



Submission

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Date: April 2010

To: House Standing Committee on Education and Training

From: Carol Sheppard
Teacher Librarian

Background Information

I am the Teacher Librarian at Dorrigo Public School (DPS) located in Dorrigo, an isolated rural community (population approx 1200). There are approximately 170 students from K – 6 at the school and based on the school size, the position is only two days a week.

I completed my Masters in Education (Teacher Librarianship) in 2007 and have more than twenty years experience working in the media industry managing information and content collections.

As a consequence of my professional background I bring to the position a comprehensive knowledge of different types of resources, delivery platforms and emerging technologies. It has become apparent to me that the key issue facing both students and colleagues in the 21st century is how to access and utilise the most relevant and accurate information from the plethora of sources available.

Terms of Reference

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

The recent Building Education Revolution (BER) had no impact on the DPS library as the library was custom built in the 1970's.

The Digital Education Revolution (DER) is expected to provide broadband connections to the library and selected classrooms for Interactive Whiteboards and computers. However the isolated location of the school has delayed this project by more than two years and there is still no timeframe for completing this project.

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

A key focus of my recent studies in librarianship was on the role of the librarian in developing an information literate community of lifelong learners. This approach is confirmed by my past work experience as an information specialist where it is essential for everyone to be able to read and decipher and act upon the most relevant and accurate information as quickly as possible.

Librarians have been collaborating and making information accessible to users long before TV, photocopiers and the Internet were even thought of. The librarian profession itself epitomises lifelong learners who are adaptable, flexible and open to new ways of working. One only has to look at the range of resources (from a book, to a weblink to a digital recording) available in any library to see that the resources managed by a librarian are not limited to the four walls of a room.

School libraries are the central resource repository in every school. However, with a trained librarian, they are no longer a quiet place in the traditional sense of just print resources, but an information hub for the whole community.

Numerous studies and research have confirmed the critical importance of literacy (reading, visual, information, writing, problem solving & higher order thinking skills) in maximising student learning outcomes.

Professionally trained school librarians are literacy experts who in collaboration with parents, principals, teachers and the greater school community can lead and coordinate better literacy outcomes for everyone.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

In NSW public schools staffing ratio formulas and student numbers decide how many days each week a librarian is employed. Thus, a school may only have the services of a librarian one or two days a week and the library is closed for the rest of the week.

As well as underutilising the physical resources, it also has a significant impact on the employment of a teacher librarian. In my case I would love to work full time as a librarian but am restricted by the staffing formula.

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

While there is obvious support and goodwill towards school libraries from communities, in my view the bureaucratic nature and “silo mentality” of the NSW Department of Education, coupled with inflexible budget structures precludes any type of sustainable or productive partnerships.

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

Digital technologies have the potential to hugely enhance and support the role of school libraries and librarians in the following ways:

- Provide professional learning to classroom teachers about new technologies

- Implementing Web 2.0 technologies to enhance learning for students and teachers
- Providing better access to up to date, relevant and appropriate resources
- Ensuring the development of an information literate community
- Encourage the pursuit of life long learning
- Providing a collegiate, neutral friendly environment that encourages learning

Recommendations

1. Recognition of the role of a professionally trained teacher librarian in school reporting (eg. My Schools website)
2. Review the staffing formula applied to teacher librarians in NSW public primary schools to better utilise the resources and skills of both the school library and the librarian
3. Encourage the professional role of the teacher librarian as an information specialist in the school community
4. Provide resources (including time) for teacher librarians to allow further collaboration both within the school and the greater community
5. Provide resources for teacher librarians to broaden their role in the school to include the coordination of new technologies and associated learning resources