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The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

At Engadine West Public School we *had* an unusually large library. An indication of its size is that it is now in the process of being turned into 4 classrooms with BER money. This large floorspace enabled the inclusion of a 'library computer laboratory' (equipped with 30 PCs) which was used to teach information literacy skills to classes of students K-6. Because the concept of information literacy embraces a 'literacy' of information (regardless of format) — a library computer laboratory was the ideal space in which to teaching and learning could authentically take place.

Unfortunately, we have been advised that the off-the-plan replacement library which is to be built for us, despite being the largest available, is not big enough to allow us to incorporate a class-sized computer laboratory like we had before.

This is a huge setback for the information literacy program I had set up in our school. I am no longer able to teach information literacy skills in the authentic context of the information hub of the school. (I am now

teaching in a computer laboratory – isolated from an information context.)

One year ago I completed a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) through Charles Sturt University. The thrust of the whole course was the key role Teacher Librarians should be playing helping 21st Century school communities to navigate the increasingly diverse world of information. Amazingly, I *was* playing this role in our library computer laboratory, which was just a few metres away from the print dictionaries and thesauri, print encyclopedias, print maps etc – so my students could readily compare and contrast the different formats in which similar information might be available to them. They were able to see for themselves, the benefits of the world wide web, as well as its limitations for K-6 students.

The 19th Century design for our 'new' library has stymied my integrated approach to teaching students about information and how to be independent learners, which had so impressed my Charles Sturt University lecturers.

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

It is my view that many of current school librarians, who trained some years ago at a time when print was the main format information that came in, are holding back the achievement of educational outcomes of our students. Their 19th Century preferences for quiet

libraries- isolated from the hustle and bustle of classroom life, 'tried and true' print resources and interminable half-hour class borrowing sessions have no place in contemporary learning communities!

Education authorities would do well to remember that school librarians are also teachers – clearly they should be *teaching* information literacy (and, therefore, literacy), not engaging in low level tasks such as book processing and book circulation, which could be done far more cheaply by library assistants.

I have noticed that old-style Teacher Librarians tend to hide behind a rationalized, fuzzy, self-styled job description of promoting a love of literature and improving literacy in their schools. This will never be true while they use interminable half-hour class library borrowing sessions as a convenient excuse to remain at arms-length from the realities of outcomes-based planning, teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation, even in their 'pet' areas of literacy and literature.

If the future potential of school libraries in improving educational outcomes is to be realized, *recently trained* Teacher Librarians need to be identified by state education departments and given priority for placement in schools, so that libraries become lighthouses for 21st Century technologies and pedagogies in schools. Recently trained Teacher Librarians know that their re-visioned role involves curriculum-based collaborative planning and teaching *with* classroom teachers in vibrant, functionally-dynamic library spaces and that their tools of trade are information resources in every format including print, online, digital, wall-charts, globes etc. We realize that it

is no longer good enough to just lend out, return and re-shelve books; our role is to add value to our schools by sharing our knowledge about information with the whole school community and providing a stimulating information environment in which educational outcomes will be achieved.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

The BER program, which provides what I consider to be small, 19th Century-style library buildings to public schools, has almost convinced me to seek work outside public school education. I question what development of my role is possible if the physical facilities are outmoded, even before they are built.

I work casually in the Wollongong University Library. Administrators of that library have responded to changing times, technologies and educational pedagogies – and undertaken a building program which Julia Guillard's BER team should take notes from for future reference : Library staff have rationalized their print collection to make more space for individual desks with computers, group study desks, sound-proof group study rooms, printers, photocopiers, an audio-visual room with multiple DVD players each equipped with multiple ports for headphones, and two purpose-built large computer laboratories for teaching and learning of information literacy skills.

Wollongong University library's physical environment and print collection are complemented by its rich online library environment –including readily accessible ebooks and ereadings, which are stored on both local and remote servers. Money is no longer wasted on multiple copies of print resources as it is spent, instead, on digital versions which are accessible to all.

The university library is a totally dynamic learning hub and is a focus for all individual and group study on campus. Students want to be there because the physical facilities that are now available for them, match their learning needs. The library that is planned for Engadine West Public School is depressing, in comparison.

At the University library my role as a librarian is 'research help': that means that I am always available to guide individual students with their individual research projects and to individually teach them the processes of information searching, retrieval and evaluation. I am constantly using higher order thinking skills and stimulating my students to do the same. I know that I am 'adding value' – why can't schools use Teacher Librarians in this way?

If a school's measure of the value of a school Teacher Librarian is if they are looking after 30 students at all times during the school week – then that is enough for high achieving Teacher Librarians like me, to consider working outside of public education.

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

As a casual university librarian at University of Wollongong, I can see great potential in active partnerships between universities and schools. What we university librarians observe is that students are entering our universities with little idea about what a library catalogue actually is, let alone how to search it; they seem not to have any understanding of how books are ordered and shelved in libraries across the western world (ie the Dewey system); they have little understanding of the need to evaluate information resources, especially those found on the world wide web; their knowledge of referencing and citing, and the need for it, is very limited.

Also of interest is that many university students have no idea of the steps in the research process (finding keywords in the task, analyzing the task, considering where the task fits in with what they have learned so far, defining what type of information they need and what format might be most appropriate, searching for information, locating information, selecting the most appropriate information, organizing their information into a suitable text type, selecting a suitable communication technology and using it to share what they have learned, evaluating all the previous steps and learning lessons for the next research task). Effective collaboration between schools and universities, including training and development for school teachers and school librarians by university librarians, would result in improved educational

outcomes in schools in relation to independent learning by all.

I can also see potential in closer relationships between schools and council libraries. Some school libraries in Sydney are also council libraries and there are cost-saving benefits in that model of operation. Schools may find the money they need to advances in the provision of digital technologies through cost-saving partnerships with local councils. School teacher librarians could hand over class borrowing sessions to council staff and concentrate on their teaching role in information literacy.

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

Having worked in both a university and a school library I can see the extent to which schools could move more quickly to embrace emerging technologies and educational pedagogies.

University libraries have large *e*reading collections – these are scanned copies of book chapters or journal articles which lecturers/teachers have specifically requested be made accessible to every member of specific educational groups. These pdf files are stored on a local server. This technology should be being used in schools. Very few first year university students have any concept of what a journal article is and what its role in an academic research task might be. This suggests that high school students are not being exposed to this type of material and the question is 'why not?' – especially at the Year 11 and 12 level.

University librarians play key roles in the provision of comprehensive interactive online learning environments for use by students and staff in collaboration with librarians. These environments may be used for low level purposes such as simple text-based information dissemination by teaching staff, but can also used for the delivery of podcasts, interactive learning modules and self-correcting online assessments.

They can also be used to provide highly engaging, virtual, collaborative work environments where students are guided to express opinions, compare them with the opinions of others, question others, find ways of working cooperatively even when difficulties arise and collaborate to create a group product. These virtual environments can be as simple as wikis, as interactive as connected classrooms across the globe, or as complex as virtual worlds, but the key to them all is that they necessarily involve interaction between students, between students and their teacher and between the students and the information resources provided specifically for the purpose by the teacher and librarian.

Students find working in virtual environments extremely engaging, but extremely challenging at the same time. University librarians have witnessed the independent learning skills and personal skills that students develop as they struggle to solve technological problems and negotiate with each other. Because of this, they are prepared to work closely with teaching staff to provide the virtual environment, the information and communication technologies appropriate to the task and the information resources which will stimulate high order

thinking skills like analysis, synthesis and creation of new ideas of using old ideas in new contexts. This type of challenging collaboration between librarians and teaching staff, to improve student learning outcomes, should also be happening in schools!

There is no reason at all why similar technologies cannot be adapted to the primary and high school learning environments. The prospect is exciting and recently trained Teacher Librarians, who are comfortable with information in all its formats and communicating in any format, are perfectly placed to coordinate the provision of interactive online work environments for school students.

University library websites are comprehensive information packages which teach skills and processes as well as provide access to a wide range of information resources. Public school Teacher Librarians need to take charge of and develop school library websites which do the same. I would suggest that Ms Guillard appoint a team of 'lighthouse' Teacher Librarians who can lead the way in library websites which meet the information needs of the whole school community. I would be thrilled to be a member of such a team.