

Submission Number: 34

Date Received: 8/4/2010



SUBMISSION
INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS
IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Dr Sandra Cox-Townend

(Ed.D, M.Ed.Admin, Grad.Dip.Ed.Admin, B.A, Grad.Dip.Lib, B.Bus.Admin)

Terms of Reference Addressed:

- The Future Potential of School Libraries and Librarians to Contribute to Improved Educational and Community Outcomes, Especially Literacy.
- The Factors Influencing Recruitment and Development of School Librarians.
- The Impact and Potential of Digital Technologies to Enhance and Support the Roles of School Libraries and Librarians.

Introductory Summary

Teacher Librarians and school library/resource centres have unlimited potential to improve and enhance the learning outcomes for the learning community. They are well placed and critical to a positive outcome for information and information technology literacy in the school environment and the wider community. They require the establishment of a career path and recognition through appropriate remuneration for those who lead in their own professional development to bring the very best skills and knowledge to their profession and their role as a Teacher Librarian in the school environment.

In the digital age Teacher Librarians have been at the forefront of embracing new technologies and are leaders in information and information technology literacy. Digital technologies have had a significant impact on the role of Teacher Librarians; however, they have adopted these new technologies as additional and new avenues through which they can assist their learning communities. Professional development is a key component for Teacher Librarians to keep meeting the challenges of the digital age. It is through these technologies that professional development may be delivered to Teacher Librarians at a digital point of access. This would ensure the widest possible delivery beyond the confines of distance, time and economic considerations.

Teacher Librarians are essential to the development of a culture of lifelong learning and effective utilisation of information through information and information technology skills. Their role is even more essential to the learning community in the context of the *Digital Education Revolution* which requires the knowledge, expertise, and skills that Teacher Librarians possess.

The Future Potential of School Libraries and Librarians to Contribute to Improved Educational and Community Outcomes, Especially Literacy

Teacher Librarians are at the very heart of the information communication technology (ICT) and literacy processes within and beyond the school environment. They are at the forefront of introducing, establishing and nurturing the effective use of technologies within the curriculum, research and educational environments. They are core to providing the necessary understanding in the use of technologies for the selection, authentication, retrieval, processing, evaluation, and analysing of information for the research process across the curriculum. Teacher Librarians are the constant in a dynamic technology driven environment, adapting their skills to ensure students and staff within and beyond their educational institutions are able to effectively achieve positive outcomes in their learning experiences using the tools of the age.

In an era of constantly changing and advancing technology, Teacher Librarians are even more aware of the challenges that schools are facing with regard to literacy. The technology that our young people are surrounded by and are using today challenges the literacy process as it relies on short cuts of the written word and the need for instant and packaged information. This change in the living environment of young people highlights the important role and need for Teacher Librarians in today's learning environment. The Teacher Librarian is core to supporting and facilitating in students the understanding and comprehension of the information produced through the technological process to ensure they have the literacy skills to effectively access this information and utilise it in a manner that will ensure a positive outcome for their studies.

The Teacher Librarian works across the curriculum with teachers to provide a comprehensive range of information in a variety of forms to enrich and facilitate the learning environment. The school library of today is a resource centre, homework centre, study centre, research centre, reading and recreational centre and information portal. In our roles within the education environment we combine teaching and librarianship enabling teaching strategies and pedagogical practices, resource management, information and information technology literacy skills while supporting the upgrading of existing technologies and the introduction of new technologies.

The school library/resource centre I have managed for the past seven years, of 30 years as a Teacher Librarian, has opening hours of 8.30am-5.30pm Monday – Thursday and 8.30am-4.00pm Friday. Each day is divided into six lessons with every lesson of the day in the library/resource centre booked with junior research classes, Year 11 and 12 senior study and research lessons in addition to permanent subject bookings and small group bookings. Monday to Thursday 3.30pm-5.30pm after school tutorials are conducted across subject areas. I, as Teacher Librarian am present in the library/resource centre throughout the day in addition to recess and lunch to provide assistance to students during their out of class breaks. Our extended hours of operation provide a homework centre for the students during which time I am available as a tutor assisting either individual students or groups of students with any and all aspects of their studies.

Essential to this role is a high level of skill in technology, proficiency with a wide range of software packages, a sound knowledge of the curriculum and content being taught in each subject area. Central to the effective support of students and teachers across the curriculum is a high competency in literacy which is the foundation of the learning environment. From the conducting of year 7 orientation programs to assisting year 12 students with the research, construction and proofreading of personal interest projects and subject assignments, a thorough competency in literacy is essential to the learning environment.

School library/resource centres and Teacher Librarians play a pivotal role in the lifelong learning of their communities. They are innovators, always adapting and evolving as the learning environment is challenged and changed by outside forces, whether it is the constantly changing technology, the changes in form and delivery of knowledge and information or the changes in the curriculum. It is the constancy and effectiveness of Teacher Librarians that facilitates and supports the learning process for both students and teachers.

Improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy is core to the role of Teacher Librarians. They constantly embrace change and through their library/resource centres support their students and teachers with the learning of new technologies, the different forms of information, the effective selection, retrieval, analysing and utilisation of information, keeping literacy as a core element in the process.

Teacher Librarians and their library/resource centres also nurture a love of words, reading and recreational pursuits. Through print and electronic resources, students and teachers are encouraged and supported to build on their literacy whether it is by reading a print or e-book, e-mailing, blogging, using web 2.0 applications, reading a print form periodical for a favourite pastime or researching for study. Teacher Librarians work with both students and teachers to ensure their literacy skills are constantly being improved through the reading, writing and researching processes. These skills are core to the role of the Teacher Librarian and the information process.

The changing social and cultural environment in which students and teachers find themselves makes the role of the Teacher Librarian and the library/resource centre an asset essential to their learning communities. Their ability to operate across the curriculum and work with individuals and groups of all ages and year levels, within designated school hours and into extended hours ensures a comprehensive support system for the literacy process and the nurturing of a love of learning in an ever changing economic and social environment. The Teacher Librarian and library/resource centre has the potential to ensure positive outcomes for their learning communities by facilitating lifelong learning and literacy ensuring that individuals have the skills to adapt to their constantly changing circumstances in a dynamic age.

Teacher Librarians are able to impart the information and technology literacy skills to all learners that will empower them to find, evaluate and determine which form and source of information whether it be print or digital is the most appropriate to meet their needs. Through their school library/resource centres, they are also able to partner with other institutions to provide access to a wide range of facilities and resources, making information and the skills to navigate it, available to all.

Summary

- Teacher Librarians and school libraries are at the heart of contributing to improved information literacy and information technology literacy within and beyond the school environment.
- Teacher Librarians are key innovators in creating links and bridging gaps of access in our digital environment.
- Teacher Librarians are core to facilitating the sharing of knowledge and skills for all learners within and beyond school communities to have opportunities to be lifelong learners.
- Teacher Librarians should be considered assets in ensuring positive outcomes for their learning communities.
- Teacher Librarians and school library/resource centres have a continued essential role in facilitating lifelong learning with literacy at the heart of the learning process.
- Teacher Librarians continue to have the capacity through their important role to empower individuals with the skills to adapt to dynamic and constantly changing learning, social, cultural, economic and work environments.
- Teacher Librarians are integral to assisting their communities develop the literacy skills required to function effectively and successfully in a complex information and technology rich environment.
- Teacher Librarians and school library/resource centres have the capacity to enrich the lives of all individuals as they invest their time and skills in facilitating a culture of lifelong learning, providing the knowledge and literacy skills to use the different sources and forms of information in a smart way.

The Factors Influencing the Recruitment and Development of School Librarians

It is essential in this age of constantly changing technology, the challenges of literacy and a dynamic social, cultural and economic environment that trained and qualified individuals are employed as Teacher Librarians. Individuals need to undertake university level education and training as Teacher Librarians and continue to further their studies and training throughout their careers. It is essential that Teacher Librarians keep abreast of the challenges that are a part of an evolving social and economic environment that is affected by constantly changing technology which by its very nature challenges the effectiveness of literacy in our communities.

At present there is no career structure for Teacher Librarians other than through the teaching structure. This structure which provides opportunities for positions of responsibility excludes Teacher Librarians because they are unable to take on these positions of responsibility due to the obligations they have to their library/resource centres. In practice there is no time to undertake the extra responsibilities when they are already managing the library/resource centre, offering extended hours of opening, are on duty through recess and lunch and either assisting individual students or groups at other times.

There needs to be a promotional structure within the role of Teacher Librarian to encourage the best individuals into these positions. We cannot attract or expect to retain people who are highly qualified if they do not have a career path that rewards their dedication and pursuit of further qualifications. A recognised career path with appropriate remuneration for achievement of higher degrees and training will have a positive outcome in attracting and retaining individuals who are prepared to aspire to excellence and bring that excellence into the school environment. It would also ensure a pool of people who would have the capacity to mentor those who are new to the profession.

Currently, Teacher Librarians are remunerated as teachers; there is no acknowledgement of their head of department role and no recognition of teachers or Teacher Librarians who gain Masters and or Doctoral degrees. There is no incentive for individuals to pursue further study to bring the very best to the education and information process. There are too many better paying jobs beyond the education system to retain highly qualified individuals.

Establishing a career path for Teacher Librarians will also encourage those already in the profession to upgrade their qualifications. It is now not good enough to rely on the authority of a basic university degree that is twenty or thirty years old; we also need to keep learning and evolving. The role of a Teacher Librarian is exceedingly challenging because we interact with and assist so many individuals, both students and teachers throughout the day. Their needs are unique and we need to have the capacity through further study and professional development to embrace the changing and challenging needs of the technology driven education, social and economic environments.

A Teacher Librarian's role as teacher of information and technology literacy skills, manager of the school library, its resources and staff, provider of information services and systems, facilitator of teaching strategies and pedagogical practices, tutor and mentor all reflect the skills, knowledge and expertise that resides in one individual. The Teacher Librarian is an asset to their learning communities, contributing effectively to the development of a culture of lifelong learning through the provision of information and technology literacy skills which transcends their school environments to positively influence the broader community.

Summary

- Teacher Librarians need the appropriate university qualifications for their dual role of teaching and librarianship in the digital age.
- Teacher Librarians need to continue their own lifelong learning, upgrading their skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their role in a constantly changing information environment.
- Teacher Librarians need a clearly defined career path within their profession to ensure they have the opportunity to be leaders within the context of the school library environment and school communities without compromising their role as Teacher Librarian.
- Teacher Librarians who have undertaken professional development in the form of further university study to gain higher degrees need to be remunerated accordingly. This could take the form of an allowance scaled according to the level of those qualifications.
- As we live in a digital age, priority needs to be given to the delivery of professional development packages to the desktop for Teacher Librarians to continue up skilling beyond their university qualifications. These packages may include tutorials and courses for improving and upgrading information technology skills and information literacy skills. Recognition or accreditation for the completion of such courses would be a further incentive for proactive participation in the process.

The Impact and Potential of Digital Technologies to Enhance and Support the Roles of School Libraries and Librarians

Technologies have had a profound affect throughout society, particularly on the learning environment as we prepare our students to become effective learners, communicators and workers in a digital age. Teacher Librarians and their school communities are challenged by the constant change in the types of technologies, their applications and effective use within and beyond the education environment. The school community has had to adapt to technologies that are now part of the everyday lives of young people today.

The Teacher Librarian is integral in ensuring that members of their school communities have the literacy and information technology literacy skills to effectively function in today's society. The Teacher Librarian effectively incorporates the use of digital technologies across the curriculum and throughout the school community. These technologies are now essential to the education process and are core to the library/resource centre of today. Teacher Librarians continue to be leaders in embracing the new technologies in their school communities as part of their philosophy of lifelong learning in a dynamic, constantly changing social, cultural and economic environment.

Teacher Librarians are information specialists who are well placed to assist students and teachers utilise digital technology effectively and become effective participants in the information process. Information literacy is an essential and core skill for success in today's digital workplace and global economy as the changing nature of the work, social, economic and cultural environments challenges all individuals in an information rich world.

The ability to understand information and knowledge and to effectively utilise digital technology relies on the specialist skills of the Teacher Librarian to equip members of the school community with the necessary literacy and information technology literacy skills to fully participate in their local and global communities.

As information specialists Teacher Librarians have a critical role to play in providing their school and wider communities with the ability to become literate individuals with the skills to select, evaluate and utilise information in all its forms. The specialist skills that Teacher Librarians possess to facilitate the literacy process are core in assisting members of the school and broader community to adapt to dynamic environments and changing technologies that are constant challenges to individuals trying to navigate their way through the digital information age.

Integral to the work of the Teacher Librarian is their role of assisting everyone in their communities. Through their school libraries they make information and information tools accessible to all. They teach information literacy and information technology literacy skills ensuring their communities are information savvy. These information specialists ensure that everyone has the opportunity to develop their literacy skills; they are at the forefront of digital

technology, and they can work on a one to one basis or with a group or class of individuals. They know how to access, select and process information and are able to share this knowledge and the skills necessary to effectively utilise it. Through their school libraries they provide the expertise, technologies and literacy skills to bridge the gap between the information rich and information poor in a constantly changing digital age.

Teacher Librarians and school library/resource centres ensure that their learning communities have the resources and skills to navigate our dynamic digital environment. They provide the expertise and services that provide individuals with the opportunities to successfully develop the skills to be lifelong learners, adapting to the challenges of a constantly changing social, economic and working environment. Providing the skills for their learning communities to be information savvy can only enrich the lives of individuals by teaching them how to identify quality information in an age of information overload.

The role of the Teacher Librarian has become even more necessary and important in our digital age. With the increasing amount of information and constantly changing sources of information, the skills of the Teacher Librarian are needed to find the best sources of information, authenticated sources of information and quality information while ensuring that individuals have the skills to effectively utilise the information.

Teacher Librarians are constantly working to provide opportunities for all; they strive to empower individuals by providing access to technology and teaching them how to use it, how to be information and information technology literate.

Digital technologies have the potential to allow the Teacher Librarian to have an even greater interactive role with the learning and wider community. Interactive assistance can be provided beyond the traditional confines of distance and time and takes the school library and its services to the broader community.

Summary

- The impact of digital technologies has been profound, in the change of information delivery, the new forms of information and the volume of information that is available.
- Digital technologies have challenged the Teacher Librarian to continue to be proficient and effective with different modes of information retrieval and delivery.
- The information explosion created by digital technology access has challenged Teacher Librarians to ensure their capacity to provide both information and technology literacy skills to all members of the learning community. Literacy skills are at the heart of the lifelong learning process helping individuals to adapt to their constantly changing social, economic, work, cultural and learning environments.

- Digital technologies have the potential to enhance and support the role of the Teacher Librarian by taking the school library into the learning community providing portals for the access and retrieval of information and services.
- Digital technologies are yet another string to the bow of the Teacher Librarian, providing even more sources and types of information for the learning community.
- Teacher Librarians remain at the forefront of the information process, embracing the dynamic information and technology environment, adapting to the new challenges of the information age, utilising the different forms of technology and the information it creates.
- The digital age has provided Teacher Librarians with more instant forms of communication, packaged information, diverse and unlimited amounts of sources for information access and retrieval, all tools and sources to enrich the lives of their communities.

Conclusion

Teacher Librarians and their school library/resource centres play a pivotal role in the digital age, in which we now learn, socialise, work and live. They are a source of specialist skills, knowledge and information that facilitates the provision of information and information technology skills to effectively and successfully navigate the information environment. Their role as teacher, administrator of resources and collection development, manager of library/resource centres and staff, facilitators of strategies and practices to enhance the teaching and learning environments, providers of information and technology literacy skills, contributors to and participants in curriculum design and implementation, places Teacher Librarians in a strategic position to deliver quality services for improved educational and community outcomes. Teacher Librarians provide specialist knowledge and experience which is integral to the learning community. They nurture a love of learning and empower individuals to adapt to and successfully engage in and participate in the changing environments in which we live and learn.