



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

A submission by Riverside Primary School, Launceston, Tasmania 7250

Riverside Primary School is a large, urban primary school presently consisting of 666 students, Kindergarten to Grade 6, ages 4-12. There is a full-time teacher librarian as part of the school staffing quota, as well as a library technician for 20 hours per week. Our teacher librarian supports 28 classes through weekly sessions, resources classrooms with print and digital materials, provides additional support to teachers in all facets of literacy teaching and learning and encourages parent involvement in the literacy development of their children.

Our teacher librarian offers a service to the entire school community by providing for and making accessible:

- Quality literature
- Information literacy – locating, selecting, sorting, evaluating and reporting information
- Digital and multi-modal literacy

These elements are vital if we want students to actively participate in the 21st Century.

Riverside Primary is one of the 'lucky' schools in Tasmania as we have a school large enough to support a full-time teacher librarian. Only high schools, district high schools and large primary schools would be in the position to employ a full-time teacher librarian. The ability for schools to resource even a part-time teacher librarian varies greatly. Sometimes the value placed on the service provided by a teacher librarian depends on school policy, community support and the school resource package. These issues will differ from school to school. At times, some schools believe they are able to provide a library service for their students without the provision of a teacher librarian. However, an effective library service must provide more than an exchanging of books on a weekly basis. With the information and digital literacy demands of our current world this is now of even greater importance.

Some of the issues surrounding teacher librarians and their ability to provide an effective service to their school community include:

- Funding and resourcing – teacher librarians and their library budgets have to compete with many other school priorities, subjects and projects
- Training accessibility – presently the only way to train as a teacher librarian in Tasmania is through on-line study
- Ongoing quality professional learning, particularly in relation to digital literacy
- Networking, both hierarchical and collegial
- The time required to provide an effective internal organisation and maintenance of the library as well as the external provision to clients

As part of the current Federal Government Building Education Revolution, libraries were identified as one of the suggested building priorities. As a result many schools have built, extended or refurbished their current library facilities. However, there is no use investing in buildings without providing the resources to staff them adequately. We must provide teacher librarians with the training and professional learning which focuses on current best practice. Only this will support our students in our ever-evolving digital and informational literate world.

Other Federal Government funding projects, such as Investing in our Schools and computer roll-outs for high school students have provided more computers in many schools. However, simply providing more computers in lab-style settings will not enhance the ability for students to become computer or information literate. Computers are a tool for connecting to information easily. Teacher librarians have a vital role in supporting students in understanding the most effective way to access this information and the credibility of the information they find. As our world changes rapidly and information increases exponentially this will become even more important.

Our teachers and support staff recognise the important role teacher librarians play in our school community.

Our library is a great resource and support to our teaching and learning program and our teacher librarian's expertise and knowledge in this area enables us, as teachers, to access more resources than just books off the shelf. She provides the students with a program that complements and extends the 'in class' teaching program. (Gr 1-2 teacher)

Teachers need many resources to be able to teach effectively. This means schools have a large amount of money tied up in library resources. We need to be accountable for the money spent on these resources so we must have someone who knows what they are doing to be able to manage the resources properly. Teacher librarians have been trained to view information and learning in a different way to classroom teachers and this is valuable for students and class teachers to tap into. (Ex-teacher librarian and now classroom teacher)

Coming into a new position with no resources the library staff were extremely professional and supportive. Without needing a request they showed me and provided a whole range of books which would support the work I was doing with students. They have supported in a wide range of ways, helping with ICT understandings through the use of library IT. I place the highest value and respect on the teacher librarian resource and library support staff. (School Chaplain)

Having a teacher librarian in our library is just so valuable to our programs. My Grade 5-6 planning team feel that including ICT into our planning is essential. Our students are growing up as digital natives and it is imperative that we encourage and support this, as it is already the way of the world and will only become more so as they grow up and enter the workforce. In attempting to provide these kids with meaningful learning experiences our teacher librarian is our school's most valuable ally. Our teacher librarian is always willing and keen to be involved in our planning and to find creative ways to use our library session to integrate with our unit of work.

I believe that ICT is highlighted in the new Australian Curriculum so we will rely on her even more to support student needs. Through her work she has ensured our skills and confidence as ICT teachers as well as the skills and creative use of ICT by students is current. Having a full-time library service is so important in today's education where current practices like Readers' Workshop require students to access a wide range of quality literature. The expertise of a teacher librarian who knows abilities and interests can be a valuable source of guidance for students in their choices. (Grade 5-6 teacher)

I've taught in smaller schools where there is no teacher librarian to work with children and it really does have a negative impact on a school! You miss out on the expertise and depth of knowledge to give students the best. It devalues and definitely reduces the opportunities for children to tap into a wealth of knowledge, specific skills and all the extra programs our teacher librarian provides. I would be horrified if this integral part of our school curriculum is lost. Aren't we trying to empower our children and make them the best they can be so that we really are the clever country? (Grade 1-2 teacher)

Our students understand what the teacher librarian and library is able to offer them.

Our teacher librarian has shown us where to find different kinds of books all by ourselves (Hayley – 7)

We use the interactive whiteboard to learn all kinds of different things (Lily – 7)

We learn how to treat books the right way like how to turn pages and look after the spines (Mackenzie – 6)

Our teacher librarian shows us how to look up special stuff on the computers (Jessi – 6)

We know that books go in alphabetical order in the library (Danielle – 6)

Our teacher librarian showed us the non-fiction books are the true things and we find them by looking at the numbers on the spine (Sarah – 6). Those numbers tell me where the book lives (Taylah – 6)

Our school library is great because we can find information easily. There are thousands of books to read. It's easy to find good books for your age and for free (Jesse – 10, Hugh – 10)

Not only do we enjoy the library facilities but our families do too. We don't only use it as a library but we use it as a different type of learning centre. We use it for Smartbots – a robot building program, Tournament of Minds – a tournament that increases our thinking abilities and a place to borrow laptops (Isobel – 11, Shannan – 10)

Teachers and students of Riverside Primary School

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