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The Secretary of the Committee
House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

I am writing this submission to present the views of a Teacher Librarian in a small NSW public primary school of approximately 240 students. My part time position, is for three days per week, because of the size of the school. The majority of my classes are RFF, and are 30-40 minute sessions for each class on a weekly basis. We have also put in place a collaborative team teaching arrangement to teach research skills to years 5 and 6, for 40-45 minutes sessions, once per week.

My role is very diverse and touches many other educational activities throughout the school, such as.

- providing the children with access to a variety of literature,
- promoting borrowing and reading for pleasure,
- developing programs in collaboration with class teachers to develop effective research skills,
- selecting resources to support curriculum development and teaching objectives,
- administering a library budget,
- managing and coordinating library staff and volunteers,
- organising special events which support student learning such as Book Week.

This list demonstrates the many and varied tasks of a teacher librarian.

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

Through the BER, a significant amount of money has been invested in refurbishing the library building and providing some additional physical resources. However excellent physical resources cannot deliver high quality educational outcomes without the skill and expertise of qualified teacher librarians, who can apply these resources in an integrated manner within the broader context of school activities.

The role of the teacher librarian is not to work in isolation, and is not simply to administer the resources of the library. A teacher librarian is most effective when they can work together with other classroom teachers to integrate the use of library resources in delivering educational outcomes. This is particularly important in the areas of literacy, research, and information management. It is essential that school libraries and teacher librarians are seen as a complete package. Neither of them will function effectively without the other, and both are most effective when integrated into the broader educational activities of the school.

Schools, no matter how small or large, can only function effectively when the whole school community plans and works together collaboratively. I sincerely hope that the Inquiry recognises the importance of the teacher librarian and the school library as a vital element of the whole school learning environment.

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

The flood of information available to students and staff brought about by the increasing presence and use of information and communications technology, means that the school library must be an ever evolving and developing centre for information collection, organisation and interpretation. The teacher librarian's professional skills must develop accordingly. It is essential that future school libraries are seen as a valuable part of a dynamic learning environment. Library users are provided with the skills to seek, find and interpret information so as to develop deep knowledge, critical thinking and ethical approaches. A school librarian with an informed understanding of their community is needed to maintain a balanced and relevant collection of digital and print resources which support the central learning objectives of the school.

Literacy skills and appreciation, in particular, grow through many experiences including listening to stories, viewing images, participating in performance, undertaking observation, using the imagination, responding to challenges, discussion, and formulating opinions. The school library, under the guidance of teacher librarians, can contribute enormously to the development of literacy in children.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

I trained as a teacher librarian twenty two years ago. Then, computers were the new frontier. Since that time I have witnessed a remarkable transition in technology and the consequent up-skilling required in the role of teacher librarian in the modern school library.

However, in that time I have also seen the demise of a number of librarianship courses, and a reduction in the profile and professional standing associated with becoming a teacher librarian. Two of the major factors leading to this are attitudes toward the profession and misconceptions about the role of a teacher librarian. Significant factors influencing recruitment and retention of teacher librarians include:-

- acknowledgment by the school community and peers of the value of the role of the librarian,
- access to professional development opportunities
- the strength of the partnership between the school executive, staff and the teacher librarian,
- a sense of isolation from peers if opportunities to collaborate on educational outcomes are not available
- budget constraints that prevent teacher librarians from acquiring and developing adequate library resources to support learning outcomes,
- lack of support staff to complete routine administrative tasks so that teaching time is not severely reduced,
- lack of opportunity for teacher librarian networking and development of professional support.

The shortage of professionally trained teacher librarians is becoming dire. The average age of my teacher librarian colleagues, at least in my immediate network, would be well over forty years of

age. Very few young faces are ever present at meetings and conferences. I hope that the exposure of and support for the role that may come from the Inquiry can help to reverse this trend.

Conclusion

To conclude with a story from my school community. The demographics of Manly Vale include a number of families newly arrived from non English speaking countries. A new mother to the school offered to help move and re-shelve library books at a recent working bee. Although her English is very limited she diligently boxes, sorts and re-shelves books meticulously into alphabetical order. Her sons borrow a range of titles, both fiction and non-fiction, every week. They often ask to reserve books that have been introduced to them through class activities. They, like many other children, choose to use the library on occasion as a sanctuary from the noise and bustle of the playground. This new Australian family has a great desire to learn, and an enormous reverence for books, teachers and education. The school library and librarian offer a service that is invaluable in their newly chosen life in Australia.

I am grateful for the opportunity to give my view on a subject I believe to be of paramount importance to the education of all Australian children.

Yours sincerely,

GLYNIS POOLE

Teacher Librarian