A Submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians

The role of the Library in schools can be understood in three main ways: as space, as service and as story.

THE SPACE

A. The physical space: Rather than emptying out libraries are becoming the centre for curriculum, learning and community networking. The library connects the work done in the classroom with extended goals of education; it is where compulsory education becomes voluntary- and lives.

Spaces that support the growing role of libraries have not been widely created in schools as they have begun to be in university academic libraries, local community libraries and State libraries.

Building funding needs to target the development of such spaces and needs to open up, in school communities, ideas of what libraries are (can be). Is there any reason why a school library should not also include a cafeteria and a bookshop etc, and so be a community hub, yet also work closely with the other libraries in the area in resource sharing? Libraries are increasingly meeting places outside of school hours, in which it is (more than) OK to study.

School library spaces need to be built that are living and learning spaces. The storage and collection of resources needs to occur in these spaces, rather than the other way round. The use of high end technology and dynamic, soft and flexible use of space is the way to go.

B. The digital space: The library is like a two way coat- turn it into digital space and you can still use it as a library. Mobile technology is so very exciting here. School libraries can be in classrooms and homes and on holidays with the people they serve.

Funding needs to target technologies used by school communities that extend learning and engagement beyond the classroom, technologies and new digital spaces that extend the range, the power and the life of the learning that occurs. School libraries are the ideal place from which such digital spaces and networks can grow and targeted funding should reflect this.

THE SERVICE

Library services provide multiple nodes for connection in complex learning environments.

A. To Staff: The Teacher-Librarian, Librarian or Library Manager's prime role is to support and participate in the development of the teaching and learning principles and practices of the school as a whole, but also, to support the work of the specialists in their particular learning areas. This means that Library personnel must be able to work with experts in their own fields, and this requires a specific kind of leadership quality. There must be a willingness to allow for decentralisation, through participation and adaption, of "control". The emphasis on specialist

library knowledge directing others should be replaced with an emphasis on facilitating "community" as informing and connecting with others.

B. To Students: The library service should support a student into the learning "community (collective)" that is a school. In a learning community knowledge is created by all the participants and as it is created and shared, provides new opportunities for further learning and creative enterprise. All learning is of interest to a library, all specialist areas supported and included. In the Library, students are given the opportunity to discover how things are connected- what they learn, what they do and what they experience as "at home" and "at school" and "in class". Forming these connections through the social and educational roles that a library plays in a school is essential for best practice in education.

Personnel best suited to fulfil these roles are not necessarily library, IT or academic specialists first, though understanding and experience with a specialty area to a high level is essential. Personnel must also have the skills to manage or be part of a team that interacts with large numbers of materials, pieces of information and people to create a moving, integrating, developing whole. Personnel must recognise that this is achieved through supporting individual freedoms, independence, responsibility and trust.

Library personnel must love what technology has done for libraries and want to be part of further developments, even at the school library level.

THE STORY

The library can be the text of the story of a learning community, leaving and cherishing fine and lasting traces and patterns of learning and wonder and participating in the creation of unique, (in)credible, and deeply meaningful ways in and out, to and from the present. The large, busy, well funded, well built library in this sense is not a monolith to its own importance in education, but an outward, living sign that education is happening- and that community is happening too.

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