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Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission by the Illawarra Schools Libraries Association

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Terms of Reference and submission

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

A Teacher Librarian has dual qualifications.

Firstly, the Teacher Librarian is a qualified, experienced classroom teacher, who has a deep knowledge of the curriculum, understands how students learn and the pedagogy of teaching. In addition, in a primary school Teacher Librarians are in the very privileged position of being the only teacher in the school who actually teaches all of the students in that school. This affords them a whole school perspective of the development of the students K-6 and constant experience of the curriculum. This obviously adds value to their role and their knowledge can be useful to the students, the principal and the entire staff.

Secondly, the Teacher Librarian has a post graduate qualification in Teacher Librarianship, either a Masters or a Graduate Diploma. There are two main strands to this course, collection management and information literacy. Collection management includes an in-depth study of literature for children and young people. This course equips Teacher Librarians to manage and maintain the collection, budget, library staff plus whole school teaching resources. In a typical school the collection includes teacher references, readers, fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, journals, textbooks, equipment, digital resources (including websites and online journals), computer software and audiovisual resources. The collection has to be continually monitored for currency, relevance and bias. In addition, the teacher librarian supervises students during the school day, which allows the whole school community unlimited access to the library all day. Untrained staff cannot provide a library service to students. Non-teaching staff are not permitted to supervise students so the appointment of non-teaching staff to school libraries will restrict student access which will impact on learning.

A pilot scheme by the NSW Government under the National Partnership Agreement to 'increase school based decision making over recruitment, staffing mix and budget' has already impacted on Teacher Librarian positions. The pilot scheme allows schools to 'cash in' positions in the school. As the Teacher Librarian is above establishment in schools in NSW this position is a prime candidate for replacement with cheaper staff (as done at Loftus Public School) such as school assistants. Allowing schools to replace a highly trained teacher librarian with untrained staff will impact on learning in the long term.

The move to School Based Management (SBM) in Tasmania in 1991 has now lost them 50% of their teacher librarians. Since School Based Management was introduced into Victoria in 1993, at least 35% of qualified teacher librarians have been cashed in for library technicians. Queensland is now losing qualified teacher librarians under SBM policies. The ACT is also following suit. All these states, plus South Australia, have lost their central school library services. There is no one to advise on school libraries at top levels. In NSW the central service, once having as many as 60 staff, now has a handful to advise, review, publish, run conferences and do what they can.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) in NSW has a policy of centralising purchasing by schools but is divesting responsibility of budgets and staffing to Principals under SBM policies. On one hand the NSW DET is removing responsibility from schools by not allowing them to purchase from school elected suppliers but allowing schools to decide their own staffing. This policy of DET is abdicating its responsibility to adequately fund and staff schools.

In public secondary schools in NSW there has been no direct funding for school libraries since the Commonwealth Grants of the 1970s and the state school library subsidy, which ended in 1974. From 1969-1975, approximately \$3/secondary student was spent in grants for resources and equipment. State grants in NSW reached an extra \$15/student (Lundin, R. An evaluation of the Australian Secondary School Libraries Programme: A summary report of findings, 1970-1974, CSSLRP Paper No.9, January, 1975, p.116) An informal survey (The Hub) in 2008 found of 87 schools surveyed around Australia, 7 private primary school libraries had \$21 to \$71/per student, 9 private secondaries had \$3-106 per student, 5 Catholic primaries had \$11-46/per student, 10 Catholic secondaries had \$25-\$96/student and 29 government primary libraries had \$1 to \$53/student while 27 government secondaries had \$7 to \$60/student in their library budgets.

A survey conducted in the Illawarra in 2008 (McGuinness, 2008, unpublished) found that of 20 local schools surveyed (3 high schools and 17 primary schools) library budgets ranged from none to \$35/student. There is no minimum DET formula for funding per student each year and the funding of individual school libraries varies greatly throughout the state. The average price of school resources can be found at <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/library/avprice/index.htm>. Prices range from \$19 for a fiction paperback to \$60 for a non-book fiction item.

In 1986 school library clerical staffing was reduced in high schools from 36.25 hours/week to 31.25 hours per week. In larger school libraries with 1.5 assistants this meant a reduction of 16 hours per fortnight. Primary school library clerical assistant staffing remains very inconsistent. In the 2008 Illawarra survey, only 42% are working to DET guidelines, so hours vary considerably. Only 10.5% of library assistants have any qualifications and these only in high schools. No primary library assistants hold any qualifications. This is seen as a real need.

- Primary schools – Building Education Revolution programs are providing new libraries many without teacher librarians. All Primary schools should be allocated extra time for their teacher librarians.
- NSW DET is providing Connected Classroom resources to each school. Some libraries are benefiting from this, but some are not. Not all libraries have Interactive Whiteboards and they should be in every school library.
- Those teacher librarians that do have access to an Interactive Whiteboard have had an opportunity to incorporate a new learning tool that increases student engagement and leads to improved learning outcomes.
- Teachers are collaborating to produce units of work incorporating Quality Teaching elements. Teacher librarians are able to effectively assist with resourcing their units and collaborating in the teaching of aspects of these units.
- The laptop rollout in High Schools is having a huge impact on the way students can access information and a huge potential to improve technology and information skills.
- Teacher librarians have to be self-motivated and self learning to keep up with the constant changes in technology. Those that hesitate will be left behind and will be unable to teach information skills in an optimum fashion.

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

A number of factors influence the contribution school teacher librarians and libraries can make to student learning. These include:

- i) The level of active promotion of the position of teacher librarian in schools by State Governments,
- ii) The commitment of State Governments to adequately staff schools to prevent Principals from timetabling teacher librarian positions to alleviate timetable issues, and
- iii) The commitment of State Governments to actively maintain teacher librarians above establishment and off school timetables

Sarah Mayor Cox Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University has stated recently in the media, "One of the reasons Australia is starting to fall back in international studies in levels of literacy around the world is we're not putting our money where our mouth is." Over sixty studies around the world have shown that qualified teacher librarians in well-stocked libraries improve literacy test results.

Students in this digital information age also must be information literate for academic and employment success. Information literacy may be interpreted as the need to understand the need for information, to define what you want, to locate relevant information, to select and analyse information, to organise it and present it in a clear and appropriate format, evaluate the product and use a metacognitive process to evaluate the process. Students need to search the Internet to locate relevant and reliable resources. These skills need to be learnt by students and the teacher librarian is the ideal person to do so. It takes a high degree of knowledge to sort through the massive amount of digital information to locate relevant resources on the Internet. The lessons by the teacher librarian should be in collaboration with class room teachers to make the lesson relevant to the student. Digital literacy is essential for the student to locate resources from the overwhelming number of unreviewed sites available.

- Literacy – The classroom focus is on the mechanics of reading. Children are being taught how to decode and comprehend and their choice of reading materials is highly structured and is determined by their "reading level". Teacher librarians play an important role in supporting this, by assisting teachers to choose the right resources which are age appropriate, current and at a level which the children can read. A library technician does not have the training or skills to do this.
- Literacy - The teacher librarian focus is on reading for pleasure and for information. With younger children the emphasis is more heavily weighted towards reading for pleasure. Many teacher librarians encourage children in their schools to participate in the Premier's Reading Challenge, MS Readathon or KOALA (Kids Own Australian Literature Awards) to widen their reading experiences and put their reading skills into practice. Feedback from parents, teachers and children is positive as children attempt books that they would not normally choose and thus are improving their reading skills through wide reading. Teacher librarians spend a lot of time and effort in identifying books for the reading challenge to make selection by children an easier task.
- With older children, teacher librarians encourage reading for pleasure but put more emphasis on teaching children how to read for information from a variety of resources – digital, print and visual.
- The teacher librarians classroom teaching experience and knowledge of the curriculum enables them to be able to supply and suggest books to match student and teacher needs, thus providing the best possible resources for the teaching of literacy.

- Teacher librarians are aware of all the newest resources and digital learning tools which complement teaching and learning programs. Teacher librarians are often the first in their school to use new technology and demonstrate to teachers through collaboration how the technology can assist classroom teachers' learning needs.
- Teacher librarians could make greater contributions if they had more time to do this. Many teacher librarians in NSW have to provide Relief from Face to Face teaching time for other teachers and do not have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers in their library lessons.
- Some teacher librarians are finding their allocation of teaching hours (as determined by the current formula in NSW) are insufficient to contribute as much as they could. The formula needs to be reviewed. It is especially inequitable as it is governed by the number of mainstream students, not the number of classes. Schools with special education classes IM, IO, ED, and multi-categorical for example, have to do more, with less. The inequality continues when comparing primary and secondary staffing. Secondary schools of 300 students qualify for a full-time teacher librarian. Yet, a primary school of 300 is staffed only 3 days/week.
- Clerical staffing of primary school libraries is also not equitable. Some primary schools in the 200-600 student range have collections larger than some secondary schools. Yet they have one quarter or less of the clerical staffing. This makes the delivery of resources inequitable.
- A school library program contributes to building student confidence, independence and a sense of responsibility for learning (Hay and Foley, 2009, p. 17).
- An effective school library program also has the capacity to build a reading culture in the school. Ways include: reading aloud to students, coordinating reading challenges (eg: NSW Premier's Reading Challenge), developing a graphic novel collection, integrating literature circles into the curriculum, using book raps to support literature and literacy units, and using the internet and web 2.0 technologies to support literacy skill development and online engagement with authors and e-literature (Hay and Foley, 2009, p. 18).
- A large body of research identifies the essential role the school principal plays in developing and supporting an effective school library program, and the importance of successful partnership between principal and teacher librarian (Hay and Foley, 2009, p. 21).
- For the future potential of teacher librarians to contribute to improved education outcomes (especially in literacy) there is a need to make the

teacher librarians contribution seem more obvious, reported more (at a school, local, state and federal level) and more tangible.

- They (teacher librarians who responded as a part of the *School Libraries 21C* discussion report completed in 2009) often stated that school libraries had a definite impact on student learning, even though in most cases the specifics of this relationship were not articulated. This raises a fundamental concern about the invisibility of outcomes, perhaps contributing to a wider educational perspective that school libraries do not contribute significantly to student learning outcomes (Hay and Todd, 2010, p. 33).

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

The NSW Department of Education and Training(DET) has a lack of understanding of the important role the teacher librarian plays in actively promoting reading and Information Literacy in the school. DET has historically left it up to school Principals to define the role of the teacher librarian in school. The role of the teacher librarian is covered in the Handbook for School Librarians in NSW but this role is not actively supported by the department. All too often the role of the teacher librarian in Primary Schools is to provide relief from face-to-face teaching for classroom teachers with little regard to their role in promoting reading or Information Literacy. In High Schools the teacher librarian is increasingly timetabled with classes so their supportive and educational role is eroded and sometimes lost to the school.

- The majority of teacher librarians in NSW are people who have chosen the role because they have a personal passion for this area of responsibility. They have a love of learning and literature and are attracted to the role because of the diversity within that role.
- However, some teacher librarians have been appointed from other areas of responsibility (either from relieving positions or because of school-based staffing decisions) who do not have any formal teacher librarian training. These people often do not display the same passion and motivation as someone who has undertaken training. Schools in our area have been affected. Teaching staff without teacher librarian qualifications have been appointed to Jamberoo Public School, Cringila Public School, Mt Kembla Public School and Kemblawarra Public School.
- Some teachers show an interest in the role of teacher librarian and undertake post graduate study in the hope that they will be able to be appointed as a teacher librarian. There is no guarantee that students of Teacher-Librarianship will gain an appointment as a teacher librarian.
- The teacher librarian's role in a school is a specialist role, which requires the undertaking of post-graduate studies to be of maximum benefit to the school. Teacher librarians with post-graduate training are far more likely to be

innovators and leaders within their schools than those appointed without these qualifications.

- Most principals, teaching staff, students and parents are unaware of the responsibilities of a teacher librarian. Many of the duties performed by teacher librarians are unseen and undervalued. Students and teachers expect to be able to select and use resources in a library but have no idea of the time and effort it takes to develop and maintain an up-to-date library collection targeted at their specific needs. Many parents are unaware that the teacher librarian actually teaches their children.
- As a post graduate qualified professional the teacher librarian manages and maintains the collection, budget, library staff plus whole school teaching resources. In a typical school the collection includes teacher references, readers, fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, journals, textbooks, equipment, digital resources (including websites, online journals), computer software, audiovisual resources. The collection has to be continually monitored for currency, relevance and bias. In addition, the teacher librarian supervises students during the school day, which allows the whole school community unlimited access to the library all day. Untrained staff cannot provide a library service to students. Non teaching staff are not permitted to supervise students so the appointment of nonteaching staff to school libraries will restrict student access which will impact on learning.

Development:

- A teacher librarian's development as an information specialist is often hampered by the DET's policy of using teacher librarians for relief from face-to-face teaching. In some schools a teacher librarian's whole timetable can be relief from face-to-face classes. Sometimes teacher librarians provide additional executive release in schools which is also an inappropriate use of the teacher librarian and not supposed to happen according to DET guidelines, but some Principals still follow this practice.
- Teacher librarians are also hampered by their allocated hours. In NSW teacher librarians are appointed according to a formula based on the number of students/classes in a school. This formula was determined before the huge technological advances that have been made in schools and is now proving to be inadequate in many schools. There are so many programs (especially using the facilities of the Connected Classroom initiative) that could benefit students, but the TL does not have enough time to use them.
- The lack of consistency in the allocation of clerical support to teacher librarians also has an impact on the quality and equity of programs and services a teacher librarian can provide. Clerical support for teacher librarians is now determined by the Principal instead of by an equitable formula and

some teacher librarians do not have any clerical support and have to perform all the cataloguing and processing tasks necessary to provide and maintain library resources. Teacher Librarians have inadequate time allocation for administration because providing relief from face-to-face teaching takes precedence. The recommended 20% administration time is not always adhered to. The principal determines clerical support for teacher librarians and some teacher librarians do not have any clerical support and have to perform all the cataloguing and processing tasks necessary to provide and maintain library resources. In addition, the clerical assistant appointed does not necessarily have library technician qualifications. Clerical assistants may not necessarily be a trained technician. This means that any spare time that primary school teacher librarians have on the day their clerical assistant works is devoted to training the assistant to do the tasks that are supposed to free the teacher librarian to devote more time to teaching. This training sometimes takes years to progress to a stage where the assistant is able to perform duties independently.

- Now that almost all central school library services have been disbanded or reduced in staffing, most teacher librarian professional development must be provided by peers. Teacher librarians establish network groups within their regions and plan and deliver the professional development that their peers need. This way provides a system of delivering professional development to peers that is real, relevant and up to date, but dependent on the free time of volunteers. This is the model that we use in the Illawarra. Our association, the Illawarra School Libraries Association, has been in charge of supplying teacher librarians and library assistants with their professional needs for the last six years. As new technologies and applications of those technologies emerge, there is a constant need for teacher librarians to be at the forefront of their application in a school situation. This type of professional development relies on the goodwill of a small group of teacher librarians to plan these programs usually on very tight budgets.

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

Librarians in Primary and High Schools and Universities, have a role in ensuring the knowledge of students flows seamlessly from one institution to the next level. Time is required for Teacher Librarians to form networks and links with each other. To adequately do this the position should remain above establishment and off the school time table.

Teacher librarians also have professional links and provide in-house professional development. This is vitally important to the profession and needs to continue.

- NSW is one of the few states, up until now, where teacher librarians are recognised as being an essential part of the staffing allocation and the DET

has provided a teacher librarian allocation to every school based on the number of children at the school.

- The DET, however, does not provide a defined policy outlining the role of a teacher librarian, so it is open to interpretation by Principals according to their personal prejudices and experiences. No two schools use their teacher librarian in the same way. An official role statement would allow teacher librarians to be used in the best possible way to support the curriculum needs of schools and maintain equity in the expectations placed on the people performing the role of teacher librarian.
- *The School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit* is the broad body that is responsible for a support network throughout NSW. Colleen Foley, Lizzie Chase and Cath Keane provide a wonderful service to teacher librarians, but sadly many teacher librarians in the state are unaware of the support they have to offer. Being so understaffed, they cannot afford to offer services widely. There is also no officer at a CEO level to advise on DET policies.
- The Federal Government has no policy that covers teacher librarianship across the nation as some states do not employ teacher librarians in every school.
- Local Government has no direct influence but Local Libraries often set up programs which allow schools to visit or to make use of local library services.
- Local Communities – support varies and is usually dependent on how proactive the teacher librarian is in their own school community. Some Parents and Citizen(P&C) bodies have provided wonderful things in their school libraries, because the teacher librarian has made an effort to be part of the community and attend P&C meetings to advertise the role of the library. It is often back to the efforts of parents, as it was before the 1970s, to fund our school libraries adequately.
- An effective school library works with its learning community (e.g. computer coordinator, library committee, teachers, nearby schools, local libraries) to build the capacity to provide online and digital resources and services that support student learning (Hay and Foley, 2009, p. 18)

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

Teacher librarians have an important role to play in demonstrating and professionally developing teachers at their own school in the use of technology . The need for students to evaluate digital resources is vitally important to students and teacher librarians have a direct role here. Research skills now encompass the digital world and this is a logical extension of the role of the Teacher Librarian.

- Digital Technologies have had a huge impact in school libraries ever since the introduction of OASIS in the early 1990s. Teacher librarians had to completely change the way their library records were stored and enter all paper data onto the OASIS database. For many teacher librarians at that time, this was their first introduction to the digital world. Since then, teacher librarians seem to have developed a love for technology as a tool to assist students as well. The only negative is that OASIS is still the system that we have to use. Even though it is now run from a centralised base, it is often unreliable and very slow. Even so, teacher librarians are very successful at providing a 21st century service to their school community with an outrageously outdated database that is increasingly difficult to manipulate.
- Teacher librarians are often the first people in a school to hear about and incorporate new technologies into their schools. Teacher librarians throughout Australia have large, digital networks and are able to communicate with each other and inspire and suggest new ways of using technology in schools and support each other in the process.
- The Connected Classroom project and the introduction of interactive whiteboards in NSW has had a big impact on the way teacher librarians can deliver information skills to students. The level of student engagement with these technologies is very high.
- Teacher librarians who have interactive whiteboards are able to enhance their teaching in ways that were not possible with books. The ability to put interactive text and pictures on a screen allows the students to focus on a teaching point that may only have been previously possible by one-to-one teaching with individual students. *Smart Notebook* has many features that can make the teaching of an information skill far more engaging and practical with a greater retention rate by students.
- Teacher librarians are also able to teach students how to use web-based information. Teaching the same search skills that they use with text to locate and use information. These skills are not always taught by their own teachers.
- As a post graduate qualified professional the teacher librarian manages and maintains the collection, budget, library staff plus whole school teaching resources. In a typical school the collection includes teacher references, readers, fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, journals, textbooks, equipment, digital resources (including websites, online journals), computer software, audiovisual resources. The collection has to be continually monitored for currency, relevance and bias. In addition, the teacher librarian supervises students during the school day, which allows the whole school community unlimited access to the library all day. Untrained staff cannot provide a library service to students. Non teaching staff are not permitted to

supervise students so the appointment of nonteaching staff to school libraries will restrict student access which will impact on learning.

- There is a school of thought that suggests that traditional libraries and books have no place in the future education of children. Teacher librarians strongly dispute this theory, *particularly in primary schools*. Students need to learn the basic reading and information skills they need through books. What they learn through reading books can be applied to other technologies later. Even though it is often suggested that books are dying, book purchases are still at an all time high in Australia. Books in electronic form are beginning to appear on the market and are proving to be popular, but they are still books. NAPLAN testing requires a strong knowledge of the narrative genre. Teachers may be able to teach the structure of narrative, but there is no better way to learn about narrative than to read a lot of fiction through books!
- Hay and Foley (2009, p. 19) list a number of new digital technologies that can be used to enhance and support the role of TLs
 - blogs - public learning journals, book reviews, commentary on issues, creative writing tasks, feedback from readers.
 - wikis - useful for group projects and problem solving tasks where reader feedback is encouraged, can be used by teacher librarians as a means of promoting their own school library
 - social bookmarking skills - excellent support (for teacher librarians, students and teachers) for class/stage based units of work
 - podcasting - share live or recorded audio material; ideal for oral presentations of student projects, digital storytelling, student interviews
 - file creation and sharing - provides a web facility for individuals and groups to work on the same files

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