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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Secretary,

You will have received a great many submissions detailing the great truth of the potential of Teacher Librarians to have a major impact upon educational outcomes in schools. In fact, if you have not already begun to wonder, you surely will soon be led to ponder why the profession is so under-recognised when it can make such a difference to schools, and despite the indisputably excellent examples of improvement by fine practitioners documented to your committee. My take on the problems the profession has faced, and on why it has been so undervalued, is the rationale that has prompted my writing. I need to emphasise from the outset that I am writing this submission as an individual, and that the opinions expressed here are my own entirely, and not representative of my school, which in fact I have decided not to disclose in this document. I am prepared for this submission to be published with my personal identifying details attached, but I do not include details of my school in this letter as I write it as an individual.

I must say that personally, I have found my time as a TL to be inspiring and fascinating. I am not writing this submission, however, from this perspective, as I feel that changes need to be made to the practices used by schools and teacher training if the profession is to be saved from its present decline.

I am a practicing teacher librarian, currently working in a Catholic secondary school in a job share capacity in Queensland. My experience as a teacher librarian practitioner began before I qualified, in the Northern Territory many years ago, when I was given the opportunity to replace the school's Teacher Librarian when she moved on. My principal at this time offered me this opportunity as an incentive to stay in the school as I was

preparing to resign at the time from my position as a classroom teacher. I found the new position interesting, and eventually decided to do further study and become qualified. I now have gained about 6 years equivalent full time experience in various schools in the Catholic, Anglican and State school systems in Queensland, in the primary and secondary systems, since attaining my qualification, though I have not worked full time since qualifying, because of family commitments. I graduated in 2000 with a Master of Applied Science (Lib & Information management), having changed my career from that of classroom teacher, studying for the further qualification whilst my children were young and at home.

So I am not a young Teacher librarian, in fact I have turned 50, yet I am comparatively recently qualified, and I feel I have something to offer your submission through my own honest observations and experiences of the profession. I have, of course, worked throughout my career with Teacher Librarians before I became one, as a classroom teacher for about 10 years, and since I have moved around schools, I have replaced and been replaced by a few Teacher Librarians since I became qualified too, and am currently actually sharing a job with another TL. So I present myself as well qualified in my observations of the profession.

From a personal perspective, I have felt it a privilege to find myself in such a central position in my education community- my school, placed between teachers, parents and school administration, with a knowledge of cross curricular concerns, approaches to learning and the resources used to serve them. I find that the position of TL, because it is flexibly timetabled in the secondary system in Queensland, allows me to seek learning objects, both physical and digital, in a way which is efficient, as I am one seeker with a broad catchment who has access to many sources of information, and I have been trained to access information efficiently from a variety of resources. I have been trained to collaboratively plan units of teaching with teachers and learners across all subject areas in order to disseminate the knowledge I have gained. I am in the perfect position to be an agent for change and innovation, having a more wide ranging interest in educational applications and pedagogical practices than subject teachers. I am unconcerned with filtering for a particular subject area, as my umbrella covers all subjects, so most of what I

find on educational sites is of some use, and I am in a position to disseminate to the appropriate members of staff the findings of my research, be it on the internet, via my regular checking of various blogs and educational sites and discussion fora, or in professional readings of journals or books.

In my experience, the resources and support offered to Teacher Librarians by those offering courses in the profession have been very good, and my course at Charles Sturt University was run by people well aware of the dead wood in the profession and the effect on its reputation as a result. It was a common catch cry of theirs that TLs needed to document their practices and the improvements they had made in their schools by pre and post testing in order to build the recognition of the potential impact of the profession on others. As far as I can see, this is still inadequately documented, perhaps because there are so few good practitioners, and they are overwhelmingly busy. I think that, though recent graduate teacher librarians of course understand the role, they are so few in number that they will continue to fail to make an impact to the overall misunderstanding of the profession. If things stay as they are, courses in Teacher Librarianship will continue to have difficulty attracting graduates as the changes to the profession are poorly understood, obscuring its potential.

I am afraid most of my observations have not been appreciative of the practitioners of the profession. In my opinion, the role of Teacher Librarian has been a poorly understood component of the teaching staff in schools, viewed at best by other staff members, and school leaders as a bit of a 'black box', and at worst as an expensive waste of money. Unfortunately, this ignorance has led too frequently to the circumstance where the role of TL is open to exploitation by teachers and Teacher Librarians wishing to avoid contact with students and looking for a soft, well paid option which allows them to remain in schools.

This situation has been allowed to happen for a number of reasons, the most relevant of these to your committee being the acceptance of unqualified staff into the position of Teacher Librarian. This acceptance came about because clearly not only is the ignorance of the role of the Teacher Librarian a factor in Schools, but in State Education

Departments as well. Whilst no teacher would generally be allowed to teach in an area outside of their expertise, teachers who knew nothing about the skills required of a Teacher Librarian were readily accepted into this role. This was not recognised as a problem because few of those in schools except the qualified TL knows what she is supposed to be doing, and of course much of the degradation of the position is done by well intentioned principals such as mine, long ago in the Northern Territory, who allow teachers to sidestep into the profession. Unfortunately as much harm again is done by well meaning teachers and teacher librarians occupying the position without knowledge of their obligations and subsequent negative impact upon the reputation of the profession. Another problem faced by the profession is the acceptance of qualified public librarians who are not teachers into the role, also permitted by the ignorance of an administrative team who feel the role only requires looking after the school's resources.

Once they have obtained the position of Teacher Librarian within a school, it can be very difficult to remove these seat-warmers from the system, particularly as nobody at the school knows the extent of the loss of potential that the school is suffering, due to this lack of understanding. Any conscientious and honest person working in education, or any cursory investigation into the various Education Systems, both State and Non Government, throughout Australia will confirm the fact that it is difficult indeed to objectively assess the performance of teachers, before or during their years of service, and it is even harder to get rid of the dead wood from the system if identified. How much more difficult, then, is it when there is only one of this type of teacher in most schools, and the role is not well understood by other teachers or their principals? It is easy for me to think of examples from my acquaintance of people acting as TLs in schools, both those qualified too long ago, and those un or under qualified, some of whom have the best of intentions, but are not aware to any significant extent of the degree to which they are failing to fulfill their role.

A relevant observation here, though: at least in South East Queensland, where I live, the sectors in which Teacher Librarians are disappearing fastest are those in which it is least possible for principals to select their Library staff. The principal's reaction to a poor Library manager is that they reallocate these TL positions to the classroom, using the ex-

library teachers for teaching duties, to improve their teacher: student ratios in a more practical way, because they see this as the best use of scarce staffing resources. In the independent sector, where a greater amount of freedom may be enjoyed by principals in relation to who they employ to staff their libraries, and yet the budget is similarly driven by the imperative for value for money, the profession is surviving - with some schools of my acquaintance having more than one full time equivalent Teacher Librarian operating within the primary or secondary school, because the initial appointee to the position was so well appreciated.

Up until recent times thanks to ICT, it was not even common for teacher librarians to have any appreciation of what TLs in other schools did, or what they should be doing. It was only due to the widespread distribution of some excellent publications for the profession (Scan¹ is a fine example) that I had any idea what I was supposed to be doing before I was qualified, or indeed the potential of the profession as an agent for innovation of pedagogical practices. I am touching upon the issue of the professional isolation of TLs here - a long standing complaint of the profession - with some cause - but more importantly an impediment to the improvement of practitioners, and to the progress of the profession itself. But this isolation need no longer be an issue, with the advent of professional online discussion lists, and the extensive sharing of web 2.0 tools.

If we are to have TL practitioners who fulfill all the marvelous potential of the role, and who make a difference to the educational outcomes of students and who inspire and innovate and lift the practices and performance of teachers, keeping up with innovation in educational applications of IT, we must stop accepting others into the position in schools. We must educate all subject area and general graduates during teacher training to share this expectation of in house collaboration with the Teacher Librarian, and to ensure that collaboration and team teaching happens, we must begin to place compulsory standards of practice and evaluation on the Teacher Librarian profession. Additionally, the Teacher

¹ Published by the *Curriculum K-12 Directorate*, Scan is a quarterly refereed journal that focuses on the interaction between information in a digital age and effective student learning. It is published by NSW Department of Education and Training: ISSN 07264127

Librarian must be a member of an online TL community such as OZ_TL² Net, in addition to relevant state and system based listservs. They must be supported in their participation in regular professional development, and they must attend regional meetings where possible.

The above imperatives need to be contingent upon the continued occupation of the position of Teacher Librarian, along with membership of the relevant state and national professional bodies, who do their best to raise, maintain and publish and exemplify the standards of the profession. Also imperative to the continued proper fulfillment of the position of TL is the mandatory updating of professional qualifications, or at least compulsory testing of their knowledge of innovative educational practices using ICT, at the very least those provided by the Departments of Education in their State and sector. Because what good can a person do whose role has evolved to embrace guiding teacher and student learning and understanding of the Educational Applications of ICT if they qualified before these were widely used? Or if they can't be bothered keeping up? And we cannot rely on people to keep up and 'do the right thing' out of the goodness of their hearts, because this does not happen, and will continue the erosion and degradation of the profession.

It greatly helps the efficiency of the operation of the role if the Teacher Librarian is a member of the IT or Curriculum leadership team within the school, because It is not good enough for the TL to hold onto what she may know without passing it on. The TL must be flexibly timetabled so that they can meet with classroom teachers during time specifically freed up and allocated for the purpose of these meetings, and there should be a minimum number of hours per term allocated (for both the TL and Teacher) for these sessions.

After such meetings, a report and plan should be completed and submitted to the leadership team with changes to pedagogical practices planned as a result of the meeting

² OZTL_NET is a discussion list for information professionals working in Australian schools, managed by the teacher librarianship academic staff at the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.

clearly outlined. The TL should be required to team teach with the teachers with whom they have met for the initial period of introduction of new practices, to ease this process. If this were the case, ongoing professional development of teachers would be happening in the area of Educational Applications of ICT, driven by the only teacher in the school with the time, with cross curricular expertise, and with ICT expertise: the Teacher Librarian.

In this way, connections between subjects, and cross curricular projects using essential questions of a multi-curricular nature can be introduced and resourced. Thus, the TL is the person on the ground, pushing and implementing the Computers in Education component of the government's Educational Revolution policy. Because as we should have known, the money provided by the government for ICT hardware will be largely wasted if teachers do not have the expertise to implement programs which effectively utilise it.

We already know that teachers are time poor as a group during the period spent at their workplace, so they do not have the time to trawl the world wide web widely looking for the latest applications relevant to their subject area (though for more and more this becomes a pleasure and an inspiration to which they will devote plenty of voluntary time, once started off on the journey). This impoverishment of time has resulted in a poor take-up of digital learning objects, even when these are provided for free on their websites by State Education Departments on behalf of their teachers, and despite the plentitude of outstanding, relevant and free or almost free resources available elsewhere on the internet. It will continue despite the widespread presence of large numbers of computers in schools due to the investment of the federal government in the Computers in Schools program, and despite the widespread presence of computers in the homes of Australians (even teachers).

This is because children and adults are getting good at using computers, and even collaborating on the production of content for social networking, because it is fun, but it takes time and energy to change work practices and throw out well used plans that have worked in the past, in order to do things in a new way. This is in spite of the fact that it is patently obvious that (particularly computer literate) children are completely bored by traditional methods of teaching.

In summary, it seems to me that most of the problems faced by the profession of Teacher Librarian stem from a gross and long standing misunderstanding of the role, and actions taken and omitted as a result of these. Others' understanding of the role has not changed as the concerns of the librarians have moved on. This misunderstanding is best addressed by those involved in the delivery of teacher training, as a part of the course they deliver to their graduates (both primary and secondary), so that new teachers arrive in schools with an expectation of in-house ongoing professional development and mentoring from the teacher librarian, adding a source of pressure for the TL to rise to the task. The profession would have great power to attract graduates if there were a better understanding of what it entailed, as it is an inspiring job which promises autonomy, respect, and the freedom to tailor the position follow your interests, concentrating on those aspects best suited to your own abilities, whether it be digital or book based literacy and information processing skills. It should not matter, as long as the TL can demonstrate that they make a difference.

Please find below some expansion of my main points in relation to the terms of reference of your committee.

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

The impact of the Computers in Education program and other investments such as library buildings, has been softened and much of their potential lost as not enough libraries are staffed by qualified or competent practitioners.

There is enormous potential for the enrichment of these programs, and for ensuring their ongoing impact on schools if the profession were to be upgraded.

If qualified and competent people are not placed into all schools in order to educate teachers about digital resources and how to use them freely and already available to them, much of the money on hardware will be wasted.

TLs are in the perfect position to provide support to staff and students attempting to innovate using the educational applications of Technology, and implementing a digital curriculum, thus complementing and adding value to the investment of the federal government.

Teacher Librarians should be one of the most valued and crucial players in the ongoing implementation of the scheme.

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

Qualified TLs are trained in the retrieval of information from a variety of texts, both digital and physical, making them time efficient compared to teachers

TLs are not limited by looking for a particular subject area as they search, so more of what they find is useful

Qualified TLs are trained to collaborate with teachers in addition to the above, so will disseminate what they find effectively

TLs are in general flexibly timetabled, so they have time to search for resources for teachers and can make time to see them to pass on their findings on an individual or faculty basis

TLs are in a position in the school where they are in contact with students and teachers whilst they are retrieving information from a variety of formats, so they are frequently well placed when problems arise, to help in a timely manner.

Being teachers, TLs are able to tailor the format of their findings and pass on their knowledge to teachers, students and even parents.

TLs, because they are often at school for extended hours, supervising the study of students, are in a position to interact with parents on both an informal and formal basis, and are frequently requested by schools to help to develop the online skills and knowledge of the parent community in the school.

TLs are equipped with a cross curricular knowledge, and the knowledge of current educational and assessment practices used by teachers and students within their school community, so they are in the best position to identify resources in many formats to fulfill the needs of these parties.

TLs are regularly asked by their schools to develop and implement policies for internet and other resource usage due to their specialised understanding of copyright issues, correct usage policies, and internet safety resources and practices. They are often also well placed to police the proper following of these practices.

Qualified TLs are aware that they are charged with the responsibility of developing and expansion the literacy of the students and teachers, by referrals to reading matter for leisure and professional practice, and by the implementation of reading and information and literacy programs, and by ensuring that a variety of types of resources are used to answer the requirements of assignments set within the school, and that these are appropriately and accurately acknowledged and accessed.

TLs traditionally have been responsible for resourcing the curriculum; an aspect of their role has always been teaching staff and students about the development of research skills, of accessing and citation of print resources, but this has expanded in more recent times to include the searching and access of subscription databases, websites and other web resources, and their appropriate use.

The positive and negative implications of the emergence of the internet as an information and teaching resource in schools were recognised first by quality Teacher Librarians who responded in a number of ways. Noting the superabundance and paucity of quality information resources, they developed resources aimed at the development of critical literacy and evaluation of resources and identification of contradiction, verification and

cross checking of information, using a variety of validation tools developed and shared by experts.

Good TLs read children's literature and discuss books with students. They run reading incentive programs, provide a forum for the exchange of recommendations of reading and further access to information related to texts via the Internet, author websites and online interviews and book raps, Literature Circles and book trailers and reviews and webquests. They love the unique relationship they can have with students.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians:

The role of TL is a mystery box to teachers and school administrators, due to the lack of education about the role included in teacher training programs. This has led to the under-recognition of Teacher Librarians and the placement of unqualified people into the role, which has further eroded respect for the profession and a lack of appreciation for its potential.

The admission of unqualified or inadequately qualified people into the field has opened it to exploitation by opportunists.

The role of TL is under appreciated as a result of the above factors by both teachers and principals in schools, and those working in bodies of Educational Administration, and so the position is re-allocatable in a lot of school systems, and in a lot of states of Australia. Naturally, due to all these factors, many school administrators have taken advantage of this ability to reallocate the position, and left libraries unattended by qualified personnel, to improve the teacher: student ratio.

The profession is unattractive to new recruits for the above reasons.

The profession shares with Teaching in general the lack of a National and Binding code of practice which ensures that practitioners stay up to date and maintain and develop their knowledge and expertise. But in Teacher Librarianship it is especially tragic, as the role can be so pivotal to a school, and can be so wide reaching in its influence.

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

Teacher training institutions must introduce a unit in all courses which informs potential teachers about the expectations they should have for ongoing professional collaboration with Teacher Librarians.

Schools and public libraries could cooperate more in the provision of databases, author visits and courses to the general public and the school community, as so much of their area of responsibilities overlap, and savings may be made in this way.

Relevant government bodies need to make the position of TL not re-allocatable.

Relevant government bodies should ensure only those qualified may occupy the role of Teacher Librarian.

TL representative bodies should be required to produce a binding code of practice to be followed by practising TLs.

Both of the above parties should collaborate to produce a constantly evolving testing regime to which TLs should be subjected to demonstrate their ability and skill levels.

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

In the past, Teacher Librarians have felt isolated within their workplace: they are often the only practitioner of their type in the school, so there has been some justification for these feelings. But the emergence of SCIS, the central schools cataloguing agency, has freed the TL from the endless, rigorous and obscure task of cataloguing of resources, as 90% of cataloguing is now as simple as downloading a file into the electronic catalogue. The machine readable catalogue records downloaded from SCIS are of an excellent standard, and identical Australia wide (for the same resources) so this is a great step forward. In the past, depending upon the number of resources to be catalogued, and the rigour of the librarian, cataloguing may have taken up half of the librarian's time. The expansion of the Teacher Librarian profession's province of Information management and resources into the arena of the internet and database management, and the explosion of sharing and collaboration encouraged by the introduction of web 2.0 has resulted in a great deal of support and sharing of resources. It is difficult to feel isolated in such an environment, where real time consultations or delayed interactions are so much a part of our everyday functions. The percentage of the Teacher Librarian's time spent in working with and for teachers' and students' direct benefit has increased, as less 'back room' work is done by the TL. Potentially, this should make the new role of the profession much easier for her co-workers to grasp. The area of TL expertise overlaps now to a greater extent than in the past with other subject areas, increasing the relevance of the profession to a wider range of teachers and students. Potentially, the TL can have something to offer every member of teaching and administration staff in her school, as she will happen upon information and tools of relevance to them all every so often. Local, National and Sector and Information Management System specific TL networks, aided by the ease of electronic communication and the wealth of information found and shared by Librarians and teachers ripe for passing on, are growing in importance and influence, and acting as another factor to improve our performance and knowledge, increase our efficient sharing of resources and information, and overcome any remaining sense of isolation.

This concludes my submission to the committee. Thank you for this opportunity for consultation.

Sincerely yours,

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Teacher Librarian
Librarians - preserving, propagating
and promoting our cultural environment