



A response to the Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools



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

Impact of investments on the activities of school libraries

Recent federal investments in school structures have resulted in increased library space and the number of computers in school libraries. The result of these changes is greater access for classes, and individual students, to the resources both print and electronic. The impact of additional computers has been an increase in individual instruction. However, there has been no further diversification of library activities.

Libraries built or refurbished using the stimulus package funding now often need:

- Appropriate staffing including both teacher librarians and library support staff.
- Extra funds for books and other resources, processing materials, shelving, furniture and other infrastructure.

Impact of policies on school library activities

Federal and state policies have impacted on the resources required by teaching staff and students. The implication for library activities is that greater priority has to be given to developing an understanding of the new programs, sourcing, acquiring, processing, promoting of resultant materials. Other library activities eg promotion of literature are affected.

- The requirement to prepare students for the **NAPLAN** have resulted in an increased demand on library resources and staff, as schools refine teaching and learning to meet the additional criteria. It is unfortunate that this policy encourages “teaching to the test” activities.
- The **National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions** has resourcing implications for the school library collection. For example, an increase in Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) courses requires increased funding to resource these courses.
- The introduction of the **National Curriculum** will have implications on print and electronic resources. For example, within the draft English National Curriculum, the preface of each year has specific recommendations for reading of fiction and non fiction that, if implemented, will require additional and different materials to satisfy the requirements of the curriculum. Another example is the proposed use of eBooks in the primary years. This will have implications for funding, storage, training of staff, and acquisition of materials.

In addition to this, many Teacher Librarians have adjusted or are working to adjust their individual library program to incorporate policies developed to improve teaching practice and student outcomes in the light of 21st century learning outcomes. For example, many Teacher Librarians have aligned their programs to match the ELAs of **Every chance to learn: Curriculum framework for ACT schools**. There is also the additional program of **Quality Teaching and learning in ACT schools**.

This is at a time when in some schools, the library is poorly staffed or under staffed. The situation in ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) schools is that thirty one primary schools, three high schools and all four early childhood schools do not have a trained Teacher Librarian. They may be managed by a classroom teacher, school assistant or in one case a library technician. The budget allocation is minimal and materials in the collection are often out of date and inaccurate. The staffing situation means that access to this is limited as well. **There is an inconsistency of provision of services which should be rectified especially in light of Principle 7 and 15 of the National Platform and Constitution.**¹

Recommendations

1. That every student should have access to a qualified Teacher Librarian.
2. That the student: teacher librarian ratio is adequate to support the student numbers of a school.
3. That additional Teacher Librarians should be employed if student numbers dictate the need
4. That the library collection (print and electronic) is accurate and readily available to all students.

¹ ALP National Platform and Constitution , 2007, Chapter 4: Investing in Our Future: An Education Revolution Accessed http://www.alp.org.au/platform/chapter_o4.php

The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

Teacher Librarians already contribute to the educational and community outcomes of their individual school to the extent that staffing and funding allow them.

The weight of research (see attached links) emphasis the benefits to student learning of a well resourced school library, staffed by trained Teacher Librarians and associated professionals working in conjunction with classroom practitioners to deliver a library program that takes into account the individual needs of students.

International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), 2008, *School libraries make a difference to student achievement* at School libraries online <http://www.iasl-online.org/advocacy/make-a-difference.html>

Hay, L. (2005b) 'Student learning through Australian school libraries. Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions', *Synergy* 3(2), pp. 17–30. Retrieved from <http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol3num2/hay.pdf>

Hay, L. (2006b) 'Student learning through Australian school libraries. Part 2: What students define and value as school library support', *Synergy* 4(2), pp. 27–38. Retrieved from http://www.slav.schools.net.au/synergy/vol4num2/hay_pt2.pdf

The ability of teacher librarians to contribute to educational and community outcomes is highlighted in the ***Standards of professional excellence for teacher-librarians***, a joint ASLA/ALIA document retrieved from (http://www.alia.org.au/policies/teacher-librarian_standards.html)

Recommendations

1. That the recommendations to be published in the *Learning in a Changing World² series* be adopted by all Education Departments, especially in regard to supporting student learning outcomes.
2. That there be an investigation of programs such as the International Baccalaureate that provide models for teaching of Literacy and Numeracy especially in the primary and middle school years.
3. That in line with the planning of National Curriculum, that a generic scope and sequence of information literacy skills be developed for use throughout Australia.

² ACER Press: to be published in late 2010

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

We wish to note that when responding to this criterion, we are referring to **Teacher Librarians** who have qualifications and experience as teachers and qualifications and experience as librarians. The term **school librarian** could be misinterpreted. The advantage that the dual qualification of the teacher librarian has for students is that the Teacher Librarian has specialist knowledge and understanding of school curriculum, teaching practices and developmental stages of children and adolescents as well as specialist knowledge and understanding of resource management and access to information.

Recruitment

The shortage of qualified Teacher Librarians has been known for a number of years³ however there is little incentive for a teacher wishing to take up the Teacher Librarian role.

- Training to become a Teacher Librarian requires a major commitment. Potential Teacher Librarians have to enroll in distance education courses, pay all costs (full fee paying courses plus HECS), take time from work to fulfill course requirements and maintain their current employment. The cost of this exercise has been calculated by a recently qualified Teacher Librarian as \$40,000.
- There is a Teacher Scholarship Fund for ACT DET employees that will provide a maximum of \$6000 but there are no scholarships being offered in the specific area of Teacher Librarianship.

Support and Development

- The Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn has a designated School Library support position and offers Professional Development and training in Library Management Software to ACT Teacher Librarians
- The ACT DET no longer has a designated School Library support position in central office and provides no targeted support for training or development of Teacher Librarians.

³ Combes, B. (2008), Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1. Australian School Library Research Project, ASLA, ALIA & ECU Retrieved from <http://www.chs.ecu.au/protals/ASLRP/publications.php>

Disincentives

- Teacher Librarians hold a dual qualification but there is no recognition of this.
- School based decisions regarding staffing mean that in DET schools the staffing of the library is competing with other funding demands. Staffing of the school may vary each year. This can result in the Teacher Librarian position being reduced or removed. The lack of security in this situation has seen many experienced and qualified Teacher Librarians lost to the profession.

The career path for Teacher Librarians is nonexistent. Contribution factors for this include a lack of understanding of the skills associated with the position. Practitioners have to leave the library to gain promotions.

Recommendations

1. That the staffing of school libraries is independent of the staffing formula. In addition, this formula provides for a fully accessible school library that is open at all times during student school attendance and that is staffed by a qualified teacher-librarian.
2. That the personnel employed in school library facilities includes qualified Teacher Librarians and trained library assistants / library technicians.
3. That there is monetary recognition of the dual qualification of Teacher Librarians and appropriate recognition of the qualifications of library technicians.
4. That there is consistency of qualifications across all territories and all states.
5. That Education Departments promote and assist existing teachers to become Teacher Librarians through financial assistance, tertiary courses and reward and incentive programs
6. That the use of Teacher Librarians in primary schools to provide relief from face to face teaching be replaced with a provision of time, for example flexible timetabling. This will allow the Teacher Librarian to implement teaching programs, support student and outcomes based learning programs and for administration duties.
7. That the Federal Government encourage tertiary institutions to provide undergraduate courses in teacher librarianship, to cater for the short fall in qualified Teacher Librarians.
8. That Education Departments value and recognize the role of Teacher

Librarians, and have in place procedures to ensure that succession planning occurs.

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

Recommendations

1. That Australian Government and state/territory Education Departments should acknowledge the role of the Teacher Librarians in educational policy and documentation such as the National Curriculum. This would clarify and support the work of Teacher Librarians for school staff and raise the profile of the Teacher Librarian in the school community.
2. That there are promotional campaigns informing the general public of the benefits to student learning of a well resourced school library, staffed by trained Teacher Librarians and associated professionals working in conjunction with classroom practitioners to deliver a library program that takes into account the individual needs of students. This would help students, parents, teachers and principals understand the work of the Teacher Librarian and know that a well funded library program can directly improve the educational outcomes of students.
3. That Education Departments provide curriculum support services for Teacher Librarians e.g. ICT and software, Professional Development and Training, as provided for other teaching professionals.

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

Australians readily adopt new technologies. There are 15.3 million Australian Facebook users. Myspace has 264 million members. {find other examples}

Part of the uptake of technologies is the resultant requirement of users to accept (and be alert for the opportunity of) change. For example, mobile phones have computing functions and the computer (and Skype) allows you to make free phone calls, video calls, and text message. There is a blending and adaption of technologies.

Under the circumstances, this criterion should be asking how Teacher Librarians, and schools in general, assist students in dealing with the increasing rate of change of technology. The attitudes and skills that people (students, teachers, parents, and grandparents) need to live comfortably in the 21st century should be

the focus of education. Teacher Librarians are the ideal group to facilitate the take up of these skills in the education environment. Research has shown that they have been at the forefront of technological change in schools.

For many, Web2.0 technologies are used for social interaction. The challenge is to harness these technologies, which are a part of students' lives, for educational purposes.

There is a general lack of current understanding of the use of digital technologies by school and department personnel. Commercial and Professional Associations are offering online opportunities to upskill practitioners. Without the understanding and capacity to use both the tools **and** information available, students will be information rich but not Information Literate⁴ adults.

Recommendations

1. That the Federal government recognizes the need to upskill Teacher Librarians in the new technologies, in an information rich environment eg Smartboards
2. That school libraries have inexpensive or subsidised access to repositories of information (eg commercial databases) to provide an alternate and more sophisticated form of information.
3. That there be a recognition of the inequality of access to all forms of resources. An example of this is a great difference of access to digital resources between country and city schools.
4. That the tools needed to perform in the 21st century include library management systems. Adequate and accessible Government funding needs to ensure that libraries have web based library management systems, a reliable digital video media system, and an infrastructure with sufficient bandwidth to support individual and class online learning (both within the school setting and remote access from home).

⁴ Bundy, Alan (Ed), 2004, Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework: principles, standards and practice, 2nd ed, Adelaide, ANZIL