



**To the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training**

I welcome the Federal Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians. As a teacher for twenty-four years and twelve of those as a trained teacher librarian, I am deeply concerned at the rapidly diminishing number of trained teacher librarians and the lack of properly resourced school libraries, particularly in primary schools and the impact this is having on the literacy skills of young Australians.

Harold Howe, former U.S. Commissioner of Education said "*What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks of education*" (Howe, "*School Library Journal*", 1967). The Library Resource Centre (LRC) is the hub of our school and I represent the exception in a primary school as a full-time teacher librarian with a library budget that allows me to provide a well resourced LRC. I am privileged to see our 552 students (21) classes every week in our LRC. However, my role as teacher librarian is vulnerable to a change in school principal to one who believes the internet is all the school requires or believes it is cheaper to employ a library technician to manage the LRC. This could easily mean my role as teacher librarian is redundant.

**Many comments of support for school libraries and teacher librarians from staff, parents and students from our school can be found here on our LRC Blog at <http://smotlrc.globalstudent.org.au/2010/03/30/we-need-school-libraries/> Please read as many as you can because they have been written specifically for the Inquiry.**

One of my many roles as a teacher librarian is to be an integral part of the school Literacy program. I am part of each student's reading journey from Prep to Year 6. I am with them as Preps when they select and scan a book to borrow on their first visit to the LRC and I guide, encourage and help foster a love of literature and reading in my students through to Year 6. I strongly agree with Australian children's author, Michael Panckridge when he says "*Every word on every page of every book is a small step on a journey to being a better reader, a better writer and a more interesting person.*"

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/prc/keypeople/ambassadors/panckridge.htm>

As a teacher librarian I support this by providing classes where students participate in a range of literature activities exploring a range of genres, themes and multi-modal texts.

The reality is that I see each of our 21 classes for 40 minutes once a week and approximately 10 -15 minutes of that time is for DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) when children browse, read and borrow. Literature is a major part of the LRC program which also includes teaching students how to use the LRC, information literacy skills and relevant e-Learning skills. A lot of the support I give students for their reading is outside their class time.

***Outside class time I support students with reading in the following ways:***

- Encouraging preschooler siblings to borrow from our LRC
- Opening the LRC for borrowing before and after school three mornings and afternoons a week and two lunchtimes
- Regularly purchasing and promoting new books to ensure our collection is current and meets the recreational and learning needs and interests of our students
- Purchasing books recommended by students for the LRC
- Creating engaging displays to promote reading and books
- Providing students with the opportunity to participate in author/Illustrator visits, Book Week activities and various competitions
- Organising Book Fairs to encourage and support reading
- Recommending novels for teachers to read with their class for enjoyment or to support class topics and selecting classroom Bulk Loans
- Assisting in selecting books for classroom Literature Circles
- Registering students who choose to participate in the Premier's Reading Challenge
- Maintaining our LRC Blog as an integral way of promoting books and supporting our reading community as well as developing online connections for our students within our school and with the wider community

Last year one of our students entered and won a competition for the Megs series of books that he enjoyed reading. As a result our school won a visit from Mark Schwarzer to promote his new book and our school received wonderful media coverage. This had a huge impact on our male readers who saw positive male reading and writing role models in Mark Schwarzer and Neil Montagnana-Wallace. Neil is returning to our school in Term Two to speak to our Year 5 and 6 students about how he writes the Megs series and this will no doubt further inspire our students as writers.

Of great concern is what is happening in those primary schools where they do not have a teacher librarian to purchase, promote and read appropriate literature to meet student needs and interests or organise visits from authors to inspire the students to read or write. What happens to students who do not have a teacher librarian who is an "enabling adult" to assist them to select appropriate books and connect them to just the right book for them? In her letter to *The Age* on 3/4/10 Sheryl Gwyther, one of our Australian children's authors explained the value of a teacher librarian when she said *"From my experience as a teacher, parent and now children's author who visits primary school libraries, I have seen how well-funded ones run by experienced, enthusiastic teacher-librarians, with the support of their principals, can make a huge difference to how children explore and learn through language and literature."*

The Lonsdale Report (2003) found that active school library programs run by trained Teacher-Librarians made a significant difference to student learning outcomes. It would be highly beneficial if the library could be explicitly recognised in national curricula for the central role it plays in helping student achievement in reading and writing.

Today's students are confronted by a huge volume of information and as a teacher librarian I am able to teach students the information literacy skills they require to navigate their way. In our LRC, students from Prep to Year 6 are taught how to locate books on the shelf, use the OPAC and how to access online resources. Students are taught about plagiarism, how to write bibliographies as well as learning how to critically

evaluate websites and select information appropriate to their needs. As part of digital citizenship they learn about cyber safety and netiquette.

As a teacher librarian I have a global perspective of the school because I work across all levels and with all staff in some capacity. I need to have an overview of all curriculum areas and learning outcomes to be able to both recommend and purchase appropriate resources to support our Prep to Year 6 teaching and learning program. I work closely with the Curriculum Coordinator to ensure Inquiry topics are adequately resourced with a variety of resources including print, non-print and digital.

I currently collaborate where possible with teachers to ensure students have access to appropriate resources and are taught research skills. As one of my colleagues said on our LRC Blog, *"We live in a rapidly changing world where teachers need a multitude of resources and professional development to assist them in delivering a meaningful educational experience to their students. I rely on the expertise of our teacher librarian to access information for my learning and for my students."*

(<http://smotlrc.globalstudent.org.au/2010/03/30/we-need-school-libraries/>). This comment is supported by research by Dr Michele Lonsdale *"Collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers."* (Lonsdale Report 2003)

However I would be more effective as a teacher librarian if I could collaborate with teachers during their planning rather than providing the Release Time from face-to-face teaching for them to plan. I could then contribute my knowledge of resources, information literacy and my Web 2.0 skills. Using teacher librarians primarily to provide Release Time diminishes their role and often leaves them isolated because they are not part of any team planning. The LRC timetable would also operate more effectively if it was a flexible timetable that wasn't restricted to providing Release Time and enabled the teacher librarian and classroom teachers to work together to teach and assist students.

In 2009 I completed the School Library of Victoria's "Learning with Web 2.0 Program...Re-imagine" to ensure my role as teacher librarian was evolving with the contemporary digital world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in which we teach. This led to the development of our LRC Blog which has become an integral part of our LRC. The LRC Blog is our library's presence on the internet. It is also a means of promoting books and supporting our reading community as well as developing online connections for our students within our school and with the wider community. In our first year we had 4000 visits from both interstate and overseas. The LRC Blog has even gone beyond my original goals as evidenced by one of our teachers *"Our T-L is innovative, come and visit our school LRC Blog where teachers, students and visitors can communicate even when away. What a way to teach Geography! Last year I was fortunate to travel overseas and I was able to keep up communications with my students through our LRC Blog. They in turn were excited to be able to send me messages about their current learning and all that they were up to."*

**Our LRC Blog can be found at <http://smotlrc.globalstudent.org.au/>**

I am a member of our Leadership for Contemporary Learning project team and involved in assisting staff to develop an understanding of contemporary approaches to learning in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school. This term I will be working with a group of staff with a focus of learning how to use Web 2.0 tools to assist both teachers and their students to explore, connect, collaborate, create and share in a contemporary world. It is an exciting time to be working as a teacher librarian in a school library and being able to utilise digital technologies to enhance my library program and engage our students in their learning.

Many schools across Australia have been fortunate to benefit from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding from the federal government and like my school, many are building much needed school libraries. However, it is about more than simply providing a building. Without a trained teacher librarian to manage the resources and transform the space into a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Commons with resources that support all areas of the curriculum and digital tools that enable students to learn in our global village it will simply be a room for storing books.

I am a teacher, but I choose to be a teacher librarian. I am passionate about the role I play in education and I sincerely hope that this Inquiry will acknowledge and support the vital role of libraries and teacher librarians in education. My hope is that the Inquiry will ensure that it will be the norm that every school has the necessary funding for a well resourced library and a trained teacher librarian.

*At the moment that we persuade a child,  
Any child, to cross that threshold,  
That magic threshold into a library,  
We change their lives forever, for the better.  
(President Barack Obama 2008)*

## **References:**

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(These are my personal views and do not represent the views of any organisation)

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