



To: Secretary, Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Education and Training

Re: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian
schools

Dear Secretary,

As a writer of books for children and young adults, I have been privileged to visit hundreds of schools across Australia since the early 1980s. Again and again I have witnessed the role that the library and teacher librarian play. I request that funding be increased for the book stock in school libraries and for the employment of qualified teacher librarians.

I know that other people in their submissions will include all sorts of vital statistics about literacy rates and so on, but I believe that the school library has a vital role above and beyond its demonstrable educational value. Very simply, the library is the heart of a school, and the teacher librarian is the person who keeps the heart pumping.

The school library is a place of refuge, where kids go at lunch time when they need to escape from teasing or bullying, or when they just feel like a bit of peace and quiet and solitude. A class visit to the library is a mini-excursion, a welcome change from the claustrophobic sense of being stuck in the classroom, period after period.

The teacher librarian is often the one person in the school who has direct educational and social contact with students from every age and grade. Through discussion of the challenges facing a character in a book, students are often able to talk in an oblique way to the school librarian about issues or personal problems which they would be reluctant to raise with a teacher or even a counselor. As well, the teacher librarian usually seems to know exactly what book to recommend, in order to take a particular child on the journey from literacy to literature.

Over recent months, I have been observing the Education Revolution being built in the school behind my back fence. The sound of jackhammers and the sight of bricklayers, which is now my daily experience, has of course been repeated across the nation. Yet there is no point to creating new gymnasiums, new art studios, new music rooms, new science labs < and yes, even the occasional new library < if federal and state education departments do not understand that a well-stocked school library and a qualified full-time permanent teacher librarian are the heart and soul of every school.

Yours sincerely,

Nadia Wheatley