



Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

House of Representatives

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Dear Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to offer a submission to this inquiry. I support and advocate for the further development of all school libraries as a central hub of learning within the school and wider community. I support and advocate for the staffing of these valuable assets by teacher-librarians in schools – experienced teachers, qualified with both curriculum/ teaching and library credentials supported by specialised teacher-aides.

- **the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;**

The funding to provide a new library at my school has been greeted with much anticipation and enthusiasm by the school community. The opportunity has allowed us to further integrate digital learning into the library so that equitable access can be made by all areas of our school as well as to provide an exemplary model for 21st century learning. The collaboration of our teacher-librarian and ICT/Smart Classrooms co-ordinator in consultation with staff, students and community has allowed development of a facility that is aimed to meet our needs now and into the future. A key element for success in achieving the learning potential of the new resources and facility lies in the staffing provided to ensure its best use for learning. With a teaching background and understanding of current curriculum needs, as well as knowledge of processes for library resourcing and management, the teacher-librarian is well placed to guide the teaching and learning within the library setting. In most schools in my local teacher-librarian network and professional association, the teacher-librarian had a significant role in promotion and support for digital learning within their schools.

To support facilitation of the educational elements of the role of the teacher-librarian, regular, consistent support of a specific teacher-aide or library technician is vital. In order to ensure a well maintained collection and assist with management of the day-to-day operation of the library within guidance by the teacher-librarian, a specialised library-aide position is important. School Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) continues to support school libraries through access to its database with consistent cataloguing within agreed standards. This has allowed the library-aide to assume some cataloguing responsibilities under the direction of the teacher-librarian. The teacher-librarian has then been able to devote more time to overall resource management issues and curriculum based activities. The associated services and resources – Schools Online Thesaurus (ScOT) and Connections newsletter – have also kept the

teacher-librarian in touch with issues related to library and information services in schools.

The provision of government investment through resources eg internet safety and security – mostly website based eg Cybersafety, budd:e ... – has been an asset to activate student understanding of the importance of these elements in today's digital world. It is to the teacher-librarian to whom the letter or resource will be passed for processing as a resource, but more effectively for purposes of reviewing and use as a teaching tool whether by modelled lessons by the teacher-librarian or passed on to relevant teachers. Without a person to guide the distribution of such valuable resources to the right audience, they might become 'stuck on a shelf' or somewhere in the office.

Our teacher-librarian has recently joined our school as part of the CSIRO's Scientists in Schools and Mathematicians in Schools program which is funded under the Quality Outcomes Program administered by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Having a person who understands the curriculum needs and can connect the whole school to such valuable resources is useful for quality learning experiences.

- **the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;**

In our school the teacher-librarian has been a key member of the literacy team for many years. Through an insight into curriculum needs reading strategies, promotional reading events and opportunities for students are provided to extend their learning. The teacher-librarian provides literature lessons highlighting book language, author and illustrator techniques ... to engage students in the joy and love of reading as well as associated skills to incorporate into their literacy repertoire. Whilst teachers can provide similar focus on the elements, many comment that they learn from the modelling provided by the teacher-librarian, how valuable it is that someone else can share that joy and love for reading with their students and the teachers are exposed to new literature also.

Our teacher-librarian facilitates student involvement in various opportunities that focus on reading – Premiers Reading Challenge, CBCA's Readers Cup – the regional interschool event organised by local volunteer teacher-librarians, MS Readathon, National Simultaneous Storytime, local Writers Festivals and Children's Literature camps ... Whilst it has been offered for teachers to facilitate their own class participation in these activities, they greatly appreciate the role of the teacher-librarian in the overall administration, promotion and celebration of these on a whole school basis. As well the teacher-librarian facilitates Book Club and Book Fair to encourage families to build home libraries.

Within our school the teacher-librarian has undertaken a complementary role as the school's gifted education co-ordinator. This offers teachers support in catering for the diverse learning needs of students. As well the teacher-librarian has guided staff development in this field to improve understanding and strategies for differentiation of the curriculum to cater for the learning needs of gifted students. The range of activities facilitated by the teacher-librarian includes chess, science club, leadership – Student Council and Library Assistants, and facilitating attendance at various extension camps eg sustainable recreational fishing and children's literature at regional environmental education centres.

In acting as the Student Council co-ordinator our teacher-librarian supports students to nurture and develop their leadership qualities, skills and potential to

help improve our school. By facilitating real-life activities which develop lifelong skills and attitudes for students to engage as active and democratic citizens now and into the future, student learning is greatly enhanced. Our new BER library will further support this by offering a regular venue for meetings, as well as a display space and noticeboard. Similarly, the teacher-librarian co-ordinates another important student leadership group within our school – Library Assistants. These students, elected by their classmates, supervise class borrowing, support various activities including literacy with lower school students, make recommendations for resource purchases ... – all planned to provide real-life opportunities to showcase, and enhance, their skills as well as provide service to the school community.

Teachers and students are further supported in achieving quality learning outcomes by accessing the teacher-librarian to provide lessons – guided, group, class, modelled ... as negotiated – related to information skills, information literacy and digital technologies. 'Knowledge is of two forms – we can know a subject ourselves or we can know where to find information upon it.' - Samuel Johnson. Focus on 'how to learn' and 'how to find information' allows students to develop lifelong skills and attitudes for a world with ever increasing information. The teacher-librarian is a valuable partner for teachers in providing guidance in this area.

- **the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;**

Increasingly examples of schools relinquishing their teacher-librarian are heard. When principals have the power to reshuffle positions within a school, sadly some who do not understand what the teacher-librarian role can offer well enough, or find difficulty in accessing a trained teacher-librarian, may choose to not have a teacher-librarian, or incorporate the role with another. These decisions are made to the detriment of the learning potential of the school library.

To have a designated teacher-librarian position within all schools, more teachers (who have shown quality in classroom teaching experience) need to be trained as teacher-librarians. Making the position a designated one (not to be exchanged for another specialist), and encouraging and supporting teachers to be trained would further enhance the profession's status within education, as well as the library information science field. Offering the role as a career option for experienced accomplished teachers to take up further training allows the wealth of quality teaching experience to remain close to student learning activities bringing resultant improved outcomes.

Currently the profession seems to have a lot of its members in a senior age bracket. Focussing on a 'younger' group to undertake post graduate studies would allow a reserve of teacher-librarians to be developed.

Enhancing the education of trainee teachers towards greater understanding of collaborative planning and teaching with teacher-librarians would also aid greater fulfilment of the learning potential within the school library.

- **the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and**

As one of the co-ordinators of a local teacher-librarian network group, I have seen the increasing connection between public and school libraries to complement and enhance each other's services. I was recently invited as the rep of our network group to participate in a face-to-face discussion about the local public

libraries. It was pleasing to report the current happenings but also to be able contribute to a 'bigger picture view' to the public libraries strategic plan.

My school has established extensive partnerships with local government and other agencies – particularly within the field of sustainability. We benefit through the wonderful resources, including people, and the opportunities of being able to actively engage our students with real-life learning and offer back a community benefit. Our library supports these initiatives with regular displays as well as being the central key location for recycling bins for ink cartridges, mobile phones, white paper and batteries in our school.

With the wide curriculum knowledge that a teacher-librarian has, they are likely to be a key contact person within the school for various projects and initiatives eg Mathematicians and Scientists in Schools with CSIRO, contact person for local newspaper ... All of these links benefit the school and its learning offerings by connecting students to real-life people and opportunities.

- **the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.**

The variety of digital technologies now available has made tremendous impact on schools. It has required the teacher-librarian to stay abreast of rapid developments and often it has been the teacher-librarian who has led the professional learning of staff by advocating for the relevant hardware and showcasing application of the activities and programs in schools. Our teacher-librarian has undertaken ICT Co-ordinator and Curriculum Co-ordinator roles within the school. As our school has grown, the role of ICTs Co-ordinator has become a fractional paid position but the teacher-librarian continues as an active member of the ICTs/Smart Classrooms team and collaborates with the ICTs/Smart Classrooms Co-ordinator and ICTs technician re issues (hardware, software, network, printing ...) and future directions (set up for new BER Library Learning Centre). The benefits to the school community are many via this valuable partnership.

Through active engagement with professional learning available through teacher-librarian networks and professional associations as well as related groups (eg QSITE – Queensland Society for Information Technology in Education), teacher-librarians have been part of an ongoing dialogue about the digital agenda in considering the impact on their library resources and services to the school community. The state and territory teacher-librarian professional associations, as well as the national representative body ASLA (Australian School Library Association), host annual or biennial conferences (face-to-face as well as virtual). As well sub-committees organise professional development opportunities with leaders – accomplished practitioners from within the ranks of our profession. The programs always include elements related to digital technologies. Many teacher-librarians keep regularly informed and take the opportunity to help others through various discussion lists, nings, blogs and other web2.0 facilities. There is a strong sense of 'community' felt, and enacted.

In some schools the library, as a central and accessible-to-all facility, has become a 'lighthouse' facility incorporating some of the latest technology for use by all classroom teachers (until funds allow for more facilities within classrooms). Whether through provision of resources for lending to classes (eg laptops, digital cameras ...), or by the facility hosting a computer lab or interactive white boards, the library serves the whole school community.

I am proud to be the teacher-librarian at my school. I have been (mostly) well supported to conduct the role as I believe it should be, and with reference to ASLA's Standards of Excellence for Teacher-Librarians. It is challenging at times, but it is rewarding. A concern looms though. If I were to leave my school, would the entitlement of a teacher-librarian be given over to another curriculum role – ICT Co-ordinator, Curriculum HOD, specialist art teacher ...? I hope that I have advocated and provided a quality example of what a teacher-librarian can offer, but will it be enough? All the alternatives would be valuable positions in their own right, but would these roles get the best out of the library's learning potential if left to a person with no teacher-librarian qualifications or experience? Could the job be done to a sufficiently high standard if only a minor component of the other role is to 'look after the library'? Would the best potential be realised from a new million dollar facility and its similar value of resources if not managed well to support learning?

Over many years in my school, key strands within my role have changed and grown, or been eroded, in different areas as responsive to my school's needs. The aim though, to provide a quality learning and social environment within the library whilst supporting students to learn and grow as active participants and lifelong learners in a changing world, has not changed. From resource selection and management to providing lessons, my actions within the role as teacher-librarian support student learning – directly, and indirectly through their teachers and provision of appropriate resources. This is the case too with my colleagues from other schools – all striving to achieve the best outcomes for student (and teacher) learning.

The library is much more than a physical building for storage, a teacher-librarian can offer much more than reading stories and looking after the books. Our students – our future generations - deserve all that a qualified teacher-librarian supported by a specialised aide can offer. Financially it would be a huge investment, but an investment towards improved learning outcomes. For a school to make the best of other funding input into building and resources, can we afford not to make that staffing investment in providing the best quality education?

Yours in education

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Teacher-librarian