



## *Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools*

### Preamble

We are fortunate to work in a large independent school (K-12) in Queensland. We are staffed with three full-time Teacher-Librarians, all fully qualified. We have 108 hours dedicated support staff for the Library as well as a Multimedia specialist attached to the Library.

The school has two libraries covering the Junior School and the Middle/Senior school. Both libraries are well-resourced and receive comprehensive funding. We have positive, yet passive, support from the School Administration team. Our perception is that the role of the Teacher Librarian is highly valued in our school. There have always been high levels of funding support and, in terms of employment vacancies, when these have occurred; it has never been challenged that we may not need a Teacher Librarian to fill the vacancy.

### Junior School Library

The focus is:

- The development of information literacy skills through hands-on experience for the students with new information technologies
- The development of research inquiry skills in students
- The development of literacy skills through the Lexile Reading Program and through a wide reading program aimed at fostering the love of reading
- The running of an biennial Literature and Arts Festival throughout the Junior School which involves visiting authors talking and workshopping with students.

### Middle/Senior Library

The focus is :

- Extending the development of information literacy skills begun in the Junior School
- Developing critical literacy skills in student research
- Close curriculum planning in the Middle School with teachers and Year Level Coordinators
- Engendering a love of reading and writing through teacher-student discussions, the Readers' Cup Competition, author residencies and student visits to external promotional events. We actively endeavour to meet the reading needs/interests of our students by involving them in suggesting titles for acquisition by the Library.
- In-servicing of staff on new pedagogies and resources as they become available.
- Supporting the curriculum needs of teachers and students through discussion and purchase of appropriate resources. Teachers are given access to the latest publications to evaluate.

- Active encouragement in parental involvement and use of the Library resources
- The promotion of a well-balanced approach to gathering information using both traditional print and digital resources.

The Library staff, supported by the School community, aims to provide a welcoming, supportive and well-resourced facility which enhances the quality of teaching and learning. The generous allocation of library staffing allows the library to be open for extended hours thus having a greater impact on the School community.

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

Teacher Librarians assist in developing levels of literacy in students through encouragement of wide reading for pleasure. The connection between reading and language skills (such as spelling) has been well-documented.

As Teacher-Librarians, we have an important role in teaching our students to be information literate, to examine print and digital resources critically and to use information ethically. The core work of the Teacher Librarians impacts positively on student skill development to assist them to become life-long learners who are information literate.

The resource manager role of the Teacher Librarian is central to the school. The Teacher Librarian has the skills to manage resources to ensure ease of access for staff and efficient utilization of school financial assets.

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

The Teacher Librarian is a technology integrator and innovator.

Digital technologies are becoming increasingly pervasive in teaching and learning activities across the entire curriculum. The use of technology is increasing exponentially. The role of the Teacher Librarian is to help students develop skills to allow critical interaction with the mass of information available to them. It is also to willingly update their skills in new technologies and their applications.

The Teacher Librarian plays an important facilitating role in the selection of appropriate traditional and digital resources which will enhance teaching and learning.

### **The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

The Teacher Librarian is a specialist staff member.

It is essential for Teacher Librarians to have a teaching background and to have had extensive classroom experience in order to fully understand the impact of teaching strategies and the manner in which students learn. It is also essential that they have training in Librarianship.

Overwhelmingly today, Teacher Librarians in Queensland are an aging group, many of whom have minimal qualifications besides being registered teachers.

In Queensland there is, I believe, no government support for teachers wanting to undertake a Graduate Diploma or Masters Degree in Teacher Librarianship, yet these qualifications are fundamental to being able to perform the range of professional duties required. Those teachers who do undertake studies in Teacher Librarianship usually do so in their own time at their own expense.

In many State High Schools in Queensland the role of the Teacher Librarian has all but disappeared. In our local government area of the Gold Coast, there are seven large state high schools with no Teacher Librarian at all, and in the others, the Teacher Librarians have significant timetabled classes teaching a particular subject, leaving insufficient time for the valuable work needed to be done.

This contrasts to the situation I came from in the late 1980s to 1990s when, as a Head of Department (Resources) in the State system, I was in a high school of more than 1700 students with three full time Teacher Librarians.

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

The funding provided by the Federal Government's Digital Education Revolution has certainly given a much needed boost to the levels of access to digital resources in schools. In some areas the benefits of this have been less than fully realised because of the lack of professional support in schools.

In many of the State Schools, the level of Library funding has been cut significantly as principals seem to perceive computers as being an appropriate replacement for Library resources.

For students to be encouraged to become readers they must be presented with attractive, new, high-quality resources. There is a great deal of research that relates improved reading levels to improve outcomes in school results across all subjects. The most qualified person to select these resources is the qualified Teacher Librarian.

There is also much research which supports the link between school Library usage and improved learning outcomes for students.

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

The Teacher Librarian profession is fortunate to have an effective, broadly-based peer support network which operates at various levels. The online OZ-TL net, run through Charles Sturt University, offers day to day information sharing amongst the entire Australian Teacher Librarian network. At a local level, Teacher Librarian networks engage in information and resource sharing, and professional development. At a wider level, the State Associations and their local committees embark on larger scale professional development and advocacy for school libraries.

These associations are vital to Teacher Librarians, particularly as, often in schools, they are sole operators who would be professionally isolated without the support structures that have developed. In most states as well, centralised school library support agencies run by State Education departments have largely downsized and, in most states, been abolished completely in the last 20 years. Although these centralised support agencies were less than perfect they did, however, ensure high level advocacy for school libraries within Education Departments and did work hard to establish benchmarks for library services and resource funding in state schools.

There has been a downward spiral in school library services and Teacher Librarian morale within the Queensland Education sector. Grants to schools no longer include a specific library component and libraries are funded as a small part of the total school budget. This has meant, generally, that libraries have very little funding to purchase new, high quality resources to support the curriculum and to promote reading. As school libraries experience this, they are perceived as not serving the needs of their school clientele and often experience further cuts. As this spiral increases, the role of the Teacher Librarian is often seen as unimportant and professional staffing is reduced. This spiral needs to be reversed throughout all schools. Professionally trained Teacher Librarians and well-resourced school libraries are an essential component of schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is much research to support the claim that well-resourced libraries with trained, professional staff have a significant impact on student results.

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