Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

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This submission is being made to counteract the idea that with increasing use of technology in schools, Teacher Librarians and the extensive School Library collections which have been developed over many years will no longer be required, relevant or useful in enhancing the learning and educational outcomes for students, teachers and the school community.

Teacher Librarians have spent many years developing the skill, knowledge and expertise to enable them to fulfil their dual functions as an efficient Teacher and Librarian. This includes: training 4+ years for their intitial teaching degree, followed by at least five years of classroom teaching, then usually another 2+ years to complete a Masters Degree specialising in Teacher Librarianship, followed by their years of experience actually working as Teacher Librarians.

This submission is organised in seven sections:
1. Summary
2. Role of the Teacher Librarian
3. General Comments
4. The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy
5. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians
6. Appendices
7. Bibliography

1. Summary

As the world and schools are changing, the role of the Teacher Librarian and School Libraries is also changing. The dual role of the Teacher Librarian as an enthusiastic valued member of the school community, assisting both students and staff, is becoming more complex and diverse. As part of their commitment to their profession, Teacher Librarians are constantly updating their technological expertise.

There is little point in giving students a new piece of technological equipment, or an assignment to "do using the internet", or a new Web 2.0 tool, and telling students to just "go and complete a certain task". Students, and teachers, need to be trained in how to use this technology, and the Teacher Librarian is one of the key personnel in schools who provides this training. Now, with the increasing use of technology in schools and society, and huge amounts of information which is available online, the role of the Teacher Librarian is becoming more heavily involved with assisting students and staff to develop their digital and information literacy skills. This assists clients learn how to responsibly and effectively use and apply this technology and these technological tools, to maximise the learning which occurs, both now and into their future lives.

Another area of significant change in School Libraries is the increasing interest and enthusiasm of students to 'read for pleasure', and enjoy free reading. Teacher Librarians and the books in their School Libraries play a huge role in developing the literacy of students by encouraging and promoting this reading for pleasure.

2. Role of the Teacher Librarian

The Teacher Librarian supports and implements the vision of the School Community through advocating and building effective Library and Information Services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners. The Teacher Librarian is an educator and information manager. Knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning styles are combined with knowledge of resource management, information services, technology, personnel management and information access systems. The Teacher Librarian is responsible for the integration of these functions into a responsive and dynamic resource for the school community.

The Teacher Librarian strives for excellence, and is responsible for all aspects of the management and functioning of the School Library, aiming to consolidate its' role as the **Hub of Learning** in the school.

The main responsibilities of the Teacher Librarian lie in three areas:
1. **Library organisation and management.**
    - Collection development - the Teacher Librarian selects, organises and provides a wide range of relevant resources and technologies to satisfy the curriculum and recreational needs of the Library's clients, within the constraints of the budget.
    - Develop and maintain relevant Web and online resources
    - Promotion of literacy, reading and literature. The Teacher Librarian promotes a reading culture and provides opportunities for students and staff to broaden their reading experiences and explore a broad range of text types and literature
    - Library environment, space, facilities and equipment - The Teacher Librarian organises and helps to maintain a positive, inviting, organised, efficient, well maintained and workable Library environment.
    - Managing and co-ordinating Library staff
    - Develop then regularly review and update all Library documentation, in conjunction with relevant staff and students.

2. **Education role.** The Teacher Librarian creates and nurtures an information-rich learning environment which supports the needs of the school community.
    - Teaching and Learning
      a) With students: the Teacher Librarian performs the duties of information specialist, teacher and instructional consultant in various literacy resources and strategies. The Teacher Librarian collaborates with teachers to integrate research, digital and information literacy skills into the curriculum. The Teacher Librarian empowers students to be independent learners throughout their lives, ensuring that they are effective users of ideas and information, both now and in the future.
      b) With teachers: many teachers are apprehensive and lacking confidence, expertise and the time to learn new technology. The Teacher Librarian is one of the main resources available to assist staff to develop the skill, knowledge and confidence, to be able to implement technology into their teaching and learning programs.
    - Learning technologies

    The Teacher Librarian utilises current research methods and technology in the online environment, to support the curriculum. The Library provides a wide range of relevant resources and technologies to satisfy the varied curriculum and recreational needs of its users. The Teacher Librarian continuously updates their knowledge and expertise, especially in relation to technology.

3. **Professional Role.** The Teacher Librarian maintains a high level of professionalism in all areas of education, leadership and school life.
    - Professional development – continuously learning and updating skills and knowledge, and assisting students and staff with their development

- Advocacy and public relations. The Teacher Librarian communicates the mission, goals and objectives of the Library to the whole school community, and plays a major role in creating a welcoming, efficient, user centred environment with a dynamic learning culture, staffed by skilled, committed and caring professionals.
- Whole School activities. The Teacher Librarian contributes to, and actively participates in school wide activities, such as assemblies, coaching, co-curricular activities and special events.

3. General Comments

Timetabling and Teacher Librarian Availability
In High Schools in particular, one of the strengths of Teacher Librarians in their current situation is that they are not timetabled on to regular weekly lessons. This allows them to be availabe at any time to assist staff and students, at a time when it is convenient for those clients.

School Library is a Safe Haven for ALL Students
Another vital role in the operation of the school as a whole, is that the Teacher Librarian ensures that the School Library is a safe haven for all students. Teacher Librarians pride themselves on their emphasis that every student is safe from bullying and harrasment in the Library. As the Teacher Librarian is able to be in the Library all day, they are well placed to enforce this situation. The Teacher Librarian frequently plays a vital counselling and welfare role for students in need, at the time of their crisis.

Type of resources being purchased is changing
As the Internet and various other online sources are being used more frequently to find information, the emphasis on the type of books in many School Libraries is changing. Now, more emphasis is being placed on purchasing books which will be read "for pleasure" and general interest, rather than because they have to be used for an assignment. Some of the limited budget which may have been spent on Non-Fiction resources is now partially being used for technology resources, and more 'read for pleasure' books.

Diversity of uses for School Libraries
School Libraries and Teacher Librarians are often considered an essential and crucial part of their schools. The School Library may be used for a variety of purposes, in addition to the traditional reference and book accessing area. As Manager of the School Library, the Teacher Librarian has a vital role in ensuring the smooth running of the Library, and effective use of the Library Facility for the benefit of the whole school community. These additional uses may include: private and small group study area, debating and public speaking venue, displays, seminar area, video conference classroom, meeting venue, special examination or function centre.

4. The future potential of School Libraries and Teacher Librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

Information Literacy

As life-long learners, students need to be information literate. Teacher librarians specialise in teaching information literacy. School Libraries in 2010 and beyond do not simply provide resources for students. They are concerned with creating 'a community of lifelong learners' with the skills to effectively locate, use, present, and evaluate information in a variety of print and digital formats.

Teacher Librarians help students develop '…the ability to process and use information effectively …the basic survival skill for those who wish to be successful members of the 21st century.' (Hay, 2001)

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.

Some teachers over estimate the skills of students in the area of Information Skills. These skills include: Knowledge Finding, Comprehending, Applying, Analysing, Synthesising and Evaluating (Blooms Original Taxonomy). Teacher Librarians, being specialists in this field can assist students and staff to maximise their time and outcomes in these vital areas, improving the quality of process and product.

Digital Literacy

There is little value in just giving a student a new piece of technology, such as a laptop / netbook computer and expecting that they will use it in any way near its capacity for their learning. In the same way, there is little value in just giving students an assignment, research or assessment task and saying "use the internet to do it". Teacher Librarians have the expertise, skills, attitude, opportunity and enthusiasm to maximise students learning in many situations such as these.

Teacher Librarians are at the forefront of emerging educational trends, in helping students and teachers deal with new technology. As new technologies are being used more frequently, new literacies are needed to be able to interpret, synthesise and utilise this now technology. Teacher Librarians assist students and teachers to be able to use these new literacies and apply higher order thinking skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy accounts for many of the traditional classroom practices, behaviours and actions, but does not account for the new processes and actions associated with Web 2.0 technologies and increasing use of computers. The diagram in Appendix 2 shows how Blooms Taxonomy has been revised to take into account these new technological and Web 2.0 tools. The tools, etc are constantly changing. Blooms Digital Taxonomy, which is being heavily promoted by Teacher Librarians, includes the lower to higher order thinking skills of: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating and (very importantly) Creating.

Teacher Librarians are among those keenest to evolve and try to keep up to date with this change, and assist both students and staff to understand, apply and embrace these changes. Learning isn't just about telling students these tools or technologies can be found at a certain place. It is about assisting students to use these tools to facilitate learning. Outcomes are measured by competence of use, and most importantly, the quality of the process or product.

Traditional literacy

Teacher Librarians maintain an in depth knowledge of literature, both clasics and recent releases. They devote much time to helping students and teachers select books which they will enjoy reading. Many Teacher Librarians run specialised reading programs within their schools to encourage a love of reading.

Free voluntary reading, or reading for pleasure has a positive impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling ability, grammar usage and writing style. Children who read more typically have higher literacy development (Krashen 1993, 1998 in Lonsdale, 2003).

Many studies have shown that free voluntary reading is at least as effective as conventional teaching methods in helping children to do well on standardised tests. Reading for pleasure provides many benefits that these tests don't measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improve (Krashen, 2004).

Teacher Librarians are specialists in encouraging increased literacy levels through free voluntary reading or reading for pleasure.

5. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of School Libraries and Teacher Librarians

Students need to be taught the higher order thinking skills of: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating and Creating.
Teacher Librarians collaborate with teachers helping students to develop research skills and to guide students to become independent learners who can negotiate a myriad of complex digital sources of information. Given the vast volumes of information available, the rapidly obsolete nature of much of this information, and the questionable quality of much that is available on the Internet, the role of the Teacher Librarian has arguably become even more important than in the past. A crucial factor is how this vast amount of available information is used, rather than it just being available. This is another area where the expertise of the Teacher Librarian is vital.

Students need to be taught how to find and responsibly use relevant information from the virtually limitless amount of information that is available.
Without digital education (frequently done by Teacher Librarians), many students and teachers will perform a basic search, such as in Google and think they have all the necessary information to cut and paste to complete their assignment. Teacher Librarians are educating users how to effectively and discerningly use the huge amounts of information which is available. Teching responsible and ethical behaviour in an online environment is another of the Teacher Librarian's new responsibilities.

Teacher Librarians willingly and continuously update their skills in IT. They are often at the forefront in their school for assisting students and staff with their technology needs. This is all part of their collection development role, their teaching and curriculum support role and their role in improving literacy.

Quality information, for example through online databases, is not free. Teacher librarians, in collaboration with teachers, are needed to select, purchase, organise and guide access to books and information in a variety of formats. The formats in which books are available is changing. Now, as well as being the traditional printed pages which are bound together, books may be available in other formats, such as e-books, CDRoms, etc.

In many NSW schools, the "Connected Clasroom", which has interactive whiteboard and video conferencing facilities, has been installed in the School Library. One of the main reasons for choosing this location is that the Teacher Librarian enthusiastically assists staff and students to use this equipment.

Teacher Librarians often support the technological teaching and learning programs in the school by:
- locating, identifying and training clients in Web 2.0 technologies
- loaning and helping clients to use of digital cameras, data projectors, and other equipment
- developing library web access points, webpages, wikis, blogs, etc
- assisting with training students and staff in interactive whiteboards and video conferencing facilities
- networking with colleagues in technology
- providing training: to individual students, classes, individual teachers, groups of teachers, whole staff and various community groups, such as the P&C
- reviewing, developing and selecting online websites, learning objects, webquests
- researching and selecting appropriate online databases
- publicising and training students and teachers in new technologies, especially Web 2.0 tools

Thus digital technology is enhancing the work and opportunities for Teacher Librarians to improve learning outcomes and processes for students and teachers. As more technological resources and Web 2.0 tools become available, the expertise and input of the Teacher Librarian is becoming even more important.

Appendix 1.

Report on the Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement

7. Conclusion to the report by Michele Lonsdale

Existing research shows that school libraries can have a positive impact, whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally, on student achievement. There is evidence to show that:

- a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community;
- a strong computer network connecting the library's resources to the classroom and laboratories has an impact on student achievement;
- the quality of the collection has an impact on student learning;
- test scores are higher when there is higher usage of the school library;
- 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;
- 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;
- a positive difference can be made to student achievement when school libraries cooperate with public libraries;
- libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning;
- the impact of school libraries appears strongest at primary and junior high school and weakest at the upper levels of secondary school, although more research is needed to show why this is the case at the senior level; and that
- there is insufficient research on subgroups of school library users (particularly students at risk), the nature of the contribution that school librarians make to student acquisition of information literacy skills, and the extent to which a school librarian's personal attributes and qualities contribute to student achievement.

Todd (2001b) outlines some of the key findings that establish a positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement. These include a shared educational philosophy centring on inquiry learning; the systematic development of students' information and critical literacy skills; the development of students' information competence via flexibly delivered classroom instruction; active reading programs that foster higher levels of reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and language skills; and successful school library programs that set clear expectations and gather systematic feedback from students and teachers.

Further research would be useful in relation to the impact of school library programs on information literacy skills acquisition; the impact of personal attributes, qualifications and roles of school librarians on

student learning (Williams, Wavell and Coles 2001); the impact of school library interventions on particular groups of disadvantaged and at risk students, including NESB students and indigenous students; and the impact of school library interventions on students' confidence, motivation and self-esteem. It is important to know why the influence of school libraries on the learning of students in upper secondary school is apparently less than at the junior levels so that appropriate strategies could be adopted to maximise the school library contribution to the learning of these senior students. There is a need to investigate the kinds of qualitative methods that will enable the more intangible effects of school library programs on student learning to be measured, such as the kinds of indicators developed by Williams and Wavell (2001a) to measure student motivation. Given that the summary of evidence contained in reviews such as this is intended to foster greater recognition of the important role that school librarians can play in student learning, it would also be useful to have a better sense of national trends in school library staffing in Australia as well as any significant differences in roles, responsibilities, training, and working conditions among systems.

Throughout this literature review the underlying question has been: if research over the past five or six decades has consistently shown a positive relationship between student achievement and school libraries, then why does the 'case' for libraries still need to be put? Why do practitioners still need to convince decision-makers and administrators of the positive correlation between library services and student achievement?
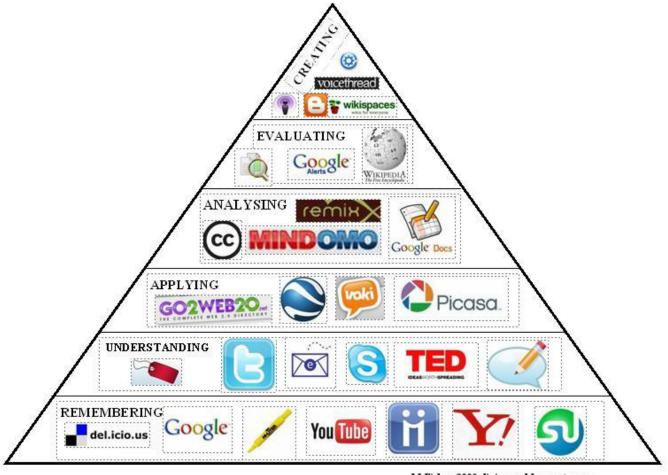
Hartzell (1993) offers several reasons why the contribution of the school librarian to student achievement might not be widely recognised in schools. First, parents usually have minimal contact with teacher librarians on a day-to-day basis and so will most likely have little idea of what impact the school library has had on their child's learning; second, teachers tend to view librarians as support resources rather than as fellow teachers; third, it is difficult to assess the extent to which a school librarian has contributed ideas, resources and services to a successful project; and fourth, librarians tend to be rather isolated, finding it difficult to build relationships with other staff in the school. For these reasons a teacher or administrator is more likely to be given recognition for student achievement than a teacher librarian.

Action research in school libraries, then, is a crucial tool for raising the profile and prestige of library professionals. Todd (2001) is emphatic that school librarians will not be able to enhance their status until they recognise the need for evidence-based practice 'that is directed towards demonstrating the real tangible power of your contribution to the school's learning goals' (p. 11). It is not enough to be doing good things, he suggests; the question 'what difference did this make to student learning?' needs constantly to be asked. Evidence-based practice, Todd warns, 'is fundamental to future survival'.

Lonsdale, M. Report on the Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement. Melbourne, March 2003. http://www.asla.org.au/research/conclusion.htm [Accessed 15th April 2010]
Australian Council for Educational Research
ACER Cunningham Library

Appendix 2.

Blooms Digital Taxonomy

Fisher, M. 2009. Blooms Digital Taxonomy Diagram. Accessed at *Visual Bloom's*. http://visualblooms.wikispaces.com/ [Accessed 15th April 2010]

Appendix 3.

Research Studies

Several Austrlian and numerous overseas studies demonstrate that effective, well resourced Library Programs can have a positive impact, whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally, on student achievement. This inquiry submission did not repeat the findings of this research, as the studies are freely available (see below).

Australian Research

- Student learning through Australian school libraries Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions [PDF]
  Lyn Hay, Charles Sturt University 2005
  This article is the first part of an extensive report into the relationship between student learning and school libraries in Australia. http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol3num2/hay.pdf

- Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1.
  Combes, B. 2008. ASLA, ALIA & ECU.
  Retrieved from http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php

- Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research [PDF]
  Michele Lonsdale, ACER 2003
  This Australian review focuses on studies conducted since 1990, which show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement—whether such achievement is measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally.
  Read it in html format on the ASLA website. http://www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm

- Report on the impact of School Libraries on student achievement
  Lonsdale, M. 2003.
  For the purposes of the IEA study, reading *literacy* was defined as 'the **...** who read more typically have higher *literacy* development (*Krashen* 1993, 1998). **...**
  www.asla.org.au/research/reading_**literacy**.htm

- Mapping Literacy Achievement:
  Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey [PDF]
  This 1997 Australian report notes Library use as a significant variable on achievements in literacy:
  Extensive use of the school library was associated with a difference of as many as 27 points to students' literacy achievements when compared with non-use of the library. Section 4: p. 207
  http://www.dest.gov.au/mla/mla.pdf

International Research

- School Libraries and Student achievement in Ontario [PDF]
  The Ontario Library Association, April 2006
  A study showing a link between school libraries and students' reading achievement.
  http://www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/137_eqao_pfe_study_2006.pdf

- School Libraries Work! [PDF]
  Scholastic Research Foundation Paper, 2006
  Brings together findings from nearly a decade of empirical studies that cite the measurable impact school libraries and professional library staff have on student achievement.
  http://listbuilder.scholastic.com/content/stores/LibraryStore/pages/images/SLW3.pdf

- Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries
  Ross J. Todd and **Carol C. Kuhlthau, 2003 (CISSL)**
  Nearly 100 percent of Ohio students who took part in a recent research study indicated that the school library, its services and school librarians have helped them with their learning.
  http://www.oelma.org/StudentLearning/documents/OELMAResearchStudy8page.pdf

- Why Should Principals Support School Libraries?
  Gary Hartzell, 2002
  This ERIC Digest suggests that it is in the best interest on both the principal and their school's students to support school libraries because quality library programs can enhance student achievement. http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/libraries.htm

- Proof of the Power
  Keith Curry Lance, 2001
  This ERIC Digest surveys recent research on the impact of School Library Media Programs on the academic achievement of U.S. Public School students.
  http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-2/proof.htm

7. Bibliography

Fisher, M. 2009. Blooms Digital Taxonomy Diagram. Accessed at *Visual Bloom's*.
http://visualblooms.wikispaces.com/ [Accessed 15th April 2010]

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Krashen, S. 2004. *Free voluntary reading: New research, applications and controversies.*
http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/pac5/all.html [Accessed 15th April 2010]

Lonsdale, M. 2003. *Report on the impact of School Libraries on student achievement.*
www.asla.org.au/research/reading_**literacy**.htm [Accessed 15th April 2010]