarians who do not always see the value in these enterprises.

    c. Other institutions which provide support and of which I am aware are:
        i.   Catholic Schools Performing Arts (CaSPA) provide performances incorporating the Book Week Theme and are organised by Catholic Education Office Drama committee.
        ii. Performances by National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) promote Book Week with performances using the Short Listed books. This helps raise the profile of books and literacy.
        iii. Children's Book Council of Australia – NSW Branch – provides Inservice training and Professional Development for Teacher Librarians with access to authors and illustrators which equips the TL to further improve literacy levels in the school.
        iv. Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA) provide Inservice training and Professional Development in *Information Literacy* and Digital Technology.

    d. All the above are partnerships which can only benefit school libraries and Teacher Librarians by further expansion.
    I am convinced that there are major technology companies which could be convinced, as an indication of their good 'corporate citizenship', to commit substantial funds to further Information Literacy, which is significantly connected to their products. This would be the province of those more adept at lobbying than I.

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

    As the role of this enquiry is to discover relevant information it is appropriate to note the main items of *Information Communication Technology* (ICT) being commonly used by school aged persons:

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[8] Haycock, K. (1995, July). Teacher Librarianship: Bridging the gap between research and practice. In L. A Clyde (Ed.), Sustaining the vision: A collection of articles and papers on research in school librarianship (pp. 13-22).

Text messaging - mobile phones;
Iphones;
Ipad;
e-Books - Kindle etc.
Blogs - web logs;
Tweeting - Twitter;
Wikis;
Social networking websites - eg Facebook, MySpace, Classmates.com etc. (Wikipedia, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites listed 187 Social Networking sites when visited on 13/4/2010. They advise: "**Please note the list is not exhaustive**, and is limited to **some** notable, well-known sites."

These listed above are in addition to what many would recognise as 'normal' or 'mainstream' websites such as those with world news, sporting news, dating sites, educational sites and encyclopaedia such as Wikipedia, Encarta and Encyclopaedia Britannica. The list is unending, and it is reasonable to include books & magazines etc., film, television and radio to the list of these 'Information Communication Technologies' in use by school students.

a. It is a fact of life that primary school children are aware of and using many or all of the above items of ICT, so it is important that, from an early age, they develop *Information Literacy* to equip them with the skill they need to identify, access, evaluate, organise and communicate the vast amount of information available. It is arguable that young people with developing *Information Literacy* will be much better equipped to avoid internet stalkers and predators if evaluation skills are learned from kindergarten onwards.

b. Therefore it is essential that the school provide them with a sufficient level of *Information Literacy* to function successfully in society, and it has been shown that this is achieved by the Teacher Librarian working in a professional collaboration with classroom teachers. In all curriculum areas it is critical that students evaluate the data they collect and assess its relevance to the topic at hand. The earlier these skills are acquired with respect to 'schoolwork', the more likely they will be applied to all facets of information use.

c. It is self-evident that school libraries must have sufficient and suitable Information Communications Technologies to be relevant and effective in the twenty first century. In most schools the most pressing requirement after sufficient physical space, is for suitable, comprehensive software for running the library and information communication equipment such as computers and multimedia equipment. Large screens such that whole class, or larger, groups can see demonstrations of technology use are also widely required.

d. The Sydney Catholic Education Office (CEO) has introduced library software called Oliver to 'manage' school libraries. It is powerful software which among other things allows students to access the library catalogue 24/7 via the internet and also allows parents the same access to see what books are available, and which books their children have borrowed. From the Teacher Librarian's point of view it handles accessioning, borrowing and general library management functions. It also allows teachers to access the CEO's teaching resources
There are obviously many security and privacy issues involved in keeping

student data available to only those with authorised access, and a great deal of training and general computer competence required of the Teacher Librarian. A library management system of this scope needs to be kept homogenous over the whole school system. As such it is imperative that the CEO maintains ongoing support in the form of an expert, with a backup person, familiar with the software and with school libraries, to be available during school hours to support all libraries using the software.

e. School libraries are poorly resourced financially, as reported by Combes, in A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1, p14: "Across the whole survey group 45.123% of schools received less than $10,000 as their annual (library) budget. In view of the average prices quoted earlier, these figures indicate that school libraries across Australia are poorly resourced, particularly when the cost of electronic resources are considered. Subscriptions to large databases can run into the tens of thousands of dollars." It is quite pointless having a modern school library building if there is insufficient funding or staffing for it to function effectively.

f. School libraries do no better for their space requirements, as again reported by Combes, in A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1, p11: "It would appear that Australian school libraries across sectors are not big enough to cater for their students and do not match recommended guidelines."

g. The Teacher Librarian with the resources in the School Library is the professional in the school for integrating these *Information Communication Technologies* into a coherent *Information Literacy* program.

3. The Way Forward

Information Literacy is essential to function effectively in society at almost any level. It is essential to recognise that what was formerly considered *literacy* is included in the definition of Information Literacy quoted in 2(c), and will not be dealt with separately in these conclusions.

The very fact that this enquiry is being held will increase awareness of the Teacher Librarian's role for many, and for that reason alone it will have some effect in improving Information Literacy.

A. It should be a priority of this committee to ensure the whole education community understands the importance of Teacher Librarians. Recent research seems to indicate that neither teachers nor principals have a very clear idea of the role of the Teacher Librarian.
Unless this situation is rectified; the role and function of Teacher Librarians properly understood by the wider education community, and they are effectively utilised, there will be little significant return on investment in school libraries. Also the successful development of *Information Literacy* skills in schools will be inadequate to meet the needs of students and the expectations of their parents.

   a. Teacher educating institutions and teacher educators <u>must</u> graduate teachers with a full understanding of the role and function of Teacher Librarians.

   b. A personal development program explaining the need for and functions of the Teacher Librarian should be introduced nationwide to educate existing teachers.

B. Replacing all older library buildings, even those 20+ years old, would be an unwarranted expense, and in many cases unnecessary, as the age of the building does not automatically indicate the quality of the library. However there remain many libraries in need of refurbishment to bring them into the twenty first century.
Combes showed that 56% of school libraries have less than the recommended space (<12%) for seating, and 67.5% have less than the recommended space for ICTs (<14%)

   a. Clearly there is a need for funding to refurbish buildings and/or equipment & books in many school libraries. Many libraries need expansion to meet seating and ICT recommendations.

   b. This funding should be specifically targeted. Departmental or school system administrators, school administrators and principals, many of whom seem to have completed post graduate courses in Creative Accounting, should not be allowed to prevent almost 100% of funding from actually reaching the libraries for which they are intended. Obviously there is some expense in procurement etc., but it should remain an extremely low proportion of the original funding.

      i. Any Commonwealth funding for infrastructure or equipment should be directed to specific schools and/or libraries rather than to education departments or other school systems. This will allow principals, in consultation with the Teacher Librarian, to decide their particular requirements *with respect to Information Literacy*.

     c. Funding should also be allowed for those 30.5% of Teacher Librarians who Combes(2), p2, reported did not participate in or have access to any professional development activity, so they may access and benefit from PD activities.

C. While there is little real hope of all school systems standardising on one software package for school library management, the roll out of software such as the Oliver system through Sydney catholic systemic system would obviously be expedited by increased funding.

D. There is a definite scope for corporate 'sponsorship' by technology companies to help in promoting *Information Literacy* in a similar manner to that which 'healthy food' companies now support sporting bodies. Improving *Information Literacy* will help promote the use of these companies' products, so they should be capable of being convinced of the value of such a partnership with the correct lobbying approach by professional associations or governments.

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