



11 April 2010.

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Dear Sirs,

Australian colleagues have drawn my attention to the above-mentioned inquiry and have informed me that submissions from outside Australia will be accepted. I am an Australian citizen. My initial training in teaching took place in Australia in the 1960's. Since then, I have trained as a teacher-librarian in the U.S.A. and in the Netherlands, and have worked consistently in that area for many years, at international level. At the present time, I am finalising my Ph.D. dissertation at the Middlesex University, School of Arts and Education in London. The topic of my dissertation is "*The evolving role of the school library and information centre in education in digital Europe*".

In 1997 I was invited by the principal of a large Dutch secondary comprehensive school (a public high school with 2,500 pupils, +/- 250 teachers) to take part in a specific educational project. The objectives were to implement educational reforms, ICT as an educational tool and new forms of learning in a structured way throughout the school, using the school library and information centre as the "heart" of this new learning environment. Emphasis would be placed on traditional aspects of school librarianship (reading and literacy) and also on new forms of learning and new literacies which are constantly evolving. The importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills would also be given priority. The ultimate aim is an increase in educational quality and academic achievement.

The principal, Dr. Jaco Schouwenaar, designed an educational matrix for the implementation of traditional teaching methods and values, plus the introduction of ICT as an educational tool, new forms of learning and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills for all pupils in all classes. This matrix would be used throughout the new learning environment within the school. The school community agreed to take part in this project after a democratic vote had been taken.

I then designed a sub-matrix which implemented the school library and information centre into the educational matrix. It described how the library, as the heart of the learning environment, would be used in this new educational era, not only in the traditional way, e.g. traditional library functions (such as literacy instruction, a place to study, borrow books, reading pleasure etc.), but also to take advantage of new forms of learning for both teachers and pupils (including information literacy, media literacy and digital literacy skills) and the use of ICT as an educational tool (with help from the librarian/information specialist to assist teachers who wanted to use new technologies in their lessons). The school library, which is now the focal point of learning and curriculum development within the school, has become a learning environment (in both traditional and digital form) where both pupils and teachers can take part in these processes. Since the implementation of the sub-matrix in the school library and information centre at the school, there has been a clear increase in educational quality and academic achievement, measured using international criteria.

The ENSIL Foundation (European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy) then triggered a European study, which I have just completed. Its objective was to see if school libraries throughout Europe could implement a similar sub-matrix in school libraries and achieve similar results. This study was carried out in 61 countries where 52 languages are spoken. The study established a set of criteria which would be needed to implement the sub-matrix in school libraries. These are qualitative criteria (and not quantitative, such as numbers of ICT hardware and software, books etc.) They include the following:

- The need for clear definitions, at international level, of what a “school library” and a “school librarian” actually are.
- The need for qualitative criteria in the traditional and/or digital school library and information centre and qualitative assessment of these facilities.
- The vision of the school leadership and his or her understanding of the values which school libraries can bring to educational quality and academic achievement.
- Co-operation throughout the school community to achieve these aims.
- The training at academic level of the teacher-librarian. This person may be assisted by lower level staff when necessary, depending on the size of the school and the workload in the library.

In 2005, a Dutch national survey took place, to see if the sub-matrix could be successfully implemented into Dutch secondary schools at national level. I was part of this research team. The same criteria mentioned above were confirmed.

This research has confirmed the value of the school library in the achievement of educational quality and academic achievement. I therefore wish to lend my support to my colleagues in Australia who recommend that all schools from primary school through to secondary (K-12) school should have a range of professional (teacher librarians), para professional (Library Technicians) and clerical staff in their school libraries. The library should be the focus of learning and curriculum development throughout the school – the “heart” of the learning environment.

Yours faithfully,

Helen Boelens,