



The School Libraries Association of Queensland is a professional organisation dedicated to providing opportunities for its members to work cooperatively in their educational settings through commitment to the development of students as lifelong learners. We advocate the critical role of teacher librarians in schools; provide information for our members; facilitate professional development for teacher librarians; and foster and strengthen relationships with other professional organisations and relevant community groups.

This report is organised under the following terms of reference:

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
- 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 role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

It has been prepared using anecdotal evidence and refereed articles from professional journals by Anna-Mieke Mulholland (President, School Libraries Association of Queensland, Gold Coast), Jan Curran (Secretary, School Libraries Association of Queensland, Gold Coast), and Annie White (immediate past President, School Libraries Association of Queensland, Gold Coast).

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

The Building the Education Revolution stimulus package has had a positive impact on school libraries across Australia, in that many schools have received funding to build or renovate libraries to become 21st century library models. Many of these libraries have been visited by or are managed by the Gold Coast members of the School Libraries Association of Queensland. Members can report that the libraries have been supplied with exciting innovations, such as media rooms with green screen technology, interactive white boards, both fixed and mobile, laptops, digital still and video cameras etc. In our opinion, as the Gold Coast branch of the School Libraries Association of Queensland, this is an excellent beginning, and we thank the Federal Government for this.

However, we believe that while the BER has begun well, there are several crucial follow up steps. Firstly, the new buildings, with all their new technology, require trained, qualified teacher librarians to administer them. Teacher librarians are information literacy and literature specialists; according to the Australian School Library Association, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified and placed as their knowledge of the curriculum across the whole school is combined with information management skills (2010). No other position in the school is so well placed to assist students in becoming lifelong learners and competent managers and synthesisers of information.

In the Gold Coast region, there are 7 major state high schools that currently run without a teacher librarian. In many others, teacher librarians have to take on other curriculum areas in addition to their library roles. These schools are being done a disservice. According to the US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (2008), more than 60 studies across the United States have determined that there is a clear link between student achievement and school libraries staffed by qualified teacher librarians. The Australian Lonsdale Report (2003) found that trained teacher librarians make a significant impact on student achievement. On the Gold Coast, we have students who face inequality. There are schools who cannot provide an equal learning opportunity for their students as they do not have a qualified teacher librarian. For some schools, the teacher librarians are limited in their ability to do their job as they have been

repositioned to take on other curriculum areas. The next logical step in the BER would seem to us to be legislating the need for a qualified teacher librarian in each school.

Teacher librarians are trained information literacy specialists. Additionally, they are literature specialists, trained to understand the scope and development of a love of literature and reading comprehension across the year levels. We applaud the Queensland State Government's A Flying Start campaign, but believe it has overlooked the role that school libraries can play in this. Resourcing school libraries with 21st century technology is important, but the role of books in the development of children cannot be overlooked. Members of the Gold Coast branch of School Libraries Association of Queensland have visited new libraries funded by the BER, with state of the art technology and inviting learning spaces, but they have minimum books on the shelves. We believe that additional funding to enable new libraries to build their picture book, fiction and non-fiction collections would be a natural follow on from the BER. For students to be encouraged to become readers they must be presented with attractive, new, high-quality resources. The most qualified person to select these resources is the qualified teacher librarian.

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

School libraries staffed by qualified teacher librarians have the potential to make an important contribution to improved educational outcomes. Hay (2005) found that a school library plays a “critical role in supporting school learning” (p28). School libraries assist students in knowing what to look for, how to look for the information, how to test reliability and other information literacy skills (Hay, 2005). In the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008 in ACARA, 2009), on which the new National Curriculum has been based, one of the new goals of the national curriculum is stated as being to equip young Australians to “thrive and compete in ... information rich workplaces”. Teacher librarians are the ones trained to teach students how to deal with the avalanche of information available (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Penne, 2000). Lance et al’s (2000) study found that when this role is performed by a qualified teacher librarian, school achievement scores rise. Scores rise higher when other teachers are also inserviced by teacher librarians on the rapid advancements in the world of information (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Penne, 2000).

Teacher librarians have the potential to have a positive impact on the literacy levels of students. The US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, (2008) found that when students have the opportunity to read books and information that they are interested in, literacy and numeracy improve. Fitzsimmons (2006, in US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 2008) stated that

school library collections inform, educate, entertain, and enrich students at all levels.... When students are able to...explore information that is meaningful to them, they not only learn faster but their literacy skills grow rapidly; they learn how to learn... (p5).

Through maintaining current, challenging library collections, teacher librarians can provide the opportunity for students to engage with those texts that will “inform, educate, entertain and enrich”.

Children become better readers (and spellers and writers) by reading. Teacher librarians are specialists in encouraging literacy through free voluntary reading, a guaranteed way to help kids become more literate (Krashen).

- 60 studies have shown that free voluntary reading is at least as effective as conventional teaching methods in helping children to do well on standardized tests. Reading for pleasure provides a great deal that these tests don't measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improves (Krashen).
- 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 seek diverse viewpoints. Information literacy includes the ethical use of information and responsible use of social networking tools.
- Funding for research in Australia on the role of school libraries and teacher librarians in improving educational outcomes is needed

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

The median age of librarians is markedly older than that of other professional occupations in Australia (ALIA, 2005 in Williamson, 2006). 86% of librarians in Australia are aged above 35; compared with 58% of the total workforce. This would suggest a lack of individuals entering the profession. One factor possibly contributing to this could be the recent trend towards using teacher librarians to fill other curriculum areas. While no published data could be found on this topic the use of teacher librarians in other curriculum areas is a growing topic of conversation among teacher librarians on the Gold Coast at professional development meetings. Teacher librarians are increasingly being given additional classes to teach in order to streamline budgets. This takes teacher librarians away from what should be their primary focus (the library), and renders as apparently less valuable the time put into training as a library professional. It is not surprising that fewer teachers are training as teacher librarians when the future career looks to be only a part-time one.

We at Gold Coast School Libraries Association of Queensland believe that there are several possible solutions. Firstly, school libraries should be funded as part of the educational budget in a distinct and deliberate way so that those making budget decisions will not be forced to choose not to have a properly qualified teacher librarian. Principals faced with dwindling budgets must feel confident that they can afford to pay for a teacher librarian, and thus gain the benefits for their students that other schools also have.

Secondly, we believe that exposing pre-service teachers to the role that teacher librarians play in schools will increase awareness of the diversity, complexity and importance of a teacher librarian. Pre-service teachers could benefit from completing one of their practica in a library staffed by a qualified teacher librarian. This will give them valuable experience of how a teacher librarian interacts at all levels of the curriculum and excellent exposure to the wide variety of ICT and information media that teacher librarians incorporate in their roles. Additionally, it will serve to help educate pre-service teachers to the wide role that a teacher librarian can play in supporting them in the development of curriculum.

We believe that it is important that experienced teachers are drawn into the teacher librarian profession. It is important that teachers have experienced the role in their pre-service training; it is also important that they have developed high levels of competency in general classroom teaching as teacher librarians teach from 5 year olds up to 18 year olds. School libraries were firmly established, along with trained teacher librarians, in the 1970s thanks to the Karmel Commission grants. Since then, teacher librarians have taken it on themselves to equip themselves for the role. We recommend that, owing to a decreasing level of teachers entering the profession, funding is once again provided for the training of experienced teachers to become teacher librarian professionals.

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

The Federal Government has begun a huge enterprise in collating the data for schools across Australia and incorporating NAPLAN results for the My School website. We suggest that the Federal Government utilise the NAPLAN results in order to channel funding where it is needed. Many studies (cited above) have shown that a school with a library and a qualified teacher librarian will achieve higher scores; where schools are demonstrated to be struggling in the NAPLAN results, the role of the teacher librarian in that school needs to be assessed. The situation of a school without a teacher librarian should be addressed immediately. When a school loses a teacher librarian, they lose

- A trained professional who develops a targeted collection of print and digital resources to support teaching and learning
- A teacher who can coordinate a whole school approach to developing student information literacy skills
- A specialist in children's literature who can excite and encourage the love of reading
- An information specialist who can provide IT, literacy, information literacy, copyright and plagiarism PD to teachers
- A specialist staff member who research has shown can make a difference to student literacy and learning

The Federal Government could positively impact school libraries by:

- requiring that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognize the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success;
- developing national school library standards;
- increasing teacher librarian training positions in university programs;
- developing and publish a national information literacy curriculum;
- providing research funding on the effect of school library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning;

- providing grants for improving literacy through school libraries;
- facilitating national licensing of online databases for school libraries

Teacher training degrees must be approved by educational institutes or departments in each state of Australia for recipients to be able to work as a teacher in Australia. We suggest that before tertiary education courses are approved, they must contain at least one unit focussed on collaborative planning and learning. Such a course should contain reference to Guided Inquiry and assist students in learning how to develop competencies in the constantly evolving virtual world of web 2.0 technologies.

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

Teacher librarians are at the forefront of the teaching profession in embracing and using technology (Williamson, 2006). Through professional development seminars run by local professional groups, such as School Libraries Association of Queensland, teacher librarians are committed to developing skills in using virtual collaborative tools such as those offered by web 2.0 tools. Part of the role of teacher librarians is to guide students in accessing these web 2.0 tools in effective and efficient ways that improve student engagement and lead to deep learning.

Improving broadband access for all Australian students through the Digital Education Revolution, funded by the Federal Government, will enable more students to access information quickly. It is the role of teacher librarians to teach students to manage the information they access in a way that means they are accessing what they need in an efficient and secure manner without wasting time or resources on irrelevant 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.

Digital technologies are an important tool offered by school libraries. However, they raise the question of equity. The Federal Government is going some way towards creating an equitable system with the laptops offered under the DER. However, access to information is currently not equitable across the school system as most databases require licensing fees in order for students to access them. Public libraries offer access freely to all library members, while school libraries can only offer access to the databases to which they can afford to subscribe. While all school students in Australia can join the public libraries, not all are in a position where it is practical, owing to family or geographic circumstances. We recommend that offering funded access to all schools to the top databases, such as those offered by the UQ Cyberschool should be a part of

the DER. Equitable access to digital information should be a standard across all school libraries.

Works Cited

- ACARA. (2009). *Curriculum ACARA*. Retrieved April 5, 2010, from ACARA:
<http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum.html>
- Hay, L. (2005). Student Learning through Australian Libraries, Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions. *Synergy*, 3 (2), pp. 17-30.
- Lance, K., Rodney, M., & Hamilton-Penne, C. (2000). *SLAV Resources*. Retrieved April 5, 2010, from SLAV: <http://www.slav.schools.net.au/resources/impact.htm>
- US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. (2008). *School Libraries Work!* Washington: Scholastic Research & Results.
- Williamson, V. (2006). Surviving change and growing the profession together. *Library Management*, 27 (8), 548-561.