

**Parliament of Australia**  
**House Standing Committee on Education and Training**  
**Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

**School Libraries, Now More Than Ever**



This submission is made by the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL), School of Communication and Information, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (New Brunswick, NJ 08901 USA). It focuses on the documented and future potential of school libraries and teacher librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy and learning outcomes.

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**Brief summary of main points.**

An extensive body of international research literature over the last 5 decades clearly establishes that school libraries, appropriately structured, staffed and resourced, contribute substantially to the quality of learning outcomes of students and to their intellectual, social and cultural growth. Research shows that highly effective school libraries – school libraries that are strongly integrated into the learning fabric of the

school and which contribute to student learning outcomes have a common set of characteristics:

- a credentialed, full time, teacher-librarian in each school (both teacher certification and school library certification through formal education);
- the availability of para-professional staff who undertake routine administrative tasks and free the teacher librarian to undertake instructional initiatives and reading literacy initiatives;
- an active instructional program of information, technical and critical literacies integrated into curriculum content, that foster deep engagement with content and provide the scaffolds for the development of deep knowledge and understanding; and their transfer across subject domains;
- a library program that is based on flexible scheduling so that teacher librarians and classroom teachers can engage in collaborative team planning and delivery of integrated instruction;
- a school library that meets national resource recommendations for schools, typically established by national and state professional associations and educational authorities;
- the provision of professional development on information literacy, inquiry and technology literacies to the teaching faculty;
- A strong networked information technology infrastructure that facilitates access to and use of information resources in an out of the school;
- The support of school decision makers who understand the multi-dimensional role of the teacher librarians, professional expectations and standards, and who enable that professional role to be undertaken in schools.

Against a backdrop of the rapid growth of web-based information services, and the escalating cost of maintaining, staffing and resourcing physical facilities called school libraries, it is flawed thinking and decisioning to conclude that the presence of a school library in a school is no longer necessary. We strongly argue that the presence of an appropriately staffed and resourced facility is necessary, more than ever.

**We believe that the school library is the school's physical and virtual learning commons where inquiry, thinking, imagination, discovery, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey, and to their personal, social and cultural growth. The school library provides a common, safe, guided, balanced and engaging information-to-knowledge space for students, and the systematic and explicit instruction necessary for students to be able to experiment with information in all its diverse forms, to inquire, to discover, to master the complex information-to-knowledge competencies that underpin deep learning, and to be innovative, creative, critical, reflective and ethical in their information-to-knowledge journey.**

## **Background**

The Center for International Scholarship (CISSL) is pleased to provide this submission to the Inquiry. CISSL is an international research and scholarly center based at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Established in 2003, it provides an arena for the international community of school library scholars and practitioners to generate, produce and share a substantial body of rigorous research on the dynamics and impacts of school libraries on student learning, and to enable the adoption, adaptation, and transformation of this research to enhance the professional practice of teacher librarianship. The center also provides professional development that supports the implementation of research findings to the learning-centered practice of school libraries. The Director of CISSL is Dr Ross J Todd, (formerly Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney). Dr Todd is also responsible for the leadership of the school library specialization in the School's Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree, which provides the formal education and certification of teacher librarians to work in New Jersey schools with full certification provided by the Department of Education in New Jersey. The school library specialization in the MLIS at Rutgers University is currently ranked #1 in the USA in the provision of school library education (as ranked by US News and World Report in 2009)

CISSL's scholars are actively engaged in research programs that center on the information seeking and use behaviors of young people as they live and learn and grow in today's information and technology rich world, with emphasis on the school library as a significant information landscape of schools. As documented on the CISSL website, ([www.ciSSL.scils.rutgers.edu](http://www.ciSSL.scils.rutgers.edu)) this research has a number of foci:

- **GUIDED INQUIRY:** to show how inquiry-based learning through school libraries in 21st century schools can be developed and implemented to enable students to learn meaningfully from the diverse and complex information sources, develop important information literacy and technology competencies as well as work and life skills, and how it can play an essential role in school improvement and reform.
- **IMPACT STUDIES:** to provide both quantitative and qualitative evidence on how school libraries help students with their learning, and to understand some of the complex dynamics that shape these impacts.
- **READING AND LITERACY:** to examine reading and literacy development in a range of contexts: reading to learn, reading in digital environments, reading in and out of school, and reading for personal enrichment. Literacy is multi-modal, including traditional literacy as well as visual literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, and information literacy.
- **EVERYDAY LIFE INFORMATION SEEKING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH:** to examine the information seeking and use behaviors of children and youth across a range of everyday life contexts, and how libraries and information agencies, including school libraries, can develop responsive services and products.
- **KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION:** to examine the nature and dynamics of knowledge construction and transformation of information by learners in the

school setting, particularly through embedding an inquiry framework in the instructional team work of classroom teachers and teacher librarians.

- **EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:** This theme focuses on how learning outcomes and learning processes through the school library can be identified, measured and documented, and form part of the cycle of continuous improvement and professional development.

The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries at Rutgers University (CISSL) holds the belief, substantiated by five decades of research, that school libraries help young people learn. School libraries are learning laboratories where information, technology, and inquiry come together in a dynamic that resonates with 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. School libraries are the school's physical and virtual learning commons where inquiry, thinking, imagination, discovery, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey, and to their personal, social and cultural growth. Teacher librarians understand that children of the Millennium generation are consumers and creators in multi-media digital spaces where they download music, games, and movies, create websites, avatars, surveys and videos, and engage in social networking (National School Boards Association, 2007). They know that the world of this young generation is situated at the crossroads of information and communication. Teacher librarians bring pedagogical order and harmony to a multi-media clutter of information by crafting challenging learning opportunities, in collaboration with classroom teachers and other learning specialists, to help learners use the virtual world, as well as traditional information sources, to prepare for living, working, and life-long learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Schools without libraries minimize the opportunities for students to become discriminating users in a diverse information landscape and to develop the intellectual scaffolds for learning deeply through information. Schools without libraries are at risk of becoming irrelevant.

Research conducted in New Jersey provides the foundation for school library impact studies.

With the school library literally the heart of the educational program, the students of the school have their best chance to become capable and enthusiastic readers, informed about the world around them, and alive to the limitless possibilities of tomorrow (Gaver, 1958,).

An extensive body of international research since that time consistently shows that there is a positive correlation between student achievement on standardized tests and school libraries. Students' higher test scores correlate with: 1) The size of the school library staff (Lance, et al., 1999; Baumbach, 2002; Lance, et al., 2001; Lance, et al., 2000; Smith, 2001). 2) Full-time/certified teacher librarians (Lance, et al., 1999; Callison, 2004; Rodney, et al., 2003; Baxter & Smalley, 2003; Todd, et al., 2004; Lance, et al., 2000); 3) The frequency of library-centered instruction (Lance, et al., 1999) and collaborative instruction between teacher librarians and teachers (Lance, et al., 2000; Lance, et al., 2005; Lance, et al., 2001); 4) Size or currency of library collections (Burgin & Bracy, 2003; Lance, et al., 2000; Smith, 2001); 5) Licensed databases through a school library network (Lance, 2002); 6) Flexible scheduling (Lance, et al., 2005; Lance, et al., 2003);

and 7) School library spending (Lance, et al., 2001; Baxter & Smalley, 2003) These correlation studies use regression analysis to isolate the effect of variables such as varying socio-economic status of students. They have been conducted in over 19 states, all with positive results.

A study conducted by CISSL in Ohio (2004) reports that 99.4 percent of students in grades 3 through 12 believe school libraries and their services help them become better learners (Todd, et al., 2004). The Ohio Study is the largest study conducted on the effectiveness of school libraries with over 13,123 students and 879 teachers as participants. Their voices clearly tell us that an effective school library, led by a credentialed teacher librarian, plays a critical role in facilitating student learning for building knowledge. This study, replicated in Delaware involving 5,733 students and 408 teachers (Todd, 2006) and Australia (Hay, 2005) involving 6,728 students and 525 teachers conveys a similar strong and consistent message: School libraries are powerful agents of learning, central to engaging students in the transformation of information into deep knowledge and understanding, and providing them with life skills to continue living, learning and working in an information and technology intense world.

So, how do school libraries help students learn?

### **Inquiry is the Framework for Learning**

School libraries are centers for discovery, inquiry, thinking and creativity. Inquiry in the school library challenges the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner to be curious, innovative, and creative in academic contexts. The teacher librarian collaborates with an instructional team of teachers and other learning specialists (such as reading, literacy, special needs and IT leaders) to help students learn how to think critically, solve problems, make decisions, and be reflective through their engagement with diverse and often conflicting sources of information. Embedded in authentic learning tasks that simulate real-life challenges are formative assessments such as rubrics, journal blogs, and reflection sheets that track student progress and promote reflection through self- and peer evaluation. Web 2.0 tools provide interactive opportunities for self-regulation and self-monitoring as learners achieve metacognitive levels as they learn how to learn (Gordon, 2009). Teacher librarians offer students authentic research (Gordon, 1999) opportunities as well, as they collect data through interviews and surveys, for example. The infusion of authentic research motivates students to interact with their own data, rather than relying solely on someone else's. In the school library the educators apply evidence-based practices (Todd, 2001) to their teaching, so that they are using tools such as action research (Gordon, 2006) that model the use of evidence as part of doing inquiry.

The Information Search Process (Kuhlthau, 1986) validated by rigorous research (Kuhlthau, 1988; Kuhlthau, 1989; Kuhlthau, Turock, George & Belvin, 1990), is the instructional framework that teacher librarians use to guide students through the predictable and essential stages of inquiry. Help and guidance are provided in the form of instructional interventions that enable students to activate prior knowledge and experiences, explore information sources to build background knowledge, select a topic, formulate a focus, collect, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information, and present a learning outcome that represents new knowledge in innovative, meaningful and creative

ways. This continuous help through intervention is known as Guided Inquiry (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2007). The interventions integrate traditional methods such as mind mapping and sticky notes, as well as Web 2.0 tools such as WonderWheel, blogging, Wordle, and even texting! They embed a range of information, critical and technical literacies, as well as reading comprehension and reflection (AASL, 2007) Teacher librarians have the state-of-the-art technical and pedagogical expertise to engage 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, blurring the line between creating content and thinking critically. School library instruction fosters ethical behavior that acknowledges intellectual property rights as well as intellectual freedom. In a knowledge-centered school, inquiry through school libraries provides the foundation for discovery, knowledge building, innovation and creativity.

### **Information Literacy is the Key to Discovering Knowledge**

Information literacy, or the ability to search, retrieve, evaluate and use information to build deep knowledge and understanding, is even more critical in today's increasingly digital environment. Despite the apparent facility with which the "Google Generation" uses the Internet, today's learners are not more information literate than previous generations. Rowlands & Nicholas (2008) found that students have difficulty performing information tasks. They tend to use simple search strategies that reflect an unsophisticated mental map of the Internet. They do not review information retrieved from online databases for relevance and they perform unnecessary searches after they obtain the needed information. They spend little time in critical appraisal of this information for appropriateness and quality. There is little improvement in evaluating the authority of sources, yet 93 percent are very satisfied with their results. The study also found that 21<sup>st</sup> century learners demand instant gratification at a click as they look for THE right answer (Rowlands & Nicholas, 2008). Such a simplistic view of "inquiry" is not adequate for the challenges for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Information literacy has developed from the simple definition of finding information to the concept of using information to build knowledge. Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, and technological literacy, are critical to surviving in a fast-paced, high tech world. More than ever before, in the increasing complexity of the information landscape, today's learners need systematic and explicit help in developing these literacies to make sense of the store of information, disinformation, and misinformation they encounter every day. The instructional role of the teacher librarian is key to this transformative, sense-making process. In a research study undertaken by CISSL (Todd, 2006) involving 574 students from grades 6 to 12 in New Jersey schools undertaking inquiry learning units, it was found that students who were given explicit instruction in analyzing and synthesizing information and constructing deep knowledge were the ones who engaged actively in transforming information rather than transporting it.

### **Reading is the Key to Understanding**

There is a considerable body of research dating from the 1930's that explores how dimensions of reading are enhanced when teacher librarians provide access to reading materials, promote reading, and integrate literacy with their instruction.. The importance of access to reading materials is demonstrated by Cleary's study (1939) which reported that students in a school with no school library averaged 3.8 books read over a four-week

period while students from a school with a library averaged 7.6 books. Gaver (1963) found that students with access to school libraries read more than those who only had access to centralized book collections without librarians, and read more than children who only had access to classroom collections. Her findings showed a strong correlation between the size of the library collection and the amount the students reported reading. This finding is supported by Lowe (1984) who found that students in schools with libraries read and enjoy reading more than students in schools without centralized libraries. Research by Allington (2002), Gottfried, Fleming & Gottfried (1998), McQuillan, (2001), and Pack (2000) provide further evidence that ample access to books and magazines predicts higher reading achievement. Collective evidence suggests that the number of books per student in a school library is a significant predictor of reading achievement. In addition, students who read more have more books available at home (Morrow, 1983; Neuman 1986; Greaney & Hegarty, 1987). In recent years, important reading research has been undertaken by Krashen (1985, 1988, 1989, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2001). Collectively these studies explicate further the contextual and instructional dimensions of reading development fostered by the school library. The evidence indicates that students get a large portion of their reading materials from libraries. Students read more when they have a quiet, comfortable place to read. In addition, the free voluntary reading promoted by access to reading materials has a positive impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling ability, grammar usage and writing style. In turn, access to books and magazines predicts higher reading achievement. An ample supply of books is key to the fostering of independent and engaged readers, particularly English Language Learning children. Students who read more typically have higher literacy development, as well as overall higher student achievement. Rutter's study of high-achieving schools in London (1979) found that such schools invested substantial budget and effort to ensure libraries were open after school as well as during the day, a finding later supported by Alexander (1992).

Ample access to books fosters more borrowing of reading materials, and is particularly enhanced with the presence of a teacher librarian to guide the choice and to encourage motivation and enjoyment of reading. Von Sprecken, Kim and Krashen, (1998) found that explicit attention from a librarian or other helper can get students interested in books and help them to discover a "home run" book. According to Didier (1982), the intervention by a professional teacher librarian increased use of newspapers and access to the library and achievement in reading by elementary school students. Thorne (1967) found that augmented library services, with attention to reading literacy programs, resulted in greater gains in reading comprehension, with boys gaining most. In addition, the teacher librarian supports reading for entertainment and personal growth by championing free choice (Lu & Gordon, 2008), and validating the reading of alternative media such as magazines and websites (Gordon & Lu, 2008). This is a critical element in reading engagement. Programs that promote reading throughout the school year, as well as during the summer, are critical to maintaining reading levels. Research reports that students who do not read during the summer typically lose one to three months on standardized reading tests scores from June to September. The cumulative effect of reading loss causes an achievement gap as children from lower socio-economic backgrounds experience the greatest reading losses. Researchers conclude that the

achievement gap in our schools is a summer reading gap (Cooper, 2003). Research on summer reading reveals that free choice is a critical element. The role of the teacher librarian in providing free choice and reader's advisory beyond the scope of the curriculum is especially critical for low-achievers and struggling readers. These students are seeking reading experiences that are relevant to their own lives and provide emotional and psychological benefits (Gordon & Lu, 2008). This points to the need to provide materials and structures that help students grow, not only cognitively, but psychologically, emotionally, and socially, through their reading experiences (Lu & Gordon, 2007).

Within the scope of school curriculum teacher librarians also play a role in developing emergent literacy across diverse academic contexts. When students are engaged in Guided Inquiry units, teacher librarians build reading comprehension by raising their consciousness about their comprehension. As students experience the stages of the Information Search Process, reading for understanding strategies are woven into the fabric of instruction. For example, when students activate prior knowledge, use mind mapping to take notes, or question the author they are improving reading comprehension. Teacher librarians are situated to help all students in a school at the convergence of reading, information, and thinking.

In addition to helping students read in traditional print environments, teacher librarians help them to negotiate digital text. Library collections are no longer static and fixed, nor is it possible to mediate them. All students are eventually challenged by texts they retrieve from subscription databases, Internet web sites, and electronic books. Reading sources, whether informational or fictional, can no longer be leveled, labeled, and packaged for consumption by students. This is especially true of electronic resources. More than half of respondents to a survey believe reading will be different in ten years (The Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010). There will be a new fluidity in media creations, with visual representations and storytelling emerging as important to "screen" literacy. Recent research indicates that students read digital text differently. Rowlands and Nicholas (2008) report that young information searchers skim, scan and squirrel, or hoard information, but do not read it. New "forms" of reading are emerging, such as 'power browsing' horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts. (Rowlands & Nicholas, 2008).

Extensive reviews by Lonsdale in Australia (2003) and Haycock in Canada (2003) agree with the findings reported in this paper that situate school libraries and teacher librarians in literacy development. These researchers conclude that well stocked libraries, managed by a qualified teacher librarian who actively promotes literacy and coordinating resources provide the essential infrastructure for developing reading literacy.

### **Will they be ready?**

The challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be met behind the closed doors of classrooms. Instead, these challenges call for a collaborative effort to bring information and technology to the expertise of the classroom teacher. Just as it is not possible to teach effectively in isolation, it not possible to isolate curriculum from the real world where



there is a natural synergism of information, technology, and reading. This synergy is synonymous with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Prosperity has long rested on how well we educate our children. But this has never been more true than it is today. In the twenty-first century, when countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, there is nothing that will determine the quality of our future as a nation and the lives our children will lead more than the kind of education that we provide them. Nothing is more important. US President Barack Obama, “Remarks on Strengthening America’s Educational System,” November 4, 2009.

Will our children be ready for the challenges of their future? Are our schools ready to prepare them for those challenges today? The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries takes the position that schools without school libraries cannot educate this generation in a way that prepares them for 21<sup>st</sup> century study and work. Libraries are - now more than ever, a vital part of school education.

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15<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.

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