



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

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- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

It seems ironic that massive spending on school libraries in Australian schools in 2009 and 2010, through the "Building the Education Revolution" (BER) economic stimulus packages, should coincide with rumours that trained teacher librarians may soon be phased out in New South Wales, or that schools may be given the option *not* to employ a teacher librarian and/or a trained information & communications technologies (ICT) specialist. I welcome this inquiry and hope that it clarifies the current situation and helps with solid planning for the rest of the 21st century.

Recent media speculation, that some school principals no longer view teacher-librarians and school libraries as essential and intrinsic elements of K-12 schooling, is bizarre. I am fortunate to have always working with supportive principals. In a few cases, they were not always so supportive, and I had to draw on skills learned in my teacher-librarian training to gain their support.

While the nature of information, and the media of delivery of that information, will be always be changing and evolving, the embedding of information skills and Bloom's Taxonomy into curricula - including the forthcoming Australian (National) curriculum - suggests that "best practice" requires teachers to plan, program and teach collaboratively with a specifically trained teacher librarian. Online publishing has no requirement for an editor, a censor, a statement of authenticity, or any form of scaffolding to support teachers and students to define, locate, select, organise, present and assess this information. That suggests to me that teacher-librarians are more important than ever.

As life-long learners, students need to be information literate. Teacher librarians specialise in teaching information literacy. The increased use of teacher librarians in some schools, to provide "Release from Face to Face" (RFF) teaching and Executive Release, reducing their ability to provide collaborative planning, programing and teaching, is another example of inequity. Furthermore, some teacher librarians are denied administration time, supposedly at least 20% of the timetable, and are forced to use their own RFF time to administer the library.

OASIS Library, the automated circulation/enquiry/stocktake program, still in use in most NSW DET schools, is a DOS-run program. It is antiquated, but there has been no clear message as to a timeline for its eventual overhaul or replacement.

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

Last year, I was a contributor to an online conference discussion, "School Libraries 21C", at <http://schoollibraries21c.edublogs.org/>

hosted by the NSW DET School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit, and this discussion provided much valuable information sharing. A summary paper was also produced. Although we hear in Departmental rhetoric that schools are "equitable", comments to the online discussion suggested that the situation across NSW and Australia was certainly not always equitable for many teacher librarians and their schools. Variations in how teacher librarians performed their roles, how they spent budgets (if, indeed, there was a budget) and what, if any, clerical assistance was available was erratic. This was not variation due to peculiarities in the community makeup, but personal differences in school administration practices.

While the convenors and mentors of this project strongly support the use of guided enquiry in schools, action research and evidence-based practice, they were disheartened that few teacher librarians were enabled or encouraged to use and collect such data in schools. Many teacher librarians are part time, supply casual and often untrained, and are not confident enough in using guided enquiry in schools, action research or setting learning sequences that enable evidence-based practice and evaluation to inform future teaching. Such data would be useful in annual school reports.

- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

It concerns me that the term "school librarian" de-emphasises the huge "teacher" component of our work. I am a "teacher librarian". Equal weighting of the title, with an emphasise on how best students' outcomes are going to be improved by teacher librarian input. Devolved, flexible staffing and ever-decreasing school budgets seem to have resulted in the increased use of teacher librarians as release teachers, or the replacement of qualified teacher librarians with less expensive staff.

I was fortunate enough to do the fulltime course, Graduate Diploma in Applied Science (Information/Teacher-librarianship) at University of Technology Sydney (Kuring-gai) in 1990, as a cadetship on full secondment-level teachers' pay. I was part of a unique group of 15 and we were able to keep in communication for several years, making a bonded study group that extended its collective vision beyond a single school. These days, prospective teacher librarians with no training often end up in the position first, then must complete a degree in their own time, with only minimal Departmental support for study days and mentorship. The role is ever changing, and is challenging enough for trained teacher librarians. A reinstated, longer retraining course would be of huge long term benefit to the profession, the students of Australia, and the teachers who support them.

For the last four years, I have been a nominated mentor for untrained local teacher librarians undertaking teacher librarian studies. While this is of huge mutual benefit, it can be taxing in time and energy, and often feels like a "free shortcut" for training new teacher librarians. Similarly, there seems to be little support for existing or new clerical officers who "fall into" a school library support role. There appears to be no compulsory or formal long term training in OASIS database management and catalogue record downloading.

- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

Again, this is an area of extraordinary inequity across Australia. I hesitate to suggest or demand equity, in that NSW seems so much better served than many other states, and I would have concern that, in order to show equity, services might be reduced to NSW local communities, other institutions and teacher librarians. It seems incomprehensible that some states do not have teacher librarians in every school.

I am indebted to programs such as the NSW "Premier's Reading Challenge", as a way to focus on the importance of encouraging literacy through recreational reading. However, even these programs require that school communities will be supportive and that teacher librarians will be confident to explore the ICT options (online reading records) offered to staff and students.

As a former editor of "Scan", the professional journal of the NSW DET School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit, I know the value of subscribing, reading and contributing to this essential publication.

Closer ties with public libraries would also be appreciated, especially for my school at the moment, whose entire school library collection is in storage, during the building of our new BER library.

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

The online possibilities offered by OASIS Library and "OASIS Library Enquiry" have upskilled many teacher librarians, but there always seems to be a shadow of doubt over its longevity.

In 2009, the "Bear and Chook books rap" at

<http://rapblog6.edublogs.org/>

was an exemplar of the effective use of ICT and digital technologies in an integrated primary school literacy program (in this case, K-2). While this, and similar online raps hosted by the NSW DET School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit, have been available to schools for almost a decade (evolving as the media evolves), it is still a small proportion of teacher librarians who have felt empowered, or whose schools have been supportive, to enable such resources to continue to be explored and developed.

Thank you,

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