

Submission Number: 243
Date Received: 16/4/10



2010

Submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools



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10/4/2010

Summary:

Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Toowoomba serves an area from Toowoomba on the eastern Darling Downs to Quilpie in the far west and south to the Queensland New South Wales border. Most of its schools are rural and remote and most of these schools are primary schools.

In 1999 The Catholic Education Office commissioned an internal Review of School Libraries. As a result of this review four teacher librarians were appointed from 2000. Each teacher librarian was responsible for working in a cluster of schools thus ensuring all schools had access to specialist advice. In 2001 the Catholic Education Office provided the ten hours of Library Assistant time to all schools.

In 2006 all schools improved their access when a Teacher Librarian allocation was included in the staffing schedule. Since 2000 all schools have benefitted from access to teacher librarians and since 2006 improvements have continued exponentially. The remaining significant challenges are to continue to develop the understanding of the role and its capacity to improve student outcomes, to fund the increasing resourcing needs of the curriculum and to engage teacher librarians in collaboration with teachers in the teaching/learning program of schools,

Recommendations:

1. *Resource school libraries for current curriculum!*
2. *Ensure every school has a school library service!*
3. *Commission research into:*
 - *The annual cost of resourcing and maintaining current curriculum for students by age level, by particular need (eg ESL, special need) and by resource type.*
 - *The appropriate staffing model for school library, e library and information services that would provide all of the benefits described in Lonsdale's review of research for all Australian students.*
4. *The publication of best practice guidelines for resourcing and staffing school sectors based on the findings of the above research.*
5. *Using 'Learning for the Future' as a minimum guide that funding authorities commit to the immediate release of targeted funding – to be an ongoing annual provision - for school libraries:*
 - *Staff*
 - *Resources*
 - *Infrastructure*
6. *Undertake research on subgroups of school library users (particularly students at risk), the nature of the contribution that school librarians make to student acquisition of information literacy skills, and the extent to which a school librarian's personal attributes and qualities contribute to student achievement.'*

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.

Introductory Statement

Australian children are required to attend school for approximately ten years from the age of five or six. Many children attend school for longer. During these years the Australian community expects that children will learn to read and comprehend what they read, that they will develop composition and writing skills, that they will undertake research on particular curriculum topics at increasingly sophisticated levels. In order to meet these expectations schools must resource these curriculum demands. Schools need to be information rich environments where children can engage with a range of information sources (hard copy, electronic and virtual) at their level for their particular purposes. For many Australian children their school and its library service may be the only information rich environment that they engage with during their lifetime.

'Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services for 'Schools' has been collaboratively developed by ASLA (Australian School Library Association and ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) and references the demands of the National Curriculum, when providing guidelines for the development of school libraries. Using 'Learning for the Future' as a guide Schools of the Toowoomba Diocese:

- *Are NOT information rich environments;*
- *Experience a poverty of the range and quality of resources necessary to support the reading development of children;*
- *Experience a poverty of resources necessary to support the research requirements of the current curriculum;*
- *Do not have targeted budgets to develop high quality collections of hard copy, electronic and virtual resources;*
- *Do not employ both Professional and non professional staff for enough time, to provide an appropriate information service;*
- *Do not generally understand that Teacher Librarians bring a key skill set to the development of children's reading, comprehension and critical thinking and therefore fail to either employ or deploy them as a part of the instructional program of the school!*

The role of the school library

The role of the school library is to serve the information needs of the school community.

1. *The provision of resources to support the school's reading program and the development of student literacy*
2. *The provision of resources (across all formats) to support the school's curriculum (particularly research) requirements*
3. *The provision of resources to support the teaching and professional development needs of teachers*
4. *The provision of resources to support particular information needs of parents in the school community*
5. *The provision of these resources at appropriate levels for each student taking account of reading and viewing level, ESL needs, and other special needs*
6. *The provision of these resources in a range of formats so that students will becoming discerning users of the full range of resource types*
7. *The development of a physical space that supports the reading, research and learning styles of all teachers and students*
8. *Equitable access to these resources for each client*
9. *Teaching and learning opportunities for teachers and students (and parents) to become proficient users of a variety of information formats*

The Role of the Teacher Librarian

The role of the teacher librarian can be summarized into three elements:

1. *Acquisitions*
The provision of information sources in any format (hard copy, electronic, digital) that will meet the needs of their clients. Such provision may be through processes that purchase, borrow (interlibrary loans) or access (on line) these information sources.
2. *Systems*
Establish and maintain systems that will enable their clients to access these resources efficiently. These systems include the design of the physical layout; the catalogue,

circulation systems, booking systems for spaces and equipment, school network systems, to name a few.

3. Information Literacies

Provide teaching and learning opportunities for their clients to develop information literacies across all formats. Having acquired the particular resources and organized them systematically, it is imperative that the teacher librarian be actively engaged in teaching teachers and students how to access and interact with these information sources effectively.

Adequacy and resourcing of school libraries

The adequacy and resourcing of any school library should be measured against the current curriculum demand, the particular needs of students, and the particular needs of teachers as well as the economic costs of the provision of the range of required resources, systems and staffing. (Since 2000 Teacher Librarians of the Toowoomba Diocese have used 'Learning for the Future' as a guide to resourcing their school libraries.

Current curriculum at State and Commonwealth level, mandates significant demands across reading and literacy development; research and information literacy development and the provision of information in a comprehensive range of formats at a range of levels.

From 2000, when Toowoomba Diocese began an annual collection of data, the cost of books alone has increased by 30%. No school library in the Toowoomba Diocese has experienced a simultaneous increase in funding. Curriculum also expects student access to information resources far beyond the technology of books. These resources – audio books, multi media materials, online subscriptions – are far more expensive than books, far less robust and have a much shorter life than a book. So the costs of purchase or leasing online, maintaining and replacing such resources are at least five times the cost over the life of a resource than a book item. Again The school libraries of the Toowoomba Diocese have experienced no adequate provision in their budgets to meet this demand. So the capacity of schools to resource current curriculum diminishes each year without an appropriate increase in budget allocation.

Schools in the Toowoomba Diocese are not provided with a targeted budget to meet these resource needs. Rather each school manages this within the school budget priorities.

All schools try to provide some allocation for book collections. The allocation per student is dependent on the size of the school and the priorities set by the Principal in developing the school budget. The majority of schools do little to provide for resources in other formats – audio books, DVDs, multi media materials, digital resources, online subscriptions - which are usually more expensive and require associated equipment to access. (Annual audit data 2000 - 2009)

School A: With an enrolment of almost 400 students this school has had 2% of the recommended resource budget for five years as the Principal does not consider it a priority.

School B: With an enrolment of about 100 students gave up the resource budget for two years because the school server died and the school had no other means to pay for the server

School C: With an enrolment of almost 200 students only has a resource budget when the P&F decide in a particular year to fund 'some books'

Of the twenty seven primary schools in this Diocese not one would have consistently provided a minimum amount for resourcing the curriculum in the last ten years.(Annual audit data 2000 – 2009)

Terms of Reference: Item 1

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

A. Staffing policy – Professional

Teacher Librarians were included in the Staffing schedule of the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Toowoomba in 2006. The time allocation was not based on research or a needs analysis and is a diminishing allocation.

This allocation has always been too small. 'Learning for the Future', 2nd ed, (2003, p 68) recommends a very similar allocation for professional and non professional staff in very small schools however as our schools increase in enrolment the diminishing allocation of the Toowoomba Diocese' staffing schedule falls behind the time recommended in 'Learning for the Future'.

That said, the provision of professional time has created some improved outcomes for schools.

- The area of acquisitions is now on the school agenda and gradual improvements are being reported in size and quality of collections across about 50% of the schools.
- The management of the asset of resources is also improving and teachers and students are able to access resources more effectively and efficiently in most schools. Simultaneously the loss of the asset of resources has been brought down to very acceptable levels in most schools.
- A few schools are engaging their teacher librarians in the teaching and learning program with reportable benefits.
- The provision of a classified position for a Teacher Librarian in all schools is necessary! The time allocation for these positions must be based on research and the demands of the position for each school.

B. Staffing policy – Para- professional and non professional

The Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Toowoomba has since 2001 provided a safety net of 10 hours of Library assistant time to all schools. This is sufficient for

schools with an enrolment of up to 100 students. Schools with higher enrolments must provide additional time from school resources.

- No school, with an enrolment of more than 100 students, has been able to provide the minimum allocation required to do the work required. All schools rely on volunteers to get the basic work done.
- Secondary schools and large primary schools need an additional library technician position for the provision of a basic service. There is no provision for this recruitment to occur.
- The school library service needs the support of a software development officer (a technician level position) to support the service in the provision of e library services. Again there is no provision for such recruitment.
- The recognition of the need for Library and Information Services to include Library Assistants, Library Technicians and Software support officers or other technical support is long overdue and should be a part of the standard staffing package from funding authorities!

C. Policies around ICT developments

Over the last ten years ICT developments in schools have benefitted by policies and budgets from a range of bodies. Our schools have seen the rollout of significant infrastructure.

I would equate this infrastructure rollout to the provision of shelving for the book collections – great infrastructure no information????

- where is the high quality information?
- students are left to use the free internet as an information source – time consuming etc not high quality, not relevant, not authoritative, no curriculum specific resources

Such developments while welcome and a necessary first step, leave our schools to then find the money and time for:

- The three year rollover and maintenance costs of this infrastructure
- The Toowoomba Diocese has provided Computers for all teachers and these are centrally funded and rollover costs are included in system budget rather than an impost on the school budget.
- The software to run on the infrastructure – most of our schools run the Office Suite (a business application and not appropriate for primary students). There is almost no investment in our schools in curriculum appropriate software or subscriptions.
- The annual costs of licenses and subscriptions to high quality digital resources – these costs are prohibitive even for our largest schools.
- The costs of professional development for school staff.

Such developments have dictated desk top or laptops as the preferred technology item. In many instances of student use other choices might be just as effective for learning, more flexible and more cost effective eg class sets of I phones, class sets of digital cameras etc.

D. BER development

The provision of new library spaces under the BER funding has been very welcome for all schools.

- It has provided a very real opportunity to create innovative learning spaces around information interaction for teacher and students.
- The implementation processes of the BER rollout at state level have highlighted a number of difficulties.
 - Lack of consultation at State, Diocesan and Local levels with Teacher Librarians about libraries.
 - Outside of the library sector there is a widespread poverty of understanding of what a library of the 21st century actually is.
 - The lack of specialist knowledge in schools where there is no teacher librarian, around design, layout, functionality, future possibilities etc.
 - The lack of knowledge of school administrations around the potential for the school library as a great centre for learning by interacting in an information rich environment.
 - The lack of effective partnerships in many schools between school leadership and the library staff
- While schools in the Toowoomba Diocese will benefit substantially from this building program, the new school libraries will provide few, if any 21st century opportunities around information interaction and production.

E. Policies around lack of targetted funds

The lack of a needs analysis for the resource needs of schools in the light of current curriculum and current costs means that the whole area lacks clarity.

- Such a needs analysis is urgently required
- Annual and increasing targetted funding to meet these complex information needs in the current cost structures needs to be put in place for ALL schools in ALL sectors.
- Student outcomes cannot be achieved in schools of the Toowoomba Diocese on the current resourcing model.
- Resourcing the curriculum IS A KEY FACTOR IN IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES!

Terms of Reference: Item 2

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

A. Existing research tells us.....

The Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement

In 'Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A review of research', Michelle Lonsdale (2003) draws the following conclusions:

‘Existing research shows that school libraries can have a positive impact, whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally, on student achievement. There is evidence to show that:

- A strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community;
- A strong computer network connecting the library’s resources to the classroom and laboratories has an impact on student achievement;
- The quality of the collection has an impact on student learning;
- Test scores are higher when there is higher usage of the school library;
- Collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers;
- A print-rich environment leads to more reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and writing style;
- The extent to which books are borrowed from school libraries shows a strong relationship with reading achievement whereas borrowing from classroom libraries does not;
- Integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students’ mastery of both content and information-seeking skills;
- A positive difference can be made to student achievement when school libraries cooperate with public libraries;
- Libraries can make a positive difference to students’ self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning;
- The impact of school libraries appears strongest at primary and junior high school and weakest at the upper levels of secondary school, although more research is needed to show why this is the case at the senior level; and that
- There is insufficient research on subgroups of school library users (particularly students at risk), the nature of the contribution that school librarians make to student acquisition of information literacy skills, and the extent to which a school librarian’s personal attributes and qualities contribute to student achievement.’

B. Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Toowoomba distribution of targetted funds for school library student collections in 2009.

The purpose of this distribution of funds was to provide schools with the means to improve their student collections to meet curriculum needs. The guideline chosen was the standards set out in ‘Learning for the Future’ (2001)

- All schools improved the quantity of resources available for reading and research (Most reached minimum standards)
- All schools improved the range of resources for particular students
- All schools improved the quality of collections

- All schools experienced significant increases in student borrowing – the highest increase was 400% over a 12 month period

Terms of Reference: Item 3

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

- A. Lack of understanding by decision makers at all levels of the role and its importance in the life of curriculum, children and schools.
 - Education authorities largely staff schools on the basis of 1 teacher X ? no. of student, with some provision for support staff.
 - Without clarity around the school as an information community and an improved understanding of the potential of school libraries and their staff this won't change decisions around recruitment and staffing

- B. Lack of clarity about the role/position
 - The culture in education and schools continues to reference positions in schools to 'teaching' rather than the positions contribution to LEARNING.
 - The lack of clarity around where the position should be located in the leadership of the school
 - Clear guidelines around the qualifications and experience required to be employed in this position
 - The ability in some jurisdictions to trade the allocated Teacher Librarian time for other positions means the role is not understood nor valued

- C. Lack of targeted budgets for appropriate staffing across all aspects of the Information (library) Service
 - Lack of needs analysis to describe the staffing appropriate to each school type and size
 - Failure to include the position in staffing schedules
 - Failure to designate appropriate non professional staff into staffing schedules

- D. PD or networking opportunities are very important for teacher librarians who are often working in isolated positions

Terms of Reference: Item 4

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

- A. Cross sector networking and partnerships is very important.
 - It has been very disappointing that in Queensland, EQ's resource The Learning Place, has not been made available at cost effective rates to all sectors

B. Local government and public library services

- Many communities already enjoy great networking and partnerships between public and school libraries.
- Schools can only benefit from these continuing to develop

C. Tertiary Education Institutions

Tertiary Education Library services can provide school libraries with great models for improved services and functionality.

The UQ Cyberschool (University of QLD), is a great example of the support and partnerships that can be developed to support school library services

Terms of reference: Item 5

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

- A. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support school library *acquisitions*
- Online access to ‘the net’ provides a plethora of information
 - Online information is unorganized and time consuming to search
 - Online information is NOT scrutinized for text level; authority, relevance, bias – students must learn to apply these for themselves – VERY difficult in a primary school
 - Digital resources are more expensive and this impacts massively on budgets
 - Digital resources are often very powerful teaching/learning tools eg. The Learning Federation, learning objects
 - Subscriptions to e-journals cost every year BUT there is no ownership of items on the shelf – impact on budget
 - Subscriptions to online encyclopedias – NO ownership for a one off cost – instead repeated subscription for years – massive impost on budgets
 - The possibilities for high quality resources are great BUT only at a cost for those schools where the cost is prohibitive they are limited to the free internet where information is generally less relevant and poorer quality
 - The logical consequence is that information for students in schools where the cost of online information is prohibitive they access generally poorer quality information than the previous generation of book users
- B. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support school library *systems*
- Automation of all services has been excellent.
 - The Diocese of Toowoomba began the systematic automation of all school libraries in 2000 and 2001. This has led to:

- All schools have a list (catalogue) of their assets
- Teachers and students can interrogate this list (catalogue) for their purposes
- Circulation of resources is now effectively managed with much smaller loss rates
- Purchasing decisions are informed and less duplication occurs
- Online access to SCIS has also been an excellent service for all schools
 - Toowoomba Diocese schools began use of SCIS in 2000 and this has led to:
 - Consistency of catalogue entry on all databases
 - School Library catalogues being a powerful and rich tool for the library and its clients
 - Significant saving of Library Assistant time at data entry tasks
- Improved communication possibilities with clients has been excellent
- Increased range of communication opportunities with clients has also been excellent
- Access to Web 2.0 technologies for e library services has also been excellent

C. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support school library ***Information Literacies***

- An impact of the tremendous increase in the information formats available has created significant extra learning for teacher librarians, teachers and students if they are to become discerning users and teachers of information in all formats.
- While this has led to an increased learning need there needs to be targeted professional development for teacher librarians to become proficient.
- Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Toowoomba has provided dedicated PD for its teacher Librarians since 2006. This PD has led to improved implementation of digital technologies in school library and information services. In many of our schools it is the teacher librarians who are providing critical leadership in technology implementation in curriculum. Demand in many schools outstrips their time allocation.
- The impact and potential continue to be limited by lack of budget, lack of infrastructure support and of course lack of teacher librarian time.

Conclusion

While Lonsdale's (2003) review of research and other research in the field clearly indicates the potential benefits on student achievement, this potential remains largely unrealized because:

1. *This is not known or understood by many decision makers at all levels of education and therefore is not considered in decision making.*
2. *Schools do not employ professional Teacher Librarians or Librarians at all, OR do not employ them for enough time to engage in the full range of their expertise.*
3. *Most schools do not employ appropriate support staff to ensure an effective library, e library and information service for their school community.*
4. *Most schools do not have an annual resources budget that provides for the complex range of resources to meet their students needs*

Recommendations:

7. *Resource school libraries for current curriculum!*
8. *Ensure every school has a school library service!*
9. *Commission research into:*
 - *The annual cost of resourcing and maintaining current curriculum for students by age level, by particular need (eg ESL, special need) and by resource type.*
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