



# **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

By the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing  
Committee on Education and Training

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Submission from  
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To: Secretary, Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

*The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy; and  
The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.*

- The role of the teacher librarian in New South Wales Public Schools
- Studies
- Teacher librarians and literacies (information literacy and digital literacy)

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

- National Partnerships Agreement
- The Impact of School Based Management practices

*The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians; and  
The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians.*

- Professional development
- The role of universities

*Recommendations*

My name is Jane McKenzie and I am the teacher librarian (tl) and Assistant Principal at Quirindi Public School, New England Region, New South Wales. In 2006 I retrained with the Department of Education and Training to be qualified to teach in a public school library. I am the first qualified tl in Quirindi Public School for at least 15 years.

During my training it became very obvious to me that the role of the tl had dramatically changed since I was at school. It was also obvious that I had no idea of what a tl was meant to teach (I used to think that all they did was put books away and tell students to work quietly) and I had been doing it “all wrong”. But how was I expected to know what I didn’t know to ask? The training molded a new teacher in me, gave me an explicit understanding of the role of the tl, expertise in current pedagogical practices (such as Inquiry Based Learning & Constructivism), an understanding of the Information Processes needed in order to have a deep knowledge and understanding of the research process. It also made me realize how impacting (or unimpacting) a tl can be in a classroom.

It has taken four years of collaborative teaching, programming and professional learning of our staff to get them to a place where they all see the role of the tl as vital in our school in supporting student learning in not only “library skills” but research, technology and digital and information literacy.

As a Year 6 teacher this year (but definitely back in the library in 2011) it has been great to work with students and teachers in our Stage and further develop students abilities through the processes, as a tl, I have learnt. It has been extremely difficult to work with an unqualified teacher in the library this year (even though she is a very competent and giving teacher), but that specialist knowledge about information literacy and research development just isn’t there.

As one of very few Assistant Principals that is a tl, it is often very disappointed to hear (but becoming more and more common) that tls are not given promotions, as they do not have “curriculum knowledge” or “relevant classroom experience”. This just cements my understanding that educators still don’t understand (so don’t acknowledge?) how impacting the role of a qualified tl can be in a school.

To improve literacy and learning for **ALL** Australian students:

- All school communities need access to a qualified tl. This ensures that all students have equitable access to both a teacher trained in the education and the specialist role of the librarian.
- Schools should have equitable access for their whole school community to books, information and information technologies.
- School library budgets should be equitable and allow schools to provide access to a wide variety of resources, including books and new and emerging technologies.

***The role of the teacher librarian in NSW Public Schools.***

*“Librarians are almost always very helpful and often almost absurdly knowledgeable.*

*Their skills are probably very underestimated and largely underemployed.”*

*Charles Medawar*

While educators are preparing our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (aren't we already 10% into it?), qualified tls have been doing this for years. This “new” style of student directed learning is not new to tls. Tls have been teaching students “research skills” for over 40 years (the medium may be changing). The role of the tl has dramatically evolved and qualified tls proven to improve student-learning outcomes.

In NSW Public Schools the tl has a multi-faceted specialized teaching role that includes:

1. Supporting teaching and learning across the whole school;
2. Collaborate with teachers to assist in the teaching, learning and assessing cycle;
3. Integrating the use of digital technologies;
4. Developing professional development in their areas of expertise (eg Inquiry Based Learning, Information Processing Skills, Effective use of the net etc)
5. Maintain, resource and evaluate library systems and procedures which include;

library budgeting

selection and culling

ordering and acquisition

cataloguing and classification using the Schools Catalogue Information Service

processing of materials

circulation

stock control

However, as we move into the digital age, in reality tIs in schools are responsible for so much more. These might include:

ensuring they have a good understanding of current pedagogy such as Inquiry Based Learning, Constructivism and the Quality Teaching Framework

managing and maintaining digital stock including computers, video conferencing units, Interactive White Boards

leading professional development for staff in the areas of information literacy, critical literacy and digital literacy

engaging in a variety of professional networks

supporting students with learning needs (including gifted and talented students) by locating specific resources

ensuring that lessons are integrated into classroom teaching to maximize student learning time

organize book fairs, book week, Premiers Reading Challenge

opening the library before, after and during school breaks ensuring that students have equitable access to resources

writing for professional journals such as Scan

organizing tI network meetings (rural tIs often having to travel for up to an hour to meet in)

ensuring they are up to date with new and emerging technologies

supporting non-qualified tIs in small schools where the tI is not required to undergo training

The bottom line is that tIs, like any other educators, prime responsibility is the education of children in our schools. TIs are just as responsible for the intellectual, social and emotional development of students in our school as a regular classroom teacher.

## Teacher librarians and literacies

*“In the nonstop tsunami of global information, librarians provide us with floaties and teach us to swim.”*

*Linton Weeks*

TIs are considered a member of the whole schools teaching staff, so are as responsible as classroom teachers for ensuring that students develop lifelong learning. Not only do tIs hold Education degrees like all other teachers, they also hold specialist degrees or diplomas in Librarianship. TIs have a specialized understanding of:

- current pedagogical practices such as Inquiry Based Learning and Constructivism;
- Information literacy; and
- Digital literacy

Qualified tIs contribute to improving educational and community outcomes, especially literacy through:

- Providing school community members with a free voluntary reading program, encouraging and promoting free literacy, providing school community members with the lifelong skill of reading;
- Specialising and developing student directed learning activities that develop the life long learning skill of information literacy. Information literacy is, knowing how to find, interpret, analyse and understand information through critically reading from a variety of resources such as print, graphics and video.
- Developing an understanding of the ethical use of information and www tools (including social networking pages, cyber bullying etc)

The NSW DET states publically in a number of areas, and through policies, that public schools and teacher’s main responsibilities are to develop student’s literacy (and numeracy) and life long learning skills, which are all in line with what qualified tIs do:

Literacy K-12 Policy (1997)

*Teachers will ensure students are equipped with a range of literacy practices and skills that support them in code-breaking and in understanding, using, analysing and evaluating texts for a variety of purposes and audiences.*

The NSWDET web page (2010)

*The key priority of public schools is to provide children and young people with the foundations for lifelong learning so that they become literate, numerate, well-educated citizens with the capabilities and confidence to make a positive contribution to our society.*

Curriculum Planning and Programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12 (2006)

*Curriculum planning and programming will account for the needs of all students.*

*Learning programs, based on Board of Studies (BOS) syllabuses, are to be provided to address each learning area in each year of schooling.*

*In providing curriculum, schools are to ensure that priority is given to English and Mathematics in all primary years especially in the early years.*

The development of literacy and life long the NSW DET Library Policy already acknowledges learning for Schools (1987):

*The purpose of the school library is to support teaching and learning within the total program of the school. Teacher-librarians collaborate with teachers in the planning, implementing and evaluating of teaching and learning programs, including the integration of Information Communications Technology and literacy.*

*Teacher-librarians provide students with opportunities to develop information skills and to use these skills competently and with confidence for lifelong learning.*

It is recognized by the NSW DET that qualified tIs have a core role to play in developing student's lifelong learning, particularly in the are of information skills, a literacy based education principal.

### **National Partnerships Agreement**

NSW public schools have had tIs in all schools since the 1970s. The staffing formula that supports this in NSW, is an integral component of ensuring that students have access to a tI (even though it is concerning that they do not have to be qualified). A concern that not enough Release from Face to Face (the 2 hours per week teachers have for planning) is provided to schools, which usually results in the tI providing this time. To have tIs staffed above establishment would ensure that their collaborative role, speicalised understanding of literacy and digital skills would be shared with classroom teachers.

(see link <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF/paper.htm> for more info)

NSWTF has stated the “decision [of some schools in the NSW NPA pilot] undermines the provision of TIs to NSW public schools and denies the right of all students to be taught by suitably qualified specialist teachers. In this 21st century age of ever advancing knowledge, information and technology, it is unacceptable that the Department would allow a specialist teacher position such as TI to be unfilled.” (Zadkovich, 2010)

### **The impact of School Based Management Practices**

- New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) has given 47 school Principals trial of School Based Management practices under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA).
- Previous attempts of SBM systems have been opposed by the New South Wales Teachers Federation, as there is little convincing evidence that either justifies or

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- supports SBM and the improvement of educational outcomes for all students.
- There have been at least 60 studies that prove a demonstrated link between schools with a qualified tl and improved student outcomes.
  - Regardless of this, two schools in NSW through the NPA have traded their tl positions for other positions in the school (non-teaching deputies and a computer teacher).
  - The tl has replaced by administrative officers. Admin officers are trained as clerical staff, not as the manager of the library.

So how can it be possible that two Principals in NSW have been able to remove tls from the library (and in some instances particularly in QLD through BER not having a tl in the library)? How can removing a specialist teacher of literacy and digital technologies from the coalface, improve literacy outcomes in students? How can it be possible that 60 studies proving that a qualified tl improves student-learning outcomes be ignored? How can we say that literacy education is a priority when we remove specialist literacy teachers from a classroom? Surely it is the students that miss out here!

See the link below for research of the value of school libraries (in particular the Lonsdale report – bottom link)

<http://www.asla.org.au/research/index.htm>

## **Professional Development**

The fact is that tls work with every student in the school. That means they are impacting on every students education, in particular their literacy development. No education system would put an untrained teacher in the classroom, so how is it possible that governments are prepared to put untrained tls in the classroom?

NSW DET acknowledges that qualified tls help improve student literacy and have ensured that unqualified tls are trained through a retraining program (a program that is applauded world wide). However this is not happening for all teachers in the library, only those who teach in the library more that two days a week are retrained. How is this equitable for our smaller rural schools?

There is very little specialized learning for tls (particularly in more rural areas) that support their professional development. Our tl network group had to find our own as we were given a literacy, mathematics, and special education etc consultant to provide us with our learning.

My understanding is that there has been NO professional development for Principals in understanding the critical role the tl has to play in schools in the past 5 years that I have been a tl in our region. I have had a number of Principals tell me they put “the worst” teachers in the library because it is where “they will do the least damage”. It is essential that training for school based Executive is a priority to ensure they have a real understanding of the critical roll a tl will have in improving student literacy.



## The role of Universities

Universities that offer tl training have reduced from 15 to 3 or 4 over the past 20 years.

- After speaking with a rural university in NSW that provides Education degrees the School of Education does not provide students with an understanding of the role of the tl and does not plan to do so.
- Other universities in NSW have continuously declined to have qualified tls speak to students about their role in schools or provide students with an understanding of the role of the tl as part of their literacy/English course component, even though development of information literacy is a core component of the NSW English syllabus (and is also included in the draft K-12 National English document).

## Recommendations

1. Collect national data on school library staffing, funding and scheduling.
2. Fund Australian research on the role of tls in improving educational outcomes (particularly literacy).
3. Ensure that funding is tied so states can and must staff and fund school library programs and services.
4. Recognise the role school libraries have in student achievement, particularly with literacies.
5. Review the role of tls supplying Release from Face to Face in schools.
6. **All teachers** working in the library undergo retraining similar to that provided by the NSW DET
7. Train school based Executive of the role of the tl
8. Develop national school library standards in consultation with bodies such as ALIA.
9. Ensure that all schools and students have access to a qualified tl.
10. Provide tls training positions in university programs (or similar to the NSWDET retraining program).
11. Ensure universities provide all students studying an education degree with a basic understanding of the role of the tl.
12. Declare a national school library day and national information literacy awareness week.
13. Education areas have a tl consultant to support the specialized needs of tls.