



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools

Introduction

The primary function of a school library is to underpin the school's mission statement by providing services, resources and programmes that foster opportunities for life long learning and love of literature. The school library is also called upon to offer all members of its community the opportunity to generate the understanding of freedom and its preservation and to develop as informed and responsible citizens. Therefore the school library operates on three levels: that as centre for resources, a centre for learning and as a service centre.

Terms of reference

With regards to the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry I would like to provide comment for:

- The future of 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

Role of the school library

The school library as a centre for resources aims to:

- be equipped with a balanced and adequate collection of fiction and non fiction books
- provide a variety of non book resources i.e. audiovisual, posters etc
- reflect the advances in technology e.g. computers, digital equipment etc
- organise its resources to be classified, catalogued and housed in a systematic way for easy access and use
- maintain and develop its collection by having an adequate annual budget

The school library as a centre for learning aims to:

- provide materials which will enrich and implement the curriculum
- encourage individual exploration and enquiry
- provide resources and facilities for research and self directed learning
- provide a variety of learning and teaching environments and experiences for classes, small groups, individuals – in literature, information skills and recreational pursuits
- encourage the use of a variety of resources
- inform its community about new materials

The school library as a service centre aims to:

- service the needs of all members of its community
- offer flexibility in meeting the needs of its community
- offer services which are provided in a secure and positive environment which is conducive to research and learning

Staffing

To operate the school library effectively, sufficient and qualified library personnel is required. School library personnel should comprise teacher librarians, library technicians and/or library assistants. School library personnel should be required to address the goals of the school library and provide a professional service to all members of its school community.

All school library personnel have a role to play in liaising with and assisting all members of the school community. Even though each member's role description differs according to expertise and training all staff are called upon to be supportive and flexible in their approach to providing services and programmes and promoting and disseminating resources.

Personal experience

In my professional experience the school library has played and will continue to play an integral part in supporting me in my learning and teaching. Two critical elements of this are the development of information literacy through the explicit teaching of information skills and the equity of access to a variety of resources. In this digital age exposure to a range of digital technologies is crucial and the school library is proactive in this area. My students' access to a wider variety of resources, both book and non book will make their learning experiences more engaging.

So that my students can be given the best opportunity to succeed in their learning, their learning requires support from the school library.

Recommendations

I recommend that:

- each school in Australia should have a physical space for a school library and that this space is adequately funded to ensure that a foundation level of resources is made available. These resources need to be a balance of both book and non book formats.
- each school in Australia employs, at the very least, a qualified teacher librarian. A qualified teacher librarian can be defined as a person who holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. A qualified teacher librarian can ensure that all students be information literate and lifelong learners.
- to ensure that there are suitably qualified teacher librarians, funding is required to allow schools to provide study leave for interested teachers to undertake a teacher librarianship course. This funding would also ensure that current tertiary institutions offering teacher librarianship courses will be maintained and that other tertiary institutions would introduce or reintroduce teacher librarianship courses.

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