



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

Thoughts of a Teacher Librarian

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The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

The government's policy to issue all year 9 students with laptops and making school libraries wireless has increased library usage at lunch time and recess as students are using their laptops as entertainment units as well as to study, including reading online graphic novels. This provides the qualified teacher librarian with the opportunity to interact with students, assisting them and informing them of the other services that are provided in the library. Often if a student is reading a online graphic novel showing them the graphic novels that are available in the library can inspire them to borrow books from the library as they are often more engaging than what is available online. More classes are accessing the library as teachers start integrating the laptops into their teaching and learning repertoire. The wireless has also increased the amount of staff accessing the library again providing opportunity to discuss how the teacher librarian could collaborate with them. 21st Century libraries are not only resource centres, where physical resources are kept and organised they are also social hubs where students can network and collaborate with each other.

The future potential of school libraries to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

The school libraries should be the educational hub of the school community and best practice 21st Century education is that of facilitation in open learning environments. With all this access to information it is essential that the teacher librarian facilitates students towards becoming independent lifelong learners. As previously mentioned the information highway is a wealth of information,

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however this does not mean that all the information is correct, that students can actually search correctly to find the information that they are looking for (a great deal of time is spent by some students surfing the net looking for the information they want) and when they find the information it is going to be at a lexical density that allows them to understand and infer what they are reading. Cutting and pasting is a problem that teacher constantly deal with in education today, this means that students invariably skim information (potentially missing relevant information) and students don't necessarily process the information and in the process plagiarise others work. The 21st Century is has a prolific amount of information available, students and staff need assistance in managing this information whether it be through books, journals, multimedia digital and electronic resources online recourses (free and subscription). School libraries are still essential for resources management and the access to information will only get greater.

An 'Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's' study has shown that "children's interest in reading has more impact on their academic performance than their socio-economic group." (BBC News world edition 20/11/2002) The report surmises that "reading for pleasure could be one of the most effective ways of bringing about social change". For students at disadvantaged school much of their access to literature would be through school and local libraries therefore it is essential to have well resourced school libraries in disadvantaged communities. It is possible that significant investment in school libraries could leave to improve NAPLAN, school certificate and higher school certificate scores. Lance (2001) has summarised reports done across numerous US states that have found that the quality of the school library has statistically significant impact on improving academic

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performance. This report and found that successful libraries have qualified teacher librarians;

- who have the opportunity to collaborate with classroom teachers
- teach information literacy
- assist individual students
- has the opportunity to keep up to date with new technology
- adequate support staff to run the library efficiently
- support of principal

The library information resource centre has;

- a quality collection (books, journals, multimedia, online (free and subscription)
- state of the art technology
- sufficient funds

Qualified Teacher Librarians expertise are based in information literacy which covers all forms of literacy “understanding and set of abilities enabling individuals to recognise when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

<http://www.caul.edu.au/info-literacy/>. Teacher Librarians are also experts in literature which means that a qualified teacher librarian is in the position to have significant impact on student literacy skills. Scholastic Research Foundation paper updated (2008) says that “School libraries inspire literacy. When learners ... have the opportunity to read stories and explore information that matters to them various forms of literacy and numeracy can emerge. Research has shown that school libraries have the tools to inspire literacy in

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learners.” Primary schools have library lessons timetabled into their weekly routines. If secondary students (stage 4 and 5) had library lessons there is the potential to develop information literacy skills and general literacy skills through reading programs and challenges, literature circles, book raps etc which the research suggests would improve overall literacy.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

It is essential to have qualified staff in the library as a significant aspect of the job is leadership through collaboration. Scholastic Research Foundation paper updated (2008) found that libraries that had positive impact on students academic achievement were staffed by qualified teacher librarians. Unqualified individuals do not have the knowledge base of the skills to run a 21st century library, this is potentially a disadvantage to the students of the school as the previous studies mentioned have suggested. An inadequate library is underutilised by the community and devalues its own worth. There are excellent courses available to people wanting to study teacher librarian. Teacher librarians need to promote their role and the value of it to all in their community and governments should support their teacher librarians by promoting the value they add to academic achievement. A major factor impeding continued development of school librarians is time to keep up to date with current technologies and resources available. Professional bodies are essential in the development of school librarians the Australian School Library Associations (ASLA) is an essential resource for teacher librarians as is the NSW DET School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit both comprehensively support the development of teacher librarians. As most schools only have one teacher librarian having a network of colleagues’ not only allows you to share

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what is happening in your school but also the impact of what others are doing in theirs.

In the community and places like universities the physical environments of the libraries are moving into the 21st century where working and socialising is becoming more interconnected. School libraries physical environments need to move there as well. Sydney University's SciTech library is a great example of a 21st Century library.

The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

The role of Federal and State government is to ensure that school libraries are funded adequately, ensure that school libraries who are servicing disadvantaged communities receive extra funding in order to improve literacy. The Federal and State government library is one that support school resources practically online (currently NSW state library is an excellent online resource for teacher librarians, teachers and students, the National library could continue to develop their online resources) practically with resources that will support the new Australian curriculum

Local libraries need to continue to keep information up to date, easily identifiable and accessible. It would be good if there was some combined professional development as we are both servicing the same community. Teacher librarians also need to have open communications with local libraries.

University libraries can also play an important role in supporting school libraries especially for senior students and teaching staff teacher librarians

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being able to have borrowing privileges through universities can give students and teacher a broader range of resources.

The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians

Digital technologies are essential to the enhancement of school libraries. Wikis, Blogs, Moodle, Flickr, podcasts and vodcasts are all ways to receive and impart information. However universities and organisations are using social networking sites such as facebook, twitter and second life to make contact and facilitate learning with their clientele. Many students are now reading books online (however paper ones will never be outdated because you can't curl up with a PC or laptop, it's not comfortable reading on the bus etc). Also

Links4Learning Teachers' digital toolkit

http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/digital_rev/libraries/toolkit/index.htm provides us with extensive example of digital resources that support literacy development;

Animoto Create videos from images

Benettonplay Create stunning animations

Classtools.net Create educational games

Gliffy Create floor plans, flowcharts and 3D diagrams

Glogster EDU Create interactive multimedia posters

Kerpoof Create movies and stories

PoducateMe Exe files How to create a podcast

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Power League Create an online debate

Prezi A zooming presentation tool

Scratch Join up and download programming software to create digital learning objects

Sketchcast Embed evolving sketches into your blog

SketchUp Create, modify and share 3D models

Storybird Collaborative storytelling

Timetoast Create a free online timeline

Voice Thread Hold an online conversation about an image

Voki Create a personalised speaking avatar

Wordle **Create word clouds to summarise main concepts of a unit for students**

There are also a lot of resources that benefit students that are not free online and qualified teacher librarians should have adequate funding in order to purchase the resources that will be of benefit to their cliental .21st Century students are in a world of constant visual and auditory stimulation and as such teachers need to meet students on their own grounds by using engaging tools to facilitate student learning. Teacher Librarians are the essential managers of these resources and qualified facilitators who encourage lifelong learning.

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It is not just the digital resources that make a great school library, the library itself also has to be a well staffed vibrant and engaging open plan space that encourages, enhances and obviously values learning.

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