

## What place do teacher librarians have in schools?

**This submission specifically addresses the following two Terms of Reference:**

- 1. The future potential of school libraries and (teacher) librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;**
- 2. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and (teacher) librarians.**

I'm going to start this submission with the oft-quoted proposal that sixty percent of the children we're teaching now will be employed in jobs that don't even exist yet.<sup>1</sup>

If this is true, then it's clear that at least a significant portion of a child's education need not be about facts or specific content but rather about information seeking, independent learning, collaboration and a raft of related skills that aren't just about remembering stuff.

Qualified teacher librarians (TLs) are the perfect people to meld the insider's knowledge of pedagogy with the sometimes complicated information-seeking processes needed these days. On the one hand, the "teacher-part" has learned what makes a good assignment, what optimizes learning for a class of individual students, what facts and thinking processes need to be addressed in a unit of work so that the goals of the lesson can be achieved. On the other hand, the "librarian-part" is the expert in passing on skills that help students to seek information, choose the best data, trust their sources, acknowledge others' work, re-construct findings and to continue asking questions, skills that are not only useful across the curriculum but also, most importantly, vital for a successful life as a contributing citizen.

This is in addition to the other TL roles of being a literature and reading advisor, providing a welcoming space for the school community to learn, relax and play in and being the hub of resource collection, knowledge and recommendations.

When we talk about "literacy" these days, there are a plethora of kinds of literacies: visual literacy, numerical literacy and media literacy are just a sample. In school libraries we are most concerned with Information Literacy (IL), and this must not be confused with Information and Communication Technologies Literacy (ICT literacy). Information Literacy encompasses all the skills that a person needs in order to search for the desired information, carefully select from what's on offer, re-organise, apply and create from these choices. IL is particularly pertinent to new digital technologies as they unfold each day: what's out there today, what can school libraries offer staff and classes, how does this new technology improve education and our lives (if at all), how well-resourced is the library so that it is best-placed to provide relevant instruction and support? Libraries need to be able to lead the way, be the go-to hub for Information Literacy learning and discovery, not lagging and risking irrelevancy to educational aims.

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<sup>1</sup> I have tried to locate the original quote and any research for this notion, which has been around for quite some time but have been unable to pinpoint it. I did find one figure that cited "[90% of today's kindergarteners will work in jobs that don't exist yet](#)" and another that claims that "[65% of today's preschool children will work in jobs that don't exist now](#)".

Here are some of the things I do in my work as a secondary teacher librarian:

- illustrate targeted internet searching
- introduce online newspaper archives
- demonstrate construction of accurate bibliographies
- encourage persistence and modifying seeking behaviour
- teach students (and teachers) about avoiding plagiarism
- collaborate with teachers to create or refresh assignments
- share new presentation tools with classes
- model scanning and skimming
- show how to interpret URLs to make selection easier
- require resources to be compared for accurate information
- compile appropriate online resources for specific topics
- select the most current and useful books
- teach the use of encyclopedias (book and subscription)
- teach students to become familiar with catalogues
- search engines vs subject directories vs searchable databases
- practice student peer-assessment and self-assessment
- recommend resources for teachers: print, digital, online
- promote Australian products (eg The Le@rning Federation)
- encourage voluntary reading, both with staff and students
- provide practice for taking notes from videos
- explain how to create good questions
- have regular meetings with staff to select best resources
- show students how to make connections with other learning areas
- unpackage resource evaluation (authority, level, currency, etc.)

School libraries contribute greatly to the successful educational outcomes that schools, parents and the community at large expect (I'm sure others have provided the relevant, current and duplicated research). They need to be supported to provide a cutting-edge service to their patrons and this means the use of appropriately qualified library staff and up-to-the-minute books, technologies and professional development opportunities.

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