

Education Services Australia

A merger of



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Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission by Education Services Australia Ltd

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Introduction

Education Services Australia is pleased to present a submission to the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools. Education Services Australia recognises the value that libraries and the teacher librarian role add to successful teaching and learning.

Summary

This submission highlights the collaboratively networked services developed with states and territories and the school community of users, of which school libraries form the major focus.

Education Services Australia recommends an adequate distribution of funding for the ongoing development of school library staff in both specific library-related professional development and as part of generic whole school development.

In multi-literate school campuses the role of the teacher librarian is as a champion of school improvement with a focus on information literacy and digital literacy. Where this role flourishes, the teacher librarian provides a key role in the process of continuous curriculum improvement.

About Education Services Australia

Education Services Australia was established on 1 March 2010 by all Australian Ministers of Education with a brief to support national education priorities and initiatives. Education Services Australia was formed by the merger of Curriculum Corporation and Education.au and has a strong association with school libraries through two of its major services: edna and SCIS.

Services to school libraries

The Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS, formerly ASCIS) was subsumed by Curriculum Corporation in 1989. SCIS provides schools with access to a database of consistent catalogue records created according to agreed national standards, in order to reduce the cost and duplication of effort of cataloguing resources in schools. SCIS reduces the cost and effort required by library staff, freeing staff to teach students research and information skills and to liaise with teachers in supporting students in the curriculum.

Education Services Australia through Curriculum Press publishes the current standards document for Australian school libraries *Learning for the Future Developing Information Services in Australian schools*, 2nd ed, and maintains a standards management role on behalf of Australian school libraries.

The Education Network Australia (edna) service provides a host of applications and tools, networking and web 2.0 technologies designed for the Australian education and training community, for educational and research purposes. For over 10 years edna has supported school libraries through a collection of evaluated online curriculum and professional resources, a federated search across key national and international education repositories and through the promotion of the benefits of technology for education and training in Australia.

Education Services Australia manages the national resource collection and infrastructure of digital curriculum resources. These resources are aligned with the curriculums of the Australian states and territories and will be aligned with the Australian Curriculum as it develops. It forms strong links with libraries and cultural organisations nationally on behalf of Australia's schools and school libraries to procure and disseminate digital curriculum resources.

The Schools Online Thesaurus (ScOT) develops and maintains a controlled vocabulary of terms tailored to Australian and New Zealand schools. It encompasses all curriculum areas as well as terms describing educational and administrative processes, ScOT is positioned to integrate into search mechanisms of school library and learning management systems linking Australian curriculum and the diverse learning resource repositories available to Australian school libraries.

The hallmark of all these services is that throughout their history they have been collaboratively networked services developed with states and territories and the school community of users, of which school libraries form the major focus.

Terms of reference

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

Recent major policies and investments have potential to impact of school libraries, including the Digital Education Revolution (DER), Building the Education Revolution (BER), Smarter Schools and Skilling Australia for the Future, Improving Teacher Quality, Professional Learning in ICT and the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum and Digital Education Revolution both impact strongly on the use of resources that support teaching and learning in schools. With the increasing use of and demand for digital resources and software, the work of teacher librarians has become even more important, perhaps with a lack of recognition of the crucial role of libraries in supporting student learning across all formats. The Program guidelines for the Digital Education Revolution¹ (2010, p. 4) include as a key outcome 'high quality digital learning resources that can be readily discovered, accessed, used and shared by schools.' Discovery, access, use and sharing of high quality learning resources is a key role of the library and key to the role of teacher librarian as information facilitator.

In most jurisdictions, each individual school must bear the cost for purchase and maintenance of library management software and infrastructure. Frequently, this software was designed close to 20 years ago and desperately needs to be replaced by 21st century software. Investment in standards-based metadata management systems appropriate in size and complexity could make a major impact on the discovery, accessing, using and sharing of quality learning resources across the country.

Redirecting investment in schools away from libraries without recognising the power of the library to support integrated teaching and learning fails to recognise the whole school nature of the library and its commitment to equity across the school.

The Australian curriculum redefines teaching and learning for schools and will require new resources and new ways of accessing existing resources to support its implementation. This is evident in all subject areas including history where a re-emphasis on the teaching of historical content and pedagogy across year levels highlights the need for Australian libraries to support teachers and students covering a broader, more diverse range of topics.

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

In multi-literate school campuses the role of the teacher librarian is as a champion of school improvement with a focus on information literacy and digital literacy. Where this role flourishes, the teacher librarian provides a key role in the process of continuous curriculum improvement. Particularly in the primary years, the library is an information centre, a teaching and learning centre and a hub for extra-curricular activity relevant to literacy.

In primary schooling literacy funding is being directed to specialist areas such as spelling, but the teacher librarian provides cross-curricular support and development for teaching teachers, not just students. For example the successful Premier's reading challenges have been linked in a positive correlation with NAPLAN results.

¹ Digital Education Revolution Projects, Infrastructure and Support (2010) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra
<www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DigitalEducationRevolution/Documents/DERProgramGuidelines.pdf>

The teacher librarian as co-teacher and curriculum leader can also carry specialist roles such as literacy coordinator, conducting programs based on wide reading and good literature. In secondary schools the school library provides community outcomes, social inclusion and establishes practices for ongoing use of libraries to support lifelong learning. School libraries also provide an assurance that all students will have equitable access to the resources and services required to engage with a 21st century curriculum.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Education Services Australia recommends an adequate distribution of funding for the ongoing development of school library staff in both specific library-related professional development and as part of generic whole school development.

All states have different policies and staffing levels, but there is a perceived lack of recognition of the specialist role of the teacher librarian and the value of the role in schools. The Inquiry should be cognisant of the important research work being undertaken by Associate Professor Helen Partridge from the Queensland University of Technology. This Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Priority Project titled *Re-conceptualising and re-positioning Australian library and information science education for the twenty-first century* is being undertaken in partnership with library and information science educators. Taking into consideration, students, educators and employers, the project aims to develop a *Framework for the Education of the Information Professions in Australia*. The supply of suitably educated graduates with the right attributes to develop and maintain high quality practice to meet the needs of the rapidly changing 21st century is a key focus of this research. It is anticipated that this research will make pertinent recommendations relating to the future recruitment, education and practice of teacher librarians.

Depending on the size of the library there may be a range of information management roles and tasks in addition to the specialist role of the teacher librarian. Library support staff has a crucial role to play in supporting the needs of teachers and students and should not be forgotten in professional development plans.

Findings of a research project undertaken by Lyn Hay in 2004-2005 'clearly demonstrate that the school library plays a critical role in supporting student learning'.² Student responses to the 'Impacts on learning' survey underpinning the research project 'specifically referred to the importance of having access to computers in the school library to complete a broad range of information seeking, information selection, transfer and storage, knowledge creation and production tasks'.³ Students valued 'being able to access a range of software programs via the school library ... because in the majority of schools in this study, the library was seen as the only place in the school which employs an "open access" policy both during class time and out-of-class time'.⁴

Teacher librarians often take on a coaching role in areas of teaching and learning, and particularly e-learning. This is partly due to their advanced qualifications and their cross-curricular whole school perspective but also due to their accessibility and availability, if school library programmes are flexible enough to accommodate this. Given that school improvement literature consistently recommends school-based professional learning teams as best practice for professional learning, it makes sense to strengthen the flexibility and availability of the qualified, knowledgeable person already situated in the school, i.e. the teacher librarian.

² Hay, Lyn 2005, 'Student learning through Australian school libraries. Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions', *Synergy*, vol 3, no 2, p 18

³ Hay, Lyn 2006, 'Student learning through Australian school libraries. Part 2: What students define and value as school library support', *Synergy*, vol 4, no 2, p 31

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 31-32.

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

School libraries are nodes in one of the strongest, most effective global networks – libraries. A key role for school libraries is positioning young learners in the continuum of library use across the life span, by teaching students how libraries work. In small communities libraries are a community hub.

Through international standards and systems, school libraries partner with other education libraries (TAFE and universities), with Australia's strong public library networks, and state and national libraries, and through them to international organisations and initiatives. National services like SCIS, Education Network Australia and National Digital Learning Resource Network support school libraries by ensuring Australian services are represented in global communities.

SCIS, which is used by 85% of Australian schools, supports local libraries by providing the capability to support sharing of information about resources. SCIS is supported by education systems with 'bulk deals' in some state, territory and Catholic jurisdictions, reducing the individual costs for schools using the service. Agencies in some state education systems provide further support to this national initiative by contributing metadata to the centralised database on behalf of local schools. SCIS is a long-standing example of a real partnership where states aggregate services to the national level.

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

As information specialists, qualified library staff have copyright and licensing expertise that is crucial to schools entering the era of digital publishing. This role is vitally important as Principals and jurisdictions attempt to educate teachers and students about new licensing models and thus minimise risk. Teacher librarians are well-positioned to monitor and advise on new developments at the national and local level with regard to open education resources and licensing options for schools. While Principals are the legal conduit in schools in the area of copyright, teacher librarians are the obvious information channel.

There is a strong teacher librarian network in the use of digital technology. Teacher librarians form a long-standing thriving community. They are the strongest group of users in edna, disseminating online resources and technologies through schools.

School librarians mentor and assist in use of technologies. Librarians were early adopters of library systems and technologies and are well equipped to provide advice on effective use of learning management systems. They understand issues around interoperability and integration of different systems in curriculum contexts.

School librarians use the SCIS database of over a million catalogue records as a source of information and metadata to be transferred to local library management systems. The SCIS database contains metadata not only for the traditional library books but for websites, learning objects, DVDs, digital video files, CD-ROMs, sound recordings, maps, music, kits, pictures, etc. The use of SCIS as a source of quality, standards-based metadata reduces the cost and duplication of effort of cataloguing resources in schools.

Data used in library catalogues is standards based. It can be moved into different systems such as learning management systems or portals to integrate discovery of digital and physical resources to support teaching and learning.

As an information manager, the librarian is the interpreter of information standards in the school community and takes the lead in implementing digital interoperability standards to ensure teachers have access to appropriate resources.

With ongoing development and support, librarians with their strong focus on resource sharing, cooperation and information standards can continue to provide leadership in the new age of integrated resource discovery and delivery.

Signed on behalf of Education Services Australia:

Name:



Position:

General Manager

Date:

16 April 2010