



Submission to the House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

I am a teacher librarian in an independent Catholic secondary school for boys with a current enrolment of 750 students.

My concern is with "the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy" and including information literacy.

I am concerned about staffing in primary school libraries and its effect on the skills (or lack of skills) which our Year 7 students bring with them when they begin high school.

My school acknowledges that a well-resourced, well-staffed school library running effective programs in collaboration with classroom teachers makes a positive contribution to educational outcomes.

Our Year 7 students come from a wide range of Catholic and public primary schools, where teacher librarians are employed for 2 or 3 days per week (if that), with little clerical assistance. Much of a primary school teacher librarian's teaching time is used for release from face-to-face (RFF) time for the classroom teacher. Consequently there is little room for collaborative teaching and, importantly, little room for teaching information literacy at even a most basic level. In my understanding, a teacher librarian in a primary school has little clerical support and this further erodes his or her teaching time.

The Library at my school is staffed by 1.8 Teacher Librarians. At the beginning of a school year, my colleague and I ask our incoming Year 7 students about their information skills:

Can they search a library catalogue? (Do they know what a catalogue is?)

Do they know what a Reference book is? Non-fiction? Fiction?

Do they know how to use an encyclopedia?

Where, in a book, would they find an index? A list of contents?

What is a caption?

These are basic skills which I would expect an 11 or 12 year old to have acquired by the time he leaves primary school. They are related not only to books but also to all forms of digital media. Sadly, the students who have these skills are in the minority.

If the groundwork which enables a student to become a life-long learner is not laid down in primary school, through collaboration between his classroom teacher and his teacher librarian, and delivered through meaningful programs, the student is at once denied equity of access and the opportunity to succeed.

All students need to be information literate, and the process of acquiring information literacy needs to begin when a child enters formal schooling.

I call upon the Federal Government to develop national school library standards, where each school has a library staffed by a full-time, qualified teacher librarian who has an adequate provision of clerical support and who is certainly not used for RFF.

Trish Atkinson
Teacher Librarian
Edmund Rice College