



Submission to the House Standing Committee on Education and Training
Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools.

Written By

Richard L. Opie

16th April 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I wish to start with some general observations:

I am a classroom teacher of English and have been for forty years. I teach in a small, isolated rural community in the far west of Victoria and I am committed to developing the literacy skills of my students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A well stocked school library manned by a trained teacher librarian is central to the efficient learning of students. It is critical to the development of literacy skills in young Australians.

A good librarian links all staff and curriculum and underpins everything classroom teachers do. The library is a point of contact for all new learning technologies and resources. It is the centre for information management.

It is the one central place within a school that is focused on these resources and information, both global and local, that class teachers simply do not have time to research.

The teacher librarian is able to present teachers with new resources, information and ideas that may work in their area but is sourced from non traditional areas.

A properly trained Teacher Librarian knows the books and the students and can match that youngster to that novel to promote the enjoyment of reading and a successfully reading experience. There is nothing worse than a reluctant reader struggling with an 'inappropriate' text.

A school without a teacher librarian can be likened to a restaurant with a chef. A lack of a restaurant promotes hunger.

Our local library does not open at convenient school times and many of our students live on farms and are bussed home immediately on the completion of the school day.

An increasingly important role of a teacher librarian is to determine the suitability of online material. In the past if the book was in the library it had been previewed, reviewed and checked for accuracy and reliability. This information management is still central to a teacher librarian's duties – even more so with the vast amount of information available and so much of dubious, even 'poisonous' quality. A google search on the Holocaust can quickly lead to hate pages. .

Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.

My school library is now run by a School Support Officer. That assumes that managing the technology and resources and advising staff and students is merely an administrative function.

To get teenagers to read is a specialist challenge. You need to know what books there are, how authors write – their topics, complexity of language, reading level etc. In so many ways it is an active interventionist role along these lines: "Hey Johnny the latest Specky Magee has come in!" Here we have the matching of student interest with a well written text of an appropriate reading level. However, what about the student who is reluctant, struggles with decoding and has no easily recognizable interest? This student is a challenge and a fully trained Teacher Librarian can meet that challenge.

That first hand knowledge of education, of student ability and books is at risk of being lost and I believe it betrays our young people.

I read much young adult fiction, I subscribe to "Magpies", I am constantly matching book, author, content, complexity etc. However, I am also teaching grammar, spelling, history, computer usage, reading of media texts, maintaining a website, blogs and wikis, supervising the smooth and safe running of the class and ensuring that my lessons meet the needs of students and VELs. This key central role of exciting reading in youngsters and so often they are boys, is only **one** of my key roles!

Impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

I would argue that the new technology makes it imperative that we have a trained Information and Resource manager (previously known as the Teacher Librarian).

My students get their laptops next week. Over the last couple of years I have learnt to run blogs and wikis. I have mastered online survey creation for use as online pre and post tests. My work sheets have been online for years. At present I am teaching myself to use online video conferencing that is reliable and stable. I attended night school for two years to gain a certificate in interactive multimedia. I maintain a faculty website.

All this has been done in my own time! There has been very limited assistance from my employer and I believe the time spent developing these skills has limited my promotion chances.

I always check web sites for content etc before I place them into a work sheet but as I mentioned in my general comments this may suggest that I am working within narrow confines and not looking wider. That is the function of a Teacher Librarian.

Why leave literacy to committed amateurs as we have left so much of the new technology in the classroom?

In this very important area of online literacy, of reading (and from my 40 years experience it is obvious that a confident reader has a richer imagination, more mature writing and thinking skills and finds the challenge of Year 12 that much more straight forward), of reviewing the vast amount material etc, I would strongly argue that it should not be left to the individual classroom teacher's 'interests'.

Whether the text is a book or on kindle or the ipad, its value as to content, suitability of language, the veracity of its facts, the moral safety of the youngster, needs to be reviewed and that function is best done by trained Teacher Librarians.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Richard L. Opie
BA, Grad Dip Ed, Grad Dip Career Ed