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

#### **Reference point 1: Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

While federal government investment in school library buildings is to be applauded, without quality staffing and adequate resources the impact on student learning outcomes will be minimal.

Teacher librarians, as qualified teachers and resource specialists, have an overview of the whole curriculum and are essential:

- To support the curriculum needs of teachers and students
- To provide a dynamic facility with up-to-date book and electronic resources and technology
- To provide a library program that supports the literacy needs of students as well as teaching them the lifelong learning skills of information literacy.

#### **Reference point 2: The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy**

Research shows that there's a direct correlation between high quality library programs and student achievement:

Results of the first Colorado Study in 1993 and followed by the second Colorado Study (Lance, 2000) showed that not only did reading scores increase with a well resourced and professionally-staffed library but so, too, did students' information literacy skills.

Krashen (2009) states that 'studies show that those who read more read better. They also write better, spell better, have larger vocabularies, and have better control of complex grammatical constructions'.

The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005) states that successful schools should 'provide a stimulating literacy environment with a wide variety of printed and computer based resources available for children and their teachers'.

- Teacher librarians are specialists in literature for children and young adults and read widely to resource the library with both popular and quality literature

- Teacher librarians develop a selection policy and use a variety of selection tools to achieve a balanced collection
- Teacher librarians develop an enthusiasm for, as well as a culture of reading within the school through regular book talks with classes as well as individual student counselling to match the appropriate book to the child.
  - Our borrowing statistics show that students in classes that participate in regular book talks with teacher librarians read significantly more than those where teachers choose not to participate in book talks.
  - Teachers rely on teacher librarians to support students' reading needs by promoting and recommending suitable books whether for recreational reading or as part of the English program. Teachers do not generally read literature for children and young adults.
- The Premier's Reading Challenge, run in most Australian states to promote reading for pleasure, relies heavily on library staff to promote and administer.
- 'Information literacy, the ability to find, evaluate and use information in order to solve problems, is fast becoming a basic skill of the information age and it is the [school library's] mission to teach those skills' (Johnson, 2005).
  - Effective learners are information literate but these skills are not learnt by osmosis, they need to be explicitly taught. Teacher librarians as information specialists are in the best position to teach these lifelong learning skills in the context of inquiry based units of work.

### **Reference point 3: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

- Lack of state-based training for teacher librarians. South Australian universities no longer offer teacher librarian courses.
- Government schools often fill teacher librarian positions with classroom teachers or school services officers who have no librarianship (or in some cases, teacher) training. It is not a requirement to have formal library or teacher librarian qualifications nor is there any expectation to take on further study once in the position. Is there any wonder that university courses closed due to a lack of interest?
- Even though education authorities espouse lifelong learning there is no incentive for teachers already working in school libraries to gain qualifications:
  - No expectation from employer.
  - Cost of post graduate study is very expensive and in most cases is paid by the employee (Catholic Education in South Australia does offer a Study Incentive Scheme that covers fees for further study).
  - Further study offers no rewards (financial or other) for teachers.

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

- School staff allocation should include a teacher librarian position. Principals should not be able to fill the position with a cheaper option to make the dollars spread further. This compromise has a negative impact on students' learning.
- University undergraduate courses would better prepare new teachers by including a cross curriculum perspective, which should include a focus on literacy (the responsibility of all teachers), information literacy and collaborating with the teacher librarian.

- Universities could offer a teacher librarian specialisation as part of the undergraduate course.
- No support services (in South Australia) are available for teacher librarians. Professional development is mostly provided by professional associations, which are run by volunteers often with full time teaching jobs.

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

A large proportion of the school budget is spent on technology, however technology alone will not improve student learning. It is how the technology is used that makes students effective learners.

The explosion of digital information and ease of access to it has had an enormous impact on education, which is reflected in the new national curriculum documents.

- Information is power only when students know how to find good quality information and apply it to solve problems. Teacher librarians teach students to be critical users of information as well as the skills to search the Internet efficiently and effectively.
- The generation of students we are teaching in our schools today choose to function through information and communication technologies but they are not as information literate in is often believed. They operate well in the areas of social networking but their ability to locate quality information for educational purposes is often unsophisticated.
- The teacher librarian often leads the way in embracing new technologies.
  - Teacher librarians regularly update their skills in information technology and have embraced Web 2.0 tools and their applications in teaching and learning
  - Many teacher librarians have developed and maintain a library website that provides curriculum support for teachers and students and complements the physical collection in the library. The teacher librarians knowledge of the curriculum and understanding of selection criteria means that web links can be selected to match research topics as well as the age and reading level of students (<http://www.sac.sa.edu.au/Library/Library/library.htm>).
- School libraries subscribe to databases that offer full text online magazine and newspaper articles as well as online encyclopedia not available on the free Internet. Students have access to good quality, authoritative and current information both at home and at school at any time of the day and night.
  - Teacher librarians keep up to date and collaborate with teachers to select, purchase and organise quality digital resources to support the school curriculum.
  - Cost of subscriptions is expensive and proper resourcing is needed to ensure equity of access to quality information for all students.

**This submission is the personal opinions of carol Grantham, Liz Cockshell and Wendy Redden and not necessarily that of the school.**

### **References**

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