

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**RE : Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in
Australian schools**

I am providing personal feedback in reference to the above inquiry, from my experience as firstly a Children's Librarian in a Public Library for 11 years and secondly from my role as a Teacher Librarian during the last 2 years.

I hope the inquiry will find that School Library programs are integral to lifelong learning and literacy development, especially in Primary Schools, that the recruitment and retention of qualified staff is of utmost importance and that a 'standard' for Library Services in schools is an important long term priority.

I hope my ideas may be of interest. My personal comments will be directed by the Terms of Reference and indicated by *italics*.

Kim White

9 April, 2010

Terms of Reference

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

The announcement of funding via the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan – Primary Schools for the 21st Century was initially greeted with much excitement. The possibility of creating a wonderful library, which would serve as a school hub in the 21st Century has been squashed as other urgent learning space renovations take priority. Our school library, although not old, has been outgrown by our school resources and requires more than the \$400,000 allocated.

Outdated furniture, fixtures and equipment will not be replaced by this funding and in the long run, the renovation of the building structure alone will not inevitably lead to improved learning outcomes for our students. Library activities have been on hold in 2010, due to other learning space requirements, but our Library will need to be packed up and used in minimal form as a result of the renovations. The investment is welcomed but the lack of specialist input into the project and the rushed nature of the program will be a negative in the long term.

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

The 'School within the Library' rather than the 'Library within the School' is a possibility if funding and support is used effectively. Educational outcomes of an entire school community, including the staff, can be affected by enthusiastic teacher librarians. Our role needs to be educating all (staff, students and school community) in 'learning how to learn', information literacy and the value of literature. Our world wide resource of information is growing exponentially but our students are not more adept at finding the answers to their inquiries, and many teaching staff also feel the same frustrations. Library staff can play a major role in improved educational outcomes for the entire school community.

Oral language remains a huge literacy priority in lower primary and the best way to demonstrate oral language is by reading aloud and discussing verbally the content of literature. A sound, research based Primary Library Skills program has been undervalued in the past and could be one part of the puzzle of improving information literacy skills across all ages.

School Librarians can play a role in linking with the local Public Library. When school libraries are not available, a strong link with the local library can mean that books are available, without cost, especially for those who can least afford to purchase them. These relationships also provide information and networks into the wider resources and services of the local government authority, providing parents and carers with links to their local community.

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

The choice to become a Teacher Librarian often seems to come after a period of working in teaching or another capacity. A wide reaching promotional campaign to attract HSC graduates to Teacher Librarianship degrees needs to focus on what opportunities are available after graduation/employment.

The ongoing professional development of Teacher Librarians is sadly lacking and is often overlooked in schools as an unnecessary extra. Teacher Librarians, often the most highly educated in a school teaching community, are overused as Relief from Face to Face Teaching staff, which means that their replacement from day to day for ongoing professional development or library management tasks is expensive. Staff often do not understand the role of the Teacher Librarian and we have, historically, not been the best of advocates for ourselves.

Those who study Librarianship are very interested in pursuing the 'management' of the library as part of their role. In many schools there is often little time devoted to the management of the Library, a role which many of us feel that we cannot give the desired focus to. Many Teacher Librarian roles are Part Time, with Full Time attention expected to achieve outcomes. Part time work is often not desirable to many new HSC or University graduates. Being paid a part time wage, whilst completing task in your own time does not provide for a good work/life balance for those currently filling the role of Teacher Librarian.

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

I envisage that partnerships with Local Government Public Libraries will be an integral part of the future of School Libraries. A possibility may be 'bulk loans' of items from the Public Library which are required short term by a class. Visits and attendance at activities provided by the Public Library could include craft/art sessions and collaboratively organised author/illustrator visits. By collaborating in this way, real links are created within LGAs and create those opportunities for 'lifelong learning' that strong communities hope to provide.

Individual school libraries are unable to include these activities in their day to day budget, but collaboration proves very possible.

I feel that a sponsorship opportunity from local community groups or parent community groups should not be seen as a conflict of interest. Donations and sponsorship of furniture, displays, book stock, certain collections and equipment would enable school librarians to deliver the level of service they desire. Partnerships and networks are the possible future of our school libraries.

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

School Librarians, in School Libraries, are the people and place for digital technology to really make an impact on student learning. The costs of providing a Smartboard, netbooks, itouchs, multiple computer facilities and wireless internet are still proving prohibitive for many school libraries. It is common for Primary Schools to not even have a dedicated computer to serve as an OPAC for students to browse the collection on site. With the advent of Web 2.0 learning, all school libraries should be 'live', at school or home, for students to collaboratively create learning experiences and interact with their collections. Our school is one of few Primary Schools which have converted to a Web based Library Management System, a possibility that has been in NSW Government Public and Private Libraries for over 15 years.

With qualified staff, authentic and ongoing training, infrastructure and support, the future of digital technology in school libraries should already be here. We are not serving our 'adults of the future' well by not providing these learning opportunities, in the library and in the classroom, especially in Primary Schools.