



### **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

I make this submission as a classroom teacher and teacher librarian with over 18 years experience teaching full time in New South Wales K-6 schools, the last two years as a teacher librarian. I have completed the requirements of a graduate diploma in teacher librarianship through Charles Sturt University, and will complete the requirements for a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) in June. Without this specialist training I would not be equipped to carry out my role as teacher librarian in my NSW DET K-6 school (see Appendix for my role statement). I make this submission, without prejudice, on my own behalf, and on behalf of the members of the NSW Teachers Federation employed at Kororo Public School, NSW. This submission addresses the following terms of reference

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

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

The most significant role of teacher librarians is as teachers. We teach students to become effective users of ideas and information, to critically think, evaluate, synthesize and create meaning, to construct their own knowledge and understanding. As life-long learners, students need to be information literate.

Lonsdale's (2003) review of the research about the impact of school libraries states that there is evidence to show that

- collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers;
- test scores are higher when there is higher usage of the school library;
- a print-rich environment leads to more reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and writing style;
- the extent to which books are borrowed from school libraries shows a strong relationship with reading achievement whereas borrowing from classroom libraries does not;
- integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information-seeking skills;
- libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning; (Lonsdale, 2003, p.1)

Todd's research on [student learning in school libraries](#) highlights the importance of having trained specialists with credentials as teacher and librarian, in terms of student learning and achievement.

Students as school library users themselves value the role of the school library and the teacher librarian, as evidenced in Hay's research on [Australian school libraries and student learning](#).

The Australian School Library Association/Australian Library and Information Association, states that excellent teacher-librarians

- have a sound understanding of how children and young adults become independent readers
- have a comprehensive understanding of literacy, literature for children and young adults, curriculum and specific programs in their schools
- have a detailed knowledge of how to promote and foster reading
- create and nurture an information-rich learning environment which supports the needs of the school community
- provide access to information resources through efficient, effective and professionally-managed systems
- foster an environment where learners are encouraged and empowered to read, view, listen and respond for understanding and enjoyment
- evaluate student learning to provide evidence of progress in information literacy and reading foster a reading culture through the active promotion of literature

[\(Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians\)](#)

School libraries and teacher librarians will continue to be crucial in the development of improved educational and community outcomes because of the unique role they play. They cater for a specific group within society (ie a school community). They are focused on providing the latest in educational resources, experiences and opportunities and therefore make a contribution to improving educational outcomes for the unique school community they serve.

Qualified teacher librarians are often the only staff members in schools to hold dual qualifications. As teacher librarians we make a unique contribution to educational outcomes precisely because we hold dual qualifications in education and librarianship. We collaborate with colleagues to ensure that library programs are linked to essential learning across the curriculum in classrooms. We are in the position of being able to expose our entire student cohort to new reading materials in a variety of genres every week of the school year. We ensure our library collection caters for the special interests and abilities of our students. We develop our library collection with the aim of supporting teaching and learning programs in our own school community. We source and acquire materials requested by our library users when they meet our selection criteria. We open our library at lunchtime and after school for students (and parents) to use our resources and facilities in their own time. In addition, teacher librarians provide opportunities for our students to participate in book/reading related events. At my school I coordinate and/or organise many events to encourage and promote reading and literacy in my role as teacher librarian. These include

- book fairs
- author and illustrator visits
- reading clubs
- the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge
- annual Children's Book Council of Australia Book Week activities and festivities

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

The Australian School Library Association's statement on [school librarians and information and communication technologies](#) highlights the important role of teacher librarians in providing the school community with access to a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, one where school library users are able to use ICTs to enhance lifelong learning and improve educational outcomes. Teacher librarians are often responsible for managing computer networks and ICT issues in their schools, because many schools, especially public schools, cannot afford to employ ICT specialists to do this job.

Teacher librarians willingly update their skills in IT; network with colleagues; and review and select online websites, electronic databases, learning objects, webquests, social networking tools, etc for use by all school library users. This is part of their collection development role, their teaching and curriculum support role and their role in improving literacy. Teacher librarians, in collaboration with teachers, are needed to perform this and many other aspects of collection development, and to guide access to books and information in both traditional and electronic formats.

Teacher librarians specialise in teaching information literacy. Information literacy includes critically reading print, graphics, video, and all learning objects to build knowledge. The information literate seek diverse viewpoints. Information literacy includes the ethical use of information and responsible use of social networking tools.

A major part of our teaching role is as information specialist. In our role as information literacy specialists, we teach students how to evaluate information on the internet in terms of its currency, relevance, accuracy and authenticity. We collaborate with colleagues to create [digital pathfinders](#) specifically [for our student cohorts](#). We work with colleagues to provide opportunities for upskilling in information and communications technologies to benefit our students. Most recently I worked with a colleague teaching Year One to improve student literacy outcomes and develop a [blog](#) for sharing the students work with their families at home. These resources have been developed because of my specialist training in ICTs as a teacher librarian, and in my role as teacher and instructional partner collaborating with classroom teachers. These technologies are of paramount importance to students. They encourage collaborative learning and the creation of new knowledge, which underpins constructivist learning theories that are being widely used in education at all levels today.

My concern is that if a school has a library staffed by teachers (without library training), or by library technicians (without teacher training), who is going to provide students and colleagues with access to resources and opportunities such as those outlined above. Who will have the expertise necessary to develop and update policy documents necessary for the successful running of the school library? Who will be responsible for the management of ICTs and computer networks in schools that cannot afford to outsource this role? Who will provide the cross curricula knowledge necessary to develop and maintain a library collection that effectively supports the schools teaching and learning programs and enhances educational outcomes, and especially information literacy? (see Appendix as an example of a thorough list of unique duties of teacher librarians)

As you can see, from the above submission, teacher librarianship is about much more than organising and circulating books to students. It is obvious that school libraries and dually qualified information specialists, ie teacher librarians, are essential and must be available in every school community.

I give permission for this submission to be made publicly available at the inquiry.

Monique O'Shea, Dip Teach (Inf/Prim), MEd (Teacher Librarianship)  
Teacher Librarian  
Kororo Public School,  
Coffs Harbour NSW 2450

## Appendix

### Kororo Public School Teacher Librarian Role Statement



The Teacher Librarian performs the following roles:

#### 1. Information Specialist

- Sources and collates resources to support the Kororo Public School themes of study boxes.)
- Provides training for all staff in the use of the OPAC.
- Provides awareness of/training for new Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in professional development meetings.
- Provides students with opportunities to develop information literacy skills and use the NSW DET information skills process (ISP).
- Facilitates student and teacher use of ICT facilities so that optimal educational use is made of the resources.
- Liaises with new teachers so that they are aware of library facilities and use.
- Develops and implements policies and procedures which ensure access to information is not impeded; interprets laws and DET policies regarding information.
- Responds to individual staff requests to assist in sourcing materials outside the library
- Responds to individual student requests to assist in independent research

#### 2. Teacher / Instructional Partner

- Teaches students to access, evaluate and use information from multiple sources in order to learn, to think, and to create and apply new knowledge.
- Collaborates with classroom teachers to analyse learning and information needs of teaching and learning programs.
- Assists students and teachers in selection and use of instructional materials.

- Encourages students to read for pleasure and motivates their reading through a variety of methods and resources.
- Orients students to the library's services and facilities
- Develops teaching resources which may be used to improve information literacy

### 3. Library Manager /Administrator

- Creates and maintains an inviting library environment that is conducive to learning.
- Supervises daily operations of the library.
- Implements, reviews and evaluates Library policy and procedures for efficient library operation on an annual basis.
- Prepares written library reports as required.
- Oversees the Oasis Library Management system, including following up on overdue books, updating the Web Enquiry homepage.
- Ensures that there is a well-balanced collection in the library to serve the varied needs of staff and students, in accordance with the KPS Library Collection Management Policy.
- Accessions and catalogues new materials and adds them to the library collection for use by staff and students.
- Promotes the library collection to the school community.
- Ensures that the existing stock is evaluated on a regular basis.
- Conducts annual stocktake of library collection
- Consults with staff in evaluating, selecting and acquiring library resources and equipment, in accordance with the KPS Library Collection Management Policy.
- Maintains a Teacher-librarian professional materials collection, including journals and publishers' catalogues.
- Attends Coffs Harbour Librarians' network meetings.
- Serves on appropriate curriculum and KLA committees (eg Technology, Literacy).
- Participates in professional development activities relating to education, librarianship and information and communication technologies to increase expertise in all areas pertaining to library matters.

- Networks with other libraries and information agencies (eg: Coffs Harbour City Library and Information Service, Coffs Harbour schools' teacher librarians, OZTLNET listserve).
- Maintains membership of professional organizations such as the Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA), and consults their policies pertaining to school libraries and teacher librarians, in accordance with KPS Collection Management Policy and the NSW DET Handbook for School Libraries

(Updated August 2009 by M O'Shea (TL) and C Attwood (Acting DP))