



## Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australia

### Submission from Sheila M O'Callaghan

**I wish to make comment on the role of Teacher Librarians in the Primary School setting in Australia. I feel it is absolutely essential that all schools are staffed with a fully trained Teacher Librarian in order to deliver a carefully selected, well resourced range of materials for staff to deliver effective curriculum and students to develop sound literacy and information skills.**

#### **Reference Point 1: the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

- While it is very advantageous that library buildings are being extended and refurbished it is essential that professionally trained teacher librarians are making educated decisions about both physical and virtual spaces.
- Professional Teacher Librarians are trained in library design and so know how best to arrange furnishings to allow for the most effective use of space by a range of clients with a range of needs.
- At present library officers (Clerical Library assistants) have approximately two weeks training or in many cases no training and are being required to make decisions they are certainly not equipped to make.
- Huge monetary investments made in virtual resources require trained personnel in the form of teacher librarians for delivery of curriculum programs.

#### **Reference Point 2: the future potential of school libraries and teacher Librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy**

- It is absolutely essential that Teacher Librarians staff school libraries. Teacher Librarians have an under graduate teaching qualification followed by a postgraduate Teacher Librarianship qualification. An example of this is my own case where I was a classroom teacher for 16 years and then gained a Graduate Diploma in Teacher Librarianship. Surely this sort of experience cannot be compared to a two-week clerical course!
- Students who have access to a trained Teacher Librarian who has literacy teaching qualifications are at a distinct advantage in developing their own

literacy skills and in becoming lifelong learners. Research constantly points to the value of a Teacher Librarian in a school..

- Teacher Librarians who are responsible for the selection of resources make a huge impact on the teaching programs delivered in schools. Busy classroom teachers rely on these professionals being familiar with the curriculum being delivered and to review, purchase and process these resources for each curriculum area.
- Teacher Librarians fulfil duty of care requirements as stated in the Education Act and before and after school and during lunch hours are instrumental in answering student information queries, promoting both educational and leisure literature and training students in the effective, efficient and appropriate use of digital resources.

### **Reference Point 3: the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.**

- There is a shortage of trained teacher librarians in Australia probably due to the limited number of courses offered for this type of study.
- The population of Teacher Librarians is aging.
- Many of the people making decisions in regard to staffing schools, misunderstand the value of employing a trained Teacher Librarian and are too heavily influenced by economics rather than student learning outcomes.
- School leadership teams often underestimate the varied roles of teacher Librarians and therefore unqualified people are sometimes employed, resulting in a dysfunctional resource setting, which sadly people eventually come to accept as normal.
- Schools with trained Teacher Librarians are often independent schools which are often envied by their state school counterparts for the programs they run, when really employing a teacher librarian is just a choice made by a principal.

### **Reference Point 4: the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians**

- Schools with trained Teacher Librarians are able to fully support programs such as, Book Week, National Simultaneous Story time, MS Readathon and the Premier's Summer Reading Challenge which give their students opportunities to share reading activities with their families and the community and so develop a shared value for the importance of literature in the early years.
- Teacher Librarians are trained to work collaboratively with public libraries and groups such as The Fremantle Literature Centre to allow students to experience working with genuine writers and illustrators.
- Teacher Librarians are instrumental in delivering current affairs information to the school staff. It is the teacher Librarian who drives programs relating to and purchases and promotes resources for the observance of occasions such as ANZAC Day, Sorry Day and Remembrance Day to name a few.
- Because teacher Librarians are cognisant of the programs covered in each learning area they are able to direct resources to the correct learning area and they ensure that teachers are informed of each new government initiative as it arrives.

- Well resourced and run school libraries welcome parents in sharing resources with their children and have resources specifically aimed at parents and their needs in bringing up their children.

**Reference point 5: the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and teacher librarians**

- Teacher Librarians are able to design resource areas so that multiple users are given equitable access to digital resources as well as ensuring that digital resources are well used.
- Teacher Librarians have developed specialist knowledge in the use of digital resources and so are able to assist staff in embedding digital technologies in the curriculum.
- Teacher Librarians work with school IT committees to select, provide and develop a wide range of digital resources for student access in the school.
- Teacher Librarians are often the individuals who oversee the largest computer area in the primary school and so are responsible for catering to a very wide range of levels of technology understandings among students.

**Because the Library Resource Centre is the centre of learning and curriculum development in the school it is essential that all schools K – 12 are staffed with qualified Teacher Librarians, and para professionals such as technicians and clerical staff such as Library Officers.**