



# Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

House Standing Committee on Education and Training  
House of Representatives  
Parliament of Australia

## Libraries, literacy and learning

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008)<sup>1</sup> identified only two goals for young Australians...

1. Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
2. All young Australians [should] become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens

Among the criteria for achieving the second goal, particularly, we find statements such as

### Successful learners

- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas
- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines
- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines

### Confident and creative individuals

- have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lives
- embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions

### Active and informed citizens

- act with moral and ethical integrity
- are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice and participate in Australia's civic life
- are responsible and global citizens

These goals have been built on previous Declarations on National Goals for Schooling, including the Adelaide Declaration in 1999 which explicitly states that students must have "the capacity for, and skills in, analysis and problem solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others".

In other words, our students need to be information literate.

If you are information literate then you are able to

- identify when you have a need for information
- locate the information you need from the most appropriate source
- select, evaluate, interpret, and organise that information and use it effectively and efficiently to meet your needs, including solving problems and creating new information.

However, being information literate is no longer confined to being able to use reference resources to find information. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is an umbrella which encompasses digital, visual, textual, and technological literacies –vital skills for survival in the Information Age.

Sigrun Klara Hannesdottir, a leading international educator has stated "Information is like crude oil. Crude oil contains potential value, but it needs to be refined to be of real value and the more refined it is the more valuable it is. The process of refining is expensive but the end product is valuable enough to pay for the refining. The process of refining information is much more complex than the refining of oil, which also means that the process of information refining is extremely valuable for each individual."<sup>2</sup>

Consider ...

*Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools*

Barbara Braxton  
Teacher Librarian

In the earliest period of human development, we were able to

- perform computation tasks using an abacus at a rate of 2-4 instructions per second
- transmit information using a messenger at a rate of 0.01 words per minute
- absorb written language at a rate of 300 words per minute
- use spoken language at a rate of 120 words per minute

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can

- perform a computation tasks using a computer at a rate in excess of 1 000 000 000 instructions per second
- transmit information through satellite-based networks at a rate in excess of 1 000 000 000 words per minute
- absorb written language at a rate of 300 words per minute
- use spoken language at a rate of 120 words per minute

Despite the advances in technology in producing and transmitting information, we are still processing it at the same rate as we were 5000 years ago.

It took 1850 years for all that was known in the time of Jesus Christ to double. By the time today's kindergarten students graduate from year 12, they will have to deal with at least 16 times more information than what is currently known.

Thus, our children will live in a world where the only certainty will be change. If they are to manage their lives and fulfil their dreams, they will need to become independent lifelong learners able to make intelligent and informed decisions. The National Goals documents identify and acknowledge this.

Yet teacher-librarians, the information specialists in schools, are becoming an endangered species in this, the Information Age. More and more schools are choosing to spend their staffing and resource budgets in other ways because of the lack of understanding by, and lack of direction from, state and federal education authorities of the need for a qualified information management professional in every school at all levels.

This is particularly curious when there is so much research<sup>3</sup> which confirms the correlation between well-staffed and well-resourced school libraries and student achievement.

Qualified teacher librarians have degrees in teaching and post-graduate qualifications in librarianship, qualifications which emphasise the specialist teaching nature of the role rather than its administrative duties.

Thus, the role of the teacher librarian is multi-faceted, supporting both staff and students within the school to create an information literate school community.

Teacher librarians are curriculum leaders. They understand the principles of lifelong learning and support these through

- a detailed knowledge of current pedagogy and curriculum
- a specialist knowledge of information literacy and the information needs, skills and interests of the students in their schools
- an integrated teaching approach founded on collaborative planning and teaching practices
- the development of a resource collection in a variety of formats to support the needs of the curriculum and student interests

Teacher librarians are information specialists. They provide expert assistance to staff and students to access resources in and beyond the school by

- suggesting and providing appropriate resources to support, enrich and enhance the curriculum
- ensuring that both staff and students have the knowledge, skills and understanding to locate, evaluate and ethically use the information they require regardless of the format in which it is packaged
- providing access and support to a wide range of local, national and global programs which enhance the development of information literacy and promote lifelong learning
- actively leading and mentoring their colleagues in information literacy strategies so they can be embedded across the curriculum
- engaging in school leadership and participating in key committees to promote a whole school culture of creating an information literate school community

Teacher librarians are information service managers. As well as developing a resource collection to support the curriculum, they

- provide access to this through information retrieval systems that meet national standards
- continually evaluate the collection and strategically plan and budget for improvement in library and information services and programs to meet the changing needs of staff, students and the curriculum
- measure library resources, facilities, programs and services against current policies, standards documents and benchmarks
- provide a stimulating and helpful environment in which students feel safe and are able to operate independently

The role of the teacher librarian has progressed light years from the out-dated, yet still prevalent, view that it is confined to being 'the keeper of the books'.

In its *Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner*<sup>4</sup> the American Association of School Libraries has encapsulated the outcomes of information literacy by determining that all learners should be able to

- inquire, think, critically and gain knowledge
- draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge
- share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society
- pursue personal and aesthetic growth

and expands these to demonstrate how being information literate is critical and crucial to achieving these goals. It concludes with four key questions

1. Does the student have the right proficiencies to explore a topic or subject further?
2. Is the student disposed to higher-level thinking and actively engaged in critical thinking to gain and share knowledge?
3. Is the student aware that the foundational traits for 21st-century learning require self-accountability that extends beyond skills and dispositions?
4. Can the student recognize personal strengths and weaknesses over time and become a stronger, more independent learner?

Here in Australia there is one key question – can we afford to leave such a critical component of education in the hands of clerical assistants? Because that is what is happening in many schools as principals, who themselves often have little understanding of the role and value of the qualified teacher librarian, staff schools according to their own agenda under school-based management practices.

Information literacy is the teacher librarian's specialist subject yet principals are prepared to deny their staffs and students access to the very person who holds 21<sup>st</sup> century education in their hands.

Information literacy is a vital component of literacy. Indeed, it has been described as “the most fundamental, the most basic of the literacies ... it is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning of all kinds”<sup>5</sup>.

Parents have a right to ask, "Will my child graduate with a 21st century resume, or a 19th century transcript?"<sup>6</sup> Schools have the obligation to ensure that it is, indeed, a 21<sup>st</sup> century resume.

To reach their full potential as envisaged by the Melbourne Declaration, Australia's students need and deserve a fully qualified teacher librarian in their school.

Therefore this Inquiry should recommend that

1. All education authorities be directed to ensure there is a qualified teacher librarian on the staff of every school
2. This position be over and above the normal staffing allocation as calculated by staffing formulae
3. The allocation of a teacher librarian be based on a formula such as one full-time teacher librarian per 250 students (or as determined in consultation with the Australian School Library Association). Schools with less than this number would have a pro-rate allocation but no school would have less access than one day per week.
4. All appointed to the position of teacher librarian be properly qualified in both teaching and teacher librarianship
5. The federal government collect statistics about current qualified teacher librarian staffing levels so that evidence of need can be gathered and benchmarks established.

6. The federal government provide increased and adequate funding to universities to ensure that there are enough teacher librarian graduates to meet the increased need
7. All principals be required to undertake professional learning about the role and value of a qualified teacher librarian
8. All education authorities be directed to restore or implement a central support service for teacher librarians
9. The national curriculum explicitly identifies information literacy as an across-curriculum perspective so that it is mandated and measurable
10. Federal and state governments deliver tied funding to schools so that a budget based on an amount per student (as negotiated with the Australian School Library Association) can be mandated and maintained.

Barbara Braxton  
Teacher Librarian

---

<sup>1</sup> Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians [Online]  
[http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf) Accessed 21 March, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Sigrun Klara Hannesdottir in *The Information Literate School Community : Best Practice* edited by James Henri & Karen Bonnano\_Centre for Information Studies, Wagga Wagga, 1999

<sup>3</sup> School Libraries Work! (2008) Scholastic Research Foundation [Online]  
[http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral\\_resources/pdf/s/slw3\\_2008.pdf](http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf) Accessed 23.3.2010

<sup>4</sup> Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner, American Association of School Librarians 2007 [Online]  
[http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/AASL\\_LearningStandards.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/AASL_LearningStandards.pdf) Accessed 21 March, 2010-

<sup>5</sup> Eisenberg, M. (2005) Information Literacy: the most basic of basics {Online}  
<http://uweoconnect.extn.washington.edu/publicmbeinfoit/> Accessed 21 March. 2010

<sup>6</sup> Moran, M. (2010) *Young Learners Need Librarians, Not Just Google* in Forbes [Online]  
<http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/22/moran-librarian-skills-intelligent-investing-google.html> Accessed March 23, 2010