

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS



NORTHERN TERRITORY SUBMISSION

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

The **Building the Education Revolution (BER)** scheme has provided additional library and resource centre facilities to government and non-government schools in the Northern Territory. Thirty-one urban schools will have new libraries or extensions to existing libraries. Additionally, 31 remote community schools will receive new resource centres. For many of these schools it will be the first time they have had a purpose built resource centre. The new libraries and resource centres, and upgraded existing libraries, will enable our schools to provide greater staff and student access to digital, hard copy and internet-based learning resources. They will increase the Northern Territory's capacity to make planned and sustainable investments in:

- teaching and learning resources and resource management
- information literate students
- qualified library staff
- community partnerships
- information access and delivery
- library program administration.

To ensure maximum benefit from the Australian Government's investment in libraries a parallel investment is necessary in qualified library staff and library collections (books and multimedia resources), particularly in the primary school sector. Library resources are often costly investments for schools, and many will not have qualified library personnel to manage new libraries or resource centres. An audit of staffing needs at BER sites should be undertaken to ensure the effective management and utilisation of these important additions. The recruitment and retention of suitably qualified library staff at some of these sites will present a challenge, particularly in the Northern Territory's remote schools.

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

School libraries and librarians play key roles in the development and delivery of library programs that support the school curriculum across all stages of schooling and improve educational and community outcomes. Quality school libraries are catalysts for increased student achievement, lifelong learning and rich community engagement and partnerships. An effective school library service empowers students by developing information literacy skills applicable across all areas of learning while at school and throughout life.

Libraries have the potential to provide the geographically dispersed and culturally and linguistically diverse Northern Territory population, both young and old, with:

- teaching and learning resources – digital, hard copy and internet based

- a place for students to access learning and develop information literacy as part of a class activity, group work or individual work through digital, hard copy and internet based resources
- quality library services regardless of geographical location
- opportunities for schools and their communities to reach out and engage with each other;
- families with access to appropriate resources in libraries
- venues for family information sessions, community information sessions and community activities.

Libraries and library programs are however often used for general teacher release time rather than dedicated information literacy programs, including the Cooperative Planning, Programming and Teaching (CPPT) programs which integrated into classroom programs the teaching and learning of information skills. In many schools CPPT programs have lapsed because of changing curriculum priorities and a shortage of qualified teacher librarians.

Teacher Librarians and Library Technicians are well-placed to teach how to successfully navigate and critically analyse the wealth of information that is on offer via digital technologies. Qualified Teacher Librarians are trained to support students to successfully and critically use Web2.0 technologies and incorporate information and ICT literacy into their teaching.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

The Northern Territory faces a number of challenges in relation to the recruitment, retention and development of school librarians: many of these are experienced nationally:

- there are limited career pathways available to teacher librarians
- there are few qualified teacher librarians, particularly in remote centres
- opportunities for university level studies in librarianship are limited.

Since the 1990s, in line with national trends, there has been increased devolution of responsibility to schools including in relation to decisions about how allocated staff are deployed across a school's priority areas. The Northern Territory Government provides schools with allocations of teachers based on staff-student ratio that:

- 1) more than adequately meets its obligations under an agreement with the Australian Education Union on maximum class sizes; and
- 2) provides principals and school communities with flexibility to make determinations as to how professional positions in the school are allocated to specialist fields such as library, music, physical education, arts, IT or any combination of these.

Principals and school communities require this flexibility in order to meet agreed outcomes described in each school's Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework.

The need to service an increasing number of curriculum priorities in schools has resulted in staff previously allocated to librarian positions being reallocated to other curriculum areas. This has contributed to a decline in the number of qualified teacher librarians working in schools as teacher librarians.

Difficulties associated with recruiting school librarians include:

- limited numbers of teacher librarian positions are available leading to limited career pathways and acting as a disincentive for potential librarians engaging in studies to attain a qualification in librarianship

- a small pool of qualified teacher librarians – nationally, there remain few university courses for teacher librarians. In the Northern Territory, Teacher Librarianship is not offered as part of a Bachelor of Teaching/Education course. Interested students would need to enrol at an interstate institution and study online at graduate diploma or masters degree level
- the mobility of school leadership, teaching staff and students can lead to discontinuity of school-based library policy and practice, including resourcing
- office based school library advisory positions that provided schools and librarians with support no longer exist
- the provision of school library professional development at a local level is minimal.

In the absence of sufficient qualified teacher librarians, ICT staff are now often allocated a responsibility for managing library services in schools. Whilst this arrangement provides for sound ICT skill development in a library situation, it does not necessarily facilitate the development of information literacy skills.

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

The Northern Territory population is geographically dispersed and many small communities are located in remote areas. To expand opportunities for all Territorians to access library services, the Northern Territory Library Service network encourages school communities to acknowledge and build on the value of their school libraries, as well as make links with and utilise community library services, including online services.

There are a number of joint-use community libraries in schools in the Northern Territory. In several of these schools there is no qualified teacher librarian so professional curriculum support is limited. Schools often have had to lean on community staff for their professional library services whilst the school is limited to providing technician levels of service to school clientele.

The proposed future model for public libraries includes joint-use school and community libraries in rural and remote communities with small populations. Joint-use facilities have the potential to better utilise human and capital resources, particularly in remote Northern Territory locations.

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

In this technological and global era, libraries and library services depend on the effective application of digital technologies by qualified and experienced practitioners. Effectively applied digital technologies build the capacity of libraries and librarians to provide a larger proportion of the population with much greater levels of access to a range of information sources and databases, including for instance Virtua.

Many libraries are investing in online teaching and learning resources that can be made available to staff, students and families from home, therefore enabling library resources to reach far beyond the walls of the library. In recent years best-practice online systems have been made available through school libraries. These cost-effective systems broaden the scope of tools available for learning and literacy both within and outside of school perimeters and provide students and parents access at any time to safe, educationally sound online systems. Teacher

Librarians can play important roles in supporting teachers and students to successfully integrate digital technologies into teaching and learning.

At the same time, schools often under-utilise the suites of technologies available to them because Teacher Librarians and classroom teachers do not have the skills required to integrate these technologies into teaching and learning. In response to the growing digitisation of resources, librarians need ongoing professional support to develop their ability to fully utilise digital technologies.