



## **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools** – submission by Gael Cresp, author, storyteller, trainer and former librarian.

### **Introduction:**

There is a big difference between a “School Librarian” and a “Teacher Librarian”. The first is someone running the school library while the second is a university graduate with a teaching certificate and a post-graduate diploma in teacher librarianship. A “Library Technician” is not a substitute for either.

School librarianship deals with the really hard tasks; its core business is embedding the teaching offered in the classroom into the child’s “standard operating procedure”.

School Librarians show children how the reading skills, learned so laboriously, can be used not only to complete projects and assignments but also to understand the world, their place in it and the role other people and cultures play.

School Librarians do this by providing a properly arranged and indexed collection, by knowing the content of their collection and, most importantly, by matching the individual with exactly the correct book / poem / illustration / map / video / data base that meets their needs at their appropriate educational and maturity level.

School Librarians build on the skills and knowledge offered by programs like “Bright Start” and “Parent Child Mother Goose” currently offered through Federally funded “Best Start” programs.

In my submission I will address the following terms of reference:

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

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

School libraries and school librarians, in particular, play a vital roll in developing and enriching the skills taught in the classroom. They reinforce the educational content by providing back ground and extension material for subjects like history, geography, science and mathematics

They provide back up services for classroom teacher through their intimate knowledge of the published literature, frequently knowing exactly which chapter in which book contains the information and examples needed to illustrate the often complex concepts being addressed in lesson plans.

Teacher Librarians provide an insight into the educational and emotional needs of the students because they see them regularly as they function in a different educational setting. Librarians generally develop a strong sense of the information needs, understanding and skills of the clients of their libraries and school librarians are, in addition, closely attuned to the emotional level of children's responses to the texts set before them. This allows them to offer a clarity of vision sometimes not available to the classroom teacher, especially with the currently over-crowded curriculum.

Teacher librarians demonstrate and test skills required not only to acquire information from reference books, text books, electronic resources and the internet they also demonstrate, observe and monitor the skills required to assess the content and reliability of these resources.



This photograph illustrates my point: the 10 week old baby, carefully supported by her mother, looks intently at the book being read to her by a friend.

The friend is making a huge effort to put expression and emphasis into his reading, carefully enunciating the syllables and pointing to the words. The baby is making every effort to follow.

However: she is 10 weeks old. She is too young to be concentrating on text – a librarian, and especially a teacher librarian, would be directing her gaze and her attention to the photograph thus teaching understanding of content as well as of the process of reading.

All these skills and contributions, however, pale into insignificance when measured against the Teacher Librarian's most valuable role; introducing children to the rich heritage of old and new fiction.

We can only invent the tools, machines, air craft, networks, computers, art that we can imagine.

We can only understand the lives of others by knowing how they have lived.

We can only appreciate the difference in the mix of cultures in our world by firstly knowing what they are and what they signify and by then understanding "down to our bones" that we are all human and feel and think and even bleed in a similar manner.

We can only know the importance of what we have by knowing how we managed to get ourselves to this state of development.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. "*On the origin of stories; evolution, cognition, and fiction*" (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.) In this text Brian Boyd argues that the overwhelming need to use narrative i.e. stories is what has allowed us to develop the disciples of mathematics, science and technology.

As their knowledge of the treasure house of literature develops, Teacher Librarians also develop a deep understanding of folk lore (or fairy tales). These contain the distilled wisdom of the ages and speak to everyone – adult and child alike – of the psychological and practical struggle to create a meaningful life in an uncertain and difficult world. These ancient stories teach resilience, compassion, honesty and insight; they model kindness, cleverness, lateral thinking and quick wittedness. Best of all, these stories are ideal for oral presentation where they are ‘told’ with the use of voice, face, gesture, intonation and emotion without need for text or illustrations. The listener creates the images for him or her self and emerges both rested and energized. Thus the storyteller teaches the art of imagination.

The venue: Kindergarten in the southern end of the Mornington Peninsula

Audience: 15 four-year-olds. One child with autism and two known to have Asperger’s spectrum disorder pointed out as potential disruptive elements.

“When are you going to read to us? Where is the book? I can’t see the pictures!”

“I am going to *tell* you a story – no book, no pictures to show. You are going to make the pictures in your head.”

Then followed a re-telling a story about two goats who have to work out a way to cross a narrow bridge without knocking each other off.<sup>2</sup>

The story finishes with the phrase “So, what kind of goat are you?” The whole group was captivated, with some children – including the child with autism - joining in the hand actions and many imitating the sounds the goats made as they crossed the bridge.

“I did! I DID see the pictures!” said the little boy about whom the teacher had notified me.

Once a range of these stories become shared knowledge in the school and home then incidents can be drawn from them to short circuit arguments (“What kind of goat are you?”) or diffuse a temper tantrum (“Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin, I will not let you in.”) This kind of storytelling in particular plays a significant role in producing a school community where bullying is minimal and where children, teachers and parents have tools to deal quickly and subtly with any that does occur.

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<sup>2</sup> “Two goats on a Bridge” in *Peace Tales* Margaret Read MacDonald. August House, 1992 pg 53.

By placing an appropriately trained teacher librarian in every school library we offer our children, our education systems and our community an invaluable tool to develop an inclusive, sensitive, innovative, integrated and clever society.

### **Term of Reference: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

In order to entice and retain Teacher Librarians there are a few fundamentals that must be put in place. The first is initial training programs.

There are currently no courses in Teacher Librarianship on offer in Australia.

This is a tragedy but one that we can address. There is a small window of opportunity for us to gather the combined expertise of those trained as teacher librarians who are beginning to think of permanent retirement. There are many, many of them scattered far and wide into other professions and occupations and within that cohort we can find the skills and knowledge to develop a comprehensive, contemporary, clever curriculum to train the next generation of Teacher Librarian. I have appended the names and contact details for several people who could play a major role in this area or who could lead you to others who can.

The next major requirement is the relationship of the Teacher Librarian with the structure and within the structure of the school.

- The position of Teacher Librarian has to be returned to its correct role as part of the essential establishment of a school: Principal, Classroom Teachers, Teacher Librarian, Office Staff.
- The Teacher Librarian should be a permanent member of the Curriculum Committee.
- Teacher Librarians need to be relieved of the responsibility to undertake playground supervision – they should have the library open at lunch time.
- Teacher Librarians should not be required to act a first emergency teacher when someone is ill – they should have the library open and offering library classes.
- Funding for library stock, equipment and supplies should be a mandated proportion of the school budget based on the number and complexity of the student body.

Finally there needs to be a structured program of on-going professional development.

- An annual conference devoted to children's literature and a separate one addressing storytelling skills and practice. These conferences must be supported financially by all levels of government and by the hierarchy of the education system and be offered on a regional, state and federal level.
- On-going local in-service training, networking and support.

- Establishment of central lending library (perhaps under the aegis of the National Library of Australia) devoted to the supply and circulation of literature related to this field.
- Establishment of funding for conduct and publication of on-going peer reviewed research into all aspects of this discipline.

Contacts for developing training programs for Teacher Librarians

Bronwen Bennett

– Extensive experience as a School Librarian, bookseller, promoter of authors and years of involvement with the Children’s Book Council of Australia at both state and national level.

Bronwen Bennett  
 Show & Tell Promotions  
[www.showtell.com.au](http://www.showtell.com.au)

Graham Davies

– consultant to the book industry, involved with YABBA (the young peoples book awards) and CBCA

[www.grahamdavey.com](http://www.grahamdavey.com)

Dr Bonna Jones

Dr Bonna Jones  
 Senior Lecturer Information and Knowledge Management  
 RMIT Business  
 School of Business Information Technology and Logistics  
[www.rmit.edu.au/businessit](http://www.rmit.edu.au/businessit)

Bettina Nissen

– Former children’s librarian, teacher of programmes to engage migrant, indigenous and disadvantaged communities in the social and educational life of their communities.

[bettinanissen@bigpond.com](mailto:bettinanissen@bigpond.com)

and of course, the author of this submission.

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

Digital technologies have proved to be a handicap for libraries in general and for school libraries in particular – just because it is easy to access information over the internet and on vast data bases does not mean that students, especially young children at primary and secondary level, should. They lack the experience and understanding to know what it is that they are looking at and represents an attempt to “run before they can walk” – very much like the man teaching the baby about the words on the page before she has the life skills to know how to “see” a picture and know what “green” is.

All this mucking about with computers, cables, modems and networks has diverted school libraries from their core responsibilities to ensure that children know how to broaden, deepen and enhance the education they receive in the classroom.

Electronic resources play a vital role by supply teacher librarians with the ability to order, catalogue and research on line but operating the network for the school is the job for a professional trained in computer science.

It would be better if we removed the emphasis from computers in classroom and relegated them to the role of tools for teachers and administration staff.

Children can be given 8-week intensive courses (on small computers better suited to the size of their hands) in touch typing, use of word processing and data manipulation packages at, for example, year 5 and year 7 and year 10. They are growing up in a digital era (natives not immigrants as we older folk are<sup>3</sup>) and will pick it up very quickly.

Removing computer access from classrooms will also reduce the opportunities for cyber bullying and the danger of children accessing inappropriate material – and just think how many picture storybooks, especially Australian ones, we could purchase with the money we save.

This will allow teachers, teacher librarians and funding bodies to concentrate on providing the teaching, resources and enrichment the children need to cement the foundations of literacy, community and life skills offered by a good education system.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hfmboces.org/HFMDistrictServices/TechYES/PrenskyDigitalNatives.pdf>

## About me:

Gael Cresp

I worked in public, special and academic libraries for over 30 years and have been a professional storyteller since 1984. I also offer training for librarians, teachers and parents in using rhymes, songs and stories with children and I have run sessions for corporations seeking to improve communications, sales and manage change.

Storyteller, author and trainer [www.storygarden.com.au/Gael.htm](http://www.storygarden.com.au/Gael.htm)

President, Storytelling Guild of Australia, Victorian Branch. [www.storytellingvic.org.au](http://www.storytellingvic.org.au)

## Qualifications:

Bachelor of Social Sciences (Librarianship) RMIT

Graduate Diploma in Children's Literature (CIT now Monash University)

Certificate in the Foundations of Professional Writing (Frankston TAFE)

Certificate VI Workplace Training (Holmesglen TAFE)

## Publications:

*The British Publishers' Traditional Market Agreement : a study*

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Dept. of Librarianship, 1977.

*The Biography of Gilbert Alexander Pig.* Illus. David Cox

Cygnets, 1999 & Puffin, 2000

*Fish for Breakfast.* Illus. Anna Pignataro

Windy Hollow, 2002