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**A submission for the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in
Australian schools.**

Summary of the main points

- **State and Federal Governments have done far too little in the information age (last ten years) to better support and fund school libraries. This has resulted in the role of school libraries being moved from the centre of a school's curriculum and a steady decline in the number of professionally qualified teacher-librarians working in school libraries.**
- **The current information age has increased burdens on classroom teachers. Information Communication Technology (ICT) training and development has taken place but at the expense of any professional development on the role of school libraries and teacher-librarians.**
- **State and National literacy agendas have not benefited the role of teacher-librarians or increased the value of school libraries.**
- **Basically over the last ten years the ICT that has exploded into the community and schools has developed a significant ignorance in regarding the value of teacher-librarians and school libraries. There have been no initiatives or programs aimed at supporting or raising the importance of school libraries and teacher-librarians in such an age. Hence a reduction in their staffing and funding.**

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

- **The research is out there regarding the significance of school libraries and the important roles teacher-librarians can play in further enhancing the educational outcomes for students. The research and evidence is out there, but the problem lies in the willingness of educational authorities to act on it. (See the following website from the Australian School Library Association - <http://www.asla.org.au/research/>)**
- **In the NSW public high school where I work I have not witnessed, in the library, what could be seen as true improvements in literacy amongst students. I have not seen a greater involvement of students in the school library choosing to be involved in literature.**
- **There has been too much of an emphasis on skill development and not enough on allowing students to 'play the game'. Libraries are very much about 'playing the game.' Allowing students real opportunities to develop their skills in real situations.**
- **The library has not received increases in funding or staffing to assist in the promotion of its services to students both at school and beyond the confines of the physical library. For literacy to be truly improved it must be on going and a student's involvement must occur beyond the school. Libraries are positioned to provide that development if resourced and staffed appropriately.**

- **In most government high schools having only one teacher-librarian restricts the capacity of the library to fully reach out to students to improve educational outcomes. Especially in those schools where student numbers exceed 1000. Within the Department of Education and Training in NSW no evaluation of teacher-librarian positions has been made (last ten years) in regard to increased workloads produced from an information age.**
- **All staffing increases are based on student numbers. A major role of the teacher-librarian is to support classroom teachers in assisting them to integrate information skills into their teaching programs. Yet when teacher-librarians are allocated to (public schools in NSW) schools there is no consideration given to the professional support role they provide for teachers.**

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

- **Little has been done to provide teacher-librarians and school libraries with adequate software and hardware to improve the management and provision of resources to students and staff.**
- **In NSW teacher-librarians still have to use a library management system (OASIS) that was developed in the 1980s. There is an online access catalogue developed by the NSW DET but this has fundamental weaknesses in its search capacity. For example, if a student makes a spelling mistake the search engine returns no results. It does not adequately prompt the user the way modern search engines do.**
- **Teacher-librarians have been basically forgotten by the NSW DET in regarding the management of information and provision of resources to staff and students. They are not even seen as the staff that principals should go to when the school considers developing a website.**
- **Often digital technologies are placed into libraries without much consideration for the role of a library. This creates a situation whereby the library is turned into a quasi computer lab.**
- **The push to integrate ICT into teaching and learning has narrowed the use of resources for teaching the curriculum. Many teaching staff will use a library solely to gain access to the ICT and neglect other resources. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning has overshadowed the beneficial role of print resources in improving educational outcomes. A library provides access to a range of resources to aid teaching and learning. When teaching is restricted to the use of one form of resource than learning is also restricted. This restriction is a direct consequence of educational bodies failing to understand the pressures placed on teachers and schools to meet the needs of their students.**
- **When the NSW DET introduced the Laptops for Learning to Year 9 students in 2009 all of those laptops bypassed each school's internal intranet sites. As a teacher-librarian who had developed such a site for students to use I had no say in this. The resource I developed was basically made obsolete**

- overnight without any regard to the work or lost learning opportunities for those students with laptops. This is a clear example of the employer ignoring the professional role and work of a teacher-librarian.
- **In regard to the Department of Education and Training in NSW there is limited understanding of the role of teacher-librarians and school libraries in a digital age. The reality of what happens (how libraries and teacher-librarians have to function) in the school is completely missed by the NSW DET.**

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

- **I am the only qualified teacher-librarian in the high school where I work. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree, Diploma in Education and a Master of Education Degree (Teacher-Librarianship). The school where I teach has 1150 students and seventy to eighty fulltime and part-time staff. Most of the teachers have had no professional development in relation to libraries and the role of teacher-librarians in an information age. Simply the (NSW Department of Education and Training) employer does not provide any. This means that even though the school has a qualified teacher-librarian it is difficult to stop the library being used in ways that does not meet its specialized purpose. Therefore ensuring that the development of information skills is harder to achieve.**
- **Only having one teacher-librarian position in most government high schools or primary schools reduces the opportunity for employment and hence a reduction in recruitment. In the school I work, since 1999, I have seen an increase in staffing: second deputy position, head teacher administration, head teacher ICT, classroom teacher positions (both full and part-time). Yet in the same period of time I have seen no increase to the library staffing, but a reduction in support staffing for the library. This increase to staffing in the school has been a result of student increases and it has taken part during an information age. A time when educational bodies should be further developing their school libraries to meet the increase in workload.**
- **The NSW DET in its inaction in developing the position in an information age would appear to be suggesting that teacher-librarian positions are no longer needed.**
- **For the last ten years the NSW DET have done virtually nothing substantial to better support the role of teacher-librarians in schools or provide school libraries with extra funding.**
- **There is a trend to remove qualified teacher-librarians out of schools, at least in the public school sector, because the view is technology can replace such a specialist. Removing the only qualified information manager in a school in an information age / future would seem foolish, but it is happening. The (public school) position is not growing but shrinking and therefore reducing the number of universities offering teacher-librarian courses.**

- **As the teacher-librarian in a large school you are not a member of the executive of that school, you are often left out of important curriculum based decisions, operational matters which impact on the school library making it at times impossible for you to actually do your job. Not being properly supported by the employer makes it almost impossible in large schools when so many other staff are competing to have their own professional agenda met.**
- **I have been a teacher-librarian, with the NSW Department of Education and Training, since 1999 and in that time I have not seen the NSW DET provide professional development training to classroom teachers, executive staff and principals on the role of teacher-librarians and school libraries in an information age. This lack of professional development, especially in an information age, increases the level of difficulty a teacher-librarian has to perform their role professionally. Even at times a teacher-librarian can be placed in other roles outside of the library making it impossible for them to perform their specialized role at all.**

Things the Federal government can do

- **Survey each public school to find out the size of their staff (full time and part time), students and how much money they spend on each student for resources for their library.**
- **Survey each state government to know how much money they have increased to school budgets during the information age to help their school libraries better meet the educational needs of students and professional development needs of staff.**
- **Write specifically to each state and territory government and ask when was the last time they reassessed the role of teacher-librarians in the last ten years.**
- **Make it policy that all students in all schools should have equal access to not only qualified teacher-librarians but access to qualified resources beyond the confines of school libraries. All students should be able to go online and access a range of databases that are an authority on information students need to access for their school work. Google is not good enough. Fund all schools to achieve this. Make it policy that the selection of such databases is the domain of the teacher-librarian within each school.**
- **Make it policy that all school teacher-librarians be given adequate training and resourcing to permit them to have a digital professional online presence so that their students can contact them to assist them with locating and using information effectively from beyond the school.**
- **Make it policy that all state educational authorities should ensure that there is adequate professional training for all classroom teachers, principals and executive staff in regard to the operation and role of teacher-librarians and libraries. With a focus on the development of information skills.**
- **Investigate the way in which public libraries, State Library of NSW for example, could play a larger role in supporting school teacher-librarians and**

school libraries. What sort of educational network could be developed if all state libraries were linked to their public school libraries?

- **Be daring and increase funding to those states that have doubled the number of qualified teacher-librarians in their schools and doubled the funding for their school libraries in the last five years. (I doubt there would be one State or Territory that has done this.)**
- **Staff school libraries from Federal Government funding. Allow States and Territories to fund for resources and buildings. (If States and Territories do not have to employ the staff they can use that existing funding to resource the libraries. That would mean the current budget for the school library where I work, if I was employed federally, would be \$80,000.00)**
- **Develop a nation wide strategy for the management and teaching of information skills that would underpin the necessity for professionally qualified teacher-librarians in schools. Link this to the State Libraries and University libraries throughout the nation.**