School Library Association of Queensland Inc
submission to the
Inquiry into school libraries and teacher-librarians in Australian schools

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School Library Association of Queensland Inc (SLAQ)

Purpose of the Inquiry:

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.

Purpose of the School Library Association of Queensland Inc (SLAQ) submission to the Inquiry:

To inform the Inquiry through its Terms of Reference, of the capacity of teacher-librarians to support student learning through their skills and proficiencies and the significance and value of well resourced and staffed school libraries in relation to student learning.

Summary:

> 'Teacher-librarians have a valuable role because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. They support and implement the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners.'

(Learning for the future: developing information services in schools, Second edition, p. 60-62)

Because they are *curriculum leaders*, teacher-librarians plan, teach and evaluate collaboratively with teachers, promote information literacy and collaborate with principals and curriculum leaders in schools to ensure that the *impact of policies and investments* on student learning is positive. Working closely with teachers in delivering the school curriculum, teacher-librarians are able to ensure that school libraries reflect current school and systemic priorities, student and school community needs and provide a safe, supportive environment in which students can learn, thus contributing to *improved learning outcomes* for students.

Because they are *information services managers*, teacher-librarians develop information systems and services responsive to student and teacher needs. *Training and professional judgement of teacher-librarians* leads to the effective management and resourcing of school libraries.

Because they are *information specialists*, teacher-librarians provide training and assistance to students and staff in the effective use and interpretation of information systems and technologies. *Digital technologies and pedagogies* play a major role in this support.

Data driven evidence indicates that school libraries, staffed by qualified teacher-librarians, have a positive impact on student learning.

Background of the Association:

The School Library Association of Queensland Inc is the professional body which has represented Queensland teacher-librarians and school libraries from all education sectors since the late 1960's. Its aims are to promote positive learning outcomes for students; collaborative partnerships with educational professionals in many educational settings; curriculum leadership; connections between students and learning through literature, information literacy, resource-based learning and technology; and the sharing of innovative pedagogical ideas.

Terminology:

In the context of this response, the term '*teacher-librarian*' refers to a qualified, experienced teacher with postgraduate qualifications in teacher – librarianship: '*librarian*' refers to a person who has qualifications in library management but has no teaching qualifications: '*school librarian*' refers to a qualified librarian with no teaching qualifications who works in a school library with children (a common position in schools overseas). These terms are not interchangeable as the positions represent vastly differing roles.

Terms of Reference:

1. What *evidence* and *examples* can you provide of the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities?

Policies:

National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN):
>   These national tests have been designed to assess language conventions, writing reading and numeracy. The diversity of Literacies presented throughout the test materials (visual, information, communication, media…) indicate a need to master the traditional skills and techniques, genres and texts, and their applications through new media and new technologies.(National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy). Teacher – librarians work with teachers to support student readiness for this assessment by providing curriculum appropriate resources, teaching specific aspects of the program whether literacy or numeracy, and in-servicing teachers in innovative pedagogy to support the program. They are involved in whole-school literacy planning; the implementation of the English Road map and the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) to support student preparation for these tests.

Major impact:
>   While funding has struggled to match resourcing requirements teacher-librarians have provided positive and professional support to classroom teachers. The time taken to model and teach generic structure and multi-literacy skills is considerable.

Indigenous schooling:
>   The Australian Government's target of reducing Indigenous disadvantage includes halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade and halving the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020. Teacher-librarians source appropriate materials to support any programs (such as the Indigenous Early Childhood program) in this area, allowing students to access data bases, on-line resources etc; and develop sustainable information skills programs with teachers.

Major Impact:
>   Untrained personnel working in school libraries do not have the curriculum background to source Professional Development and culturally specific resources for these programs to be effective enough to meet these goals.
>   {Queensland Government 2009. New Basics Project - *Multiliteracies and communications media*. Viewed 10 April 2009. Brisbane, Education Queensland. http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/curric-org/comm.html}

Digital Education Revolution (DER):
>   This program has an aim to contribute sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools that will prepare students for further education, training and to live and work in a digital world by providing for new ICT equipment for all secondary schools with students in years 9 to12. As information specialists, teacher–librarians use current Web 2.0 technologies, develop digital literacy skills in students allowing them to identify necessary information and promote the use of ICT's in the curriculum.

Major Impact:
>   School libraries have become the storage facility for computer hardware, thus reducing learning spaces; support for student use of laptops has increased; teacher-

librarians with IT knowledge and capabilities have become the technical managers of these resources; technical support time impacts on teaching time; the need for online resources increases.

The Australian National Curriculum:

The implementation of the National Curriculum will necessitate appropriate resourcing to cater for any changes met these key learning area curriculum changes. The role of the teacher-librarian has been to support the implementation of new curriculum. Central to this curriculum is an understanding of the changes which will affect current programs. Already with the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English, Mathematics, Science and History*, teacher-librarians are addressing the implications of resourcing the curriculum and planning with teachers to teach key concept skills and processes.

Major Impact:

Greater emphasis on teaching of a wider variety of literacies, generic structures, literature, ICT's and critical thinking will require planning with teachers, to develop programs to support learning within general capabilities. Teacher-librarians have been consistent with programs that have supported students in current curriculum needs. Adequate attention to the general capabilities may be compromised in schools without teacher-librarians to support these reforms as they already have knowledge of curriculum perspectives and expertise in information literacies.

Learning P-12 (State level):

The Queensland Studies Authority with its Learning P-12 plan (Queensland Government, 2009) has aligned its goals with that of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.

This suggests that every student should be able to develop, among other things, a solid foundation in knowledge, understanding, skills and values on which further learning and adult life can be built. Teacher quality can be a factor in this process and the development of National Standards for Teachers will support this.

Major Impact:

Teacher-librarians, as teachers, will also need to address these standards. Professional Development and initial training for teacher-librarians should incorporate aspects promoting professional knowledge and practice.

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School libraries must provide increased range of resources which demonstrate a variety of genres and textual styles to demonstrate a variety of literacies and numercies. The impact on school libraries and their activities is similar to that of NAPLAN and the National Curriculum.

Investments:

Building the Education Revolution (BER):

Many schools in Australia have accessed this program, with the building of libraries being the largest project category. While these buildings have provided excellent facilities in which students may access a variety of resources (print, audio visual and digital) and information skills programs, many schools do not have access to full-time qualified teacher-librarians to manage these facilities. Teacher-librarians plan with teachers to deliver curriculum programs which include information and communication skills, co-teach these programs and support school-based programs. With many schools accessing teacher-librarians only 2-3 days a week, this leaves the

school community with a 21st century facility which cannot be effectively utilised by the school community. Developing relevant information programs with teachers and providing consistent student support within these programs is difficult to achieve in these situations.

Major impact:

Improved infrastructure has provided multiple accesses for students and the school community, but the level to which schools, and in particular teacher-librarians, have been able to influence the design has meant that many facilities do not meet student or school needs.

Improvement in infrastructure has not considered the issue of professional staffing. The number of new school libraries is increasing with each round of submissions, but maintaining trained staffs to manage them and support the current learning needs of students in schools needs to be considered. Resourcing these facilities is also a major consideration.

2. What is the *future potential* of school libraries and librarians to contribute to *improved educational* and community outcomes, especially literacy?

Dr Michele Anstey (2002, p4) says that:

We need to think of literacy for lifelong learners in new ways. The toolkit of basic skills that served many people well in the 1950's is inadequate today. Advances in technology have produced a convergence of purpose between information and communication technologies.

In the 21st century students are faced with an increasing need to be literate. No longer does being able to read and write constitute 'being literate'. The demand is that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies i.e. many Literacies.

Teacher - librarians undertake a leadership role in the *delivery of literacy programs* and influence positive literacy outcomes in students. They have knowledge of a variety of *literacies* which include but are not limited to: print literacy, information literacy, ICT's (Information Communication Technology), digital literacy, visual literacy, technical literacy, subject specific literacies. These skills are utilised in programs with students, directly linked to classroom direction and cooperatively taught and assessed by teacher-librarians. Integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information-seeking skills. (Lonsdale, p35)

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 (Lonsdale 2003, p34). The teacher – librarian plays a major role in managing this environment through the professional management of the schools print and digital collections, promoting a range of literacy initiatives on many levels (Reading challenges, Readers Cup, Book fairs…) and participating in professional development which centres on literacy development.

Todd (2001) 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.

In Queensland, teacher-librarians have undertaken the same literacy training as classroom teachers. This has ensured that they are 'speaking the same language', instructing in the same mode and directing teachers to resources which complement student needs for literacy development.

Information literacy is mainly about developing understanding and insight. Literacy is about interpretation of information to guide decisions, solve problems and steer through uncertain, complex futures (McKenzie, 2000:i)

Future potential:

> Teacher-librarians exercise professional judgement in building relevant resource collections to support literacy needs. With the introduction of the National Curriculum in 2011, this management will be extended through the need to resource any changes in curriculum direction.

> If access to appropriate quantities and quality of resources to support curriculum requirements is provisioned in future school library budgets, the future impact of policies on student learning will be positive. Reliance on external funding (corporate or P&C) to support these programs is currently inconsistent and undesirable.

> Continued professional development will enable teacher – librarians to   maintain curriculum leadership.

> Continued funding for Federal programs (BER, DER) will promote creative and flexible learning spaces to support a culture of learning – a new learning environment.

> 'What is lacking is recognition … that information literacy, not information technology, is the key educational issue of the so called information age.' (Bundy, 2000)

3. What factors influence recruitment and development of school librarians?

When discussing teacher-librarians, it is the qualified teacher who has a number of years teaching experience and then undertaken specific training in the field of teacher-librarianship to which we are referring.

Recruitment influences:
> When teachers undertake this role, it generally means having to study while working full-time or part-time, or taking leave from work to complete a course of full time study. The perception by teachers considering this post-graduate study is that there is little or no recognition from education authorities for this study and ultimately the value of the position. This perception prevents many teachers from accepting positions in training programs. There are therefore not sufficient qualified teacher- librarians to meet the attrition of the current aging educational workforce.

> Principals are seeking alternatives to address the problem of shortages in teacher-librarian numbers by recruiting teachers, curriculum experts, library trained staff or aides to staff school libraries. The maintenance and accountabilities of the library business functions will be affected. Most importantly, the principal's task of ensuring quality functioning of all school facilities for the benefit of all students may be compromised in these instances. Teachers accepting these positions without teacher-librarianship training have been encouraged to complete their university studies.

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There is a need for clarity around the role of a teacher librarian. Until and unless there is greater clarity and consistency of the role of teacher-librarians, teachers feel disinclined to nominate for the position.

Influences on the development of teacher-librarians:

The current perception of the role of teacher-librarians by some education personnel does not correlate with the actual role. Currently a set of national standards exists, *Standards for professional excellence for teacher-librarians,* compiled by the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and Australian library and Information Association(ALIA) in 2001 which has been recognised by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Ltd. Teacher-librarians use this document as a base for understanding their role and tracking their professional learning in relation to their needs.

Having a mentor in a school helps give a 'real world' position to academic learning and discussions for training teacher-librarians in. Practising teacher-librarians are encouraged to become mentors to foster this professional growth.

The opportunity to participate in 'bridging' courses which are then accredited to university degrees is a positive way of introducing teachers to the role of teacher – librarians. Programs such as those currently under development with Education Queensland's eLearning Branch are a positive development.

Most tertiary courses are at masters level. The number of tertiary institutions offering courses in teacher librarianship has diminished in the past 10 years.

Professional associations play an important role in offering support and recognition for teacher-librarians. State and Territory School Library Associations, the professional bodies representing teacher-librarians, provide support, professional development and avenues for information sharing within each state or territory. ASLA, represents teacher-librarians at a national level on peak discussion forums.

The use of technology such as Web 2.0 technologies has enabled teacher-librarians in remote areas to access professional learning. Professional associations have developed and promoted these learning activities.

4. What role does different levels of government and local communities and other institutions have in partnering and supporting school librarians?

Teacher- librarians work with many external bodies to support programs within schools.
At the local level:

Continued cooperation with public library activities supports student literacy. Because of this link it would be more advantageous for students in remote areas had access to a greater range of resources and activities to promote contemporary initiatives. Lonsdale (2003, p 35) states that a positive difference can be made to student achievement when school libraries cooperate with public libraries.

P&C groups often support school libraries with funding for resources. This reliance on external funds can be tenuous as not all P& C groups are financially able to continue this funding.

Local council provision of sponsorship/ funding for resources on a regular basis would recognise and enhance their current involvement in schools.

Businesses participating in literacy mentoring could be encouraged to continue their involvement with government promotion and recognition of the role they have played in supporting student learning.

Local school library networks support schools and teacher-librarians with professional support, resource sharing, training programs and mentoring.

Recognition by local groups of the role teacher-librarians and school libraries play in education.

At state levels:

Access to support services from any location would allow for resource sharing, technical support and currency of information and programs. Having a facility with trained staff in areas from information management, information services and resource selection to support schools would be advantageous. This facility could be a joint private/ education department venture allowing for public financial contribution to education.

The expansion of current Department of Education and Training (DET) library services to form a specialised branch focusing on digital developments, ICT integration and support services for schools.

Equitable and consistent resourcing of technology for all schools to allow for greater access to technology, digital learning tools and print resources.

Access to online resources through partnerships with universities (UQ Cyberschool, data banks, federated catalogues…), State Libraries with similar facilities and educational institutions such as museums. Continued copyright and site licence agreements for their services reduce the costing for schools and allow greater access to a variety of resources.

Education authorities working closely with state and territory professional associations would develop a 'facility' where qualified staff can indicate their availability for employment and access positions that are available to e filled. Currently neither schools nor trained personnel have an easy avenue to find this information.

At the federal level:

Recognition of the impact of recent policies and an undertaking to seek guidance from those within the industry.

Recognise the national and international research that has already indicated the significance of school libraries and the role of teacher-librarians to student outcomes.

Make a non-negotiable commitment to act on the outcomes of this Inquiry.

Increase funding to schools to support federal projects (BER, DER, Indigenous Education, National Curriculum, NAPLAN) and access to training programs for teacher-librarians.

5. What is the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support school libraries and librarians?

A strong computer network connecting the library's resources to the classroom and laboratories has an impact on student achievement (Lonsdale, 2003 p.34)

Impact of technologies:

The teacher-librarian has assumed a fundamental role in preparing students to become lifelong learners and judicious assessors of information. The school library has become
…the place where children will learn how to sift through, weigh, judge, filter, critique a virtually informative and continuous 24 hour flow of information that they are going to be exposed to for the rest of their lives. (Luke, 2000:15)

Literacies are now complex, dynamic, and adaptable and need to be managed. Students now have access to online resources, databases, New Literacies (GPS, mobile phones, iPods), digital books and readers, virtual classrooms, interactive devices and web sites, laptops, internet, web based catalogues and Web 2.0 technologies. *Technology* alone cannot and will not make a difference. (Bundy, 2000). Students need to be taught how to access, evaluate and use the information found in them. Teacher-librarians as information specialists manage these literacies.

The increase in access to *digital technologies* has allowed teacher-librarians to institute professional learning activities, share knowledge of a technical nature and integrate this technology across the curriculum. Teacher-librarians have been at the forefront of using technology for many years and have been modelling its use for teachers and students. For the use of ICT's to be fully embedded into all curriculum areas (including the National Curriculum capabilities), school and education authorities need to maintain the knowledge base and be forward thinking in their use of digital technologies.

The *Federal initiative* of *DER rollout,* while providing hardware for students has not considered the management of these resources in schools. Storage, maintenance, circulation management, software, systems and replacement issues all contribute to time constraints within the teacher-librarians role. Funding to support this initiative has been the province of the school and has thus limited budget allocations to other areas. The teacher-librarian is often the person in the school who manages this process.

Online content management systems need to be organised and maintained. The use of digital technologies and associated resources create a different resource collection, one which requires different management and storage. Since access to the resources everyday has become the norm in schools reliable facilities and equipment is a necessity. *Wireless access, current technologies* and the promise of to access future technologies for students is expected.

Teacher-librarians have increased their skill base through professional learning in Web 2.0 technologies, interactive digital devices, ICT Pedagogical Licenses and Certificates (Queensland), presenting at State, National and International conferences on the use of these technologies in school programs and presented training activities for school staff.

New technologies have brought new pedagogy, new designs in school library spaces and an extension of the role of the school library. The changes, Book suggests (2002, p.19), 'have meant a greater demand on the time, skills and energy of school librarians.'
Potential for technologies:

Londsdale (2003 p. 7) has noted that

> In recognition of the growing importance of information literacy skills that will enable individuals to navigate vast volumes of information, become informed and critical consumers able to participate in everyday transactions….. Education authorities have sought to encourage the integration of information skills into the curriculum.

Schools now have Gen Y teachers as well as digitally familiar students. They all use and expect others to use the technologies with which communicate, source information and present their findings to an audience.

Teacher-librarians recognise the roles of both analogue (print, audio visual) and digital resources in school education, and are able to promote Best Practice in the use of technology. As technologies change teacher-librarians will continue to integrate their use into the curriculum.

With new infrastructure the opportunity to include new technologies as a basic need is evident. Access to digital technologies brings a need for understanding its use. In doing this teacher-librarians will enhance information services and skill development for students.

New technologies (management systems, digital recording equipment, interactive technologies) support the role of the teacher-librarian and allow for more effective management of school library resources, enhanced interaction with students and faster delivery of information to students.

Recommendations from these discussions:

The results of this inquiry should specify action on the following initiatives.
That:

- school libraries be staffed by qualified teacher-librarians to support curriculum needs
- table for mandatory staffing and resourcing of school libraries in Australia be developed. The staffing table should be based on the number of students in schools
- training courses for teacher-librarians be reviewed, increased to meet the needs of school library management with funding to support the programs
- a national policy and standard be adopted for school libraries
- mandatory funding to support the resourcing of school libraries to meet the needs of curriculum changes and necessities, school – based programs and student needs
- representatives of school library professional associations and education authorities form a peak reference group to consider these issues
- federal bodies recognise State and Territory School Library Associations and the Australian School Library Association, as the bodies with the closest association and understanding of school library needs
- to gain an accurate picture of national trends in Australia in relation to the personnel, resources and programs of school libraries, systematically accumulated national data should be collected and analysed
- decisions to staff facilities be made on educational outcomes rather than financial limitations
- a succinct position description for the contemporary teacher-librarian be developed
- funding to support increased access to future technologies to enhance the curriculum

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