

**Terms of Reference:****To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.**

As an educator and teacher librarian who began my career in state schools in New South Wales over sixteen years ago, I believe this report has been a long time coming. Many factors that are pertinent to the terms of reference of this inquiry today, have impacted the role of teacher librarians (detrimentally) in the workplace since my first initial permanent employment with the NSW Department of School Education in 1994.

For the past eight years I have worked in international schools as a teacher librarian in various positions – as both an Elementary and Head Teacher Librarian in both shared (K-12) and primary libraries and as a curriculum coordinator. My initial contract of three years was extended beyond that time due to the professional and financial benefits of international education as opposed to the diminishing role and accompanying frustrations of the teacher librarian within Australian state schools. Australian teacher librarians are highly sought after practitioners by international schools!

International research of practice within schools see teacher librarians as having central roles in the teaching and development of

1. information literacy
2. reading
3. technology and
4. the management of a school facility – the library.

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

I believe that the recent investment toward the building of school libraries while notable and certainly essential is a band-aid investment, if it does not look at what constitutes a library, and move beyond the physical space. That is, a school library is not a building alone, but must be resourced both in terms of physical and digital resources and staffing (both by qualified Teacher Librarians and appropriately trained clerical and technical staff).

You can have the most wonderfully designed library space, but if there is no Teacher Librarian to provide for the educational, social and recreational needs of the students, and investment does not include an ongoing **substantial** library budget, the result will be a new room with outdated, worn and limited resources, where inquiry learning does not occur nor reading for pleasure; and a library that is underutilised by the student and school community.

It is important to note that since teaching in the international system, I have managed and administered budgets over Australian \$30,000 per annum. At my first public school in New South Wales I received \$3000 per annum. When I approached the current teacher librarian at this same New South Wales public school where I taught, to see whether the budget had been increased since 2002, this was the reply:

“ I actually get less now I think I get about \$1200 to spend on resources and then about \$3300 for admin and stock take. I don't get any admin time during normal days because we have 8 classes and only allocated 2 days library so that is my 2 days filled with taking classes for teacher's RFF.

I think this is a big problem too that library days are not allocated pro rate but by days. We had 9 classes a couple of years ago and I got 3 days library now we lose one class and whom you lose a whole day library allocation. Who invented this system? It's crap. You get the same allocated 3 library days for a school whether you have 9 classes or 12 classes. I rang Federation a few years ago about this and they weren't very helpful. They just said that the school then has to pay me to have admin time. Well being a small school there is not much money. So now they only allocate me \$3300 for admin for a year plus stock take. That is not even half of the suppose 20% admin time for TL I am to receive. I end up doing what I can and then coming in myself without pay.

That's also why my budget has been cut. I think I used to get \$2500 about 5 years ago but since the school lost a library day and has to pay for my admin it has been slashed to about \$1200.”

What does this say about the value we place on the education of our students, their literacy and reading, on their future!

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

It is ironic that this report is looking at the **future potential** of school libraries and librarians. Librarians have been advocating for a long time how we **do** contribute to improved educational and community outcomes. In many schools, especially private schools, which support the teaching programme of the librarian and provide financial support, this is being achieved. International research into school libraries verifies how school libraries and librarians contribute to improved educational and community outcomes.

“The size of a library media center's staff and collection is the best school predictor of academic achievement.” Keith Curry Lance, *The impact of school library media centres* (1993)

The report ***What Work Requires of Schools*** (2000) commissioned in the United States (US) asked employers to name essential skills and competencies that lie at the heart of job performance today. They came up with 3 foundation skills and five competencies.

Foundation skills included the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening and mathematics. They also involved Thinking Skills i.e. thinking creatively, making decisions,

solving problems, and knowing how to learn and skills around Personal Qualities such as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.

And the Five competencies include: Resources & allocating time, money, materials, space, and staff;

1. Interpersonal Skills involving team work, teaching others, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
2. Information & acquiring and evaluating data, organizing, interpreting, communicating, and using computers to process information;
3. Systems whereby the employee understands social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
4. Technology: selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

In the workplace, the role of the school librarian is to build upon these foundation skills and competencies (See also: **The enGauge 21st Century Skills** <http://www.metiri.com/features.html>). School librarians have at the heart of their teaching programs the skills of *knowing how to learn* and the competency of *using information* – of acquiring and evaluating data, of organizing, interpreting, and communicating information.

UNESCO's Prague Declaration (2003) stated that information literacy is **part of the basic human right of life long learning**. It encompasses

“knowledge of one's information needs and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively use information to address issues or problems at hand”. And it is seen as “a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society”.

Information literacy is part of the wider information fluency (transliteracy) skills that also involve critical thinking skills, computer, digital, media and visual literacy as well as textual literacy. But it is also more – It means knowing **how to find, evaluate, and use information in all its forms in our everyday life**. Information literacy means being information smart. That is, a person who is adaptable and flexible, and who will continue to grow and learn as technology changes the way society functions. This is what we want for our students!

In the big picture, there has been a substantial body of research that has clearly demonstrated the importance of school libraries to student's education. The *“School Libraries Work”* Research Foundation Paper (3rd edition, 2008 produced by Scholastic) noted that:

*“Whether student achievement is measured by standardized reading achievement tests or by global assessments of learning, research shows that a **well-stocked library staffed by a certified library media specialist has a positive impact on***

student achievement, regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the community”.

There must school systems in place to ensure a balance of both physical and human resources and services to develop skills so students can fully participate in our global information society. Librarians are the bridge linking resources and services, and information and the information user – your students and teachers.

To begin with we need to consider the importance of information and multiple (transliteracy) literacies. **Your school librarians have an important role in the teaching programs within schools** since they have information literacy skills at the core of their own programs.

The true test of the lifelong learner is the extent to which he or she is able to go on acquiring skills and knowledge in a wide variety of life situations, once formal education has come to an end. Effective learners know how to learn and have a repertoire of tools and strategies to serve that purpose.

“The flow of new information and the rise of international cooperation have increased the importance of such skills while the unpredictability and rapidity of change requires a closer connection between school education and lifelong learning. These are prerequisites for success in the academic world, the world of work and the society of the future.” *European report on quality education: indicators and benchmarks of quality of school education*, The European Commission (1999)

Critical thinking and information literacy skills are the process skills needed to do well academically. Although they should be included within the whole school curriculum, often they are not, and thus, are not explicitly addressed by the classroom teacher. It is assumed our students already know these skills or that someone will teach the skills or that our students will somehow understand and be able to apply these skills and strategies by osmosis.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005, 59) in their book, *Understanding by Design*, also acknowledge this gap and the need for explicit instruction in these skills. “Helping students to “*learn how to learn*” and “*how to perform*” is both a vital mission and a commonly overlooked one.”

In a study of New Zealand primary and secondary schools (National Library of New Zealand, 2001), factors found to limit the effective teaching and application of information skills related to:

- teachers understanding the importance of information literacy,
- teachers' own competence in information skills,
- teachers' knowledge of how to teach information skills,
- and time to fit information skills into the curriculum. This study was published in 2001, and is still relevant today.

These gaps show that critical thinking skills and information literacy skills should be embedded into the school curriculum and linked to the various subject areas. They need to be introduced at key points and folded within class assessment tasks and activities. It is essential that these skills and strategies are explicitly taught and assessed.

When these skills are included across the whole curriculum then all teachers share the responsibility for teaching and assessing information skills. Some questions to ask as a school community:

- Do they have a whole school curriculum document that allows the skills to be taught in a coherent plan across K – 12 within your school?
- Does the school have a Library Media Policy that reflects the value that the school places on literacy, reading and the school library?
- Have these documents been developed by a balanced committee of teachers, specialists and administrators?
- Are schools also providing systems and scheduling opportunities to allow for teaching critical thinking and information/multi-literacy skills through collaborative practices between class teachers and specialists, including the teacher librarian?

These are starting points for conversations within a school community in order to integrate information literacy programs into the curriculum.

Secondly, and just as significantly, school libraries and qualified librarians play a **central role in the literacy and reading development of your students**. The need to read well is fundamental. Stephen Krashen, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California, and an international authority in the field of linguistics, language acquisition, reading and academic achievement, and bilingual education, stated that:

“research strongly suggests that free reading, **i.e. Free voluntary reading**, is the source of our reading prowess and much of our vocabulary and spelling development, as well our ability to understand sophisticated phrases and write coherent prose” (Krashen, 2002)

Simply put, children become better readers by reading. And, children with more access to books read more! And school libraries are a major source of books for children! Or they should be!

Stephen Krashen notes that:

“Is free voluntary reading the only program students will ever need to become accomplished readers? No. But research has shown that children who don’t read for pleasure have an extremely tough time developing the language and literacy competencies necessary to succeed in today’s world.” (Krashen, 2002)

Children with access to books in the home, classroom, school libraries and public libraries read more. Studies have shown that students borrow more books from school libraries that have more books and that stay open longer. The more often teachers take students to the library, the more often they will read. This is a traditional area of strength for librarians – bringing books and people together.

Librarians have been people oriented for a long time. We continue to play a strong part in the literacy development of our students not only with the provision of resources , but perhaps more importantly, with that face to face interaction and conversations that revolve round books and our personal knowledge of our students interests and needs.

On many occasions during parent meetings, parents have acknowledged the part I, as a librarian, have played in encouraging and developing their child’s reading – hooking their children into reading with that right book!

However, our interactions with student reading continues when we bring books, kids and web 2.0 together! Librarians are taking new steps to further connect kids and teachers to books and reading through library blogs and wikis. Librarians are promoting student and teacher participation as creators and collaborators in developing podcasts and using other technologies . The result is creating, connecting, interacting and communicating within the school environment and beyond into the global community. These library reading programs need to be integrated into the curriculum.

The Scholastic 2008 Family and Reading Report showed that the internet does not detract from our student’s reading. In fact, students who use the internet daily are likely to read more than students who don’t. Students do not see the internet ever replacing the printed book!

Finally, the reading skills of our students also has positive direct and indirect effects on their numeracy, science, critical thinking, and social skills. This again is supported by action research and international studies with school libraries and in classrooms (Lance – USA, Todd - Australia, Hughes – U.K., Leland – New Zealand et al.) All the more reason to encourage reading and a love of reading in our students across all age groups.

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

A third role for librarians is in leading the way in using technology. Schools must keep up with these new learning technologies. Digital technologies have tremendous impact on student learning. Yet, students still need guidance. The recent report by the British Library and JISC commissioned report [Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future](#) conducted by the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) at UCL <http://www.bl.uk/news/pdf/googlegen.pdf> clearly revealed that

“Although young people demonstrate an apparent ease and familiarity with computers, they rely heavily on search engines, view rather than read and do not possess the critical and analytical skills to assess the information that they find on the web.” Furthermore that “Libraries in general are not keeping up with the demands of students and researchers for services that are integrated and consistent with their wider internet experience” (Dr Ian Rowlands) .

Furthermore having access to technology is insufficient without accompanying professional development for teachers and teacher librarians . Yes, teachers need to be risk takers and step outside their comfort zones... we all do. But they also need to feel comfortable and competent in using technology in their own teaching programs and practices.

Collaborative practices, whereby ICT specialist or librarians assist, mentor and team teach with the teacher can provide the support that many teachers need. In some schools this may require setting up systems and schedules that make it easy and beneficial for teachers to collaborate with the library and ICT departments.

Professional development must be addressed whether through external (either online or workshop environments) or on-site professional development. Many librarians are already providing internal professional development for teachers in their schools.

A discussion recently on the ECIS (European Council of International Schools) Moodle site showed that librarians are providing PD for their teaching colleagues in reference citation and plagiarism, reliable information/web literacy, digital citizenship, critical media literacy, web evaluation, search techniques, using online databases, and online tutorials for using web 2.0 tools. These may be one off sessions at the commencement of the school year, or during in-service days, or for longer periods over a term. Librarians are no longer organisers and defenders of information, but communicators, collaborators and mediators of it.

Are school administrators encouraging the creative professionalism of their librarians and teaching staff? Are they also being seen as lifelong learners, and participating in these professional development opportunities with their staff, and adapting these tools, strategies and skills in their own practices? Are they allowing themselves time to reflect, discover, connect and share with global online communities such as “*Great blogs for busy administrators*” <http://www.sentimentsoncommonsense.com/?p=370>)

Finally, we come to fourth role – that of, managers of school libraries. Our extensive knowledge base in resource collection development and technologies ensure that collections are current and relevant to the curriculum needs of schools, and the interest levels of students.

When resourcing school libraries quality rather than quantity is very important. Books and other resources that are worn or outdated are going to give ‘the numbers’ so that library shelves are filled or overflowing ...but they are not going to be read or used! Within this current inquiry the necessity to develop resources in our school libraries can be achieved through government assistance such as special grants for Improving Literacy through School Libraries. These grants do need to be financial only and not constrained by any outside agencies that may dictate what type of resources e.g. specific titles and/or content to be obtained. The latter would only serve to compromise both the professional integrity of the qualified school librarian who is aware of the school’s curriculum needs, and the educational needs of particular school and student community.

Librarians consider ways that utilise the issues of money and time. By ordering through library suppliers that provide processing and cataloguing for new resources, books can be delivered straight to the shelves and accessed immediately by your school community. Sufficient clerical support also needs to be in place to ensure that resources are catalogued and not left languishing in back rooms while librarians juggle their teaching and management roles.

Various policies and procedures need to be in place by administrators/principals to allow for the development of a balanced resource collection.

Online database collections support the teaching and learning of the school community. Subscription to reliable and authoritative databases provide current, relevant content that support the curriculum. They typically include materials that have been published via rigorous editorial processes and include materials such as books, journals, documents, newspapers, magazines and reports. These are digitized, stored and indexed through a limited-access database. Often the suppliers will provide group discounts for schools who band together. Is this happening in Australian school libraries?

In addition, there are many free Web 2.0 tools available to facilitate teaching and learning practices. There are many sources of inspiration in the global community of educators – teachers, librarians, IT specialists – who are expanding their student’s and colleagues horizons through the use of online digital technology.

In the long term, qualified librarians and trained clerical staff are essential to ensure that school resources are catalogued and therefore able to be tracked and made accessible. Resources are a huge financial cost to schools. It is crucial that school libraries are supported

by ensuring they have a reputable online cataloguing system/company that can provide immediate support for library staff.

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

Many of the factors considered above are critical in influencing recruitment and development of school librarians. When a teaching load (especially release from face to face) is overwhelmingly large, this impacts on the administrative and management role of the librarian. When budgets are continuously cut, and money is not available to purchase new resources or to allow for access to technology, then both the literacy and teaching programmes will be adversely affected.

To assist with recruitment, increase in teacher librarian training positions in university programs should be considered. Furthermore, teacher training programs should also include a component that seeks to develop collaborative skills and also the facilitation of collaboration between teacher and teacher librarian. As mentioned previously teachers need to understand the importance of information literacy, they need to be competent themselves in information skills, and need to know how to teach information skills. This also needs to be included in teacher training programs.

International schools recognise and financially recompense teachers and teacher librarians with salary increases for those staff who continue with their own professional development by completing Masters and Doctorate degrees. Where is the incentive in Australian schools to do this if salaries are not going to reflect this? This is a factor that should be considered within the teaching profession as a whole.

To conclude in review:

The school library provides a vital element in the development of the whole child – for their academic achievement and meeting their social, emotional and personal needs.

Teacher Librarians need to be on the leadership teams in their schools. Qualified librarians play a central role in the literacy and reading development of students, and in the teaching programs within your schools. They are the link between the teacher and the curriculum, not only for the provision of resources but as collaborators in the planning and teaching programs within the school. This collaboration is extended with many school librarians leading the way in technology use in your schools.

And finally, we are administrators too! Our extensive knowledge base in developing multifaceted resources and technologies ensure that your collections will meet the school's curriculum needs and address the different educational, social and personal needs of your students. That is what we are qualified to do!

A school library can be at the hub of the school if it has the support of the government and school administration. It can be a vibrant, stimulating, interactive environment. It can have proactive librarians who are facilitators, communicators and mediators of information.

If they are not, administrators/principals need to ask this question: How can I, as administrator, encourage change and help our librarians develop and move our library forward in order to provide the services necessary for students to achieve in the 21st century?

The support of government and school administrators/principals are essential to the success of school libraries and need to be proactive in ensuring educational excellence through their school libraries.

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Biography: Yvonne Barrett

Yvonne Barrett is Head Teacher Librarian and an IB Primary Years Coordinator at Osaka International School, Japan. Yvonne has over 16 years experience having began her teaching career in librarianship in New South Wales State schools. She has taught in international schools in Asia and Europe. Yvonne's focus continues to be one of exploring and sharing ideas and practices between librarians and being a lifelong learner herself. Yvonne's recent librarianship positions have been within International Baccalaureate (IB) world schools. She has presented at workshops and conferences with particular reference to how school libraries can support the IB programmes. Yvonne is a member of the International Association of School Libraries (IASL) and is currently on the IB Asia Pacific Librarian Information Specialist committee.