



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

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I have been working as a teacher librarian in NSW DET primary schools since 2003. Prior to this I worked extensively in western Sydney public libraries and also taught Library & Information Studies on a casual basis at both Ultimo and Illawarra TAFE colleges from 1992 – 2004. I hold dual professional qualifications in both teaching and librarianship and received a NSW Quality Teaching Award in 2008. I would like to address some points in particular:

Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and activities

The three most recent policies which have already made an impact on school libraries and teacher librarians nationally are School Based Management (SBM), the Building Education Revolution (BER) and the Digital Education Revolution (DER). The economic rationalisation of the 1990's has also had a significant impact. SBM and economic rationalisation affected the states of Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria in particular, and saw teacher librarian positions disappear from schools in a misguided belief that money saved could be directed elsewhere within a school, or the teacher librarian was effectively replaced with a Library Technician who holds paraprofessional qualifications in librarianship only. In NSW, we are currently experiencing a DET SBM Pilot Project which involves 47 schools. Loftus Public School has already decided not to reappoint their retired teacher librarian, instead investing the savings on enabling an Assistant Principal to be withdrawn from teaching duties. At Cringila Public School (not within the Pilot Project), the teacher librarian's position has been replaced with a Computer Studies Teacher. Yet a third primary school waiting for the construction of a new library has elected to use their teacher librarian to focus on NAPLAN – our first documented example of 'teaching to the test'.

At present, there is no national data on school library staffing. In 2008 a survey was completed by Edith Cowan University in partnership with the Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA), however there were only 600 respondents, which is representative of only 10% of schools nationally. This survey did find of those who responded that 65% **did not** have professional staff employed in their school library. (<http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php>)

What are the effects of not employing a qualified teacher librarian?

- Without both professional librarianship and teaching qualifications, there is no one to select resources to support and enrich the school curriculum for either students or teaching staff
- Without teaching qualifications there is no one in the library who can teach literacy
- Without professional librarianship qualifications, there is no one who is a literature specialist or who can 'match child to book'
- Without teaching qualifications, there is no one in the library to teach the specialist skills of information literacy

The BER is a step in the right direction with regard to school libraries, being the first major capital investment in school libraries since the 1970's. The concern, however is that many of those new libraries will not be staffed by professional teacher librarians. In Western Australia, for example,

teacher librarians are not appointed to government primary schools. Victoria, Tasmania, NT and SA have witnessed declining numbers of teacher librarians. A new building will not increase student academic achievement alone, but employing a qualified teacher librarian AND adequately resourcing that new school library will.

The DER is a project which also has the capacity to harness the capabilities of qualified teacher librarians who are already at the forefront of digital literacy. Many teachers still lack the confidence to incorporate ICT into their teaching and the teacher librarian is in a position to lead such professional development in their capacity as curriculum and information literacy specialists. They are the one professional staff member who provides an essential link between all teaching staff and all students within a school.

In primary schools, teacher librarians also provide this linkage role – even more so as (in NSW) primary teacher librarians actually teach every student in the school each week. Unfortunately, the DER is a high school project and many primary schools are disadvantaged by a lack of computer access, as not all have dedicated labs or banks of computers in the library. They may not also have a qualified teacher librarian who has the skills to teach students how to access, critically evaluate and apply knowledge and understanding of any technologies those students may use.

The future potential of school libraries and teacher librarians to contribute to improved educational outcomes, especially literacy.

Countless studies both within Australia and overseas have already recognised that a well resourced school library coupled with a qualified teacher librarian makes a difference to student academic achievement. (<http://www.iasl-online.org/research/>)

Information literacy is the specialist strength of the teacher librarian, yet still teachers, principals and many in the community fail to grasp this fact. Our students in the 21st century need these skills more than ever in order to participate in the multi modal world. Within the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians are statements which correlate with the aims of information literacy.

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

The lifelong learning skills of information literacy are taught explicitly in teacher librarian courses, but not in teacher education courses. Indeed, the pre service teachers I address each year whilst on practicum at my school do not fully understand information literacy or the role of the teacher librarian as they are constantly surprised when informed of how a teacher librarian can support them in their teaching.

In the 21st century, our students must be skilled in:

- Being able to identify a need for information
- How to locate, select, organise and evaluate information
- How to use information for a given need and to create new information

New technologies add another layer to these skills, with students requiring skills in digital literacy. More than ever before, our students need to be critical users of information, they often collaborate with others – wherever they may be, they need to be aware of the consequences of accessing and using online information. Teacher librarians as familiar users of online information are amongst the most qualified to teach and guide students in the acquisition of these intrinsic skills.

Literacy is not just confined to the skills of reading and writing. The teacher librarian has the capacity to teach a multitude of literacies including textual, visual, digital and technological, in addition to

informational. See this particularly relevant article entitled 'Young Learners need librarians not just Google'

<http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/22/moran-librarian-skills-intelligent-investing-google.html>

School libraries need to be well resourced in order to enable students to reach their full potential. In Australia, there is a difference between the services offered by a school library and those offered by a public library. Our students need the school library to support their learning in the first instance, managed by a dually qualified teacher librarian. That library needs resources which are both current and relevant to their learning needs. The teacher librarian, like a children's librarian in a public library is a literature specialist, however, it is only the teacher librarian who can match book to child, understanding the particular level of their student's reading.

Unfortunately, funding for the purchasing of resources in school libraries throughout Australia is ad hoc at best, at times depending on the attitude of a principal and their own bias or opinion when it comes to the importance of school libraries or recreational reading. Again, there is no national data on the levels of funding schools deliver to supporting the school library.

Teacher librarians contribute to the professional development of teachers, if allowed to plan and teach collaboratively. This in turn can only improve the educational outcomes of our students. Many primary teacher librarians in NSW are utilised in 'RFF' (Relief from Face to Face) teaching – which may at times be an area the classroom teacher has little interest. This has also been a way the principal can be 'economical' with staff. Cooperative planning and teaching between the classroom teacher and teacher librarian allows more quality teaching to occur, particularly with regard to 21st century learning which may see students collaborating with peers online or via video conference to solve problems or obtain information in a variety of learning tasks. This is best shown via example and there would be many teacher librarians who would ably demonstrate the difference their teaching makes not only with regard to their students, but in the difference they are able to make to the teaching staff. See <http://tpsblog1.edublogs.org/> as an example of a writing project undertaken by two teacher librarians and two classroom teachers with their students, conducted using video conferencing. See an example of a successful book rap designed by two teacher librarians and hosted by the NSW DET <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/raps/bearandchook/index.htm>

A teacher librarian not only manages the library and selects resources for inclusion, but is able to source the best materials needed by the teaching staff – whether locally, throughout Australia or via the world online. This often lengthy task is usually completed in a teacher librarian's own time – particularly if they work part time at a school one day per week, with the majority of that time being spent teaching students. See examples of teacher librarian's websites which identify online resources and tasks essential to the teaching needs of both teachers and teacher librarians.

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~slacey/>

<http://teachers.ash.org.au/jmresources/default.htm>

<http://sites.google.com/site/smclibraryshaz/>

If the school library and teacher librarian are to contribute to increased learning outcomes, their value must be recognised, their role must be clearly understood by principals and staff without teacher librarians having to justify their teaching and position with every change in staff – principals included.

Teacher librarians in Australia are unique in that they hold dual qualifications in teaching and librarianship. When able to focus on teaching their special strengths of information literacy and literature, in a well resourced school library with a supportive principal and being able to plan and teach collaboratively with classroom teachers, student academic success increases. This does occur in Australia already, however we are unaware how often or whereabouts exactly. We do know it doesn't happen enough.

Recommendations:

1. Every school must have a qualified teacher librarian on staff, based on a formula determined via consultation with ASLA.
2. Teacher librarians must hold dual qualifications in teaching and librarianship
3. The federal government collect statistics regarding the staffing of school libraries
4. The federal government collect statistics regarding how school libraries are resourced, including funding amounts and sources
5. The federal government collect statistics on the numbers of primary schools with computer access within each school via a lab or school library with the goal of enabling equitable access to digital technologies for all primary students nationally
6. The federal government mandate that schools allocate their libraries an annual budget based on an amount per student in consultation with ASLA and as part of tied federal funding
7. That information literacy is recognised within the national curriculum as an area to be taught and its outcomes measurable.
8. That principals and executive staff be required to undertake professional development in understanding the role and utilising the skills of teacher librarians within their schools.
9. That a national Reading for Enjoyment project be initiated and promoted by leaders in government and the community to increase literacy and foster ties with both the school and public libraries for all Australians.

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