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Reflections on school libraries and teacher-librarianship, 1970 to 2011

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*Equal opportunity for all students to develop the skills and access the information they need should be seen as a **right** enjoyed by students, not an optional opportunity provided at the discretion of the principal.*

...a continuing decline in resourcing and education has serious implications for schools, students and ultimately the well-being of Australian society and economy. If we are to flourish in an information society ... we need citizens who are fluent, critical and responsible users and creators of information. And to achieve this we need dynamic, professionally committed and informed teacher-librarians who can enable current students to become citizens with these qualities. (Hilary Hughes – Personal communication)

*Modern management requires that decisions on policy, provision and practice must be **evidence-based**, which implies attending to what the research says. So one opinion is **not** as good as another.*

ACER has undertaken research of direct relevance to the present inquiry, most notably through the work of Dr Michele Lonsdale. This research concluded that student outcomes are enhanced when school libraries are adequately staffed, resourced and funded, and are supported by a strong computer network that makes resources available throughout the school's learning spaces (Lonsdale, 2003). Earlier research also identified extensive use of school libraries as a significant variable associated with literacy achievement (Masters and Forster, 1997)." (ACER submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training to inquire into and report on school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools)

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The views expressed are my own.

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Introduction

Part of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) stimulus package which helped the country avoid the effects of the GFC and stimulated the building industry was the notion that school library facilities needed modernising. By February 2010 over \$4 billion had been spent or committed on some 3500 projects.

On Wednesday, 10 March 2010 the Minister for Education, Hon Julia Gillard MP, asked the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training to inquire into and report on *school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools* (<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/index.htm>). The Inquiry Chair was Sharon Bird, Member for Cunningham, NSW – other members included Yvette D’Ath, Member for Petrie, QLD; Dr Dennis Jensen, Member for Tangney (WA); and Mike Symon, Member for Deakin, VIC.

The submissions to this Inquiry and the hearings constitute a tremendous resource. It is noteworthy that Inquiry members got the impression that teacher-librarians were a threatened species in Australia and openly contemplated mandating expenditure on libraries as essential infrastructure in schools.

I have spoken to Sara Edson, Inquiry Secretary, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment. She advises that the HOR committee of inquiry under Sharon Bird automatically became defunct with the election but would be reconstituted under Amanda Rishworth, Member for Kingston, SA in 2011. She said that all the submissions and hearings would be taken on board and peak organisations would be contacted to see whether they had any further thoughts before the final report was written.

The Committee may be found at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/index.htm>

After giving a talk to a group of teacher-librarians at the Greek Club in October 2010, Jenni King of the SLAQ Committee asked me what we should do now. This document is the result. It does not tell SLAQ what they should do. Rather it is intended as a scoping exercise to help SLAQ make up its mind.

My thoughts are arranged under three headings, followed by a Conclusion:

What do we know?

Some issues arising from the last 40 years

What should we do now?

Note: I’m philosophically committed to the term ‘resource centre’ rather than ‘library’ as it applies to schools. Also to ‘teacher-librarian’, with the hyphen, rather than ‘school librarian’.

There is a multiplicity of terms used for ‘school library’ – perhaps an indicator of the struggle we have with what constitutes a school library and/or that a ‘school library’ may ‘mean’ or ‘become’ differently and diversely in different learning communities.

Without going too deeply into the philosophy behind all this, the French/Latin derivation of ‘library’ and ‘librarian’ bespeaks books and remains so in the common mind irrespective of how professionals may define their functions. The term ‘resource’, on the other hand, does not limit the medium. In modern times, the term ‘information’ may be on the ascendancy, especially in view of the convergence of media through digitisation. One of the correspondents in compiling this paper carries the title *Head of Information Services*, with which I’m comfortable, especially as it bespeaks a school-wide role.

Nevertheless, my firm position has always been that the professional base has the two components embraced in the term ‘teacher-librarian’, hyphenated because conjoined and each modifying the

other in equal measure. The ideal situation is that teacher-librarians are members both of the teaching and the librarianship professions. Their role needs to be embedded in the teaching/learning situation. Hence the 'teacher' part is essential, while the 'librarian' part is desirable, in my view.

1.0 What do we know?

- 1.1 Research tells us, and has for 40 years, that students achieve better with access to a resource centre and a qualified teacher-librarian. See for example ACER's submission to the HOR Inquiry:

“ ACER has undertaken research of direct relevance to the present inquiry, most notably through the work of Dr Michele Lonsdale. This research concluded that student outcomes are enhanced when school libraries are adequately staffed, resourced and funded, and are supported by a strong computer network that makes resources available throughout the school’s learning spaces (Lonsdale, 2003). Earlier research also identified extensive use of school libraries as a significant variable associated with literacy achievement (Masters and Forster, 1997).”

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/schoollibraries/subs/sub328.pdf>

- 1.2 Dr Michael Hough, AM, Professorial Fellow at the University of Wollongong told the joint SLAQ-IASL conference (September 2010) in the Roy Lundin plenary lecture that the digital research skills of modern school students are simply awful. They don’t know how to define a search, how to search, how to judge what they find or how to use what they find.
- 1.3 Vast amounts have been spent under the BER (*Building the Education Revolution*) on the upgrading facilities, **without any guidelines**. At February 2010 the amount was said to be about \$4 billion over some 3500 projects.
- 1.4 Anecdotal evidence indicates varying results, not always fortuitous. In one high school with a fine tradition of school resource services the traditional resources were split up and sent to subject departments and the ‘library’ filled with individual computer stations, plus some break-out rooms for groups up to 10. No space was provided to meet with a whole class as such in the facility.
- 1.5 System-level support services have seriously atrophied as have courses to prepare teacher-librarians. Remaining are masters courses at QUT and CSU, plus a graduate diploma at Edith Cowan.
- 1.6 School systems have no accurate information as to the state of play in their schools. Back in 1990, for example, in Qld we had statistics for resource centre holdings of every school in the state. Grants could be divided up equitably taking in account relative need resulting in a complete list school allocations within hours. At budget time we knew quite accurately the shortfalls in relation to published standards.
- 1.7 The 2008 Curtin survey, evidence given to the HOR inquiry and anecdotal evidence are disturbing to say the least. For example, one sizable provincial city has seven large government high schools without a single teacher-librarian.
- 1.8 We can say now that **school-based management and decision making have failed in this particular area. Decisions have not been evidence-based**, which implies attending to what the research says.
- 1.9 While the digital revolution has created a new dimension and almost a new context for learning, the traditional paradigm of student skills and strategies for what we used to call back in 1972 RBROTAL (resource-based, research-oriented teaching and learning) has not changed. School administrators falsely thinking otherwise has led to some very odd decisions.

Many schools have lost sight of the essential role of information skills in learning, because the knowledge-practice thread carried through teacher-librarian involvement

has been severed. The potential for consistency in this area is still carried in the QUT course – however no qualified teacher-librarian means no ‘philosophy-in-practice’.

- 1.10 Traditional resources, that is books and AV materials, still have a major place in a modern resource centre. Many traditional resources have now been digitised and are available in digitised format. Many have not. Most modern resources have used digitisation in the production process, but many are then not available in digitised format. Also some are more usable in a non-digitised format.

2.0 Issues arising from the last 40 years

Some of the items in Section 3 below are self-explanatory but some may profit from backgrounding. That is the purpose of this section.

2.1 Funding has increasingly moved from states to the national level, with an emerging trend of direct Commonwealth funding to schools.

In 1942 in order to meet the war effort income tax powers were ceded by the states to the Commonwealth. From that time although education was a state function under the constitution intervention by the Commonwealth was almost inevitable.

Initially the national government interventions were in areas of identified need. The first was the Murray Committee of Inquiry into Universities of 1957 which led to increased funding of universities, which are now predominantly a charge against the national budget.

This was followed in the 1960s by national funding of science blocks in secondary schools, probably a response to Sputnik, followed in 1968 by secondary school libraries. Causes are no doubt multiple, but lobbying by the then Library Association of Australia was a factor.

From the Whitlam government years in 1972 onwards there has been general recurrent national funding to both government and non-government schools.

Now recurrent funding continues, as do special projects such as the national curriculum, national testing, the *My School* database, laptops for every child from Year 9 up under the *Digital Education Revolution* initiative, skills training centres and school halls and libraries under the BER (*Building the Education Revolution*).

In the 2009 election both parties promised moves towards direct funding from a national level.

2.2 Decision making has moved from centralised state systems to local school decision making and management.

Back in 1970 the administration of schools was highly centralised. In Queensland the Supply and Stores branch ordered and supplied all material goods to schools. Books for school libraries purchased with government funds were centrally approved and ordered.

During the 1970s a policy of decentralising the administration and management of schools was adopted everywhere. In the foreword of the standards document *Learning for the future: Developing information services in Australian schools*, Curriculum Corporation (1993)¹ David Francis wrote:

“Learning for the future ...builds on the standards for school libraries outlined in the Schools Commission Books and beyond (1979). The focus reflects recent changes in Australian education, including the shift to collaborative school planning, decision making and management.

“The development of the dynamic role of the school library resource service in the curriculum is the responsibility of the school community.”

However, many decisions about school resource centres and associated services appear to be authoritarian rather than collaborative!

Clearly accountability is needed when school principals can make decisions ignoring research findings about the efficacy of school libraries and teacher-librarians.

Already by 1990 three large high schools had no teacher-librarian and teacher-librarians were increasingly assigned part-time to teaching duties. In reading through *Resourceful partnerships: Teacher-librarianship in Queensland*⁴ I'm reminded how well things appeared to be going professionally. We had topic timetables, resource sharing networks and co-operative planning and teaching (CPT). It's hard to accept that principals were making decisions that were so educationally inappropriate, but they were.

In 1990 we found that the annual expenditure on curriculum resources, resource centre staff and facilities was about \$60 million, half of this on staffing. Principals have 'saved' funds by such strategies as using teacher-librarians as class teachers and using library technicians or aides to organise the library.

The so-called new digital paradigm has led some to place the library under an IT staff member, and over-emphasise computer terminals in the design of spaces.

'Solutions' may stem from fashions exchanged at principals' meetings rather than the solid analysis of issues. Modern management requires that decisions on policy, provision and practice must be **evidence-based**, which implies attending to what the research says. What is required now is a move from **opinion-based** to **evidence-based** decision making.

2.3 Does the digital revolution constitute a new paradigm?

In a sense a school library as a centralised institution within a school was born out of a compromise. It was always desirable but impossible to have all learning resources in each classroom. So it was mainly textbooks in the classroom and extension and enrichment resources in the school library. *Books and beyond* took some account of non-book, or audiovisual materials.

In early 1991 I signed off on a 60-page review of School Curriculum Resource Services and Related Support Services. We proposed a reconceptualization of *school level curriculum resource services* to soften the hard edges of an institution within and institution and embrace all curriculum related materials including core materials. We identified the installed base of curriculum resources in Queensland government schools as having a replacement value of about \$280 million. The annual spend on curriculum resources, resource centre staff and facilities was about \$60 million.

At that time the microcomputer revolution was well under way with automated school library systems, computer labs, computers in the classrooms, and the availability of resources on CD-ROMs.

Sadly, we were unable to satisfactorily complete that reconceptualization and I left the Department of Education. The trend towards digitisation continued apace.

During the 1990s came the internet and full text storage on the net and the so-called Web 2.0 revolution, sometimes called the digital shift or reshift. Later statements of standards have attempted to take account of these changes.

Today a further quantum change in digital technology access is taking place with one-to-one laptops, fast broadband, fibre to the home, wireless networks in schools etc.

In this context it is possible and necessary to ask whether the new digital technologies amount to a paradigm shift in how children learn and in the design and articulation of appropriate resource/information services.

There are various taxonomies of the information process/skills, all with a similar basic structure. The one outlined in *Learning for the future*¹ is based on defining, locating, selecting, organising, creating/sharing and evaluating. This basic structure was there in 1972 with RBROTAL (resource-based, research-oriented teaching and learning) and is the same now, albeit in a substantially changed media environment. Students still need to be taught the skills to cope with the prevailing media. This is best done in the normal teaching/learning context by teacher-librarians working collaboratively with classroom teachers.

The teacher-librarian's specialist contribution to school communities centres on information literacy, or more recently 'informed learning', a concept developed by Professor Christine Bruce at QUT (Hilary Hughes – personal communication).

'Digital literacy' is a limiting term. 'Information literacy' is richer and more inclusive. (Information is a broader concept than digital information, so we have to avoid the logical error of the part subsuming the whole.) 'Informed learning' is essentially about **using information to learn** and by extension, using information to support learning. In that sense **it represents the core of the teacher-librarian's role, incorporating resource selection, organisation, library management, developing and resourcing curriculum, teaching, research/inquiry etc.**

It's also worth quoting in full an eloquent statement from the ACER submission to the HOR Inquiry, previously referenced:

"Through the *Digital Education Revolution* initiative, the Government has made a clear commitment to the digital learning environment for school communities. What is less clear, however, is where the expertise and capacity are expected to reside within schools that will drive the organisational and cultural change required to ensure all staff and students are able to utilise and fully benefit from this new technology. Currently, IT staff are predominantly occupied with hardware maintenance, school management staff have multiple commitments on and off site, and teaching staff have limited time available outside their subject areas.

"Given the time and forum, Teacher Librarians are in a strong position to take a leadership role in building a digitally literate school community. Libraries create a physical and virtual hub for current information and archives. They build relationships with their users to tailor resources to cater for specific subject, support cross-curricular teaching, and meet individual interests and needs.

"Teacher Librarians are well placed to inform school leaders about usage guidelines and cyber-safety policy. They are able to offer in-house expertise and training in information literacy for students, teachers, other staff and parents and will have a key role to play in supporting the Government's upcoming *ICT Proficiency Project* focus on ICT skills assessment.

“However, where Teacher Librarians are required to take on increasing teaching allotments, or where semi-skilled staff are engaged to deliver library services, this potential is unlikely to be realised (Bonanno, 2008).

“Library education has recognised the need to better understand end user needs, to focus more on service delivery user support, and to fully utilise technology in proactive and sustainable ways to ensure access for all users. New graduates enter the teacher-librarian profession having developed skills and experience in selecting, evaluating and organising digital and print media. Existing staff utilise their networks to update their repertoire of skills and to share best practices. Having dedicated, trained staff within school libraries helps to provide equal opportunity for all students to develop the skills and access the information they need.

“Library staff are connected to and supported by online learning communities and have a key role to play in supporting students and teachers to access relevant networks and to become independent and efficient information seekers and contributors. A forthcoming research publication by Lonsdale for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations investigated the enablers and inhibitors of evidence sharing by literacy and numeracy practitioners. The research highlighted that, although online networks offer valuable information and support for teachers, time constraints and variable ICT skill levels were inhibitors to widespread ICT uptake by teachers. There is clearly a role for Teacher-Librarians in bridging this skills gap as part of a whole-school approach to information literacy.

“Further local research, including outcomes focused and evidence-based studies, will provide greater insight into existing and future learning needs within school communities. Such studies will raise critical awareness of the contribution, value and potential of school libraries and teacher librarians in anticipating and responding to these needs in building information literate school communities. The need for Teacher Librarians and school libraries is greater in today’s information age than previously because teacher-librarians are information specialists.”

I wish to comment further on this sentence:

“Having dedicated, trained staff within school libraries helps to provide equal opportunity for all students to develop the skills and access the information they need.”

“Equal opportunity for all students to develop the skills and access the information they need” should be seen as a **right** enjoyed by students, not an optional opportunity provided at the discretion of the principal.

From a societal perspective Dr Hilary Hughes of QUT put it this way:

“...a continuing decline in resourcing and education has serious implications for schools, students and ultimately the well-being of Australian society and economy. If we are to flourish in an information society ... we need citizens who are fluent, critical and responsible users and creators of information. And to achieve this we need dynamic, professionally committed and informed teacher-librarians who can enable current students to become citizens with these qualities.” (Personal communication)

2.4 What about Web 2.0?

In the latest issue of *Access* Lyn Hay has written an eye-catching article, 'Shift happens. It's time to rethink, rebuild and rebrand'.² The implications of the initial shift were examined in a study led by Professor Kerry Mallan published in 2002 under the title *Performing hybridity: impact of new technologies on the role of teacher-librarians*.³ I haven't read this study, but the implications for teacher-librarians are identified in *Resourceful partnerships: Teacher-librarianship in Queensland*⁴ as follows:

- New technologies dramatically influenced teacher-librarians knowledges and skills;
- In order to keep up with technological change teacher-librarians would need to engage in professional development activities provided by various sources;
- Workplace practices would change with a blurring of home/work boundaries;
- The school library would maintain elements that satisfied study and recreational activities;
- Gender played an influential role in how teacher-librarians perceived their relationship to the technology;
- Technology would play a crucial role in the development of a school's corporate image and the marketing strategies schools enjoy.

Considerable change, but no paradigm shift there, I think. The last element is picked up in Hay's notion of rebranding. This is a strategic decision in how the school presents itself. In fact there is already a proliferation of rebranding (resource centre, information centre, information resource centre etc), perhaps indicating a struggle with what now constitutes a 'library' and/or with the potential for diverse 'library-types'. No doubt this is an indicator of change and evolving. One might question whether 'rebranding' to coerce the use of iCentre (or any other nomenclature) serves other than to further disperse meaning rather than to cohere. For there will be disagreement, and hence yet another term and another 'meaning'.

Hay is arguing for a reshift, or second shift, with Web 2.0 technology. Hay identifies the core change as follows:

"Web 2.0 is about communication, content creation, where students are producers rather than mere consumers of information."

This, I think, is patently false. Students have been producing information in various formats from print, pictorial, audio, art, drama etc for decades and in more recent times media such as PowerPoint. Opportunities for what she calls "inquiry" and "immersive" learning have always been there, and on an active, collaborative and productive basis.

The real change lies in the branching and relational nature of digital output and the opportunity for multiple inputs and access independent of place. With the advent of wireless networks in schools, superfast broadband connections via fibre to the home and the outside world and the mass provision of laptops, the digital environment is much more pervasive

and independent of space. Implications include the teacher-librarian increasingly being called upon to teach co-operatively in spaces outside the resource centre.

Moreover, as Raylee Elliot Burns has pointed out:

“...it could also be said that Web 2.0 communication modes create other forums (blogs, wikis, twitter) for the ‘chattering class’ conversations, leading participants to believe that this is where the discussion ‘is’ and that this is what constitutes the discussion – when we still call on quite old, established forums for the proposal of ideas, communication and credibility of research, ie. the journal article if we wish our ideas to be taken seriously. There’s a challenge in getting beyond the chatter/noise.” (Personal communication)

Teacher-librarians educated in recent times are well-prepared by their pre-service courses to play a leading role in

“...enable[ing] students to use information (of all types) critically, ethically, creatively, safely and flexibly with changing technologies and in rapidly changing social contexts? (Hilary Hughes – personal communication)

Any teacher-librarians educated earlier have had manifold in-service opportunities to update their skills.

2.5 National standards need to be seriously rethought.

This still leaves open the question as to how resource/information services need to be configured and articulated in the modern information environment. Hay is arguing that schools should re-engineer their library/information and technology functions and configure them appropriately so that they support (or indeed lead) where the digitally infused pedagogy is heading.

I do agree that there needs to be a rethink of the information/technology infrastructure in the school and how it relates to teaching and learning. The notion of an iCentre is worth considering. However, I’d be cautious about immediately adopting a model that brought all the technical maintenance of digital technology within the ambit of the resource centre/library. The establishment of the position of *technology support officer (TSO)* in NSW, presumably a public service non-teaching position, is extremely interesting.

Research might reveal that there are several organisational patterns that are equally viable. What we need to get right is the educational role of the teacher-librarian. The organisational form follows function and there needs to be flexibility to adapt to local situations.

In 1969 when the Commonwealth initiative in secondary school libraries began, state governments already had standards of provision. The Commonwealth issued interim standards⁵ in 1969, based on the best state practice and external advice from bodies such as the Library Association of Australia.

That was an **interim** solution. A more deliberative document, *Books and beyond*, was issued in 1977⁶.

A similar approach is needed now. Both are research exercises to identify the best practice and leading opinion that seems to make sense. The second iteration would follow a major exercise in researching appropriate pedagogies (see 2.8 below).

I have some sympathy for principals of larger schools trying to find solutions appropriate to the new environment. I would suggest, though, that there has been some serious misfiring with, for example, the library/resource centre run by aides or library technicians under the supervision of a teacher with technology or some vaguely relevant skills, or filling the resource centre with individual terminals and sending the traditional resources to subject area centres. Again, such solutions may be born out of the recognition of a need for a new vision but are perhaps based on fashion rather than sound principle and research.

Exercises such as calling it a new paradigm, rebranding etc may have strategic value, but are of doubtful substance.

Nevertheless the services do need to be conceptualised and articulated with modern conditions in mind.

Mention should be made of more recent iterations of standards, such as *Learning for the future: developing information services in Australian schools* (1993)¹ which had a second edition in 2001 and *Standards of professional excellence for teacher-librarians* (2004).⁷ The latter, it should be noted, relates to **excellent** teacher-librarians, and is not quantitative.

2.6 Teacher-librarianship in changing times.

Within the library/resource centre where you have a single professional staff member, three broad functions may be discerned.

Firstly, resources need to be selected and the collection built.

Secondly, the collection and associated services need to be organised and managed.

Thirdly, there is a teaching function to enable the students to access and make best use of the collection and services, both as individuals and in the context of the formal educational program.

I would suggest that the first and third require experience as a teacher as a prerequisite. Such a background would be valuable for the second also.

An early decision was made to use teacher-librarians in Queensland schools, a pattern that prevailed generally elsewhere. In 1970 a group of 25 teachers was released on full pay to attend a 21-week in-service course to prepare for work in secondary schools.

The scheme soon extended to primary schools and continued for the best part of 20 years. To my knowledge, that pattern was unique in the world.

*Resourceful Partnerships*⁴ records that by 1975 some 572 Queensland teachers, including 50 from non-government schools, completed the course.

In 1972 a workshop⁸ of 'stakeholders' was gathered together in Canberra (a Commonwealth Government initiative) which worked on the roles, duties, qualifications and best pre-service preparation of school library personnel. We looked at teacher and non-teacher librarians, paraprofessional staff etc.

The role of teacher-librarian was established and preparation seen as best set in teachers colleges. The role was seen as having enough 'librarianship' content that ALIA, the professional library association, was happy to accredit courses. Which meant that qualified teacher-librarians could move seamlessly into other library settings.

Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education, as it then was, agreed to host such a course and a graduate diploma of teacher-librarianship was offered in 1976 with Dr Roy Lundin as its head.

This pattern of educating teacher-librarians had much to commend it. For a semester teachers had the chance to remove themselves from the pressures of the school while gaining new knowledge, learning new skills, reflecting on educational practice and preparing for a new role which was valued by the system.

Then after the collegiality of the course, they faced the music in the schools, completing the course with new questions about principles and practice.

Three things were different about our practices in Queensland as compared with elsewhere in the world.

Firstly, the role was always seen as that of a specialist, **experienced** teacher. Hence several years successful teaching experience was seen as a prerequisite. In other parts of Australia a pre-service teaching qualification was deemed sufficient.

Secondly, we released teachers full-time on full pay without a bond to attend the original course and then the first semester of the formal graduate diploma course.

Thirdly, we actively selected teachers for the course, usually by interview. We were looking for the right skill set as competent teachers, good communication skills and the necessary dynamism. In most other parts of the world teacher-librarians essentially selected themselves.

If we see the library/resource/information service as essential educational infrastructure then the job of teacher-librarian needs to be done well. Because of this I'd see a successful teaching experience prerequisite as an important element of future standards.

Releasing teachers full-time to attend the course happened as an emergency measure to supply the lack of teacher-librarians. If it happened in the past, when teacher/student ratios were far less favourable, only a lack of vision would prevent it in future. I note that the Brisbane Diocese of Catholic Education has recently provided scholarships to attend the course.

If such scholarships were provided then a selection process would be warranted. Lacking such a process teachers select themselves. I leave SLAQ and the QUT course with the issue of whether you can filter out teachers who are not effective classroom teachers, but love books and reading and who seek to keep the library neat, tidy and quiet.

Certainly we need research on what makes a successful teacher-librarian and the role needs to be well-defined and advertised.

In any case the issue of the appropriate roles, duties, qualifications and best pre-service preparation of school library personnel needs to be revisited. One school used a speech and drama teacher for 10 years, together with aides and library technicians. Some see the 'library' or 'resource centre' as an iCentre, appropriately managed by a teacher with computer skills. Suffice it to say, that particular suggestion should get short shrift (see 2.3 and 2.4 above).

2.7 The need for research.

The learning and teaching information/resource infrastructure of a school is too important to allow policies, provisions and practices to be based on opinion or even perhaps whim or fashion. As I said at 2.2, modern management requires that decisions on policy, provision and practice must be **evidence-based**, which implies attending to what the research says. So one opinion is **not** as good as another.

I've suggested some areas in the following section where I think research is needed. This is especially so since central services have atrophied, where in the past field contact of various kinds fed back into policy deliberations. This process was then more important than any formal research undertaken, which was in any case minimal.

Now a more formal, comprehensive and thorough-going approach is required to establish the evidence for decisions.

In 1970 steps were taken to evaluate the Commonwealth Secondary Schools Libraries Program. This research was then wrapped into broader research being undertaken in Monash. To be honest I wasn't aware of research outcomes from that source and have the impression it lapsed after a few years.

In the future there is useful potential for a nexus between professional teacher-librarian associations and the tertiary sector for the establishment of research needs on the one hand, and the dissemination of research findings on the other.

2.8 Research is needed specifically on appropriate pedagogies in every content area and at every level of the curriculum.

While Hay's article² makes mention of action research (that concept needs elaboration!), in general terms the existence of an appropriate pedagogy in the digital arena is simply

assumed. In my brief excursion into the field I was told by a particularly progressive and dynamic teacher-librarian that we are a long way from an established pedagogy that takes account of digital resources. **I suspect we are dealing with multiple pedagogies which need to be identified within each subject area and at every level.**

Anecdotal evidence has come to me of time-filling, busy-work in school libraries, where the teacher effectively has a rest. Of teachers depending largely, not on a textbook, but on photocopied work sheets. Of otherwise worthwhile exercises which place unreasonable, almost impossible demands on the staff and resources of the resource centre. And so on.

The biggest concern about what we know according to Michael Hough (see 1.2) is that children are still leaving school ill-prepared for living in a digital world. The common assumption that modern children are naturally digitally literate would appear to be entirely false. One of the failures of what we did over past decades is that there were turf issues that kept central services officers with teacher-librarianship skills out of the engine room of curriculum development. It's time now for these games to be set aside in the interests of children.

My idea is that we need interim standards quite quickly to maintain momentum. At the same time I would start on a longer term project by identifying and documenting excellent practice through research, and then building on this in conjunction with methodology specialists and curriculum developers.

At the end of all that we can then have a new look at standards of provision. We can anticipate, however, that multiple staffing of teacher-librarians in larger schools, both primary and secondary, will be required.

While I have indicated what I think are priorities, the research needed is not limited to those areas.

2.9 Support services at district, regional, state and national levels.

*Resourceful partnerships*⁴ did not provide as much detail on the history of central services as it did on teacher-librarianship in the schools. Access to Departmental information under the 30-year rule was one inhibiting factor.

Central services were severely depleted in the departmental reorganisation of the early 1990s. The reduction of support services was part of a broader trend in the 1980s to minimise the size of the public service and pare its functions back to policy development and support. In Australia this trend came to Queensland last and by agency of the Labor government elected in 1989.

In the 1970s at one point there were 22 *regional library advisers* in the state system. In 1984 there were 69 positions in Production and Publishing Services Branch, 81 in Library and Resource Services (LARS) and a further 20 in a logistical, technical and administrative

Support Services Branch. The Department of Education corporate library was separate and additional.

By 1990 some 200 district and regional resource centres of various kinds had been identified.

Those halcyon days are gone forever, but work needs to be done to research and document the history of central services (with full Departmental co-operation) through to the present, to evaluate current and future needs for support services. Five areas where enhanced support is indicated are mentioned here.

Firstly, there used to be a concept of circuit teacher-librarian to provide direct support to a specified number of small schools which will never be able to sustain permanent staffing of even one day per week. There used to be something like 600 schools in Queensland with fewer than 100 enrolments. Some of these are one and two teacher schools. I note that *Learning for the future*¹ specified one day a week of teacher-librarian time for schools of three teachers (including the principal). There is a significant number of schools, especially in decentralised Queensland, with one or two teachers.

I understand that Catholic Education do have some appointments of this kind.

Secondly, the notion of regional library advisers needs to be revisited. I've been impressed by the brilliance of some exceptional teacher-librarians in lighthouse schools who, I trust, will continue to shine brightly and avoid burnout.

However, we can't run the system on stars. We need garden variety teacher-librarians and they need support. Regional library advisors could assist schools in developing, say, three-year recovery and rejuvenation plans, including collection weeding and renewal, and then provide professional support in the implementation of those plans. One area where practical assistance could be given is in weeding smaller school collections.

Again I understand Catholic Education may have some such appointments.

Thirdly, the function of the evaluation of resources to implement, enhance and enrich the curriculum needs to be addressed at a national level to support the national curriculum.

Again, in 1984 LARS had 12 seconded teachers and teacher-librarians engaged in the ongoing evaluation of commercially produced curriculum resources, in the production of bibliographies and resource lists in areas of identified needs. My memory tells me that in 1990 we had about 15. These were supported and assisted by a bibliographic services unit numbering eight. In addition there were four administrative assistants and one supervisory position.

In 1990 we had plans to add several teams to specifically match the development of new curricula. So core curriculum resources as well as extension and enrichment resources would be identified in conjunction with the curriculum development team.

This group, planned to provide what I believe would have been a world-class level of service, was the first to go when those more powerful and presumably wiser deemed them unnecessary.

A resource evaluation function needs to be considered in relation to the development and ongoing servicing of the national curriculum.

Fourth, a school level resource and information services audit should be considered to mirror the current curriculum audit in schools. This would be generally supportive, but could be considered threatening if there are any passengers and incompetent appointments.

The regional library adviser service would be wholly supportive. An audit officer/team would primarily advise the school administration, including whether the staff deployed in the area were up to the job. This function would require senior level appointments of people with excellent service records in the area.

Fifth, each education authority needs a dedicated unit to provide policy advice, to gather information and with some publishing/dissemination capacity.

Such a unit should be embedded in a curriculum policy function within each authority, rather than as a separate unit or in an IT-related area.

This should not be seen as a return to the halcyon days of the past, rather as a vital component to ensure our children can cope with a future in a "digital" age.

3.0 What should we do now?

- 3.1 *Establish a new set of national standards, agreed to by state education authorities, catholic and independent schools. They should be based on the best current practice and advice from the peak bodies, such as ASLA and ALIA. (See 2.5)*

Peak bodies such as ASLA and ALIA should be lobbying the national government for these standards, but the standards need to be accepted and adopted by all school authorities, government and nongovernment. I suspect that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs would be the appropriate body. I think you'll find that the state minister is ultimately responsible for what goes on educationally in nongovernment as well as government schools. The compilation of standards is at this time a research function rather than an administrative exercise.

- 3.2 *Find out the current levels of facilities, staffing and resources in schools. We need to know everything, not just a sample survey.*

Normally this should be an administrative task, but isn't as simple as counting marbles. It requires expertise which may not be found in state education departments. In the Whitlam years members of the Schools Commissions primary library committee members were asked to do assessments of nongovernment school collections, to ensure, for example that books which should have been culled were not counted. Later, because this was too expensive, a form of self-assessment was used.

I can't see that anything other than self-assessment would be possible, but the survey would have to be expertly set up. Perhaps the task could be contracted out to a research body. It relates to the compilation of standards and the possibility of special grants in areas of need. (See 3.3)

- 3.3 *Fund schools to implement the national standards. Certain levels should be mandated and not subject to local discretion. (See 2.2) Catch-up funding may be necessary in areas of need.*

Again this should normally be a matter for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. In 1990 the recurrent expenditure on school level curriculum resource services in Queensland government schools was \$60 million, half of which was on resource centre personnel. As a guestimate I'd suggest that nationwide we may be talking of more than a billion dollars each year.

- 3.4 *Research the qualities, qualifications and other factors required to become a successful teacher-librarian, including educational, skill, experience and personality requirements, also pre-service and in-service educational needs. (See 2.6)*

- 3.5 *Identify appropriate pedagogies for all content areas and age levels. We need to identify and document excellent practice, involve teaching methodology experts in devising strategies and guidelines, feed into curriculum specialists and methodology lecturers in teacher preparation and identify in-service implications for existing teachers and teacher-librarians. (See 2.8)*

- 3.6 *Research the need for support services at district, regional, state and national levels. (See 2.9)*

Five priority areas are suggested:

- The appointment of circuit teacher-librarians to groups of very small schools;
- The appointment of regional library advisers;
- Establish a national resource evaluation function to support the national curriculum;
- Establish school level resource/information services audit units within each education authority;
- Establish a dedicated unit within each education authority to provide policy advice, to gather information and with some publishing/dissemination capacity.

In relation to the last, it is important that such a unit has a policy focus and has access to senior officers rather than being buried in layers of bureaucracy. Pursuing a proposal in this regard may be a platform for lobbying about the other issues mentioned above.

Such a unit should be embedded in a curriculum policy function within each authority, rather than as a separate unit or in an IT-related area.

This should not be seen as a return to the halcyon days of the past, rather as a vital component to ensure our children can cope with a future in a "digital" age.

3.7 In view of the outcomes of 3.5 above (identifying appropriate pedagogies), have another go at national standards and requirements for successful teacher-librarians (3.3 and 3.4 above). (See 2.5)

3.8 Consideration needs to be given to the framework for policy making at a national level – probably it should be the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs.

An alternative would be to log the whole matter in with COAG, but I'm not sure of the criteria for this to happen. Or indeed the advantages or disadvantages. I do know that COAG, if it sees the need, can provide substantial funding for research.

My worry about the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs is that they cover a wide range of issues and typically obtain briefings from their departments. **Frankly, therein lies the biggest hazard to getting anything sensible done.** Lobbying the byzantine innards of each department where the expertise once provided by central services units has been lost may be a bridge too far.

But neglecting such lobbying opens up the possibility of chaotic and adverse input to the Ministerial Council.

3.9 Consideration should be given to the desirable location of the research to be undertaken.

The amount of research that needs to be done over an extended period of time suggests that a national research location/centre be established. Free-standing centres take a lot of time and effort, not to mention external funding. On the other hand there is a good fit

with the research domains being established in Professor Mallan's Centre for Children and Youth at QUT. If I can quote her:

I'm currently developing a Centre for Children and Youth at QUT (see attached an early document I prepared). This will be a cross-disciplinary, cross-faculty centre and its broad research domains will accommodate research of this kind that you are suggesting. It is one tangible way forward and when it is set up (hopefully early 2011) it will provide researchers with support to develop grant proposals in much needed areas that impact on young people. **I see resource centres/school libraries/libraries as being a very important part of this.** See for instance the research domains – child and youth cultures; digital technologies for living and learning; and environments for work and play. (Personal communication - emphasis added)

Brisbane with access to a wide range of government and non-government schools of various types and sizes would be a good location. Appropriate alliances could be established with other institutions, especially Curtin, CSU and ACER.

As a priority, SLAQ should approach QUT to develop proposals further. There is no need to wait to get the call from the Commonwealth Minister or someone. To the early bird goes the worm.

3.10 Lobby the Commonwealth Department of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs to take money off the top of their grants to schools in order to conduct the necessary research.

I note (see 2.3) that research undertaken by the ACER appears to have been commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Given the billions in school grants and given that the Commonwealth have spent billions in upgrading facilities, a thin slither would provide ample funds in order to commission the necessary research to make the program work, and obviate the necessity of continually making a case to the Australian Research Council, where proposals would need to jostle with a wide range of other needs and convince decision makers without the necessary insights into this particular area.

It should not escape the Commonwealth minister that there is much to lose by spending billions of taxpayer funds in an exercise that may make little difference unless the human and other educational resource factors are given appropriate attention.

Conclusion

Someone in government perceived that there was a significant need for the refurbishment and enhancement of physical library/resource centre infrastructure in Australian schools, significant enough to justify the expenditure of more than \$4 billion. At the same time we know that young people are emerging from our schools without the necessary information skills to transact personally and professionally in the modern digital environment, an environment which the government is seeking to enhance with one-to-one laptops for secondary school students, superfast broadband and other initiatives. This gives hope that the Commonwealth government will listen to informed and sensible proposals.

Forty years ago we supported a similar initiative in physical space with money for books and other resources, with co-operative action to ensure the supply of appropriate personnel, with comprehensive standards and with a range of central and district services. A research program was undertaken to evaluate the program but unfortunately the specific research function was abandoned after a few years.

By contrast now we are providing no standards or support. We are relying on a situation where the local school administrator has the power of disposal. One opinion is felt to be as good as the next, irrespective of any research. There is a mistaken view in many places that we are in new territory, a new paradigm, so past knowledge and practices do not apply. Opinion-based decision making must now be replaced with evidence-based decision making, by building on earlier foundational research, knowledge and practices so that such research continues to inform learning within evolving information media contexts and enriches ongoing research into new media.

The idea of audit units to audit school resource/information services (see 2.9 and 3.6) is intended to constrain principals to evidence-based decision making, which then needs then to be informed by appropriate research.

I believe we urgently need new standards of provision and practice, based on the best available opinion and practice, but verified, modified and sustained over a period through comprehensive research.

Consideration needs to be given as to appropriate policy and accountability structures. We know that the Commonwealth does not control school education, but in important areas has been able to exercise leadership through co-operative action or by placing conditions on funding. **But we also know that as the matter stands co-operative action between the Commonwealth, states and non-government authorities does not automatically have purchase at the school level.** Schools have a quite astonishing latitude to do as they please. Hence the audit function.

SLAQ needs to decide where it can place its best effort, given limited resources, including personnel and time. Certainly there is a path through ASLA to national lobbying, but SLAQ is also entitled to approach its own political representatives in the Commonwealth sphere. Thought needs to be given to state level lobbying with political representatives and the bureaucracy.

At each level of government, both the Government and the Opposition should be approached. We live in volatile times.

But irrespective of all other considerations there is a potentially rewarding path in dialogue with QUT to instigate appropriate and timely research. This should happen immediately.

In summary, three groupings of issues can perhaps be discerned:

- Research
- National standards, including facilities, resource materials and personnel
- Organisational structures from school to national level for policy making, implementation and support

The third determines what approach may be taken to the other two. If we are serious about children being prepared to thrive and contribute in the digital age there is a case to see this whole area to be seen as a matter of national importance. Perhaps important enough to log in with COAG. Should that happen, for example, COAG could identify and commission research, rather than leave it to the

vagaries of submissions to the Australian Research Council. Such is the ethos of local discretion in decision making that any standards written are scarcely worth the price of printing if they are merely issued by bodies like the Curriculum Corporation or ACER.

But COAG also will bring a new level of power, increased remoteness from stakeholders and the concomitant potential for arbitrariness in decision making. All things considered, the best path is probably for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs as an office accountable both to the electorate and within the ministerial council to state colleagues to exercise leadership and where appropriate act directly. These days the power of the purse gives a head of power, but the minister would do well to realise that the best results are obtained from a genuinely co-operative framework of decision making and action.

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