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Attention: Committee inquiring into school libraries and teacher librarians,
House of Representatives,
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Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

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of Australia, New South Wales Branch.

Australia's uniqueness: We live in one of the world's most multi-cultural societies. This is a great wealth, but because English is a second language for so many it is vital for basic social homogeneity that we promote the acquisition of a conversant grasp of Australian English. This should be a key focus in all levels of education. It must involve not merely functional literacy for practical survival but a grasp of our Australian heritage. Students should be offered the enrichment of an experience of the culture we have come to know as 'Australian'. It is this kind of commonality which underpins a stable and communication-rich society.

Literacy and literature play a vital role in promoting a fundamental understanding of what it means to be 'Australian'.

A teacher librarian with specific librarian- training and qualifications, equipped with a wealth of carefully selected resources is essential to the promotion of this literacy.

The impact of recent policies on school libraries and their activities: The decline in recent decades of the provision of a teacher librarian in every Australian school is not only educationally deplorable, it is socially retrograde. Considering the recent Government emphasis upon its 'education revolution' it is to be hoped that future generations will not be able to point to the obvious irony: this 'revolution' currently appears to be saying 'buildings not books'. This is only because the two processes happen to be concomitant. It must be possible for a Government focussed as it is upon idealist policies, to equip schools culturally and intellectually as well as materially and structurally. A teacher librarian in every Australian school will greatly enhance education intellectually but also advance cultural awareness through the teacher librarian's ability successfully to navigate students through an ever-increasing wealth of new releases (much of it wonderful Australian children's fiction).

The introduction of a National Curriculum: Since Literature stands alone as a major strand in the new national curriculum now more than ever will it be vital for every school to have a trained, preferably full-time teacher librarian. This will be an integral part of the success of implementation. A well-qualified teacher librarian will be essential for two roles: first of all to guide students through the vast array of literature now available, suiting a text with a student; moreover it will be imperative to have a well-informed teacher librarian on hand to resource teachers at all times both with the texts and the audio visuals they will need to implement new curricula.

An Australia-wide policy: Currently the provision of a trained teacher librarian in schools varies from state to state and sector to sector. Increasingly there has been a



handing-over of decision-making to school Principals. While this has the benefit of meeting local needs, it can lead to a very ad hoc educational system. Some Principals have undervalued the vital role of a well-stocked library with a full-time teacher librarian and have replaced the professional educator with a library technician.

The training of teacher librarians: Increasingly educators are depending on electronic resources. It should therefore be an essential part of the current training of teacher librarians that they become conversant with advancing technology. Hopefully in this way they will be seen to be providing schools with a modicum of the necessary electronic skills of the technician. Training in the traditional skills of running a library is naturally a basic. Add to these two functional skills the knowledge and the wisdom to understand and to select the best among the available educational resources, and you have in your teacher librarian the vital school heartbeat.

Lately there has been a significant decline in the provision of Australian tertiary courses available to train teacher librarians. In the past twenty years the number has gone from fifteen to four. This is a national educational disaster.

Training courses, facilities in tertiary institutions and a high profile for teacher librarians should all be conscientiously promoted and protected.

High quality education should be perceived for what it is – a great privilege – but in terms of availability should be universally open to all Australian students.

Good teacher librarian training produces men and women who are capable of maximising educational opportunities within schools – collectively on class levels and individually on a one on one level.

Reliable research has shown the importance of well-funded, well-staffed libraries to student success.

A strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher educational achievement regardless of the socio economic and educational levels of the adults in the community. (Lonsdale ACER 2003)

Additionally there needs to be a clear ‘career path’ for teacher librarians.

Currently there are no clear avenues for them to become a part of senior management in the school administration.

Recent history of teacher librarians: In the 1970s the Federal Government injected money into the States for the development of secondary school libraries. This transformed secondary education.

The time has come for another, similar transformation.

The Federal Government: The current Federal Government needs once again to support high quality education - this time to play a revolutionary part by reinstating the profile and role of the school library, and funding the fully equipped and trained professional teacher librarian.

Funding for this project will also need to allow for a period of relief from face-to-face teaching to enable the teacher librarian to develop curriculum support strategies.

State Government: The State Governments will need to put in place the necessary tertiary teacher librarian training courses.



Further initiatives to keep teacher librarians up to date:

As a secondary but nevertheless strategically important consideration, organisations such as the voluntarily-run Children’s Book Council of Australia provide on-going support and events for teacher librarians: author visits to schools, National Children’s Book Awards, book festivals in remote outback areas, conferences for teacher librarians –among many other initiatives.

Currently there is no on-going guaranteed funding for the CBCA either federally or from the state Government. Much of the energies of this worthy organisation – both nationally and on a state level – have been directed into fund-raising to enable the CBCA to provide the services they offer. Much more could be achieved were there to be some guaranteed on-going funding in the form of an annual grant.

There are also other very worthy voluntary organisations who support the work of teacher librarians. These too could be investigated for on-going funding.

The Federal Government’s Children’s Book Awards:

The Federal Government’s initiative to fund Children’s Book Awards is laudable and the CBCA applauds this wonderful decision.

These Awards are good indicators to teacher librarians of worthy books to include in their libraries.

Acknowledgement by the Federal Government of organisations such as the CBCA for the voluntary services they offer through their own long-standing national Children’s Book Awards would always be a welcome and helpful lift to the collective profile of the CBCA, as would be the possible involvement of the national body of the CBCA - with its decades of judging experience in Children’s Book Awards- in this Federal project.

In conclusion: collaboration in promoting good Australian literature and educational resources to Australian young people through the intermediary services of a well-trained, full-time teacher librarian in each Australian school, - this must surely be the way towards educational excellence and cultural harmony in what we know to be a country of great diversity.

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