



**My submission to the Committee for the
Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians
in Australian Schools**

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Introduction

The primary function of a school library is to underpin the school's mission statement by providing services, resources and programmes that foster opportunities for lifelong learning, love of literature and the pursuit of recreational activities. The school library is also called upon to offer all members of its community the opportunity to satisfy their information needs, generate new understandings of their world and to develop as informed and responsible global citizens. The school library therefore operates on three levels: that as resource centre, a learning centre and as a service centre.

Terms of reference

With regards to the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry I would like to provide comment for:

- The future of potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy
- The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians
- The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians

Role of the school library

The school library as a resource centre aims to:

- be equipped with a balanced and adequate collection of fiction and non fiction books
- provide a variety of non book resources i.e. digital cameras, data projectors etc
- reflect the advances in digital technologies e.g. computers, digital equipment etc
- organise its resources to be catalogued and housed in a systematic way for equity of access and use
- maintain and develop its collection by having an suitable annual budget

The school library as a learning centre aims to:

- provide materials which will enrich and implement learning and teaching
- encourage individual discovery and inquiry
- provide resources and facilities for individual, paired or group research
- provide a variety of learning and teaching spaces – in literature, information skills and digital literacies

- encourage the use of a variety of resources

The school library as a service centre aims to:

- service the needs of all members of its learning and teaching community
- offer flexibility in meeting the information and digital needs of its community
- offer services which are provided in a secure, positive and safe environment which is conducive to learning, teaching, research and reading

Staffing

To operate the school library effectively, sufficient and qualified library personnel is required. School library personnel should comprise teacher librarians, library technicians and/or library assistants. There is also an avenue for volunteers. These varying roles would enable services and programmes that are apt to their school. It is imperative that school library personnel also be required to formulate annual goals set within the context of the school's mission or strategic plan. Working towards these goals would ensure that school library staff provide a professional service to all members of its school community.

All school library personnel have a role to play in liaising with and assisting all members of the school community. Even though each member's role description differs according to expertise and training all staff are called upon to be supportive and flexible in their approach to providing services and programmes and promoting and disseminating resources.

Teacher librarians are uniquely qualified as they have knowledge in the fields of education and librarianship. Their sound understanding of learning and teaching combined with the knowledge and skills in library and information management is valuable. It is the teacher librarian who primarily supports and implements the vision of their school community through advocating for and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners.

Personal experience

In my professional experience I have been involved in school libraries for over twenty (20) years. My experience covers both primary and secondary schools in the Catholic sector. In addition I had a five-year stint as a Library Advisor to all Catholic schools in Victoria. For the past fifteen years I have been an active member of the School section for the Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA] the peak national body for libraries.

During this time I have been an advocate for and promoter of both school libraries and teacher librarians. I believe that the school library has a vital role in supporting students and teachers in their information needs. I also believe that as a suitably qualified teacher librarian I have the skills and expertise to support students and teachers in satisfying their information needs.

As the education field has developed and evolved, school libraries have also participated in this process. I have observed students engaged in learning, researching, studying and reading in the school library. I have observed school communities participating in engaging activities centred in the school library. I have

observed over the years that some school libraries introduced the computer to their school. I have observed that some school libraries introduced the latest digital technologies in their schools. I have observed that some school libraries skill up their students and teachers to become lifelong learners. I have observed that some school library personnel attend professional development activities external to normal school hours. I have observed that there has been research conducted to provide evidence for the betterment of school libraries and teacher librarians. I have observed that ALIA and Australian School Library Association [ASLA] regularly provided documentation to support school libraries and teacher librarians. I have observed that there Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians were developed. I have observed that many school libraries are the hub of their school.

However I have also observed that the teacher librarian population is ageing and greying. I have observed that there is not enough qualified teacher librarians for all school libraries. I have observed that school libraries compete against other areas in their school for funds to provide for adequate resources. I have observed that some school library personnel have not been replaced when they are on personal/sick leave. I have observed that some school library personnel are not sufficiently replaced when they have resigned from a school library. I have observed, particularly in primary schools, that some principals employed library technicians to run their school libraries instead of a teacher librarian. I have observed that some school library collections have outdated resources and that these resources require upgrading. I have observed that the Catholic Education Melbourne made obsolete the role of the Library Advisor. I have observed one national attempt to collect data on Australian school libraries. I have observed a decline in the number of tertiary courses for teacher librarianship.

I am proud to be a qualified teacher librarian and to devote my professional life to working in school libraries. I value these roles so much that I am prepared to give of my time, in a voluntary capacity, to serve on the School Library committee of my national association. My professional intention is to continue working in school libraries until the time of my retirement. I consider that the school library is where I can best use my expertise and provide the right support and assistance to all members of the school community. I would like to see that the school library and the role of teacher librarian is both valued and respected with the wider community. It would ensure then that some of my colleagues would take the opportunity to work towards and gain this same type of experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- To support and fund for ongoing data collection in the areas of resources and staffing in school libraries. This data collection will provide a clear picture of the state of school libraries. Analysis of the data will enable key stakeholders to develop policies with regards to resourcing levels and the provision of adequate and appropriate staff.
- To ensure that each school in Australia has a physical space for a school library and that this space is adequately funded to ensure that a foundation level of resources is made available. These resources need to include a

balance of both book and digital resources and that these resources are indexed according to the guidelines set in *Learning for the future: developing information services in schools* 2nd ed.

- That each school in Australia employs a qualified teacher librarian. A qualified teacher librarian can be defined as a person who holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. A qualified teacher librarian, in partnership with classroom teachers, can ensure that students are able to become lifelong learners who are information and digitally literate. This partnership would primarily exist through the collaboratively planning, implementing and evaluation of learning outcomes.
- That funding is provided to ensure that there are suitably qualified teacher librarians. This funding would allow sectors to offer, to those interested teachers, study leave. This would also encourage teacher to upgrade their teaching qualifications. It would also ensure that current tertiary institutions offering teacher librarianship courses will be maintained and that other tertiary institutions could introduce or reintroduce teacher librarianship courses.