



**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY
INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES and TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN
AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS
by the community of
ST AUGUSTINE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, COFF HARBOUR, NSW**

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Contents

1	<i>Introduction</i>	3
2	<i>Background to this submission</i>	3
3	<i>Outline of this submission</i>	3
4	<i>Defining the Role of the Teacher Librarian</i>	4
4.1	Curriculum Leader	4
4.2	Information Specialist	4
5	<i>Addressing the Terms of Reference</i>	5
5.1	The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities	5
5.1.1	“B.E.R.” & 21 st Century Libraries	5
5.1.2	National Curriculum – Inquiry Underpinnings.	5
5.2	The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy	6
5.2.1	Obstacles to Overcome	6
5.2.2	Release From Face to Face	6
5.2.3	Access to School Library	6
5.2.4	Budget Constraints	7
5.2.5	Playground Duty	7
5.3	Connected to Classroom Learning	7
5.3.1	Yr 1 Pilot Program	7
5.3.2	Guided Inquiry Focus	7
5.3.3	Connectedness to Classroom Life	7
5.4	The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians	7
5.4.1	Career Opportunities	8
5.4.2	Role Descriptions	8
5.5	The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians	8
5.6	The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians	9
6	<i>Conclusion & Recommendations</i>	9
7	<i>Recommendations and Considerations for Further Development:</i>	10

1 Introduction

The community of St Augustine's Primary School, Coffs Harbour welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools conducted by the standing committee on Education and Training.

Our school's focus for the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program component of the commonwealth's "Building the Education Revolution" centres the school library as the heart of teaching and learning. As such long and rigorous discussion in this area has occurred allowing us the depth of knowledge and understanding to offer informed opinion to this inquiry.

2 Background to this submission

In 2008 St Augustine's undertook the five yearly School Review and Development program. This program, while fulfilling the legislative accreditation and registration requirements, provided the school community the opportunity to focus on the future of learning for the school. The product of the consultation process was recorded in the school's 2009-2013 strategic plan document "Personalising Learning ~ Pursuing Excellence".

With the release of the announcement to conduct an inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools, the community of St Augustine's, through newsletter announcements, email responses and through a person to person data collection process, compiled this response.

3 Outline of this submission

The submission begins by defining our school's view of the role of the Teacher Librarian. This provides the context for understanding how central the Teacher Librarian is to the teaching and learning environment at not only our school, but all schools.

The second focus is on addressing the terms of reference by citing concrete examples currently occurring at St Augustine's.

The final section provides our school's recommendations and considerations for the committee to discern over.

4 Defining the Role of the Teacher Librarian

Recent research highlights that developing information literate students is the key role of the Teacher Librarian in today's 21st century schools. This view clearly expresses the role as an educational one rather than the traditional administrative focus. As students increase their use of digital devices at home (and consequently in the school) greater attention is needed on developing information literacy skills.

Undeniably the role of the school Teacher Librarian is multifaceted with both leadership and managerial tasks that could be categorised into two areas at St Augustine's: curriculum leader and information specialist.

4.1 Curriculum Leader

As a curriculum leader, our Teacher Librarian is expected to collaboratively work with the principal, school leadership team and class teachers in supporting the teaching/learning cycle. In particular, through the promotion of information literacy, our Teacher Librarian both leads and supports the development of curriculum planning. This ensures not only the effective integration of information resources and technologies into student learning but also places the library at the heart of the learning process.

The Teacher Librarian is an instructional partner with class teachers in developing learning tasks that meet the needs of the students. As such they have strong curriculum knowledge of each of the key learning areas. In addition they have a sound pedagogical understanding of how students learn.

A positive consequence of the unique role of the Teacher Librarian is the promotion of an invigorating learning environment that engages students in reading for both understanding and enjoyment.

4.2 Information Specialist

The Teacher Librarian must be an information specialist. A key role is to organise information for effective retrieval, both in print and non print technologies. This is to support students and teachers in the context of developing curriculum programs. What was once the domain of books, the school library is increasingly becoming a learning centre housing technological devices and internet accessibility.

Being central to the information organisation of the school the Teacher Librarian is well placed to support and encourage students to use the library for independent learning. In this facet of the role the Teacher Librarian is able to help assess student (and staff) information needs and evaluate the library collection, develop collection management policies and manage the library's information services.

5 Addressing the Terms of Reference

Acknowledging that the role of the parliamentary committee is to inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australia's public and private schools, the community of St Augustine's primary school offers the following commentary under the stated terms of reference.

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

How a school defines the function of its library and library staff is often reflective of the resources at hand.

5.1.1 "B.E.R." & 21st Century Libraries

The potential product of the Commonwealth's \$16.2 billion Building the Education Revolution is the provision of an educational infrastructure that will meet the needs of the 21st century learner.

The number one priority of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century component of the building program is for the construction of new libraries. This clearly demonstrates the importance placed upon the role of the school library by the Commonwealth in context of not only school curriculum but also on the role of personnel within the school.

While much debate has occurred over the administration of the funding and the construction cost of building libraries and learning spaces, little has eventuated within educational circles on what 21st century libraries should look like. This also includes the role they should be playing in the learning environments.

Unfortunately the promotion of new libraries throughout Australia will still have the same staffing as before the BER program. Unlike St Augustine's, many schools do not have a Teacher Librarian. Often schools use parent volunteers or teacher assistants to monitor the function of the school library. This arrangement can be unsatisfactory in terms of the library being connected to the whole school.

5.1.2 National Curriculum – Inquiry Underpinnings.

Central to an effective library program is the provision of a research facility. This research focus fits neatly with the development of the new National Curriculum documents. Although there are only a few national syllabuses released for consultation at present, it is clear that an inquiry framework is central to the learning experiences.

This places the role of the librarian at the heart of the curriculum development at the school as the provision of resources, promotion of digital cataloguing and the

explicit teaching of research/inquiry based skills become common elements of school life.

Consequently, not only will teachers need ongoing professional development on the use of guided inquiry in implementing the national curricular but also will Teacher Librarians. Inquiry learning is a most important tool for 21st century teaching and learning. The Teacher Librarian plays a vital role in fostering the whole school inquiry process.

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

Embedded in the role of the Teacher Librarian is the task of encouraging literacy. Being a teacher, Teacher Librarians have the necessary qualifications to support learning throughout the school. In order to support the Teacher Librarian in this role the following obstacles need to be addressed:

5.2.1 Obstacles to Overcome

5.2.2 Release From Face to Face

School libraries should be a dynamic learning centre but in tying the role of the Teacher Librarian to a school's release from face to face program learning is often disconnected to class life. Furthermore it dilutes the role of the Teacher Librarian and limits the learning opportunities for the school.

To promote the school as a community of inquiry and engage students in meaningful learning experiences there is a need for the Teacher Librarian to plan collaboratively with class teachers. As stated previously, the role of the teacher-librarian should involve both teaching and resource management. Using the teacher-librarian as a release from face to face teacher, with an isolated, independent, teaching load, compromises the little time left to provide the resource support needed by teachers.

Our school's personal experience highlights the limitations of using the Teacher Librarian as a RRF teacher. Before moving to a different timetable approach it was not possible for any class to visit the library outside their nominated library lesson. The library is a valuable resource for the school and should be available for teachers to use with their class on a regular basis.

5.2.3 Access to School Library

St Augustine's, like all schools, must provide equitable access for all students to books, information and information technology. Appropriate recurrent funding options are needed in order to increase access and availability of the school library

5.2.4 Budget Constraints

As schools pour funds into the purchase of technological devices and set up new technology infrastructure, the ongoing costs impact not only on the whole school budget but more importantly on the library budget.

5.2.5 Playground Duty

Access to the school library during non class times is reliant upon teachers to undertake extra duties. While it is widely accepted that children become better readers (and spellers and writers) by reading, there is a need to encourage students to visit the school library.

5.3 Connected to Classroom Learning

5.3.1 Yr 1 Pilot Program

Historically, due to library lessons being tied to release from face to face, learning tasks were confined to the classroom with little or no connection to the library program. With minor changes to timetables and an invigorated drive to increase learning opportunities, Year One were structurally timetabled to use the library as a learning centre each week.

The advantages of using the Teacher Librarian in the planning and the teaching cycle are immeasurable and highlights the value of removing the Teacher Librarian from the release from face to face program. The quality of the teaching and learning experiences improved immensely.

5.3.2 Guided Inquiry Focus

Changing timetables has opened up the availability and access to the library. Consequently this has allowed our year level cohorts the opportunity to book the school library to work on inquiry based research. Using the Teacher Librarian as a resource and support the visitations to the library are more meaningful and related to classroom learnings.

5.3.3 Connectedness to Classroom Life

Often the school library program is disconnected to the learning occurring within the classroom. The weekly library lesson, usually tied to release from face to face, is diluted to simply the provision of borrowing and returning. Without a Teacher Librarian, the choosing of reading books is left to the personal whims and interest of the child.

5.4 The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

5.4.1 Career Opportunities

There is substantial variation among schools on the employment of personnel to monitor and manage school libraries. For primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore, the employment of a Teacher Librarian is a rarity as most schools employ the equivalent of teacher aides. While the autonomy and diversity for each school is valuable and desirable it is important that schools remain relevant, connected and rigorous in a fast changing world. A qualified Teacher Librarian should be the minimum requirement for each school library.

While classrooms and therefore class teachers are plentiful in schools there is generally only one school library limiting career opportunities for staff. Stories of schools failing to attract suitable candidates to fulfil Teacher Librarian positions are plentiful. Reasons for such could include:

- a genuine lack of qualified Teacher Librarians,
- lack of actual Teacher Librarian positions in schools,
- poor working conditions
- differing viewpoints on the role of the school library
- lack of acknowledgement of the role of the 21st century library and teaching/learning in 21st century schools.

With these views in mind, a comprehensive research study on the status of Teacher Librarians is warranted.

5.4.2 Role Descriptions

The rapid evolution of the role of the internet and technological innovations, the traditional job description for the Teacher Librarian has expanded to include co-ordination of the digital resources, management of technology and to be an expert in internet technology. For some this detracts staff for applying for Teacher Librarian positions.

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

Supporting schools in the promotion of student learning should be central to governmental and community agencies. Conversations with staff and parents have been plentiful in recent times as we work to implement our school's strategic plan. In order to further these conversations the following points are noted:

- For principals to support the role of Teacher Librarians they need easy access to research on the contribution of Teacher Librarians and school libraries in improving educational outcomes for students. Results of such research would provide guidance and directions for school communities.
- Promoting quality standards for school libraries would enable consistency across institutions and would promote strong networks between school librarians to occur.

- There is disparity between staffing levels of high school libraries and primary school libraries of similar size.
- As we acknowledge the important function provided by school libraries and their Teacher Librarians, there will be greater reference to using the library as a resource to improve student learning.

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

A school must make significant investments in emerging communication and information technologies to develop a digital library service in order to provide online access to catalogues and reference services. As students continue to immerse themselves in digital technology the role of the school to provide learning experiences to support this generation of students' different learning styles is imperative. For this to occur, the St Augustine's experience would suggest the following:

- Even though technology is expanding, books will continue to be printed. Teacher Librarians, in collaboration with teachers, will still be needed to select, purchase, organize and guide access to books and information. Consequently, administrative time needs to be expanded to enable the Teacher Librarian the opportunity to engage in such tasks as well as keeping abreast of the emerging digital technologies.
- The developing role of the Teacher Librarian is on the provision of support. As Teacher Librarians update their skills in information and communications technology, they will become more important to the school community as a service to learning. Supporting the classroom teacher with curriculum support as well as their own collaboratively teaching role all supports the improvement of literacy within the school.

6 Conclusion & Recommendations

School libraries are integral to fostering effective schools for the 21st century. Teacher Librarians will continue to have a key role in the education of their school's students because they are seen to be adaptable to developments in learning, teaching, technology, the internet and in librarianship. While the physical environment of the school library may take on different forms, what won't change is that the information and knowledge environments created by Teacher Librarians in collaboration with teachers will continue to expand. If student learning is to benefit, then this new information and knowledge environment in the school will need to be carefully managed. Consequently it is imperative that a specialist Teacher Librarian is employed in school libraries.

From this discussion it is evident that role of the Teacher Librarian in the 21st century is changing dramatically. It is well publicised that students don't learn in the same way as they did 15 or even 10 years ago. The increasing popularity of social networking and

interactive media sources has made it necessary for educators to change their thinking about how students learn, and subsequently change their teaching techniques and tools.

Teacher Librarians must be maintained as they are viable and indispensable members of the educational community in schools. Their roles and levels of expertise in the areas of information literacy and technology have broadened in recent years. This has seen an increase in their effective collaboration with teachers in developing and implementing 21st century learning opportunities for students.

7 Recommendations and Considerations for Further Development:

- Consistency on school library staffing, funding and Teacher Librarian working conditions across schools is needed
- Provide necessary funding so that schools can staff and fund effective school library programs and services
- Funding for library staff should not be the responsibility of the principal.
- The library should be accessible of the school community five days a week
- Every library should be separately funded to employ a qualified Teacher Librarian
- The Teacher Librarian should not be part of the release from face to face program in the school.
- Until there is acknowledgement of the value of the library in the school as a learning community and that funding is directed to support the role of the library, libraries and their contribution to student learning will continue to be a grey area in schools.