



Submission to the *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.*

**Terms of reference:**

The role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians

**The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

This major funding initiative should have provided the ideal opportunity to highlight and reinforce the role of the school library and the role of the teacher librarian in the teaching and learning programs within schools. Unfortunately the investment focus has been on only bricks and mortar rather than library activities and resources, including the provision of a trained teacher librarian in each school. It has been an economic stimulus in terms of the provision of physical amenities, which for many schools has been long overdue and most welcome. The economic stimulus package has been a short term bonus for those involved in the erection of the libraries, but has not necessarily provided the most important stimulus which any economy can provide - that of well educated, information literate potential employers and employees. The perceived possible loss of teacher librarian positions as well as the lack of trained teacher librarians in many schools, especially primary schools, as well the lack of opportunity for teacher librarians and the local community to have input into the new libraries has overshadowed much of the potential of the building programs.

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

The present and future potential of school libraries and teacher librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy is both important and enormous. Teacher librarians are experts at teaching students to use information to build knowledge. Schools which have qualified teacher librarians who work with other teachers to develop meaningful information skills programs are able to engage students with information and learning. Regardless of the socio-economic background of the students or their educational levels student will achieve good outcomes if they have access to an environment which is rich in resources and rich in support so that they have every opportunity to develop reading and information skills.

Because teacher librarians have contact with most staff and students in a school, they have the benefit of a big picture approach to what is happening in a school. They are in the position of seeing what gaps there may be in various programs and approaches to literacy, and are hence able to work with staff to enhance ways of assisting students to further develop literacy skills. Programs such as Peer Tutoring, run in conjunction with TAFE, develop literacy skills for struggling readers and enhance the skills of the older students who assist as tutors. These are essentially coordinated by the teacher librarian in collaboration with the learning support team in the school.

The teacher librarian in any school must be trained for that position.

## **The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

There is a great need to increase teacher librarianship training positions in university programs both in terms of replacing those who will leave the service in the next few years and in terms of providing schools with specialised teachers who are critical to improving literacy and learning – both in terms of information literacy and providing resources to allow students to become confident readers, both in terms of the curriculum outcomes and personal enjoyment and growth.

There needs to be much more done to incorporate into teacher training courses for both primary and secondary teachers an understanding of the role of the library and the role of the teacher librarian. Teachers new to the service have a great understanding of their teaching subjects and available technologies, but little knowledge of how to develop information literacy skills in their students. There is the assumption that quite developed technology skills in students equates with the ability to make good decisions and choices from the vast and complex amount of information available.

Professional development for principals needs to incorporate a focus on the school library and the role of the teacher librarian. The provision of up-to-date technology does not automatically equate to the development of sound information skills.

The title *school librarian* in itself misrepresents the role the *teacher librarian* plays as a partner in the school's learning and teaching team. It is both a teaching and management role, the teaching role being foremost.

## **The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians**

Support from the School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit for NSW teacher librarians is invaluable. It is the primary source of professional support. Teacher librarian networks provide varying degrees of both formal and informal support. These networks are of particular importance to those who teach in rural and isolated schools.

Groups such as the Children's Book Council of Australia, subject specific teacher groups such as English and science teachers associations, public libraries and the state libraries are all key partners for teacher librarians. They work together to provide shared opportunities and resources, rather than leaving teacher librarians in isolation to continually reinvent the wheel.

## **The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians**

The potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the role of school libraries and teacher librarians is fundamental. This is where the students are at. It is what they use and like to use. It is an easily accessed and available learning tool which is very attractive to them and suits the way they like to learn. It is a very adaptable teaching and learning tool.

Access to digital technologies and unlimited information has not automatically resulted in improved informational literacy levels. What it has highlighted is a much greater need for more highly developed information skills. The ability to define the information need, to locate relevant information, to select appropriate information for the particular audience, to organise that information, to determine the format in which to present the information and to assess the information in terms of what knowledge the student has created to enhance their own learning requires a deeper level of engagement in the learning process expecting a search engine to both understand their information query and then find the desired answer.

Digital technologies ask a lot of students and in many ways makes the use of information a more challenging task. There is a wide held assumption by students, particularly those working under pressure the night before, that because it is published on the web it must be accurate, relevant and up-to-date. Determining the integrity of the information has become increasingly challenging for students. The role of the teacher librarian is to develop in the students the skills and strategies to help them wade through the virtual ocean of information so they are better able to evaluate information sources, to understand the transient nature of the web, and to assist them to make good choices about the information they access. The role of the teacher librarian has become more important in assisting students to navigate what is in reality an information overload. Students more than ever need support in using information. Teacher librarians can evaluate websites, etc and add them to the library catalogue. This allows students to focus on using the information rather than spending too much time on locating information.

The issue of books versus technology is no longer relevant. It is about information, no matter what its format or packaging. Information is packaged in a multitude of ways, all of them valid. It is about catering for the different learning styles of all of our students and it is about having students be able to access a wide variety of sources for their information. Different students prefer different kinds of packaging for different kinds of tasks. The technology does not determine the information task; the information task and audience determine the research requirements. The teacher librarian has always had the responsibility to manage information so it is accessible to students and is appropriate to the nature of the task and the needs of the student. This is core business.

The challenge is to build the capacity of students to use information in such a way that the intellectual integrity of the original composer of the information be it in the form of text, images or sound, is maintained. One of the most challenging concepts to teach students is that of intellectual integrity and copyright and that because a technology

makes something possible, or copyright very difficult to maintain, does not necessarily mean that it is acceptable practice.

Digital technologies have allowed teacher librarians to support students in deciding the most appropriate way of presenting and sharing information and building knowledge. They are no longer restricted to their classroom. Through such as podcasts, blogs and wikis they are able to discuss ideas and present findings far and wide in an instant. They are supported by teacher librarians in this process.

The impact of digital technologies in supporting school libraries and teacher librarians has been crucial. Cataloguing print, online and non-print resources is now done using online resources such as SCIS data bases. School library catalogues are stored and maintained remotely from a centralised server while still allowing individual teacher librarians to tweak their cataloguing entries to provide for the needs of their users and nature of their specific collections. Other collections and resources such as data bases can be easily accessed and shared. This allows schools to build collections beyond their own walls.

## **Recommendations**

1. That all schools have a trained teacher librarian
2. That all school libraries have access to trained support staff
3. That all school libraries have opportunities for flexible timetabling
4. That local school communities have authentic input into the development of any new library facility and that the 'standard' in relation to student numbers, furnishings and fittings be more flexible so that layouts of new school libraries are more suited to the needs of the particular school.
5. That teacher training institutions provide trainees with knowledge and understanding about the role of the teacher librarian and the library and the part it plays in all teaching and learning programs.
6. That principals be provided with professional development which allows them to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of the role of the teacher librarian and the library in engaging students and achieving learning outcomes linked to curriculum standards and goals
7. That the title used be *teacher librarian*, rather than school librarian so as to emphasise the teaching role

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