

Submission**Number: 238**

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools 2010

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Submission Overview

This submission is prepared in response to the inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

The following responses are based upon NSWDET policies and publications, readings and studies undertaken during Charles Sturt University Teacher Librarian retraining program and personal experience in the role of the teacher librarian in a public school library.

The responses provide an indication of best practise and aim to provide an example of the ideal, that is school libraries and teacher librarians are collaborative, communicative and reflective of their school educational goals, outcomes and curriculum. The teacher librarian is an information specialist able to source, apply and interpret information in whatever form: print or digital.

The submission is prepared by Julie Grazotis, a teacher librarian with 3 years experience in a public school library and over 12 years experience in teaching in the NSW public school system.

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

The school library has long stood at the heart of a school. It is the place teachers' source books, posters, video and digital material to support student learning. It is the place that fosters a love of reading and authors in students'. Recent government actions have further strengthened and validated this role. The library is therefore vital to the education of a life long learner.

The implementation of teaching initiatives such as the NSW Quality Teaching Model (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 1999) serves to strengthen the role of the teacher-librarian and the position of the library as an influence and contributor to a school's educational outcomes. Quality Teaching is a pedagogical approach to teaching whereby student prior learning and past experiences are acknowledged as key to their attainment and application of new knowledge. The skills and learning processes applied within library education are attuned to these ideals. The information skills in schools document (NSWDET 2007 updated from 1987) outlines the set of steps students require to research effectively. These skills enable students to locate, use and select information to complete assigned research tasks. Implementation of the Quality teaching approach has only reinforced the need for the information skills process and the role of the library in a student's education.

The inclusion of libraries in the Building Education Revolution highlighted the important role libraries play in the infrastructure of a school. Funds allocated to the improvement and construction of school libraries indicates their vital role in a student's school experience, they are valuable learning space within a school. This building program signifies that the activities, resources and staff attached to the library are a valuable asset to the Australian school setting requiring up to date technologies, efficient resource organisation and open learning areas for collaboration and communication.

2. Future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.

The school library has long functioned on both a physical and virtual level. The increasing influence of digital technology and collaborative learning will further

enhance these two roles. School libraries stand as a vestibule for information. The Teacher Librarian the guide.

The teacher librarian, given their dual qualification, is capable of connecting teachers and students with accurate and reliable information. This connection is made through collaborative programming and teaching. The teacher librarian is an information specialist, curriculum leader and information manager. The teacher librarian is a partner in the education of the whole child, liaising with teachers regarding required resources, reading abilities and the application of digital technologies.

The true potential of the library and the teacher librarian is in their readiness to educate and support today's multi-literate students. Literacy by definition is the possession of education (Macquarie Dictionary 1981). It therefore stands that the library and the teacher librarian is able to contribute to the education of today's student in all aspects of literacy: print, digital, interpersonal and visual. The library possess the resources to meet the literacy needs of school students across each of the areas, not only supplying the resources, but providing instruction and skills to apply and interpret the information contained within the resource.

3. Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

Training and development is essential for teacher librarians to embrace their diverse role with a school. The re-training program run in partnership with Charles Sturt University provides its graduates with both the knowledge and network to begin the journey. Graduates also possess the dual qualification of teacher and librarian, which enables them to support the school community through both knowledge of educational pedagogy and practise as well as application of resource management and circulation practises.

Continued professional development through NSWDET workshops, Australian School Library Association (ASLA) workshops and other are essential to the professional development of the school library as it maintains a relevant and current awareness of new resources, digital technologies and management approaches.

Whilst teacher librarians must continue to be supported in their professional growth it is also vital the library itself remains well funded and valued by the wider school community. The school principal is vital to the development of the school library and the teacher librarian. Through opportunities to address staff and parents regarding library resources and activities and adequate funding allocation the value of the library in educating the students is recognised and acknowledged.

4. Role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians.

School libraries require daily maintenance, updating and up keep. This is only possible if the library and the teacher librarian are well funded. The library budget is crucial to servicing the educational environment. A relevant and reliable library collection contains current resources and technologies. Federal and State Government TIED funds are required to ensure school libraries remain up to the task of providing resources to staff and students.

The NSW Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC) has seen a partnership develop between school libraries, the state government and parents. This initiative has strength the community message that reading is a valuable skill and pastime. Students embrace the challenge to read books and engage in conversation about books. If operated correctly the PRC can unify the school community, thus lifting the profile of reading and the role of library in educating a literate student.

The School Libraries and Information Literacy website linked through NSWDET Curriculum Support is a crucial resource for teacher librarians, principals and teachers. The site provides policy, procedural and management directions. Additional publications such as SCAN, a NSWDET quarterly publication for teacher librarians, ensure that the school library remains at the heart of educational collaboration and communication. Articles, reviews and professional experiences through both the website and the publication indicate that the government values the role of the library the professionalism of the teacher librarian.

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

The teacher librarian is a vital link in the digital information chain. Digital technologies require critical use and assessment. The Teacher librarian provides both

a physical and virtual environment whereby students can collaborate and communicate. Installation of Interactive Whiteboards and the introduction of the Digital Education Revolution Program has only strengthened the need for an online database of reliable and accurate digital resources. The teacher librarian is able to provide these resources through various digital formats such as wikis, web pages and blogs, ensuring students have access at their time of need.

New technologies are only an extension of what the library already provides by way of resources, teaching support and student instruction. The library and the teacher librarian embrace the opportunity to use new information tools to collaborate and communicate. Engagement in the curriculum is not only expanded but re-created through digital technologies. The teacher librarian, due to their experience and dual qualification, are able to assist students and teachers in navigating these technologies and applying them to reach their educational goals.