



Submission to House standing Committee on Education and Training

Re: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

It is with passion that we, as two Teacher Librarians in government schools in Western Australia, present this submission to express our concern with decisions made by the Department of Education in relation to school libraries that will have, and are having, a detrimental effect on our student's present and future needs. We represent both the primary and secondary sectors of education. The issues relate to school libraries being managed by unqualified, unprofessional, and inexperienced staff, the manner in which Information Communication Technology is being introduced in school libraries and the inadequacies of school library budgets.

The school library has a specialist, educative role within the school. It has a Teacher Librarian familiar with the curriculum and with HOW students learn. School libraries are dedicated to supporting lifelong learning, but it is the Teacher Librarian's role to teach students HOW to navigate their way through the mass of information sources, and WHICH resources to navigate. These are life long skills.

Teacher Librarians play an integral role in delivering the school curriculum, with a focus on digital and print literacy and the many skills required for successful learning. As such, we have some concerns about the future of school libraries and Teacher Librarians. An investment in infrastructure and facilities alone is not sufficient to continue to support student learning in the 21st Century. Information literacy is a transformational process in which the learner needs to find, understand, evaluate, and use information in various forms to create for personal, social, or global purposes" ("Information literacy from prehistory to K-20: A new definition" in *Knowledge Quest*, Vol.32:4, March/April 2004).

In particular, the professional staff should be fully qualified teacher librarians who hold recognised teacher qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. Within the broad fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. This is valuable because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. The cross-curricular, multi-disciplinary expertise of teacher librarians is vital to help them in this journey.

School communities need a qualified Teacher Librarian in every school. A Teacher Librarian is both a teacher and a librarian. In primary schools in Western Australia it is not compulsory to hold a Teacher Librarian qualification, but I believe this inadequate practice will not effectively accomplish the role competently. It is the attainment of my university qualification that has provided me with the knowledge and skills to work with teachers to assist students to become lifelong learners. The Western Australian College of Teaching recognises the importance of ongoing Professional Learning. Untrained staff do not have this requirement and therefore lack the necessary skills and knowledge demanded by the role.

School communities should be able to provide equitable access for all students to books, information and information technology and the skills to locate and understand the appropriate information to meet their needs. Equitable school library budgets need to be able to provide this access.

School libraries and literacy

- Children become better readers (and spellers and writers) by reading. Teacher Librarians are specialists in encouraging literacy through free voluntary reading, conducted through evidenced based activities devised in consultation with classroom teachers.
- Reading for pleasure provides a great deal that standardised tests don't measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improve.
- As life-long learners, students need to be information literate. Teacher Librarians specialize in teaching information literacy.
- Information literacy includes critically reading print, graphics, video, and all learning objects, to build knowledge. The information literate student seeks diverse viewpoints. Information literacy includes the ethical use of information and responsible use of social networking tools.

School libraries and Information Communication Technology

- Books will continue to exist in many formats, printed, e-books, CDROMs, etc. The trend for quality information, such as newspapers and online databases, is no longer free. Teacher Librarians, in collaboration with teachers, will be needed to select, purchase, organize and guide access to books and online information.
- Teacher Librarians willingly update their skills in IT, develop library web access points, digitize data, network with colleagues, review and select online websites, learning objects, webquests, online databases, social networking tools, etc. This is part of their collection development role, their teaching and curriculum support role and their role in improving literacy.

Recruitment and development of school librarians

- Teacher Librarian training programs have decreased in the past two decades. There are no undergraduate courses in Western Australia to attract and train quality professional Teacher Librarians for the future.
- The recent trend toward devolved, flexible staffing along with dwindling school budgets has resulted in the increased use of Teacher Librarians in classrooms and the replacement of Teacher Librarians with less expensive, unqualified and inexperienced staff. Untrained non-professional staff do not have the professional knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to link resources and current teaching practices to curriculum content. These skills are only gained through original university qualifications, followed by ongoing professional development and constant interaction and moderation with classroom teachers. A case in point is the new National Curriculum where professional knowledge will be required to help implement it and provide appropriate resources.
- The Digital Revolution has funded much needed Information Communication Technology, but too often to the detriment of the school library resource budgets.

Role of government

- Good educational planning relies on good data. We have no complete national workforce data on Teacher Librarian numbers and use. We have no government school data on school library budgets. Inequitable library budgets result in equitable student outcomes.
- Educational leaders need easy access to the research on the contribution of school libraries and Teacher Librarians to improved educational outcomes.
- Educational leaders need support in developing excellent school libraries and excellent Teacher Librarians (Professional Learning in the use of Standards for Excellence, Information Literacy Standards and Library Standards).

- Quality teachers and pre-service teachers need easy access to the research on guided inquiry, information literacy, collaborative planning and teaching with Teacher Librarians.
- We have no current national government standards for school libraries to guide their development. Historically they did exist. (*Books and Beyond: Guidelines for library resource facilities and services*. Canberra: Schools Commission, 1977, 2nd ed. 1979)
- WA Department of Education support services virtually no longer exist in terms of consultancy services. In Western Australia there is no specific support for school libraries at the district office level and a rapid decline in District Office Library Support teams. The closure of District Resource Centres has further exacerbated the problem. Professional associations have had to assume the majority of professional development, dependent on volunteers, who are practicing professional in schools. These professionals are already stretched, providing a successful, consultative and varied learning programme. Newly appointed untrained school library staff are often dependent on local Teacher Librarian networks for their training.
- A big push was made in the 1970s to develop secondary school libraries. A similar push was never carried out fully for primary libraries.
- Common policies for school libraries and information literacy are needed across all states.

Things the Federal government can do:

- Collect national data on school library staffing, funding, and scheduling;
- Tie funding so that states can and must adequately staff and fund school library programs and services;
- Require literacy programs and other national curricula to explicitly recognize the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success;
- Develop national school library standards, including minimum standards for staff working in school libraries;
- Increase teacher librarian training positions in university programs;
- Develop and publish a national information literacy curriculum;
- Provide research funding on the effect of school library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning;
- Provide grants for improving literacy through school libraries;
- Facilitate national licensing of online databases for school libraries

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