

THE SAVING AUSSIE BOOKS Re-visited Campaign
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Secretary of the House
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher-librarians in Australian schools

This submission is on behalf of the *SAVING AUSSIE BOOKS Re-visited* Campaign.

Last year, many authors joined in the campaign to keep the Restrictions on Parallel Imports of books into Australia. Children's authors in particular were very concerned – hence the formation of the SAVING AUSSIE BOOKS website.

Now, there is another threat to Australian children's books – they are gradually disappearing from the shelves of school libraries. Why? Because those libraries are in crisis. They are disappearing, along with trained Teacher-Librarians.

Authors are making their own submissions to the Commission's Inquiry in school libraries and teacher-librarians, but as co-ordinator of the SAB website, and with their permission, I would like to offer the comments collected from concerned authors over the past few weeks.

All have visited school libraries giving workshops and talks on books and writing. All passionately support a viable future for Australian school libraries – the one place in a school where, under the guidance of specialist teacher-librarians, children and young adults can gain research and analytical skills using to arm them for the future, and most importantly, to learn the joys of reading stories and poetry.

Yours faithfully

Sheryl C Gwyther
Spokesperson

Attached: Comments from Australian authors

Australian children's authors speak out for school libraries and teacher-librarians

Janeen Brian - award-winning author of picture books, short stories, poetry, non-fiction, short fiction and novels for young people and the educational market.



In the early 80's I was asked to run a small library at a small Catholic School for a small amount of time each week. That extended to running two school libraries at two Catholic schools, which ended up swallowing most of my week. Finally I quit one school, remained in the other, acting as a permanent, part-time teacher-librarian, three days a week for six of the happiest years of my teaching life. I left only to go writing fulltime in 1990.

One other point, I was untrained as a teacher-librarian.

In those days, in that situation, it was not a school problem. I took a short Librarian-Technician course, which I'm pleased to say I passed. But for the rest, I taught myself. I was my own apprentice. However, my aim was that the library should reflect my passion for books, reading, enjoyment of discovery and illustrations. To that end, I devised all sorts of interactive games and curriculum based programs as well as filling the library with children's work, displays, and featured books. And I read to the children.

Nowadays, as a visiting author, I can sense what is happening in a school library the moment I walk into it. Call it a seventh sense. Times have changed. Rows of computers now sit placidly along benches. And not every school has a teacher-librarian.

But in the schools where there is a strong, committed teacher-librarian, there is a vibrancy. Whether the teacher-librarian is in the room or not, I can hear the conversations with individual children; the genuine interest in what they are reading or their thoughts on a particular book. I can sense the effort to help a child deepen or broaden his/her reading interest; the encouragement to participate in Premier's Reading Challenges, MS reading Programs or other such extending programs. I can see their ideas displayed on pin-up boards and notice the enthusiasm of children to find books. I become aware of book clubs in the school. And I hear those teacher-librarians read to the children.

I've been there. I've done that. It was my job and I loved it. Hopefully I turned some children onto reading. Hopefully many are still reading.

We need teacher-librarians to foster that love of reading, that confidence in book choice, as well as the confidence to step into any library or any bookstore as they grow into reading adults.

Katrina Germein – Australian children’s multi-award winning author of popular picture books.



IMAGINE ... a public school in the 1980s

In the library foyer was a scratch and sniff jelly bean poster. Inside were the stories waiting to be read. At the start of each lesson we sat on the floor, almost holding our breath, waiting to see what the day’s book would be. We knew a story had already been chosen especially for us. These stories were chosen by the teacher-librarian.

A teacher-librarian who knew us, loved books and choose titles we would love too. I relished being read to. I remember specific covers, series and favourites.

We didn’t know that such immersion in literature supported an invaluable love of reading and an appreciation of storytelling, books and the written word. We didn’t know that these things would lead to improved literacy outcomes for us later in life. We didn’t know that our librarian was helping to expand our vocabularies, our general knowledge and our world view. And we didn’t know that by reading to the class as a group, by our sharing the stories together, part of what we were enjoying was a feeling of connectedness and community.

We just thought library was fun.

In 2010.....

I want my own children to have what I had, and more. Today’s best libraries encompass new digital literacies also. They help our children to become fluent in the ever unfolding technologies that will be always present in their lives. I want my children to enjoy dynamic technology that can motivate and impress.

And I and want my children to enjoy literature and community that can entertain and comfort. These modern and traditional mediums support and inform our children. They are education disguised as fun. They are meaningful and essential. They support literacy of all kinds.

The Future.....

The things I want for my children are achievable. They are most possible with well resourced school libraries staffed with trained teacher-librarians; librarians passionate about children, children’s literature, and new technologies; librarians with the specific knowledge to support other teachers; librarians with the specific expertise to know, guide and inspire our children.

Dee White – author



I'm lucky to have two children who are both good readers, but they are different too. One is like me, a hopeless bookworm – the sort who reads at the breakfast table and bumps into things because he is holding a book to his face and the wall just seems to jump out of nowhere.

The other reads slower with more detail, he is a lot more discerning in his book tastes. I remember a feeling of panic a couple of years ago when the youngest reached that 'danger period' for boys and stopped reading.

It crept up on me slowly. He was an independent reader and no longer needed me to read to him or help him select his books – or so I thought. I was wrong! One day, I realized that he was barely reading at all. He never came home with books from school. He said he had read them all, and they were all boring. When we went to the library, eldest son went straight to the catalogue where he poured over all the choices. He always came out with a bag of books that must have been at least half his body weight – and he read every single one.

Youngest son on the other hand, wandered from shelf to shelf and came out with nothing – or perhaps a couple of books that he borrowed because he "had to borrow something". These books generally never left his library bag.

I panicked. I had never thought that a child of mine would stop reading. What I soon realized was that he still wanted to read...he just didn't know where to go to find the books he liked. That's why schools need trained teacher/librarians.

Fortunately, in grade 4, my son had a teacher who was switched on to his quirky sense of humour. She brought him books from her own private collection, which he eagerly devoured. I spent a great deal of time with him at public libraries asking the librarians for recommendations, and trawling the bookshelves with him. We also started reading together again as a family, and it's something we still enjoy. For my son, 'the danger period' when boys stop reading wasn't brought about by him deciding he didn't like books anymore. It was caused by having nobody, particularly at school, to guide his reading. I wonder how many other kids stop reading for this very reason – they simply don't know what book to pick up.

I implore the people with the decision-making powers to employ MORE teacher librarians, not the reverse. If our politicians want improved literacy skills, then they must do their part to ensure that all kids have the resources they need to keep them reading.

Michael Gerard Bauer – award-winning Australian author



Each year I visit over 40 schools, talking to students about books and writing. I spend a lot of my time in libraries and resource centres. That's why I'm a huge fan of teacher-librarians. To me their role is one of the most crucial in any school.

Without the expertise and enthusiasm of a dedicated teacher-librarian, school libraries face the real danger of becoming sterile storehouses for resources or glorified computer labs.

At their worst, they can appear like a 'prison for books' – uninspiring, inviting, and a place you would only spend time, if you were forced to.

Teacher-librarians fight against this scenario. They are people who transform school libraries into places where books and other valuable resources are not just kept, but where they are made more readily accessible and where they are actively promoted and celebrated.

Show me a library full of posters, and promotions for books and authors and reading, as well as creative and eye-catching displays on all manner of fascinating areas of learning, and I'll show you a teacher-librarian at work encouraging and fostering a love of reading and the pursuit of knowledge.

Each library or resource centre should be the lifeblood of our schools. What we need are more teacher-librarians with their unique skills and genuine love of books and learning to keep that love pumping.

For me, each placement of a teacher-librarian is money well spent, since everything I have experienced and witnessed as a frequent school visitor convinces me they are worth their weight in gold.

Sophie Masson – multi-award winning and prolific Australian author for children and young adults



As the child of non English speaking parents (great readers, but not in English) school and public libraries for me were absolutely essential to my growth as a reader and a writer in Australia.

Without those wonderful school librarians who set me on the path to discovering more and more books, I doubt I'd be where I am now!

Guest blogger: Kylie Hillcoat – parent and beginning writer for children

I am a parent with children at Shellharbour Public. I was at the school library for work placement for a Library Technician Diploma Course I am currently doing. I am also trying to be an author but I am quickly realising *that* it is harder than I thought!

I wanted to write a comment for this blog too because of my children's school library – I reckon it is the best there is!

The librarian at Shellharbour Public School is Mrs Cooper. I have to say Mrs Cooper does an absolutely terrific job. She is constantly thinking about ways to engage the kids and encourage their use of books and the library in general. The children love going to the library, as most weeks there is something new and exciting to see.

Our kids wouldn't know about half the books they end up loving to read if it wasn't for the likes of Mrs Cooper prompting and encouraging. I hope Teacher-Librarians remain within the school system forever!

Claire Saxby – Australian author and poet for young people



I have great memories of school libraries and school librarians from my childhood. My family moved around a lot and I was the new kid often. But the libraries, though their room sizes and stock changes were a constant.

The librarians knew their shelves and would guide me to the familiar and to the unfamiliar. They taught me how to search for information for projects and homework, and how to search for information for fun.

My children were fortunate to have a teacher librarian for their early years at school. She did so much more than just check books in and out. She taught my children how to use a library, how to find information, how to find fiction and non-fiction.

Then the school decided they didn't need a librarian. They put a very competent teacher's aide in the library on reduced hours. She was very pleasant and helpful but she was not a teacher librarian and she was unable to give the children the library learning experience they'd had before.

Over the next few years, I watched library use diminish and the quality and variety of the books decrease. Library sessions gave way to borrowing at recess or lunch. The children knew more about the computers than the teacher's aide.

Not her fault at all. It's not her role. It's the role of a teacher librarian and our schools are poorer for their lack.

LEE FOX – Australian children’s author

It was the scariest school I’d visited. The kids were scary and the teachers were even scarier. As I walked across the playground, one kid told me his play lunch had been stolen. Another kid cried because she’d fallen over and grazed her knee. A teacher yelled at two boys for not wearing hats. In a concrete thoroughfare ten kids flew passed me screeching like a flock of white cockatoos. As I walked up the steps to the school library I felt jangled – and it was only 8.45 a.m.

I walked though the library door and stepped into another realm. It was silent. Two calm and rather lovely teacher librarians spoke quietly to children about stories they might like to read. Other children sat on bean bags with their heads in books. Five children raced up the library steps talking loudly. But when they walked through the library door, their voices dropped as they headed for the shelves to find a favourite book to read before the bell rang.

On the wall there was a display the kids had made for Book Week. As I set up for my talk I felt my previous anxiety subside and I thought, ‘I love school libraries and I love the teacher librarians who make them a refuge for young book lovers.’

GABRIELLE WANG – Australian author for young people

When my children first started primary school, there was a lovely teacher librarian who enthused the students with a love of books and reading.

Then in Year 5, there was a change of school principal. He moved the TL to the computer room and employed a library assistant instead.

At the end of the year, the TL resigned.

The library went from being an exciting classroom with displays of new books and colourful posters, to a lifeless, dull space.

HELEN ROSS – author/poet

I was recently invited to Sydney for two school visits as a visiting author, as well as conducting poetry workshops. My story telling sessions with the Preps were conducted in the libraries.

It was lovely being surrounded by aisles of lovely books and the librarians acted as ‘hosts’ and tour guides of their school.

The librarian knew all the children and lunchtimes were abuzz as children poured over their favourite books, and chatted to the librarians about their favourite books. The librarians had such a wealth of knowledge as they assisted children in choosing books of interest.