

Submission for the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools



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Terms of Reference

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

Reference point 1: the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

Policies for the improvement of library infrastructure and buildings ignore the issues of professional staff:

- to organise and maintain the library (physical and virtual spaces);
- who provide access to a range of sufficient resources that cater for different reading levels, curriculum areas and learning styles;
- who develop curriculum with teachers which integrates a range of resources such as online, print and audio;
- who promote and develop reading programs to encourage a love of books and enhance literacy; and
- who can provide access to quality virtual resources for curriculum programs.

If children are to be lifelong readers we must instil a love of books
(Paul Jennings, 2003)

In today's society an increasing number of students come from homes with few or no books and no reading culture. All our children have the right to access to a heritage of children's literature – including books from our own past, classics, award winners and established favourites. Our schools have a responsibility to ensure this access if we wish to instil a passion for reading and a love of books. Why are we not investing in the value of reading?

Yet we have hundreds of primary school libraries with thousands of dollars worth of books and other resources and no teacher to be the facilitator, the mentor and the catalyst to ensure that our children learn to love books – how many of you could go into a public library and choose a book to read for pleasure with absolutely no knowledge of good authors or titles, or access to reviews and publicity? Very few. Reading to children, promoting wonderful picture books and fabulous authors can hook children in for life. The same students who have few or no books at home are unlikely to be in a position to use a public library regularly as this relies on parent support.

Research skills, critical literacy, information skills all need to be taught yet many classroom teachers do not have the knowledge to do this – they even lack the basic skills to use a library. Internet usage has made this even more critical.

Recommendation: If all our primary schools had a trained teacher librarian and a strong library program throughout the school, carried out in collaboration with classroom teachers, we would undoubtedly see an improvement in literacy standards of our children and a greater knowledge base for our teachers. Most private schools have this and some enlightened public schools have it but there is no equity of access to quality children's literature, information resources and information literacy programs for our children.

Reference point 2: the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

Professional staff in school libraries must be Teacher Librarians. Teacher Librarians have a teaching qualification plus experience in the classroom, as well as a postgraduate qualification that is an entry level into the profession of Information Science (Librarianship). As trained teachers TLs are able to:

- communicate and design curriculum programs with teachers which incorporate a range of resource formats;
- design and promote reading programs which introduce children to quality literature; and
- fulfil the duty of care requirements as stated in the Education Act.

As Information Specialists, TLs:

- provide access quality digital resources which support curriculum and students learning outcomes;
- design programs which train students in the effective, efficient and appropriate use of digital resources.

Research Supports the Role and Value of the School Library in Supporting Literacy Programs

An overwhelming body of research has been produced in the last ten years showing that a strong library program run by professional staff makes a positive difference to student outcomes and literacy levels.

Learning for the Future, a joint publication by the Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), published by the Curriculum Corporation, is the recognised standard for school libraries in Australia. It outlines the necessity for both professional and support staff in school libraries, in order for all students to have access to quality children's literature, information resources and appropriate teacher assistance to support all learning styles.

The appointment of Teacher Librarians and Resource Teachers in Western Australian schools is at the discretion of principals as part of the overall staffing formula. The pressure on staffing has led to many principals, especially in primary schools, choosing not to have a teacher with responsibility for the library and library programs. Many primary school libraries are staffed only by Library Officers who are clerical staff employed in Public Service positions according to the school support staffing formula. A worrying trend is that secondary principals are now also

deciding not to have a Teacher Librarian. In some cases it is purely because the staffing formula is so tight, in others it is because the Principal does not see the importance of the role.

It is the Teacher Librarian or Resource Teacher who creates a culture for literacy and inspires a love of reading by

- providing students with access to a wide variety of reading materials,
- introducing children to classics and traditional literature – essential elements of our literary heritage
- promoting quality contemporary children’s literature, and
- teaching the important information and higher order thinking skills so vital in today’s outcomes-based education.

These include critical literacy and the use of information in all its forms – print, electronic, online etc. The teacher librarian works with all teachers across the school to ensure improved literacy for all students.

It is vital that all school libraries are staffed by trained personnel across school hours. Some libraries in primary schools are only open when the part-time Library Officer is available. This is an enormous waste of the resources available to the students and is completely negating the role of the library in aiding student learning. Secondary schools are increasingly reporting that students are coming in to Year eight unable to process research tasks effectively.

It has been argued that all teachers can carry out this task but it has been found that many teachers, especially new and inexperienced teachers, do not have the required knowledge to teach information literacy, nor do they have the knowledge of quality children’s literature to enable them to promote it. Pre-service training for teachers is woefully inadequate in this area. From 2005 volunteers from the Children’s Book Council of Australia, WA Branch, all teacher librarians, have been freely providing lectures at Edith Cowan University, Curtin University, Notre Dame and Murdoch University to trainee teachers on how to select and use quality children’s books and encourage reading. This offer of expertise has been eagerly received by the lecturing staff and the students.

Research which irrefutably supports the value TLs bring to academic programs and student learning, including the importance of school libraries may be found at this link:

<http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/links-schoollib.php>

Recommendation: that the Federal Government provides all students in Australian schools with equal opportunities to access quality children’s literature, information resources and information literacy programs by ensuring that school libraries are adequately staffed with professional teacher librarians or resource teachers.

Reference point 3: the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

- Currently there is a shortage of qualified Teacher Librarians in schools across Australia.
- This is an aging population with grave issues associated with succession planning and sustainability.
- This is a time when information and the globalisation of economies means that the average citizen must have graduated secondary level education with some information literacy skills, if they are going to be able to participate in the information economy.
- Only three institutions currently prepare TLs in recognised Graduate Diploma and Masters Level courses – Charles Sturt University, Edith Cowan University and Queensland University of Technology.

- Hence many schools have libraries which are run by library technicians, and library officers or parents who are not qualified to provide the educational components.

Recommendation: 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 in the school.

Attached as Appendix 1 is a list of current research and other publications that provide evidence that strong library programs run by professional staff improve literacy levels and student outcomes.

Appendix 1

Research documents

Access to all these documents is available from the CMIS website at <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/cmis/eval/library/value/val2.htm>

Mapping Literacy Achievement:

Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey

This 1997 Australian government report notes Library use as a significant variable on achievements in literacy:

'Extensive use of the school library was associated with a difference of as many as 27 points to students' literacy achievements when compared with non-use of the library'. Section 4: p. 207

<http://www.dest.gov.au/mla/mla.pdf>

Student learning through Australian school libraries Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions.

Lyn Hay, Charles Sturt University 2005

This article is the first part of an extensive report into the relationship between student learning and school libraries in Australia reports that 'evidence shows that an effective school library program managed by dually qualified full-time teacher-librarians contributes significantly to learning"

<http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol3num2/hay.pdf>

School Library Impact Studies

A website detailing numerous research studies into the value of school libraries. Includes: School Libraries and Student achievement in Ontario [PDF]

The Ontario Library Association, April 2006

A study showing a link between school libraries and students' reading achievement

<http://www.lrs.org/impact.php>

Why Should Principals Support School Libraries?

Gary Hartzell, 2002

This ERIC Digest suggests that it is in the best interest on both the principal and their school's students to support school libraries because quality library programs can enhance student achievement.

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/libraries.htm>

An enabling adult: The teacher librarian and the reading environment.

Susan La Marca, 2003

In Scan, NSW DET, Vol 23 No 4 November 2004

Research undertaken in Melbourne to ascertain the factors that influence the teacher-librarian as an enabling adult in creating a reading environment in secondary school libraries.

'In essence a reading environment within a school library is the atmosphere that is created that encourages young people to read'.

Other Publications

Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services for Schools. ASLA, ALIA, 2001.
'Research into general academic achievement and literacy increasingly reports that the provision of quality information services is essential for the achievement of learning outcomes.' Page 9

Literacies, Libraries and Learning: using books and online resources to promote reading, writing and research. Edited by Ray Doiron and Marlene Asselin. Pembroke, 2005.

'When classroom teachers and teacher-librarians work together, their efforts have greater impact and students learn that the whole school is a learning environment rich in the culture of reading.' Page 46

The Power of Reading. Insights from the Research. Stephen Krashen. Libraries Unlimited, 2004.
'If libraries are a major source of books, and more reading means better reading, better libraries should be associated with better reading. This has been found to be the case.' Page 65

Attached as Appendix 2 is a report compiled in 2006 expressing concern at worrying trends in education, with particular reference to teacher librarians in schools, still equally relevant today.

Appendix 2



THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
W.A. BRANCH (INC)

WORRYING TRENDS

The CBCA (WA Branch) has been concerned for the past five years or so about :

the funding cuts to universities generally and in particular, the diminution and seeming lack of respect for literature and the arts in tertiary education. We have seen reductions in staff in Arts Faculties and we have seen philosophy and wisdom virtually displaced by career-oriented undergraduate courses.

The gradual reduction of the literature component of courses in Teacher Librarianship training and Information Science courses (the name says it all). This has happened slowly but stealthily over the past decade. Firstly, there has been the huge drive and demand to train teachers and teacher librarians in information and learning technology. It has been a steep learning curve, for lecturers, students and for practicing teachers. It has been both necessary and a positive move in education but, simultaneously, less and less time has been devoted to the teaching of, and focus on, fostering the love of reading and literature in teacher training institutions.

A simultaneous decline in the ability of Teacher Librarians to deliver reading programs and promotions to the teachers and students at their school. The necessity to deliver programs encompassing meaningful learning and the use of the internet as more than an alternative 'book', as well as the drive for TLs to be leaders in demonstrating the use of new software, new databases and new hardware, has driven teacher librarians to redefine their roles. They have

been forced to make very hard decisions about what they can and can not achieve in a day, a week, a year's work. And all too often, it's the literature that goes.

The fact that in Western Australian secondary schools, the formula that assured schools of a ratio of so many Teacher Librarians to so many students was dropped two or three years ago. Now the principal decides how many staff s/he wishes to allocate to the Library Resource Centre or the Information Centre. Now the principal can choose to employ an Information Technologist rather than an Information Resource Teacher. This means of course, that it is now possible - if not probable, (and it is indeed already being played out in primary schools) that there is no qualified person available to read and promote young adult and children's literature in the school.

The realisation by educators such as Lesley Reece of the Fremantle Children's Literature Centre and others that more frequently young children today have no home-generated love of reading, nursery rhymes, fairy tales ...

The increasing demand on booksellers, particularly those in specialist children's bookshops to make the selections for schools where the person in charge of the library does not have the knowledge, skills or qualifications to choose appropriate, diverse and relevant material for the students in their schools.

The financial situation of Library and Information Resource Centres. Many have seen their budgets curbed, forcing teacher librarians to make very difficult choices with regard to how to best make the money go around.

It is an Orwellian situation where 'literacy' is the priority of all primary and secondary education all over the country, yet the hub of literacy and learning, The Library Resource Centre is being so severely compromised.

References

Celia Cole, Children's Literature Specialist, (formerly of Westbooks Children's Book Centre).

Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia.
(1998) Curriculum Council, Western Australia.
www.curriculum.wa.edu.au

Curriculum Materials Information Services, Department of Education, Western Australia
www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmisis/eval/

Lesley Reece Director Fremantle Children's Literature Centre
Old Prison Hospital: cnr Knutsford Street and Hampton Road, Fremantle 6160
www.fclc.com.au/

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Adapted from: Kailis, Lefki (2004) Keeping Literature Alive for Young People in Orana 40(3) Nov 2004