



**Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians
in Australian Schools**

***Submission by the Sunshine Coast
Teacher-Librarian Network Group***

The Sunshine Coast Teacher-Librarian Network Group is comprised of primary teacher-librarians and resource managers (teachers) from both public and private schools across the Sunshine Coast. Our group meets quarterly and we keep in touch via the Suntel Listserv based on the Queensland Government Website. We also contribute and share professional information on our Suntel wiki on Edna Groups.

Terms of Reference

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Specifically the committee should focus on:

1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

The Federal Government's 'Building an Education Revolution' funding has meant that many of our members' schools will benefit with new libraries, rolled out in different stages of the funding. Collaboration with building contractors and executive teams has varied and was often minimal in those schools who were involved in the early stages. However, our group appreciates that school libraries have been acknowledged as an area of importance within schools.

Many of us have attended professional development opportunities to enhance our new libraries and create flexible, productive and interesting areas, catering to different learning styles, users (small group, large group, technology, staff and community) and

promoting library services. Many members are disappointed that the funding did not include a budget component for innovative, up-to-date resources to support and enhance learning outcomes within our schools. Funding for resources is often inadequate, leaving aging collections that are no longer functional for our students in the information age.

Funding for appropriate staffing, including qualified Teacher Librarians and teacher aides supporting the teacher librarian, was also a factor that our group expressed concern about. Consistency at the state level with regards to budget, teacher-aide time allocated and Teacher-Librarian time allocated are extremely important. In some schools, executive teams have chosen to replace the fully qualified teacher librarian with a teacher. These teachers are often asked to undertake two roles (that of Resource Manager and that of Curriculum Coordinator). Whilst these teachers endeavour to fulfil these roles to the best of their ability, often the knowledge and skills of the qualified teacher librarian are put on the back burner in order to support new curriculum initiatives such as the National Curriculum and NAPLAN outcomes.

The National Curriculum currently has 3 focus areas (literacy, literature and history) that will be expected to be implemented within all schools, The heavy influence of literacy and literature within the curriculum really necessitates a fully qualified teacher librarian (and the myriad of skills they possess) within every school.

Some of the Sunshine Coast Teacher-Librarian Network Group members had part of their training funded by the Queensland State Government as part of a scholarship when they studied in the early 1990's. We believe that a re-establishment of funding for training of teacher librarians would be beneficial for future educational outcomes for our students.

Teacher librarians support teachers, teach information literacy skills, encourage reading for enjoyment and life skills, apply knowledge of literature and inspire children on a one-to-one basis by recommending appropriate texts. Teacher librarians are constantly supporting staff, offering ideas, planning collaboratively with them and ensuring that students are offered a rigorous and well resourced pedagogy for our "digital native" students. We support teachers and community in the implementation of new

initiatives such as the National Curriculum and work with staff and students to improve NAPLAN results within our schools.

Teacher librarians organise and run innovative programs such as Reader's Cup, literature circles and expose children to extra curricular literacy based activities such as Voices on the Coast, online Book Raps and the Solar Children's Festival.

The Sunshine Coast Teacher Librarian Network Group believes that executive teams need to develop a real understanding of the value of a trained teacher librarian and the skills they possess. At the same time, we understand that we need to undertake an advocacy role to enhance this understanding.

As a group we develop partnerships with Sunshine Coast Regional Council Libraries, and they in turn support us with regards to resourcing inquiry units, student projects and homework. We also support council libraries by encouraging students to take up membership.

Adequate, equal and fair access to school libraries and their resources for all children across the country remains of the utmost importance to us.

2. Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

On the Sunshine Coast, there is a distinct lack of positions available to qualified teacher librarians in State Schools. All of the private schools in our area employ either a teacher librarian and/or a librarian.

Whilst some of us have extremely supportive executive teams, we believe that the lack of positions available is in part due to executive teams not valuing the position of the qualified teacher librarian and replacing them with untrained (i.e. non-library trained) teachers, or not having a teacher-librarian at all. This causes us great concern.

Librarianship courses need to reflect the changes in technology and recruitment for these courses needs to become more rigorous.

Many of the teacher librarians in our group are in an older demographic group and upon retirement are not being replaced by

qualified teacher librarians. The need for young, enthusiastic and technology minded teachers undertaking a school librarianship course is of the utmost importance.

Professional development opportunities for teacher librarians are very limited.

The Sunshine Coast Teacher Librarian Network Group recognises the need to maintain training and knowledge with regards to technology, which changes on a daily basis. We are all very supportive of the few opportunities that do arise and share our knowledge at our network meetings for those unable to attend professional development.

Teacher librarians have a very complex role, often differing at each campus, and often incorporating new technologies.

Many of us undertake a leadership role within our schools with regards to training of staff for new software, hardware and digital resources.

Competition for the education dollar (curriculum initiatives, school based decision making about budget allocation) also has an effect on the perceived value of professional development for teacher librarians.

3. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians

The provision of effective budgets to develop collections which support new initiatives - e.g. Australian National Curriculum, NAPLAN and rigorous and pedagogically sound curriculum - needs to be address at a state level. This will ensure that our school libraries, their staff (fully qualified teacher librarians and teacher aides to support them), students, and the school communities have the support they deserve.

4. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

The current information landscape offers a huge volume of digital and printed resources, and more than ever we need the skills of teacher-librarians to support students and teachers to navigate, evaluate and effectively use this landscape.

Our group believes that there is a place for both digital and text collections. The digital collection should enhance what we do as teachers and lifelong learners. The World Wide Web and digital services are just a couple of tools that students should use.

Extracting, evaluating and using information are all skills that students need to undertake lifelong learning. These are the types of skills that teacher librarians teach and encourage on a daily basis. Assisting students to develop an understanding of cyber safety and the appropriate use of social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace and FaceBook are rapidly becoming a very important facet of our role as teacher librarians.