Submission re:
School libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Submission written by

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

   Funding for the construction of primary school libraries as one option of The Building the Education Revolution Program (2009) has resulted in many new libraries being built. However, most schools do not have suitably qualified staff to run those school libraries. There is a risk that this enormous investment will be squandered if all aspects of the scheme are not considered i.e. the building, staffing, provision of resources, professional development for both the library staff who constantly need to update their skills and the general teaching staff re the opportunities now available to them.

   The Computers in Schools Project has resulted in many of these laptops being housed in the school library and loaned through the library borrowing system - a sensible means of responsible management. Obviously this practice is only possible in schools which have a library. While the provision of laptops is commendable, there is a need for considerable infrastructure to support such a program in any school e.g. teachers trained to maximise the learning opportunities provided by this technology, technical support staff to manage the maintenance and repair issues and teacher-librarians to teach information literacy skills to students. Otherwise, there is the risk that students will improve their keyboarding and computer game skills, rather than broaden their educational opportunities.

   There is some anecdotal evidence of school libraries being used as storage-rooms for laptops provided as part of the Computers in Schools Project. These are mostly schools which do not have library staff.

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

   Information literacy skills are taught to students by teacher-librarians, hopefully often in a collaborative learning environment with the classroom teacher. These skills help students to become informed, analytical, discriminating, independent and capable learners, critical thinkers - all basic, but essential life-skills.

   The other critical area of literacy is related to the promotion of reading. School libraries should place much emphasis on methods of encouraging students to read. Through reading, students improve their literacy, which in turn assists them in not only their general school work, but also their ability to speak, to write, to comprehend, to pick up on all the cultural (particularly literature) references in e.g. The Simpsons. Schools which achieved high

assessments in the NAPLAN Reading Test (and consequently Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation Tests) were invariably those with strong reading programs e.g. Candlebark School at Romsey, Victoria.

Distribution of reading-lists for staff, particularly just before term breaks, encourages staff to read. It is often easier and quicker to collect something from the school library rather than make a special trip to the public library. The image of a PE teacher with his holiday reading tucked under his arm is an invaluable example for students.

Most parents recognise the value of reading and will do anything to encourage their children to read. This might be in the form of suggested reading-lists provided by the school library and distributed either in paper form or via e.g. the school intranet. Another option might be the promotion of events such as book launches or readings where students have the opportunity to meet and hear an author or illustrator speak about their craft. The school library plays a huge role in the dissemination of news concerning new and forthcoming publications. Students are always keen to know the latest.

Some school libraries play an important role for parents, allowing them to borrow both fiction and non-fiction. The example of the parent as a role-model is critical. Children who grow up in a family where reading is normal invariably adopt such habits themselves. School libraries have access to many books, journals and online resources which discuss issues of great interest not only to teachers, but also parents, from understanding boys to coping with grief, to methods of assisting children with special needs, etc. Promotion of these titles and encouragement of parents to read them must invariably lead to a greater awareness and informed involvement.

Audio books are often borrowed by families who are planning long car-trips during the school holidays. This shared "reading" involves the whole family and sometimes leads to interesting discussion, invariably opening the parents' eyes to the range of reading materials available to their children.

3. **The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians:**

In an effort to balance unrealistic budgets, primary school principals, particularly in the State sector, chose, over the past 20 years, to cut back on their specialist teachers - art, music, PE and library. Part of the argument for reducing specialist teaching staff was to allow smaller class sizes. As a consequence, the specialist became a general classroom teacher. This was the genesis of the demise of the primary school library.

There are very few courses available for training as teacher librarians. The University of Melbourne (formerly The State College of Victoria at Melbourne, The Melbourne Teachers' College) ran the only course where graduates were fully trained teachers and librarians. Librarianship was the major subject and studied during each of the four years of the course, plus three other teaching disciplines. The only options now are for post-graduate teachers to train as librarians (usually in the Business School (as at RMIT) therefore with no school emphasis, or for teachers to study librarianship via distance education with Charles Sturt University. Without doubt, the preferred model would be concurrent training for teaching and librarianship, rather than separate courses. This would emphasize the involvement of the teacher librarian in the teaching program, the knowledge of the curriculum, the awareness of the varying student ability levels, the provision of resources for students with special needs, an insight into the way students learn, an ability to teach research skills, a good knowledge of the contemporary and classic literature which should be an essential part of the collection in any school library, etc.

The stereotypical librarian is elderly, staid, and frankly, a bit of a dragon - not the glamour career which will appeal to the young, even if there were courses available. However, this image is gradually changing. Places such as the State Library of Victoria are proving very popular with all ages and patrons are seeing the possibilities of working with many online and digital resources, in addition to the traditional book resource. Part-time employment in a bookshop holds much appeal for many keen readers and thinkers and is often a stepping-

stone to the study of librarianship. Schools are seen as a more vibrant environment than the average public library and hence, if marketed successfully, would attract keen and capable staff.

During the last 12 months, there have been many occasions where positions for Teacher Librarians have been re-advertised. This has been necessary because there are very few trained teacher librarians available to fill those positions.

Many school libraries, particularly in the primary sector, are being managed either by library technicians or volunteers. The library technicians are usually employed on a part-time basis, are not involved in the curriculum and planning discussions with the teachers and have no time to do anything more than the physical processing of new materials. Most are being exploited because the schools are unwilling or unable to pay for a teacher librarian. Not surprisingly, the turnover of staff is significant. Most importantly, the students are receiving, at best, a severely compromised library service. Likewise, in school libraries where the staff are all volunteers, there is no consistent methodology and indeed the volunteers are usually not library trained at all, leading to an endless range of problems. Another economic strategy employed by some schools, including some Catholic primary schools, has been to close the school library and use the services of the local public library. This is far from ideal with very limited co-operative planning and support within the teaching program. Insufficient knowledge of the needs of individual students, and most importantly, limited access for the student, rather than the convenient access of a school library and all that it provides.

The Independent Schools have a totally different attitude. This sector can showcase many examples of new school libraries staffed by qualified teacher librarians and library technicians. This is where many of the remaining trained teacher librarians are relocating, partly because they know that these schools support, value and consequently fund their school libraries.

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

The State Library of Victoria is an excellent example of an institution which provides valuable support for school libraries, both primary and secondary. This ranges from hosting talks by visiting authors, to tours for students and or teachers, to conferences and exhibitions. Their Inside-a-Dog website is a favourite with many secondary students, encouraging students to read and write reviews of fiction and vote for their choice in the INKY Awards. ERGO is a valuable resource for both students and teachers, often recommended to them by the teacher librarian. One of the most valuable services of the SLV is the individual membership which is available to all Victorians, including students. This provides access to an extensive range of online resources, many more than any individual school library could ever afford. The SLV is also a fine model of a working and constantly evolving library.

The Age newspaper has a service for schools called the Education Age. This provides outlines of issues in the news, articles about education and the ability to search for full-text articles on a chosen topic.

The National Gallery of Victoria provides tours for school groups (students and/or staff) and regular updates of events, exhibitions and talks which are relevant to schools. Their website and bookshop also provide excellent resources.

The National Gallery of Australia in Canberra not only services those who can visit it, but through its Educational Office and the website, provides support materials which focus on current exhibitions, allowing teachers to plan lessons which simulate a visit to the gallery e.g. Learn More / Online Resources. Again, the combined resources from the bookshop and the website extend that experience and teaching opportunities.

The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) administers the Book of the Year Award. Via the website, students are able to participate in the Junior Judges' Project, a competition which provides an insight and understanding of the award process. There are many

opportunities for students at all levels to become involved in Book Week activities organized by all State Branches. School libraries would usually purchase Book Week merchandise to help promote student involvement through competitions, activities, displays, book character parades, etc.

The National Library of Australia, via the website, gives access to many resources, particularly to members. Their Trove resources are extensive and varied, especially for students and teachers researching anything of an historical nature.

The Melbourne Writers' Festival includes a Schools' Program, featuring authors of books for young readers, both Australian and International. Most talks for school groups are at Federation Square, in particular BMW Edge, a location which is popular and contemporary, helping promote the image of reading. Similarly, older students are keen attendees at many other festival events, depending on their particular interests. These are opportunities for students to extend their experience beyond the school boundaries.

Professional organisations such as ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association), SLAV (School Library Association of Victoria) and ASLA (Australian School Library Association) provide valuable opportunities for professional development and collaborative planning and review of projects through conferences, journals and their websites.

Journals such as Viewpoint, Magpies and Reading Time all provide news and inspiration for display and promotion of reading to the broad range of patrons who are serviced by a school library.

Curriculum Corporation provides information about resources for the broad range of learning areas. This information is usually disseminated by the school library to several faculties. SCIS (The Schools Cataloguing and Information Service) would be subscribed to by many school libraries. The major value of this subscription is the ability to download catalogue records and find resources (including websites, DVDs, etc.) which have been catalogued on particular topics. However, there are many schools which cannot afford the annual subscription. This not only results in a greater workload for the library staff, but can also lead to more inconsistencies in the catalogue if professional library staff is not employed.

A school membership of the ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) Cunningham Library is a valuable source of newspaper and journal articles for teachers, plus access to the Cunningham Library.

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

Many school libraries provide Pathfinders to support the research projects within a school. A pathfinder would usually be prepared by a teacher librarian, listing recommended resources, both electronic and print. Thus there might be links to relevant websites, scanned newspaper articles, lists of books available from the school library, journal articles, etc. This task demands a thorough understanding of the research task, an awareness of the range of abilities of the students concerned, a knowledge of the collection within the school library and beyond in the virtual library.

Subscriptions for online resources are expensive, yet parents and students expect that the school library will provide these services. Indeed there are many free resources available on the net, but if students are to learn how to identify and use credible sources of information, they need to have access via their school library. Students must be shown examples of good and bad websites. The alternative is that the student sees "research" as the first three results from a Google search which might be so broad that it resulted in several million hits.

All secondary school libraries should have access to a range of electronic resources at subsidised costs. These resources include online encyclopedias, full-text daily newspapers and a considerable range of journals. This needs to be negotiated at a federal level to allow equal access for all users in schools. At the moment, there are no standards and hence

no equity in the access available. Similarly, all primary school libraries should have equal access to e.g. two online encyclopedias and an agreed list of additional electronic resources.

E-books were the subject of a conference held at ACMI in Melbourne in 2009. Delegates (predominantly teacher librarians from secondary school libraries) were informed that there were no standards set for lending rights of E-books by school libraries. The advice was that each school should negotiate an individual deal with the supplier or distributor of the E-books. This is an area in urgent need of investigation and negotiation on behalf of all school libraries.

The suggestion that a school library should invest in e.g. 20 E-book readers @ $800 is not necessarily a feasible solution. Add to the cost of the reader the price of e.g. 20 E-books and you have a very expensive piece of technology which is able to be used by only 20 students at any one time, is a very expensive item to leave on a tram and as a collection, has devoured $20,000 of the library budget. Again, this is an area where standards are yet to be developed, initially by the publishing industry and then within school libraries.

Most school libraries hold collections of DVDs and perhaps some VHS tapes. Many school libraries are currently recording off-air directly on to a hard-disc electronic video storage system such as Clickview. There are many challenges for school libraries, including the establishment of cataloguing standards and procedures, plus copyright issues.

During recent years, the supply of text books has moved rapidly towards a digital format. Two years ago, most booklisted titles included a printed text and companion CD-ROM. Now the standard is the text and access to online resources via the publisher's website. If a title is booklisted, the school can often negotiate with the publishers to provide an electronic version on the intranet. If they have not done so already, in the very near future schools will be considering electronic alternatives to these booklisted titles, plus an electronic version of an atlas, a dictionary, a bible, etc., accessible from either school or home, probably via the school intranet.

Copyright regulation would appear to be written retrospectively. It is not clear-cut, nor does it address many of the current developments of resources available within schools. The school library is invariably at the centre of many of the issues regarding copyright, either because the library houses the item under discussion or is responsible for its distribution or loan within the school community.