



INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

NSW Department of Education and Training submission

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About this submission:

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference, drawing on research and professional literature, and information gathered by the Department during an extensive online forum. This 2009 *School libraries 21C* forum was a strategy of Curriculum K-12 Directorate to engage school communities, and inform a common vision about, and capacity building needs for, school libraries into the future. Participants included principals, teacher librarians, consultants, academics, and principal and teacher librarian or school teams.

Introduction:

The *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools* raises vital questions about the future of school libraries and teacher librarians. The Inquiry offers an opportunity to reflect on the positive contributions school libraries and teacher librarians make to student learning in schools, and to guide the vision for school libraries and teacher librarians into the future.

Research and professional literature indicates key contributions by school libraries and teacher librarians in the areas of reading and literature, as well as integrated information, literacy and ICT skills across the curriculum. Digital and online texts and Web 2.0 technologies are integral to such learning enrichment.

The NSW government values the role and work of teacher librarians and school libraries in NSW government schools.

The Department's current policy and practice in relation to teacher librarians and school libraries are:

- libraries are an essential resource to support teaching and learning in curriculum context
- teacher librarians collaborate with teachers to plan, implement and evaluate teaching and learning programs, including the integration of ICT, for information literacy development and lifelong learning
- school libraries provide resources for teaching and for students' learning and recreational reading
- the teacher librarian is a specialist teacher who develops, manages and implements, on behalf of the principal, systems and procedures to ensure effective teaching and resource support for curriculum programs.

The place of school libraries and the role of teacher librarians in an increasingly technology rich school learning environment are critical issues.

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

- New primary school library facilities provided by the Building the Education Revolution (BER) supply schools with the connected infrastructure to create an appropriate environment for a 21st century library.
- The provision of appropriate technology systems enable students to have access to school libraries and community resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week and connect people and places.
- The draft English K–10 National Curriculum emphasises literature and a stronger focus on teaching of literature in K–6, increasing the need for support by school libraries and teacher librarians to stimulate a reading environment, providing enhanced access to quality literature in print and digital forms, and providing a diverse array of reading experiences.
- Participation in the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge is often facilitated and coordinated by teacher librarians in schools.

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

The NSW government values the role and work of teacher librarians and school libraries in NSW government schools. The place of school libraries and the role of teacher librarians in an increasingly technology rich school learning environment are critical issues.

Research shows that a school library:

- makes a difference to student learning (*School libraries work!* 2008 – drawing on studies in over 19 States in USA, one study alone drawing on 13,000 students)
- contributes to building student confidence, motivation, independence, and sense of responsibility for learning (Kuhlthau, 2004; Lonsdale, 2003; Dyer, 2001; Murray, 1999; Hay, 2006b; quoted in Hay & Foley, 2009)
- often provides effective practice in building a reading culture and improving students' literacy capacities through a range of strategies (Boyd, 2006 and others quoted in Hay & Foley, 2009)
- contributes to improved student achievement by providing instructional materials aligned to curriculum, collaborating with teachers, administrators and parents, and extending hours of operation (*School libraries work!* 2008)
- works with teachers to provide expertise to build capacity of students as effective information users and learners (Hay & Foley, 2009; *School libraries work!* 2008) in keeping with community expectations.

A range of initiatives by the Department of Education and Training (DET) support a vision, with appropriate use of the teacher librarian role, to ensure:

- the school library is an engaging, flexible, high-tech centre of inquiry preparing students to function effectively in an increasingly complex informational and technological world (Hay & Todd, 2010)
- students are equipped to be confident, creative, ethical, self directed digital age citizens and workers in the future
- online projects, such as *Raps and book raps* using blogs and wikis and hosting literacy experts and authors, provide:
 - students with opportunities to share their learning with parents at home
 - meaningful teaching and learning experiences using current technologies and enhancing reading, writing and literacy outcomes
 - models for teacher librarians and teachers collaborating for enhanced student learning in the digital environment.

School librarians need to work in partnership with principals as learning leaders (Hay & Todd, 2010). In working with teachers to support the learning needs of students into the future, school libraries can use print and digital resources to:

- enhance digital literacies and extend the variety of reading experiences
- support student inquiry and resource based learning, when accessing and using the plethora of information available to:
 - engage with and deal with conflicting information
 - apply critical thinking skills to evaluate, synthesise and use found information
 - gain skills and confidence in independent learning to enhance lifelong learning capacities (compiled in Hay & Foley, 2009).

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

- Diminished availability of tertiary courses and shortage of specialised teachers: the Department currently provides a *Teacher Librarian Retraining Program* in partnership with Charles Sturt University targeting graduate teachers. This is one of the strategies developed to meet the demand for teacher librarians, providing support for teachers to complete tertiary qualifications in teacher librarianship. Participants undertake a 12 month program of part-time post-graduate study by distance education and leads to the award of a *Graduate Certificate in Teacher Librarianship*. From 2003 to 2009, 287 teachers in NSW public schools have completed their teacher librarian studies through this program. A further 48 teachers began training in February 2010 and will complete the program at the end of 2010.
- The perceived lack of promotion of teacher librarians as a career option or experience has a negative impact on incentives to become a teacher librarian.
- Ongoing professional learning and support is required as teacher librarians are often experts in print and traditional media. Many need support to move beyond being novice users of digital media to harness the capacities of Web 2.0 technologies.
- Supervisory functions and release from face-to-face responsibilities can limit the core, flexible role of teacher librarians collaboratively supporting effective inquiry, critical information literacy integrated with ICT, and reading and literacy for student learning.
- A stronger evidence based practice approach is required to enable school libraries to articulate contributions to student learning.
- Effective Web 2.0 technology, including library systems, provisioning for school libraries is essential.

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

School libraries need to be learning and learner centred (Hay & Todd, 2010). In order to ensure equity and capacity for libraries as dynamic, high-tech 21C learning centres:

- Government at Federal, State and Territory, and local levels must play a significant role in supporting school libraries and teacher librarians:
 - Federal government can inform common vision and expectations for curriculum needs and consider school library contributions to national partnerships.
 - State and Territory Government policy and support can ensure the place and role of school libraries and teacher librarians into the future and providing guidance for consistent, equitable implementation at the school level.
 - Local government can encourage partnerships and resource sharing with local libraries, contribute to initiatives which encourage reading and literacies for an informed democratic society in partnership with schools and education systems.
- Closer partnerships need to be developed with the wider school community, local libraries and relevant local businesses and organisations to share expertise in order to enrich literacy and reading support, and harness appropriate technology.

Partnerships which support access to literacy and literature experts, and professional learning to ensure increased capacity to provide dynamic learning environments, resources and technology use in the library include:

- Western Sydney Young Peoples' Literature Officer, Blacktown City Council.
- Education systems working with professional associations providing regional, statewide and national conferences.

- Professional associations and local networks supporting professional learning.
- Childrens' Book Council of Australia (CBCA) promoting and supporting literature and annual Book Week events.
- Teacher librarians working with technology experts in schools and regions.
- Government, system and school budget allocations which allow equitable resourcing for school libraries to meet student learning requirements and community expectations into the future (Hay & Foley, 2009; Hay & Todd, 2010; School libraries work! 2008).
- National online Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS), with states through, for example NSW SCIS Agency, providing cataloguing of print, digital and online resources to support bulk subscriptions by states and sectors to free teacher librarians to spend more time on teaching and learning responsibilities.

In NSW government schools, the Curriculum K-12 Directorate, through the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, provides policy and curriculum support for school libraries and teacher librarians

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

A teacher librarian's essential work is curriculum design, focusing on resource based inquiry, supporting and leading instructional teams, and knowledge/facilities manager, in order to support the learning goals of their school (Hay & Todd, 2010). Digital technologies provide additional mechanisms to achieve this.

The benefits of digital technologies need to be maximised. New forms of online reading and demands on literacy, challenging students as learners, are emerging. Developments in technology, and the collaborative digital environment, can:

- reshape the resource based and inquiry focused learning experience; and
- enhance the capacity of school libraries to resource teaching and learning.

Emerging technologies can:

- offer library management systems which better leverage Web 2.0 technologies, which:
 - include integrated systems capable of running e-books and videos, including collections accessed directly from websites
 - operate federated searching and integrate with other information services for responsive, streamlined access to resources.

Digital technologies are essential for teacher librarians to work with their teaching leadership and colleagues to:

- support equitable resourcing of the curriculum
- enhance opportunities for diverse reading experiences
- teach information skills in a digital age, including:
 - coping with the plethora of online and digital information
 - dealing with complex and conflicting information in digital and other formats
 - critical thinking and building new knowledge in creative ways.

Such approaches are compatible with emerging discourse on digital age pedagogy and skills, which include:

- student centred learning
- authentic, engaging tasks
- critical thinking and problem solving
- communication and collaboration
- information literacy using ICTs (CISCO, 2008; Partnership for 21st Century Skills).

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