



Submission for **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

Submission made by:

Deborah Abela, Children's Author and Teacher

Date: Tuesday April 13 2010

To: Secretary, Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

Terms of Reference:

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

As an author I visit many schools around the country talking to kids and teachers about writing and books. All of them applaud the Rudd government's Education Revolution that has led to the funding of new libraries, believing that a rightful importance is being placed on a part of the school that should be at the very heart of how they operate.

However, unless those new buildings are filled with trained professionals, they will ring hollow. The librarian, when working in conjunction with teaching staff, can ensure the curriculum is supported and provide material to make subjects interesting and relevant.

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

A vibrant, well functioning library can make a positive impact on students' confidence, ability to learn, level of independence and ability and motivation to self-learn. Confidence in reading leads to a confidence across the curriculum, which can add to the general feeling of worth of a child. Reading stories can help kids deal with problems and fears and help them cope with and understand themselves, others and their place in the world. Reading develops, among other things, creativity, vocabulary, the ability to grasp concepts and ideas, it fosters empathy for other people and confidence in themselves. It encourages imagination and helps kids realise that there isn't only one way of facing a situation but lots of ways. Reading develops critical thinking, introduces kids to new things and has the ability to broaden their interests.

In a world where methods of communicating, sourcing information and learning are constantly changing the school library should be at the forefront of those changing technologies, equipping kids with the skills to face the modern world when they leave.

- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians; the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

I find frightening that you can no longer study Teacher/Librarianship in the state of Victoria. Librarians across Australia are often an aging population of professionals, many of whom, once retired, are replaced by younger untrained teachers with no library experience or simply not replaced at all. I also find it concerning that when schools are given complete control of their budgets, I have heard staff voting to employ a teacher over a librarian to aid smaller classes, or pay an administrative staff member to help with paperwork. I don't blame them for wanting smaller classes or for a school to run smoothly from the office, but doing so at the expense of the library is to go counter to why schools exist at all...for the education of children.

There are many reluctant readers amongst school kids and without the dedication of the librarian to identify those kids and aim to reach them with suggestions and fitting the collection to their needs, they may leave school having not discovered the joy of reading. Without a good foundation in reading, every other subject will suffer. The librarian can take the time to keep the collection relevant and enticing for students, ensuring it is well utilised. The quality of the collection will have a definite impact on the students desire to use the library and therefore learn.

The link between illiteracy and people in prison is undeniable. The link between literacy and achieving good results across the curriculum is irrefutable. The library is a place to make sure reading is not only enjoyed but treasured and the teacher librarian, with their flare for creating enticing spaces, is the keeper and giver of all that gold, which not only enriches those kids, but flows on to create a smarter, more enlightened Australia.

The Rudd government's stimulus package to improve school libraries is a brilliant initiative but that needs to be coupled with a dedicated effort to staff them with trained professionals, to make sure we send kids into their futures filled to the brim with ideas, imagination and knowledge.

Deborah Abela
Children's Author and Teacher