**Submission to the-**

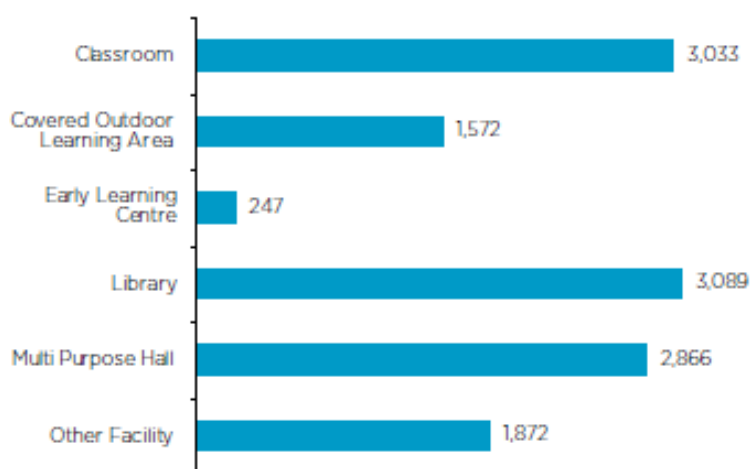**INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS,**

**April, 2010**

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

The Federal Government has recently invested, massive amounts of money to build school libraries.-
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Documents/NCIReport.pdf



Chart 6: P21 Projects by Facility Type (to 31 August 2009)

**Note:** Some projects involve work to more than one facility type. Therefore, total number of projects does not equal total number of facilities.

The NCI Report says 3,089 new school libraries have been built. However, there has been little discussion from the Federal Government about funding for Library staff or resources, though this Inquiry holds some hope. However, just as a library building alone will not boost learning, so an inquiry alone will not solve issues relating to Library resourcing, unless appropriate action follows from the inquiry. The billions allocated to library buildings will not translate into improvements in learning outcomes, unless there is adequate resourcing, staffing, programming, management, and administrative support.

**Why Every School Needs A Library**

(The following content is adapted from the " A library for every school" proclamation (April, 2010) signed and distributed by Stichting ENSIL and co-signed by IASL, IASL Europe and IFLA School Libraries and Resource Centres and used with their permission.)

1. **School Libraries Boost Student Achievement.** Research shows Libraries boost achievement.
   http://www.asla.org.au/research/    http://eprints.qut.edu.au/20410/
   http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/45/8a/c9.pdf

2. **Challenges of the Information Age.**  Schools need more not less support to cope with increasing technology.  Students need to be able to locate, select, evaluate, analyse and synthesize both online and print information. Content and online techniques are changing at an escalating rate and staff and students need specialist support with this. With changes in media, students still need to be encouraged and motivated to read, and specialists are needed to assist with the increasing range and variety of online reading material, skills to interpret and manage this content, and staff who are focused on reading promotion for enjoyment. The world of reading and viewing opens doors to writing, creativity and innovation in content creation.

3. **How School Libraries Help Learning.**  School library staff help with developing information and communications literacy-how to articulate information needs, search for it and retrieve it efficiently, understand and evaluate its authenticity and reliability, communicate it, and then use it to make decisions and solve problems. School librarians play a key partnership role with teachers enabling the integration of information and communication literacy into the school curriculum.

4. **The Digital Divide and the Haves and Have Nots.**  There is an equity issue if some students are not gaining skills in digital literacies and managing online information. There is an issue of equity of access to reading and research materials and access to technology for those who do not have these via their home circumstances. People in some socio-economic groups, especially, may not be exposed to the enjoyment and opportunities created through reading in their home contexts. There is also a loss of lifelong learning potentials, with an associated opportunity cost to student development, if students are not encouraged to enjoy reading.

   Research shows that " (... although there is a strong correlation between borrowing books from a school library and reading achievement, borrowing books from classroom libraries does not have the same impact." (Frose 1992) More research on how school libraries improve reading more effectively than promoting reading only in classrooms can be found at
   http://www.asla.org.au/research/reading_literacy.htm

   Combes (2008) in the Australian Schools Library Project reported that Independent schools have a much higher level of professional library staffing than state schools. Government and Anglican schools were shown to have a lower ratio of seating in their library per student than other schools.  Therefore, there is an issue of equity for state school students in terms of receiving quality of education, if state school libraries are not staffed and resourced.
   http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/documents/ASLRP%20A%20snapshot%20of%20Australian%20school%20libraries.pdf

5. **Partnerships and Alliances.** "Information itself is becoming the strategic resource of the Information Age, and information resources - their collection, their organisation, their cataloguing, their indexing, their dissemination, their communication, and most importantly their use - have long been considered to be in the specialised domain of librarians, libraries and librarianship but librarians alone cannot do the job.  Nor can teachers alone do the job.  Nor can pedagogy specialists alone do the job.  They all three must partner and form a "learning triumvirate alliance" within the context of knowing how to use libraries and information resources as integral parts of the learning process, including the use of social media networking approaches and tools."

6. **Budgetary Options is an Outmoded and Misguided Policy.** The establishment of school libraries "should not be at the discretion of national and local governments, school principals and school boards, in the name of "budgetary flexibility.

7. **Educational Best practice** "A modern multi-media library resource centre equipped with the technical and professional skills acquired in an accredited librarianship education program is absolutely crucial to the economic and social progress of every country. The need for a library, staffed by a professionally trained, educational information specialist in every primary and secondary school (not just at the university level) is an absolute "must" if countries are to survive, prosper and compete successfully in the 21$^{st}$ century, in the context of the Global Information Society."

(From http://www.ensil-online.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19:proclamation-a-library-for-every-school&catid=3&Itemid=13)

Research shows that Libraries with quality Library programs produce higher student achievement. However, over the last decade, resourcing and staffing levels of libraries has fallen. Some state governments and other employers have failed to clarify expectations regarding the role, and then left it to Principals to decide how to staff Libraries.

Library programs should receive systemic support, just as is provided to Maths, English and other subjects to ensure all students have access to a quality Library program. The government has spent billions on new Library buildings. It will be a flagrant waste if these buildings are not put to best use by staffing them with quality Library staff and providing sufficient resources. However, books on their own will not teach children to love reading. A computer will not find the exact bit of information required without a person who has the skills to retrieve and use this information. And if schools want quality teacher-librarians, they need to support them, resource them, educate them, make sure expectations are clear and evaluate them. They need to select the best staff for the role of teacher-librarian, not leave the role to only those willing to pay for the qualification.

If research shows that libraries increase learning outcomes, then there needs to be more support and understanding of how this occurs. However, the quality of school library programs varies due to:

- Staffing- both aide and library specialist provision
- Resources and funding- even the best library staff will struggle without adequate funding
- Context - curriculum operation, timetabling, ethos, access to technology, lack of clarity of goals.
- Administration support- it is repeatedly shown that the effectiveness of a Library program is closely related to support from the school Principal http://www.iasl-online.org/pubs/slw/july09.htm
- Systemic support- Education Departments and employers should provide more support with resources and guidelines, and clarify the elements required of library programs as is done with subject areas

Libraries provide specialist support in the 3 Rs – reading, research and resourcing. Over the past decade, advances in technology have drastically changed reading. We are now talking about multi-literacy, digital literacy and trans-literacy, in addition to traditional literacies.

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

The terminology used for qualified school library staff varies. This can include teacher-librarians and librarians; but many libraries are staffed by library assistants, some of whom also have qualifications. The American Library Association adopted the title, "school librarian," for those with at least undergraduate qualifications in 2010. Another term that has been used frequently in the past has been "media specialist" http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6715763.html .

However, school administrations need to be clear about what functions it wants professional staff (with at least undergraduate qualifications) in libraries to perform. Roles in school libraries vary greatly depending on school size, other staffing, age of students and school resource status. Possible roles currently performed by many school librarians include to varying degrees:

1. Librarian- cataloguing, processing, organization, copyright
2. Multi-media specialist- cameras, editing, publishing
3. IT support, integration, access, software for improving educational outcomes including Web 2.0 and 3.0 tools
4. Curriculum support
5. Implementation and design of information skills program
6. Implementation and design of reading/literature program
7. Educational leadership including teambuilding, collaboration with staff and students, school planning and policy input, and problem solving skills
8. Manager- of staff, budget, self, time, resources, facility, marketing, public relations
9. Teacher – model good pedagogy, and engage students in learning through inquiry, active learning and effective instructional methods
10. Learner – keep abreast of changes in information and education, sharing these with the school community, implementing best practice to meet particular learning needs.

Even though all teachers today would teach reading in some ways, teacher- librarians particularly recognise the importance of sustained reading, and developing the reading habit for enjoyment, not just subject purposes. This skill is very important in developing literacy, as students need to be able to read increasing quantities and varieties of material as they progress through school. While all teachers should support reading, school librarians specialise in literature and finding books that will help overcome reading reluctance in some students. Encouraging reading of literature in a sustained manner is particularly important given the increasing use by students of technologies such as texting and Facebook that use a type of shorthand for communication, and often operate against skills in grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary.

## The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

There is often discussion about who should staff a Library and the level of qualifications. Much of the clerical and administrative work can be done by aides. However, it is the teaching/instructing part of the role that brings most value to staff and students. An aide can process the books, but who will help the reluctant reader to find the book that will start them enjoying reading, or improve student searching so they do not have 6 million results on google?

It would be beyond their role description to expect aides to regularly instruct classes in information and literature matters. The core value of the role lies in teaching. If the person employed is a

Librarian, then the teacher must be present while the Librarian gives "instruction." A Librarian will probably not have been trained in education or curriculum or assessment or lesson design. A teacher may have some of the teaching skills, but will usually not be trained in Library systems, resource management or Library programming.

The 10 functions of the role previously mentioned, show why it can be difficult to find qualified staff with skills in all areas. With a shortage of teacher-librarians, let alone skilled teacher-librarians, it may be timely to acknowledge that a wider range of qualifications than only 'teacher-librarian" be considered when seeking staff to manage the Library. For example, a teacher-librarian who gained a qualification a long time ago and who has not continued with professional learning, may be less effective in the role than a classroom teacher who has a highly developed understanding of information skills and literature promotion.

Ideally, staff without teacher-librarian qualifications should be given training to develop skills they lack in Library management and program delivery. There should also be consideration about the provision of Library qualifications in other ways and perhaps by bodies other than Universities. Universities are not always sufficiently responsive to the needs of other organizations, including schools. Currently, only a limited number of Universities offer Library qualifications, and this is usually a Masters program in Teacher-Librarianship. Perhaps there needs to be bridging courses to assist staff who already have an undergraduate library or an education degree, and have many of the other skills and aptitudes desired in a teacher-librarian, to gain skills in Library management. It would seem that Universities are setting the requirement of a Masters degree for teacher-librarianship, which may be further discouraging suitable staff from this career path. Perhaps Universities need to be encouraged to consider options such as including teacher-librarianship as a major in undergraduate education degrees.  Similarly, courses need more flexibility, such as courses specifically to allow Librarians to become teacher-librarians.

While qualifications are preferable, the real necessity is staff who are able to manage a school Library program effectively. Because each school differs greatly, the role is very dependent on the ability to learn from experience and to be able to apply Library principles to the particular school context.

Even with qualifications, mentoring is important for new school library managers, just as new teachers benefit from mentoring. In recent years, there has been a lack of systemic support, such as staff who could supply mentoring, from education bodies. While professional organisations such as SLAQ and ASLA try to provide help with this, they are staffed largely by volunteers, and do not have the resources to provide systemic support.

The whole approach to teacher-librarianship and its important role has not been recognised by education employers. Often, forms for teachers offering to do supply or contract work do not allow teacher- librarianship to be identified as a specialty. Thus, employers can find it hard to organise leave replacements. Similarly, it can be difficult for teacher-librarians to obtain information about new positions. Thus, positions may remain unfilled for an unnecessarily long time, and staff seeking work find this difficult. In addition, some Principals are timetabling school librarians onto full or nearly full teaching loads, leaving no time for Library administration, and aide time may be insufficient as well. These problems further discourage people from seeking work in school libraries.

Currently, to study teacher-librarianship, individuals must often pay for the additional study, as well as expending considerable time and effort for the additional qualification. This may discourage the best individuals and sufficient individuals from undertaking the role. In NSW, scholarships are being provided for teachers to study teacher-librarianship. This allows the education department to actively select teachers with the best aptitudes to perform the role. This option should be considered in all states, not just NSW.

However, in NSW, there are also moves to provide training to teachers and expect them to compensate for lack of qualified library staff. Teachers are under increasing pressures from many directions including National Testing. If teachers were able to provide quality library programs, then the research would not show that school library programs boost student achievement. With an increasing rate of change in information and communication technologies, it is unreasonable to expect teachers to be able to keep pace with new developments in information skills, plus new literature, as well as the many curriculum changes, and apply all these to their core teaching, while facing increasing demands from students with diverse needs.

Due to the current shortage of teacher-librarians, it should be considered whether Libraries must be staffed, at first, by someone with a library qualification. However, any staff talking on these roles should be willing and expected to undertake some type of Library training. Education Departments should provide mentoring and training programs to assist staff who are identified and interested in pursuing Library management to gain these skills. Also, in areas where aides manage school Libraries, there should be teacher-librarian support provided, in some form, such as a visiting consultant, a helpdesk, other online resources, and daily support resources to provide assistance and advice.

**Challenges – many of these challenges have arisen out of a lack of systemic support for school librarians over the last decade**

- While subject teachers are given clear guidelines about what they must teach, and this is being nationalized, this has not been done with school Library programs. Just as subjects have essential learnings, so there needs to be consideration about what essential learnings students gain from Library programs. It is important that all students have access to a quality Library program, so it is important to identify the criteria that should be included in such as program. If employers do not clarify what they want Library programs to achieve, it is not reasonable to complain if they are dissatisfied with what is provided.

  Teacher –librarians also need to be clear and plan what they need to achieve in Information Literacy and Literature programs. This assists goal achievement and prioritizing. Otherwise, key goals can be overlooked. In a "service" role, it is very important to stay focused on goals or time can be subsumed by other demands. While "helping" is part of the role, the priority should be implementing a Library program designed with a scope and sequence to suit student developmental needs and collaboratively planned with teachers to give the greatest benefit to the school community.

- Similarly, there is much room for centralized provision of resources. Library procedure documents could be developed centrally which each school could modify to suit their own needs. At present, many teacher-librarians are duplicating procedures developed at every other school. Education Departments should be providing resource templates and

identifying documents and procedures for quality school Libraries. There should be much more sharing of best practice and resources to enable all school libraries to increase efficiency and focus on the needs of staff and students.

- Some teacher-librarians are prevented from operating adequately due to lack of aide support and an insufficient budget.

- Some teacher-librarians need to be more flexible. They approach their role with lists of things they "don't do". While a negative response may be valid in some instances, there also needs to be reasonable flexibility on the part of teacher-librarians. For example, they might be unwilling to teach Year 8 if they are a primary teacher-librarian. There needs to be some flexibility in meeting the needs of their schools and supporting their administration, just as the administration should be supportive of the role.

- Some teacher- librarians completed qualifications many years ago and have not changed their perspective of the role since then. Some teacher-librarians have not progressed their professional learning sufficiently over the past decade. This may have been exacerbated by lack of access to technology for both staff and students. Also, professional learning requires time and it is not realistic for staff to achieve this if teacher- librarians are timetabled excessively.

- Technological advances mean aides can do many tasks previously done by teacher-librarians such as most cataloguing. Some teacher-librarians perform such functions due to lack of support staff, but others have support staff and still choose to spend considerable time on such tasks. Time spent on tasks that can be done by aides, is done at the expense of other functions that might more directly support teachers and students.

- Flexible timetabling may work in more highly resourced situations with highly skilled staff, but not in all circumstances. It requires a high level of collaborative skills and more time for planning. It is also costly – having 2 teachers present. While this may be best pedagogy, not all schools can afford a totally flexible timetabling regime.

- Some teacher-librarians take on additional roles that impact on their Library programs. For example, running the school fashion parade is only valid if the Library program is also running effectively. If this core role is not made a priority, then it reduces respect for the importance of the Library role and creates questions about the need for a teacher-librarian. This is not to say Library staff should not involve themselves in extra-curricular activities, but that the importance of the Library program should be paramount.

- Some teacher-librarians do not address all aspects of the role. For example, they may implement a magnificent Book Week, but it takes all year to organize this, and information skills may not be covered sufficiently.

- Some teacher-librarians avoid teaching, yet this should be the core of the role.

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

One of the problems with Library staffing has been clack of clarity and management of the role by the education system. This has been exacerbated by the rapid changes in reading media and

technology in the past decade. Despite role descriptions, Principals may also be unclear about what they can expect and question the value of the teacher-librarian if they are not teaching. Other Principals take advantage of this lack of clarity and timetable teacher-librarians on for Release from Face to Face teaching to the same maximum load expected of teachers. The various education systems in Australia need to develop clearer understandings of what good school libraries do, and ensure it is being done.

There needs to be the establishment of reasonable expectations of those managing Libraries. The amount of time for Library administration will vary depending on the school. However, this should be additional to time for teacher-librarians for planning lessons. This lack of systemic support for the role of teacher-librarian, uncertainty and reduced funding for libraries can only be further discouraging staff from pursuing library studies and adding to the teacher-librarian shortage.

School decision making should be based on evidence. If school libraries are shown to boost achievement, then all students should have access to a quality Library program, and it should not be left to the discretion of a Principal to choose to reduce spending on Libraries in order to spend funds on other items which have not been found to boost achievement.

There needs to be clarity between the Principal or their delegated representative and the teacher-librarian as to the role and goals of the Library. There should be a meeting at least annually to discuss the Library Action Plan and program for the year. This Library Action Plan should also reflect school goals and curriculum objectives. School management and staff should have some opportunity for input into Library planning.

Similarly, teacher-librarians should be subject to performance review based on these established goals, implementation of the Action Plan and criteria for a quality Library program. The role of teacher-librarian should be a respected position for the best teachers, not an escape for those who no longer want to teach. There would also be an opportunity to develop the role as a breeding ground for those seeking promotion- as the wide variety of skills already described would be invaluable for school administrators.

Education Departments should be monitoring school Library programs to provide support, resources, and to ensure the delivery of quality programs. There should be more systemic provision of professional learning for teacher-librarians. Flexible timetabling may be too expensive for some schools, but there should be guidelines about the teaching loads of teacher librarians and a combination of options may work best. There are also modified ways in which flexible timetabling can operate to suit various school situations. For example, in primary schools, teacher-librarians schools could collaborate and plan with teachers at the beginning of the year to determine which units the teacher-librarians will work with which classes to develop information literacy skills. In addition there should be scheduled times for borrowing and reading promotion. The result may be that the classroom teacher may be present for some but not all Library lessons. While the teacher-librarian takes classes, teachers can be freed for other priorities such as professional learning, planning etc.

Thus, a more flexible method of flexible timetabling may be needed by many schools, as well as more flexible staffing models. This does not mean cut-price resourcing. If aides are managing Libraries, then they need to be supported.

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

Jamie McKenzie in his article "Why We Still Need Libraries and Librarians" http://fno.org/mar2010/still.html clearly outlines how School Librarians have an important role in teaching effective use of digital technologies. He refers to

- Skills needed to manage information over abundance- to define what is needed and identify the problem, and locate and select suitable information, analyse, synthesize information and use digital presentation tools
- Need to evaluate quality and veracity of online information
- Skills in using information without copying and pasting, to give credit and not plagiarise, referencing correctly
- Skills in searching in a time effective manner by keywords, and other techniques, and using appropriate search tools and filters
- Assistance with comprehending the information and collecting it – note taking, skimming, scanning
- Selecting technology tools that most effectively enhance learning from the abundance of new technologies available
- Teaching how to access the deep/hidden internet and databases
- Using digital technologies to engage learners.
- Supporting students in their appropriate use of technologies, including social networking sites. Assisting with teaching safe internet use
- Supporting classroom teachers with useful digital technology resources to enhance learning

In addition to Jamie's ideas digital technologies allow school to implement flat classrooms that utilise resources and expertise from around the world. For example video conferencing allows students to learn from real world "experts" in various fields, and to engage in lifelong and real world learning experiences e.g. conversing in another language by email with students from that country.

With increasing rates of change in communication and information technologies, school librarians can play an important role in identifying those tools which will improve learning outcomes in a particular school and assisting and collaborating with staff on the implementation of these.

Advances in digital technologies mean reading material will continue to exist in an increasing number of formats and locations. Quality information is often not free. Teacher librarians, in collaboration with teachers, will still be needed to select, organize and assist school communities with accessing reading and information.

**Name of responder:**

**Anne Weaver**
(these are my personal views and do not represent the views of any organisation)

**Head of Library and Information Services**