Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools – submitted by June Wall

Brief overview of June Wall

I am currently the Head of Library at a private school that caters for Yrs 5 to 12 in Sydney as well as the Vice President Association Operations for the Australian School Library Association (ASLA). Prior to my current employment, I have been a primary and secondary teacher, a lecturer in an under graduate course at UTS and teacher librarian in primary schools as well as other secondary schools. I have also worked in a consultancy capacity for an education system and a commercial company where I worked nationally in the education market. My response is submitted under the breadth of experience and knowledge that I have as a teacher and teacher librarian of over 30 years experience.

Executive Summary

The majority of school libraries Australia wide do not have the resources to provide an exemplary information and learning service to their school communities in the digital arena. Insufficient access to quality resources and sufficient staffing to be an active part of teaching and learning in the school limits the impact on student achievement. The potential for the learning value of a teacher librarian in a school community should be addressed with particular reference to digital literacy and the national curriculum.

Teacher librarians with qualifications and experience in teaching as well as library management have the following capabilities:
- Information literacy
- Critical literacy
- Digital literacy
- Literature and literacy
- Higher order learning

Recommendations
1. The focus for teacher librarians in teaching and learning should be on multi modal or digital literacy with support from the education systems.
2. Every school should have a full time teacher librarian with consideration for schools with populations of over 600 to increase the number of teacher librarians.
3. Commonwealth Government funding for online resources suitable in the education K-12 market.
4. Post university continuing professional development for teacher librarians to be managed nationally and linked to teacher registration supported by government.
5. Resource funding for the implementation of the new national curriculum.
6. Further research to be sought on a national scale with appropriate statistics on the link between student achievement and school libraries.

Terms of Reference

1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
   - Digital Education Revolution policy that has been rolling out since 2009. This policy that has a 1:1 program for Yrs 9 to 12 by the end of 2011 at its core has been interpreted in multiple ways by education systems and schools. The need, by schools, to meet the guidelines has often meant that some of the laptops have become part of the management and circulation of school libraries in order to provide equity of access to all students or as a safety measure where schools can loan a laptop to a student for specific learning needs or if the students laptop is in for repair. This has created a significant staffing issue in some schools in order to manage the security and circulation of the laptops. At my current school where there are 3 full time teacher librarians, it now uses at least 10 mins in each period to loan laptops to Yrs 11 and 12. This is the equivalent of 1 hr per day in a 6 period day. The additional access to technology also requires additional teaching or facilitation of learning when the student has an information or technology query that the teacher librarian can support. Outside the private school system, school libraries are also required to manage laptops with far less library staff and teacher librarians. The laptop rollout has also changed the time needed for teaching in the digital literacy arena. This will be expanded upon in section 5.
   - Australian Curriculum. The new national curriculum with the intention to implement from 2011 will cause a range of additional or expanded services for school libraries and teacher librarians. Schools across Australia will need to resource the curriculum at the appropriate literacy levels. For example, my school in History does not focus on the medieval era in Year 8 and so the new history curriculum will need resources for that content and appropriate literacy level. This has budget implications as well as staffing implications. Schools will need to prioritise their resource budgets for at least 2 years in order to meet the curriculum needs. While learning resources can be prioritized, the schools will also need to manage staffing time to acquire and process the resources as well as develop learning activities and digital resources for their specific clientele.
   - The Building Education Revolution has provided many new primary school libraries. However, many of these will not be staffed appropriate to the teaching and learning needs of the school community. A physical library space is of limited use to the learning needs of the community if it does not have adequate professional staffing.

2. The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

   Well resourced school libraries and qualified teacher librarians can impact on educational outcomes (Lonsdale, 2003; Krashen, 2008), especially literacy through the following areas:
   - Teacher librarians with expertise and experience in digital technologies and cross curriculum projects lead the development of transliteracies or digital literacies within the curriculum. They will be of significant value in the resourcing and teaching of digital literacies for the national curriculum not only

for students but the development of teacher capabilities in this area.

- Wide reading. Teacher librarians, primary and secondary, have a focus to develop a culture of reading for enjoyment outside of the English curriculum. Wide reading programs or literature programs encourage students K – 12 to read for enjoyment and develop literacy skills. In many schools, these wide reading programs are part of the English curriculum taught in the school.
- Digital objects and resources – development and location of digital resources of high quality and local relevance to specific school curriculum. Learning for students especially in the 21st century and with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and a 1:1 laptop program involves access to and use of digital resources. Many resources available on the Internet are not at the appropriate literacy level or are not "packaged" in such a way as to make them easily accessible for students. Teacher librarians can be the mediator of digital resources as well as develop digital resources for use by students and teachers in their classrooms.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of teacher librarians;
   - The motivation to enter the role of teacher librarian is varied. In earlier years it was based on either:
     - A passion for working across a range of curriculum and year levels to assist students in their learning
     - An interest in information technology
     - A love of books and reading
   - The ability for schools to retain high quality teacher librarians is based on:
     - Variation in schools expectations and role descriptions. For example, some schools use teacher librarians as the staffing for relief from face to face teaching for classroom teachers with little acknowledgement as to the value of the teacher librarian's role. These variations of teacher librarians roles or expectations can decrease motivation or change the actual work
     - Economic factors of full time versus part time work. Many primary schools only have part time staff which limits the staff who are available for the positions
   - Career pathways. Those teacher librarians who seek advancement and are usually high quality teacher librarians can only find career paths that take them out of the library. This is a similar problem as is apparent with teachers who have expertise. This expertise, which is valued in the classroom or library, is lost to students as the teacher or teacher librarian applies for positions that often take them out of direct contact with students.

4. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;
   - State education departments and other systems of education such as the catholic system need to show leadership in the use of school libraries and the value of teacher librarians in the learning process.
   - Local communities such as professional teaching associations, for example, ASLA can provide professional learning opportunities for teacher librarians so that they can maintain and develop their knowledge
   - The Institute of Teachers or teacher registration bodies should encourage teacher librarians to meet the professional standards (which need to be more flexible and show value for teachers who do not have a direct class but are

heavily involved in teaching and learning).

5. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and teacher librarians.

- Digital literacy has been recognized by the 2009 and 2010 Horizon reports as a significant issue that needs to be addressed for learning. New media can have a vital role to play in engaging students in learning for a purpose. Teacher librarians are in a position that could be leveraged more effectively for learning by recognizing the expertise in digital literacy needed and encouraging schools to utilise the role of the teacher librarian in the digital agenda.
- Digital technologies have enabled teacher librarians to focus on teaching and learning by reducing, in some tasks, the management time needed for maintaining a library. This has been enacted through the development of SCIS as a national bibliographic database and resource sharing through EdNA (both now a part of Education Services Australia). Web 2.0 tools if leveraged smartly can also enhance the roles of school libraries and teacher librarians by sharing resources developed or located nationally and globally. Some systems of education are moving to a more centralized model of library database which reduces the time management overheads at the local level and therefore allows the teacher librarian more time to use in teaching and learning.
- As literacy is more multi modal in both the skills needed and delivery of information, students need to have a range of skills in literacy but especially in digital literacy or transliteracy. The development of the e-book, subscription agencies for a range of online information services and self publishing of content requires the student to be able to negotiate the information source, manipulate the information and develop knowledge to use the information and evaluate its quality and value to specific learning needs. Quality information on the Internet is still predominantly on a user pay basis and so school libraries with limited budgets find it difficult or not possible to subscribe to many quality online services. If school libraries had access to these types of online information sources, they could more ably meet the information and learning needs of their students.

Conclusion

School libraries and teacher librarians in Australia have been recognized internationally as the leading practitioners in information literacy and digital literacy programs for learning and school libraries. School libraries are a cultural entity that must continue and develop for Australian students who deserve a quality education. Teacher librarians are uniquely situated with a skill set in transliteracy and digital literacy and an understanding of cross curriculum content and strategies who should be utilised and developed so that Australia can have 21st century standard libraries and learning.

References

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