Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

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

Despite our school making submissions each time they became available we were overlooked as a recipient of any investment.

Taminmin College consists of 3 subschools, the Senior School of approximately 600 students, the Middle School of approximately 600 students and the VET section which provides courses for students from both our schools and from other high schools in the Darwin area and also remote communities.

Our school library is dual purpose and provides services [as Taminmin Community Library which is run by the Northern Territory Library Service] to people living in the Rural Area and remote as well as the school. The Library was built over 20 years ago to service a school population of approx 400 and a rural population of approx 8,000. Today our school population is over 1200 and the rural population in the vicinity of 20,000.

Between 8th-12th March 2010 the average number of students daily in the Library was 555 and the number of public patrons averaged 172. All of this in an area of 315 sq mts housing over 30,000 print items and associated fixtures and fittings.

There has been no increase in space provided, staff or resources in the past 9 years I have worked here as teacher librarian.

We continue to provide a range of activities to the public through various under 5's program which run in conjunction with school classes.

There is only one teaching area and 10 computers available to be shared by all classes plus we outsource print material to classes.

My understanding is that much of the recent Federal investment into libraries has been in the Primary school sector. My concern is that not many Primary school libraries are actually run by a trained teacher librarian and therefore more than likely there is no development of literacy programs and information literacy skills.. The buildings are provided but not the expertise to assist our students.

The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, particularly literacy

What does a trained teacher librarian contribute to educational outcomes that an untrained person does not. They have valuable expertise in how to develop information literate students who can take their place in our complex society. They know that good decisions depend on good information and have the skills to teach students that getting information is easy but getting the right information is difficult.

Teacher librarians are the ultimate search engine. They can find the best resource for the task and can assist in making information accessible, available and affordable to all students.

Teacher librarians have the knowledge and skills to develop reading programs and to assist students and teachers with selection of appropriate materials.

A good teacher librarian works with teachers to resource the curriculum with print, visual and digital items that will engage with the students.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

School librarians in the NT are an ageing group. I believe I am one of only 4 secondary trained teacher librarians in the whole of the Territory though there are a number of primary trained tl's who work across primary, middle and senior schools. There is no training available to teachers in the NT to become librarians so all courses have to be done externally. Usually this means working and studying at night so a 2 year minimum course is very daunting. Plus the cost has to be covered by the person studying and then at the end of it is there going to be a job. Whilst the tl position in the NT is over establishment it is at the direction of the school executive whether a teacher librarian is seen to be important enough to employ. Most secondary tl's in the NT government schools also have teaching classes regardless of the size of the school. This then means that the library is being run by the technician when the teacher is in class.

There is little or no professional development of teacher librarians undertaken by DEET so the ability to keep up with changes in technology and digitalisation are dependant entirely on the teacher librarian. The only professional development I have undertaken in the last 6 years have been biennial days that myself and the teacher librarian from Palmerston High School have organised together for tls from government and private schools across the Top End.

Library technicians are in exactly the same situation of having to pay for their own courses which are available here in the NT. However ongoing training in changing technologies is not available the same as for tl's.

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

I am in the fortunate position of being teacher librarian in a dual purpose library and have 9 years of experience of how different levels of government and members of the local community can work together for the benefit of all in the community.

Dual purpose libraries enable a better use of resources. A simple example is that I can source early reading books for our less literate students and conversely parents from the wider community can source online databases provided by the school.

The Library is open for longer hours than a normal school library and this gives students much more access to the facility and resources.

Students learn to communicate and work alongside older and younger members of their local community and in doing so become aware of the wider world.

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

School libraries are an exciting and challenging place to work because of the changes to technology and how this impacts on our students. There is huge potential in digital technology but unfortunately it comes at great cost both in resourcing and staffing.

A couple of examples are Clickview and ANZRC. Clickview is a multimedia database and in our visual world would be an amazing tool but at a set up cost of over $7,000.00 plus ongoings of $2,500 per annum is totally out of reach of my budget. ANZRC is a magazine and newspaper database Australia and worldwide and at $3,000 per annum is again very expensive and we only have it at our school because it is provided by the Community Library.

Until very large amounts of ongoing money are provided by governments many school libraries will lag behind in what they could be offering.

Wireless is essential and access to computers to enable equity for all should be a high priority.

Money must be provided for furniture and fittings, for continuing upgrades, to adequately staff libraries with trained librarians and technicians to ensure we have information literate students leaving our schools.