



Submission:

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

"Reading is a ladder out of poverty." Gordon Brown, 2008.

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

I am a parent of primary school aged children and find our school library a very sad and dilapidated place. For three years it has been staffed with an AO2 School assistant who is doing a fine job of checking out and checking in books that students borrow. There is however no forward planning or importance placed on the vital role of books, reading and the need for promotion of reading. We have had visiting authors in Darwin and none of them have been invited to come to Nightcliff to inspire our young readers. There has been no librarian to promote events such as "Book Week", "International Children's Book Day".

Darwin hosts a successful Writers festival annually. This year's visiting children and youth authors are numerous, including Randa Abdel-Fattah, Melaina Faranda, Morris Gleitzman, Phillip Gwynne, Wendy Harmer, Barry Jonsberg, Melissa Lucashenko, Leonie Norrington and Kim Toft. The *Writers in Schools Program* is offered as part of this festival. What better way to increase exposure of brilliant literature to our young learners? Teachers have numerous roles on their plates and we need professionals in schools who are prepared to seize on such opportunities to work with events in the community for the benefit of their students. Our school is participating in this program this year because a parent brought it to the Principal's attention and is helping transport the visiting author.

Many parents today are relying on their local public libraries to provide for their children's reading needs. However a number of parents lack the time to visit libraries with their children outside school hours, or they ignore the correlation between reading and achieving. If schools are mandated to provide adequately resourced libraries, run by professional librarians there is the hope that more children will be inspired to read, thus become more literate, therefore contributing more to their community.

Criteria -- require that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognize the central role school libraries have in student achievement

With the Introduction of the National Curriculum comes an opportunity to align the resourcing of school libraries with the focuses of the curriculum, in particular the English Learning Area.

Prof. Peter Freebody, of the University of Sydney is quoted from the introduction to the New National Curriculum

"I think there will be more of an intense focus on the use of literature on teachers. I hope it will encourage teachers to deal with fewer texts more deeply, and that will put pressure on them to discuss with their colleagues what are really good texts that will bear that kind of attention, and still be motivating and engaging." ¹

Teachers and therefore students are going to benefit from having a librarian in their school. One vital role of a librarian in a school could be to become the colleague who can work with teachers and the school community to discover and recommend texts that can bear the pressure of intense scrutiny and provide motivating and engaging content in order for students to achieve and attain solid levels of literacy.

In the UK, the president of the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (CILIP) wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister Gordon Brown in response to his government's decision not to provide school libraries as a statutory requirement, even though that government states that "school libraries are a key resource for pupils and teachers". The CILIP president stated that "Good school libraries and their librarians are an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Just as it is a statutory duty to employ qualified teachers and deliver the *National Curriculum*, so it should be a statutory duty to provide school libraries with qualified librarians as an essential part of every child's entitlement to a decent education".³ I feel that the Government in Australia should recognise the importance of qualified librarians being a vital part of gaining a decent education.

Criteria -- collect national data on school library staffing, funding

How can a focus on literature be made if a report on the school libraries in Australia found that 12.5% of school libraries have an annual book budget of under \$1000?² If the new book budget is so poor surely we need a professional to manage and promote what physical collection the school library does have. The debate continues regarding books (physical resources) vs bytes (information available online), but you still need a professional to manage the bytes AND the books, albeit a limited number of new purchases. It's no use having a poor book budget, hoping to rely on information available online and having no professionals in libraries to teach children HOW to find information and evaluate what they find. We need to fund school libraries to be staffed by professionals who can promote books and reading and teach information literacy.

I urge the Government to consider the importance of Professional Library staff in school libraries.

Regards

Alex Kersemakers
(Electronically lodged)

13/4/2010

References

- 1 - *Development and Consultation Overview: K-10 Draft Curriculum'* (Transcript)
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- 2 - Combes, B. (2008). Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1. *Australian School Library Research Project*, ASLA, ALIA & ECU.
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- 3 - *CILIP calls on PM Gordon Brown to make school libraries statutory*
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