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SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER  
LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

As an Ambassador for the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge and author of books for children and teenagers, I have had direct experience of the importance of teacher-librarians in developing literacy.

In the past ten years I have visited primary and secondary schools around Australia and have seen how pivotal teacher-librarians are in forming children's attitudes to books. I can feel the presence of a teacher-librarian as soon as I walk into a school library. Teacher librarians build bridges between writers and readers, place the right book in the hands of young readers at the right time and create a literary haven in the heart of a school. I am extremely concerned at their disappearance from schools, particularly government schools.

Schools that are lucky enough to have libraries staffed by qualified teacher-librarians invariably have powerful literary cultures. I believe teacher-librarians are crucial in establishing the literary culture of a school and their impact on students should never be underestimated. Teacher-librarians engender an attitude towards books and writing that make it possible for children to fully appreciate the importance of literacy and literature in the broader context of their lives.

Technicians and classroom teachers are not interchangeable with trained teacher-librarians. Creating environments that encourage and nurture young readers and writers requires the energy and commitment of trained professionals who have access to adequate funding to keep their libraries working efficiently. Properly staffed and funded school library programs and services are the cornerstone of a vibrant, literate school community.

Few schools where the library is staffed by technicians can match the dynamism of libraries that have committed teacher-librarians at the helm. Young readers need the informed guidance of professionals who are properly trained and supported in their role as literary specialists.

The new technologies and media are complementary tools that young readers should have access to but not at the expense of traditional forms and human contact. Nor should money spent on technology be at the expense of employing human beings who provide community, guidance and cultural support for young readers and writers. It's heartbreaking to visit schools where the library is little more than a storeroom for books and computers. It should be the living, social hub of any educational institution.

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