

Submission to House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

I understand that there are many comprehensive submissions to this Committee about the role of school libraries and qualified teacher librarians in achieving quality, educational outcomes for Australian school students. It is not my intention to cover that sort of ground. Rather, I am going to give a more personal view of student needs in regard to the appointment of a qualified teacher librarian and the establishment of a school library.

Some of the present discussion about the role of teacher librarians has resulted from the Government's stimulus package. This has allowed many primary schools to establish a new school library. However, this initiative has not been paired with the appointment of a professional educator, who is qualified to make the most of this rare opportunity.

More unusual than this discussion is my present educational appointment. I am a qualified teacher librarian with the opposite problem. I teach in a school without a school library. As a professional offering this educational specialty, it is hard for me to divorce the two issues one from the other. How does this happen in Australia?

My present school is a relatively new secondary school of about 500 students. We do not have the finances to build a school library at this stage and, of course, secondary school libraries were not included in the Government's stimulus package. However, we have a school council and a management team, which understands the educational necessity to appoint a teacher librarian. As a result we have a full-time teacher librarian allocation but no functional library space in which to work with our students. This is a challenging situation and one that I have not experienced before in 30 years as a teacher-librarian.

The curriculum areas in which I work focus on literacy. They include cyber safety, research planning, promotion of reading, ICT literacy, provision of quality adolescent literature, the SACE Year 12 Research Project, author visits, information literacy, copyright and plagiarism. We work hard to create a functional learning environment for our students and to contribute to student success. Some students come to our make-shift space as individuals or in small groups; sometimes we go to the students' classrooms or computer rooms to work with them. All of our Year 8 students take out membership in the local public library and we encourage our Year 11 and Year 12 students to join the adjacent UniSA Library as community members. Nevertheless, these alternative strategies do not replace the need for a 21st century school library, which our students can own, and in which we can fully contribute to student literacy and success.

My experience in school libraries tells me that the school library is one of the busiest physical spaces in a school - used before school, during lesson time, at lunchtime and after school with a variety of teachers, learners and learning tasks to be accommodated. I often wonder what it says to our students about the

priorities in the wider community, when our school is unable to physically establish what should be the very heart and soul of its academic life.

I urge the Government to:

- make comprehensive provision for school libraries from Reception - Year 12
- fund the appointment of qualified teacher librarians to provide leadership, teaching, librarianship and management skills in these facilities
- address the matters of school libraries and qualified teacher librarians as intrinsically-linked educational issues.

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