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Submission to Inquiry into
School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools
by the Children's Book Council of Australia (SA Branch) Inc.

Submitted by

Julie Wells

Teacher-Librarian

President, CBCA SA Branch

Incoming CBCA National President 2011-2012

GPO Box 2392

Adelaide 5001

This submission is in the form of a letter and addresses the following 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 impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians



The Children's Book Council of Australia (SA Branch),
GPO Box 2392,
Adelaide 5001
www.cbcsa.org.au

15 April 2010

The Secretary,
House Standing Committee on Education and Training,
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra.
ACT 2600

To the Secretary,

The South Australian Committee of the Children's Book Council of Australia regrets the need for this inquiry but welcomes the opportunity to reiterate the intrinsic importance of the teacher-librarian and the school library in the education of students at all levels of schooling in Australia.

The teacher librarian's role is a complex one and involves being a teacher to support other teachers in curriculum development, a mentor in assisting students with research projects, an educator in resource-based learning, a guide in library services, a disseminator of information throughout the school, and a promoter of literature. The position of teacher-librarian in fostering the education of every child should go unquestioned.

Recent economic investment in school library buildings by the Federal Government is to be commended, but it is ultimately a successful investment only if these buildings house up-to-date, relevant collections in all formats, managed by specialists – qualified teacher-librarians. It appears that the economic investment of recent times has overlooked the need to address the quality of collections and teacher-librarian training programs.

It is essential that school students are guided through library services in order to develop the skills to research successfully. Current curricula include numerous research projects throughout a student's school life; a skill which is ongoing; being utilized in tertiary studies and chosen careers. The school library is an essential classroom for the entire school, providing an information base for all, and the teacher-librarian is the educator and guide.

The library enables a school to open its doors to the wider community, facilitating the exchange of information, and assisting teachers to be selective and discriminating with course material. In terms of information opportunities, the teacher-librarian is best placed to seize them when they arise. The school I reiterate is an essential classroom for every student.

The teacher-librarian has the knowledge base and dissemination skills (teaching and educating) to respond to new digital technologies. In meeting the inevitable IT management challenges, investment and training will ensure student needs are met.

Promoting literature is a traditional yet essential role of the teacher-librarian. In order to meet the demands of the curriculum a sound knowledge and understanding of literature, traditional and contemporary, for adults and for young people remains an unquestioned task for the qualified librarian. More than ever before, everyone is interested in literary criticism – a way of rediscovering what makes a book live. Students need to learn discernment when reading and evaluating literature. Through reading we share a sense that fiction has a unique capacity to live on, even form, our imaginations. Memory is an art form which gives us meaning and a place in the community. Books, libraries and librarians, will assist a young person's passage through life.

For all aspects of school life we believe that the modern, well-facilitated library, managed by a qualified specialist is essential, and we trust that government bodies will respond to this inquiry by ensuring that these needs are met. Support must be given to educational leaders so that excellent libraries and teacher-librarians are provided to our school communities. I speak on behalf of the SA Branch Committee of the Children's Book Council of Australia, in reiterating that the Australian Government must invest in the future education of our children. The school library environment functions for this same goal.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Wells
President CBCA SA Branch