



**School Library Association
of South Australia Inc**

PO Box 2093
Kent Town SA 5071

Email: slasa@slasa.asn.au

ABN 645 335 422 10

National Inquiry into Teacher Education

Submission by the

School Library Association of South Australia Inc. (SLASA)

Contact: Alle Goldsworthy, Vice President SLASA, Ph 8226 2006 Email: slasa@slasa.asn.au

Summary

This submission has been prepared by the School Library Association of South Australia in consultation with its members who include teacher librarians from all three education sectors – Department of Education and Children’s Services, Catholic Education Office and Association of Independent Schools, South Australia – from Reception to Year 12. SLASA would like the inquiry to take into consideration the important role of teacher librarians and the continued and appropriate training of these vital educators.

Teacher librarians

“In this age of information ... the skill of learning how to learn, and becoming critical consumers of information is increasingly important.”

(Leading the way: the changing role of teacher librarian; a position paper by the Australian Education Union, Tasmanian Branch, March 2000)

An individual’s success in the 21st century will depend largely on his/her ability to locate, critically evaluate and use information. Educators are transforming their approaches to teaching and learning to enable students to view the global community as a potential information source throughout their lives. Teacher librarians have a fundamental and powerful contribution to make in preparing students to face the challenges of the future. They have a leadership role in the school to ensure that students are given opportunities to develop information literacy and to promote resource-based learning as the methodology that facilitates this. (SLASA, 2004)

This quotation is from the *Teacher Librarian Role Statement* developed by the School Library Association of South Australia in 2004 which identifies six key aspects of the work done by a teacher librarian in a school:

- Teaching and learning across the curriculum
- Management of the Resource Centre
- Literature promotion
- Curriculum involvement
- Services involved in providing excellent access to print and non-print resources, including online resources
- Provide leadership within the school

Teacher librarians have specialised expertise in literacy, literature, learning and the information process, which has a major impact on student learning and in particular, on student literacy.

The Australian School Library Association (ASLA), together with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) have recently endorsed the *Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians*. It states that:

Teacher librarians support and implement vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners. A teacher librarian holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship, defined as eligibility for Associate ...membership for ALIA. Within the broad fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. This is valuable because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. (ALIA/ASLA, 2004)

It is for these reasons that a teacher librarian is recognised as being a valuable and integral staff member of every school. However, there are major issues facing the profession of teacher librarians, largely stemming from teacher education courses provided at universities.

Issues

- Succession - ageing of the teaching profession and in particular teacher librarians
- Very low numbers of teacher librarians currently training and graduating
- Universities not encouraging and advising the right practicums for students to be recognised as qualified teacher librarians by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)
- Every SA DECS school is funded for teacher librarian time within the global budget but schools do not always use the whole funding for the teacher librarian position. Too often the funding is diverted at least in part to other positions.
- The cost of gaining dual qualifications as a second qualification at graduate level may mean HECS is unavailable and upfront payment required

Training of teacher librarians

SLASA has recently produced a pamphlet called *Working in School Libraries* (SLASA, 2005). This outlines the courses available for school leavers, librarians and teachers to gain the dual qualifications required to be a teacher librarian in South Australia.

Key problems:

- School leavers studying a teaching degree can only graduate as qualified teacher librarians to teach up to Year 9 and only if they get the right course and practicum experience. Even then, for some students units are offered at two different universities a long way apart.
- No teacher librarians able to teach upper secondary level are able to study in South Australian institutions.
- There is no undergraduate tertiary degree provided to train librarians in South Australia. This means that no longer can a person gain a degree in librarianship and then gain postgraduate teacher qualifications in this State

- For qualified teachers it is necessary to pay upfront fees for graduate courses to become a qualified teacher librarian. Although there are currently two incentive schemes available to some teachers, they are not widely publicised.

Australian research

The importance of access to a well-stocked and staffed school library in terms of literacy achievement is proven by research. There has been a great deal of research internationally into the impact of school library and information services on children's reading and learning outcomes. For a review of recent research and its relevance to Australian education, see: Lonsdale, Michele, 2003 *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: a Review of the Research*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne available at: <http://www.asla.org.au/research/>

Implications of the research findings

- Well-resourced school libraries are essential. They become a learning hub for the school, offering access to print and non-print resources and a gateway to resources from all around the world. They also provide ease of access to information technology.
- The physical environment needs to be complemented by specialists who are qualified teacher librarians. Teacher librarians teach the skills of life-long learning by introducing students to the Inquiry Process and the skills of information literacy, visual literacy and critical literacy. In a non-threatening environment, they support students in their quest for knowledge, allowing students to develop at their own pace and in many cases, pursuing their own interests.
- Teacher librarians, as knowledge managers, are familiar with the latest developments in information technology and work with staff to promote the most effective systems and services, ensuring successful integration into the curriculum.
- Teacher librarians are trained in children's literature and reading development, and inspire young people with a love and knowledge of literature. They assist to find the right book for each child to suit differences in reading interests and levels. They provide the incentive and stimulation to discover new authors and books. Research has shown that free voluntary reading by children has the greatest impact on their acquisition of literacy skills.
- Teacher librarians work in partnership with school administrators, classroom teachers, literacy coordinators, Information and Communication Technology coordinators, public libraries and school community libraries, bookshops, parents and keep abreast of research into reading by academics.
- Excellent teacher librarian training courses need to be provided in each State. It is essential that we ensure that such valuable specialists continue to be available to our schools. An Australian Education Union survey of South Australian government school library staffing in 2001 found that "a third of all schools are understaffed and/or staffed with unqualified personnel." (Spence 2002)

In conclusion, the School Library Association of South Australia believes that one of the best outcomes for children and students of this National Inquiry into Teacher Education is to make recommendations that ensure:

- Every school in Australia is staffed with a teacher librarian with the dual qualifications of teaching and librarianship based on student numbers.

- All states have access to universities offering excellent teacher librarian courses ensuring the supply of qualified committed teacher librarians for all Australian schools

References

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