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

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The invisible hands: teacher librarians and school libraries have a strong positive impact on student learning

What do we know about the importance of reading?

- All the prominent literature tells us that students cannot improve their writing (and language proficiency generally) unless they read
- We know how important language is for learning
- Teacher Librarians are in a unique position with students to capture the teaching moment as it arises out of genuine interest, in the place where the resources are held. This can have the powerful effect of creating readers, or moving someone's reading from mass market escapism to complex language and literature

Vignette One

It is Huntingdale Technical School in Melbourne in 1983. A teenage girl browses the fiction shelves of the school library. An avid reader (the only one in her family), a bit of a loner (she's not a "cool" kid), she loves romances and mysteries. She's having trouble finding something: she's read all the R.L. Stines and the Sweet Valley Highs.

The Teacher Librarian stops to chat while she puts books away. She suggests that maybe a bit of a change would be good – what about a story set last century? The story's about a young governess who goes to work in a remote house on the moors in England, and she falls in love with her employer. There are some odd noises from the shut off areas of the house...? The girl's not entirely sure about an historical novel and it looks a bit long, but she is prepared to give it a go. She and the teacher librarian talk to each other often about books.

A few days later when she returns the book, saying how much she loved it, that's it's the best thing she's ever read, she asks for another just like it. She and the teacher librarian re-shelve *Jane Eyre*, and go off to find something else just as good, set last century....

Why is information literacy important?

- Future working lives require lifelong abilities to find out the unknown and make sense of it
- Students need empowerment and skills to carry out research
- Too often they are "sent to the library" to "do research" for an assignment
- Assumptions are made that they know how to find (and use) the information they need

Vignette Two

In 2005, in a school in the growth corridor of Melbourne, a young boy of thirteen leaves the catalogue, and wanders over to the shelves, looking disconsolately at the books on Egypt. He stands there, uncertain, peering at the questions on his assignment sheet. He doesn't know where to begin.

The new Library Teacher (she's on a Teaching Round from the university) comes up to him and asks if he needs some help. When he explains he needs information about pharaohs, but can't find anything, she says with a smile, "But you've found the books you need!" He admits he doesn't know where to start, as none of the books seem to be about pharaohs. She suggests that nearly all of them probably have something, and shows the references to pharaohs in the indexes at the back of the books. He takes several, and settles at a table.

A short while later, the student teacher librarian sees him back at the shelves, proudly showing another student how to use an index.

This is a school in the south east of Melbourne. The literacy rates here are very low, and it is considered a "tough" school, particularly for novices. This student teacher says on returning from her practicum, that she would like to be a Teacher Librarian in a school like this. She wants to make a difference.

- In the 1970s and 1980s in Victoria, this boy would have known all about using indexes
- Most primary schools had a trained teacher librarian and students attended classes weekly, where basic information schools were taught from Prep to grade 6
- This is not the case today

Why is it important to have a focus on Librarianship and the use of resources in Teacher Education?

- Teacher Education needs to be as broad as possible
- One year has to cover a great deal, and formal units can only cover so much
- Individual, student initiated learning moments matter

Vignette Three

A young student teacher with a real fire in her belly to teach English well, returns to her education faculty during her Teaching Round. She has been asked to prepare a unit particularly aimed at boys, one for which she is required to find gender specific plays, and has come to the faculty's library to find materials for her unit. This library has experienced teacher librarians, and the co-ordinator lectures in Teacher Librarianship Education.

She has been there for an hour *"finding books and reading, and going out of [her] mind"*. One of the teacher librarians asks if she needs any help. It is a small space, so the staff can see all the students working there. At the end of the year, this student writes in an online survey: *"Woooo Hooo! with all of the texts in the library she knew which were which and also gave me additional resources to broaden the scope of teaching boys so thank you"*.

- All of these stories show the important relationships formed between people in education settings
- Information technologies are vital in all workplaces and lives, but effective, guided use is paramount
- One to one, out of the formal classroom, there is little need for pretence (we know weak students often try to hide their struggles), and both personal reading passions and problems with understanding or having the skills for an academic task, can be shared with a teacher who will not be in a position of judging or assessing
- It is a special relationship, a genuinely *educative* one, one that opens doors
- A teacher with particular skills in understanding the research process, and at the same time having an extensive knowledge of resources (digital, print and audiovisual) and their place in learning, can do much to encourage and empower both the disadvantaged and gifted alike

The situation in 2010: School libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

- **The state of Teacher Librarianship in Australia is precarious. It is a greying profession. Many of the courses in Teacher Librarianship offered at the beginning of the 1990s have closed. Only 4 institutions currently offer courses or units in Teacher Librarianship¹. Three of them offer these courses on campus, in a face to face teaching situation, in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania.**
- **The state of school libraries in Victoria is poor. A study conducted in 2001 found that only 13% of primary schools have qualified Teacher Librarians. In addition, the study found that 12% of school libraries were staffed by people with no formal qualifications at all, in education or librarianship². The situation was found to be**

¹ Australian Library & Information Association. (2010). ALIA Education: Teacher Librarian. Retrieved from <http://www.alia.org.au/education/qualifications/teacher.librarian.html>

² Reynolds, S. & Carroll, M. (2001). Where have all the teacher librarians gone? *Access*, 15(2), 30-34.

considerably better in secondary schools in 2004, but 12% of schools had no teacher librarians in their libraries³.

- **The situation with Faculties of Education having their own teaching resources collections for teacher educators and students alike to examine, and where curriculum specialists are available to assist students, is dire indeed. A study conducted in 2006 showed that 7 out of 25 institutions represented in an Australia wide survey still maintained a faculty collection and specialist faculty staff⁴. In 2010, that number has reduced to 3.**

I appeal strongly to the Government to find the funding, and the will, to re-start a program of providing not only good libraries but teacher librarians in schools, established three and a half decades ago. And immediately, while there are still mentors in schools to bring the next generation of Teacher Librarians into the profession.

Appended are three academic papers I have written on the subject. I have listed them here with short descriptions to indicate their pertinence / illustrative value to this inquiry.

Attached studies:

Winter, R. (2008). The Outsiders: Teacher Librarians at the cutting edge, or on the chopping block? In M. Heston, D. Tidwell, K. East & L. Fitzgerald (Eds). *Pathways to change in teacher education: dialogue, diversity and self-study. Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices* URL: <http://sites.google.com/site/castleconference2010/Home/proceedings-of-the-seventh-international-conference-2008>

This study looks at the way in which school libraries and Education Faculty libraries enhance student learning. It is a paper written for a conference which deals particularly with practitioner research into teacher education practices.

Winter, R. (2007). Teacher Librarians: their metamorphosis in the Google Age: an Australian case study. In A. Berry, A. Clemans & A. Kostogriz (Eds). *Dimensions of professional learning: Professionalism, practice and identity*. Rotterdam: SensePublishers.

This study traces the role of teacher librarians in Victorian schools over time, from the 1970s to 2006, when the chapter was written. It contains historical data concerning Teacher Librarianship education, quotes from studies looking at the staffing in Victorian school libraries, as well as research into the impact of school libraries on student achievement.

Winter, R. (2006). What do you do in Library Method - learn to say, "Sssshhh!!!"? In L. Fitzgerald, M. Heston & D. Tidwell (Eds). *Collaboration and community: pushing boundaries through self-study. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices* URL: <http://educ.queensu.ca/ar/sstep/S-STEP6-2006.pdf>

This study looks at teacher librarianship education practices at Monash University in Melbourne, particularly in relation to the formation in students of their professional identity as *teacher* librarians, rather than the librarians they were in former working lives.

³ Cook, M. (2004, April 26). Cracks in the halls of learning. Melbourne: *The Age* (Education Supplement), pp.6-7.

⁴ Locke, R-A. (2007). More than puppets : curriculum collections in Australian universities. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 38(3), 192-215.