



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

I would like to personally comment on the terms of Reference from my perspective as a qualified Teacher Librarian and working in both the position of Teacher Librarian and also as the Head of Information Services in the Independent school at which I currently work.

I began working in a school library in 2000 without any special qualification and thought at the time that I was doing an adequate job by selecting and maintaining a relevant collection of both physical resources and also many online curriculum 'links' made available through a library website.

It was not until I personally decided to gain Teacher Librarian qualifications through Charles Sturt University, however, that I realised the scope and potential of working as a Teacher Librarian.

After completing a Master's degree in Applied Science (Teacher Librarianship) my whole focus changed from that of providing a relevant and up to date collection to that of leading the way in Information Literacy and new technologies within the school community. This included training teachers in new methods of Inquiry learning and team teaching with them to introduce new Web2.0 technologies into the classroom.

Terms of reference in this Inquiry: To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools

- **the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

Many school are receiving upgrades or new library buildings under the Federal Stimulus Package. New or upgraded School library buildings do make a difference to student's attitudes and desire for learning in bright well designed environments.

This is like 'leading the horse' to a well equipped well of water – making him drink is up to him! Whilst spending money s on school library buildings is very important, the services provided within the library are even more important. Extra funding has not been allocated to train more school librarians to be leaders in their communities to team with and train teachers to use new technologies and new information tools.

- **the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy**

In my school I am constantly encouraging teachers to take part in literary experiences available to them. We take part in the Premier's Reading Challenge which is organised by the Teacher Librarian as class teachers have not had time to lead in this. We also run special activities in conjunction with Book week each year to encourage reading across the whole school. Last year, for example, I organised for each Secondary English class to come to the library and organised for them to be introduced to new genres and novels through a "Speed Dating" game which as well received and resulted in many more books being read. English teachers also bring their classes to the library for Wide Reading and are encouraged to share their experiences and books through a newly created library blog.

- **the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

Gaining Teacher Librarian is expensive as this is post-graduate training. I had to wait until my family could afford for me to gain the qualifications and many teachers who have observed me in my job and have shown interest in it cannot face the cost of training.

Many teachers who have assumed the role of Teacher Librarian have not had this post graduate training and would benefit from doing a course. It is through training that the whole scope of the job becomes clear and the Teacher Librarian can lead the way in demonstrating and team teaching in using new research methodologies, new technologies, Internet safety and etiquette, Copyright in the digital environment, literacy across the curriculum, 'fluency' in all new technologies and much more.

A well-qualified Teacher Librarian is able to initiate and lead pedagogical change in the school.

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

With the leadership role of the school librarian there comes the responsibility to engage students (and teachers) in the wider community of research and support.

In my own school I encourage senior students to join the State Library to utilise their databases and services.

Our local libraries are also places to which I refer students when our own resources are not adequate. [Camden and Narellan library also have digital and recording facilities to which I refer students for their arts courses.]

Through our Teacher Librarian network I learn of many new ideas to implement in the school. [One of these was a government initiative for teaching an online unit of work on ecology called “Murder Under the Microscope”. We have taken part in this online competition/activity for a number of years but without the initial idea and subsequent team teaching approach by the Teacher Librarian it would not have happened at all].

Online activities, such as this, engage students and encourage thinking skills beyond most other activities. They do, however, need more support than classroom teaching and it is into this online environment that the **vital supporting role** of the Teacher Librarian comes to the fore.

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

Digital technologies enhance and enrich the learning experience. Students learn to use these technologies very quickly. They do, however, need skills of discernment and also search skills to enhance their activities online.

The Internet search results via ‘Google’ do get results but many students are finding it increasingly hard to find relevant results quickly. They also must be trained to check the authority of information found online.

As our teachers are encouraged to change pedagogy and teach within an *Inquiry* framework, they too are finding the higher level of thinking skills are not well supported with a normal web search.

It is into this environment of Inquiry Learning that we encourage students to look deeper into the web and find information from more reliable sources via databases. This means the school needs to pay subscription costs for access to reliable information. Not only do schools need trained Teacher Librarian to lead in this but also funds to access information online.

In my own school we have been taking part in Action Research using AIS funding to investigate the impact of using new technologies and new pedagogies in research. Without a doubt the findings showed that students are excited by working within an Inquiry framework and by new technologies to support their work. Their work was shared and done collaboratively on class wikis – with the Teacher Librarian as guide and mentor of the class teachers as they learnt to use technologies themselves as well as support their students in this.

I would be happy to speak further of the importance of the role of teacher Librarian from my personal experience and know that this is a position that needs to be expanded through adequate training and supported at the highest level of Government so that the students and teachers in our schools have the support base needed to adequately develop literacy skills and technology skills in this age of constant change.

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This submission has been written with the full support of the Headmaster.