

Librarians at Risk

Building the Education Revolution is delivering new libraries, halls, classrooms and science and language laboratories to 9500 schools throughout Australia. Will the worth of these buildings be realised? Teacher librarians concerned with their roles, the staffing and funding of school libraries share their concerns with us today.

A GREAT deal of research in recent years has shown school libraries make a positive contribution to students' learning outcomes. While most of these studies have taken place outside of Australia, there is little doubt school libraries in Australia contribute to learning. However, the quality of library services offered by many schools and community libraries has been eroded by shrinking budgets and fewer qualified staff. Libraries are a significant societal asset and need to be seen as an educational investment, not a cost. There are numerous reports of schools "cashing out" teacher librarian positions and choosing to use teachers without library qualifications or administrative staff to run libraries. Teacher librarians are concerned about the quality of school library staffing, funding and scheduling.

They are worried about the lack of awareness of administrators, policy makers and government of the importance of their role in the development and promotion of literacy. These grave concerns have forced teacher librarians to lobby for change. Pressure has forced federal Education Minister Julia Gillard to call for an inquiry. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training is now inviting submissions from concerned organisations and individuals. The committee will specifically focus on:

- The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.
- The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.
- The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.
- The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians.
- The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

Inquiry details: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/index.htm>
Submissions close April 16.



BOOKED TO LEARN: Students at Aquinas College, Southport.

From the teacher's desk:

"In reviewing libraries in Australian schools, it is to be hoped that the situation in small and remote schools is not forgotten. We used to have dedicated library aides and regional library advisers to support these schools with a set budget for resources. All gone. Library budgets in small schools today are so small or non-existent it is impossible to maintain a collection that will entice young readers, even if they had the staff to select and manage the resources."
TL, Qld state primary school

"Library programs are often reflected by good NAPLAN results for that school."
TL, Qld independent primary and secondary school

"In the Northern Territory, Tls are very rare - schools are staffed according to student enrolment. Tls are part of the general pool. It is up to the principal as to how the staffing allocation is used - with the result that most schools have no TL and an untrained office person in the library."
TL, NT state primary school

"We are a school that is getting a wonderful new library, yet there won't be anyone to staff it. The library officer has one day a week and needs that to just put books away and try to tidy up after teachers and students have trashed the library during the week. I am a qualified TL and have no allocated time. I am now a maths specialist. I relocated to the library to keep a weather eye on things and to open it at lunchtime. I'm going to retire at the end of the year. I've had enough."
Teacher, WA primary school

"Staffing levels have deteriorated over the years. When I arrived at the school 20 years ago there were 960 students, 3.4 Tls and one library tech, which increased to 15 when student numbers reached 1000. Now with 1200 students, there is one TL and 0.6 library techs. We are providing more services and people expect more of us with fewer staff. Our budget has decreased dramatically because the money is being spent on computers. 'Libraries are not important' is the view of the principal."
TL, Vic state high school

"The potential of the BER libraries will not be fulfilled without qualified library staff in sufficient numbers to make the dream a reality. A realistic staffing model should be mandatory. TL hours should not be able to be traded away by principals."
TL, Qld state primary school

"Ask how a school with 3000 students (state) does not have one qualified or unqualified teacher librarian - just library staff and an ICT person."
TL, Qld Anglican primary school

Status of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia

- 35 per cent of Australian school libraries responding to Australian School Libraries Research Project in 2007 said they had no staffing. (Many more without staff would not have even responded.)
- More than 20 per cent of schools reported having no professional staff, in the Northern Territory, however, the situation for teacher librarians is dire.
- Tasmania, WA and Victoria had the lowest number of teacher librarians employed.
- Many libraries are understaffed, underfunded, trying to run effective programs on little or no budget.
- Despite the welcome injection of federal funds to library buildings, many new BER libraries will have no qualified teacher librarian and no new books.
- The Digital Revolution has funded much needed IT, but too often to the detriment of the remainder of school library resource budgets.

Quick facts:

- In Tasmania only 50 per cent of schools have teacher librarians, Victoria and ACT 65 per cent and in the Northern Territory 5 per cent.
- In Western Australia, teacher librarians are not mandated in primary schools.
- In 2002, "apart from those very small

schools with no teacher librarian entitlement, a third of school libraries around SA were understaffed and/or staffed with unqualified personnel" (Spence, 2005).

- In Queensland, too, teacher-librarian numbers are dwindling. Seven large state high schools on the Gold Coast alone have no teacher librarian. Others have teachers or even library aides in charge who have no formal training.
- Since 1983, the number of primary school libraries staffed by qualified teacher librarians has dropped dramatically from 55 per cent to 13 per cent (Reynolds and Carroll, 2001).
- 12 per cent of the school libraries in their survey are managed by someone with no formal qualifications of any kind.
- Teacher librarian training programs have decreased in number from 15 to 3-4 in the past two decades. We have no national data on teachers undergoing the training.
- 50 per cent of school libraries surveyed are trying to do their job on an annual materials budget of under \$10,000 a year.
- 50 per cent of government schools have budgets of under \$5000.

Sources: Australian School Library Survey 2007 Project www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php
The Hub <http://hubinfo.wordpress.com>

Research from Australia

SCHOOL libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement - whether such achievement is measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally - in the following key ways:

- A strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic 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.
- Integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information seeking skills.
- Libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning.

Source: *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research by ACER Research Fellow Dr Michele Lonsdale, 2003, Australian School Library Association.* www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm

Research from the US

SCHOOL library programs staffed 60 hours a week or more had a 9 per cent improvement in test scores, compared with programs staffed less than 60 hours. Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) scores are higher in schools where:

- There is certified, university trained staff.
- Library circulation is higher.

The library catalogue is automated and online. There are more books and videos.

Source: *The Status of School Library Media Centres in the Sunshine State (Florida) and How They Contribute to Student Achievement* www.sunlink.ucf.edu/makingthegrade/summary.pdf
Conclusions: www.crbis.org/sisa/student-achievement.html

Open letter to Education Minister Julia Gillard

Dear Ms Gillard,
Thank you for launching an inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools. The Federal Government's Building an Education Revolution stimulus package showed us your vision for 21st-century school libraries. Now it's time to consolidate that vision by staffing those buildings with professional teacher librarians.

All Australian students deserve 21st-century schools staffed by 21st-century professionally qualified teacher librarians.

Australian education stands at the crossroads of technological, educational and cultural reforms. As a specialist in both information literacy and reading, the teacher librarian is uniquely placed to deal with such change.

The Lonsdale Report (2003) found that active school library programs run by trained teacher librarians made a significant difference to student learning outcomes. Students in schools without a teacher librarian were educationally disadvantaged.

Teacher librarians are digital information literacy specialists. Teacher librarians are familiar with both the curriculum and with how students learn. They work across all curriculum areas to resource the curriculum with suitable resources catering for the individual student. They collaborate with teachers, help students to develop research skills and guide students to become independent learners who can negotiate myriad complex digital sources of information. Teacher librarians help students develop "the ability to process and use information effectively... the basic survival skill for those who wish to be successful members of the 21st century" (*Learning for the Future*, 2001).

Teacher librarians connect people with each other through reading. The national curriculum renews the emphasis on literacy, literature and history.

Despite an influx of technology into schools, OECD survey results show that Australia's reading literacy ratings have slipped. Reading literacy underpins an individual's ability to succeed.

The best way to improve literacy is to immerse children in reading (Krashen, 2008). Teacher librarians maintain an in-depth knowledge of literature and are dedicated to finding the right reading for each student. Teacher librarians run specialised reading programs



within their schools to encourage reading. Not only does reading improve student literacy, it also fosters positive and enjoyable reading experiences that contribute to lifelong learning, to greater empathy for others, and the discovery of where and how we fit into our world.

Professional teacher librarians are the "people assets" of libraries.

There has not been a review of school libraries since the federal programs to build, staff and resource school libraries in the 1970s.

With the decentralisation of power in education, there has been an erosion of the people assets in Australian school libraries, a severe decline in the number of qualified teacher librarians staffing libraries, in the number of teacher librarian training programs, in school library funding, and in centralised school library services and policy advisers. Many school libraries throughout Australia lack the cross-curricular, multi-disciplinary expertise of teacher librarians vital to help students on the information journey.

It's time for Building an Educational Revolution WITHIN school libraries.

Much has changed since the 1970s. Libraries and teacher librarians also need to change and to become "change makers", adapting best practice to a digital environment. It's time for national standards and policies about school libraries and library funding, for a recognition of the need for pre-service and in-service training of teacher librarians for Australian schools, with reform informed by detailed data collection and research.

We commend the Federal Government on its initiative to launch this inquiry and look forward to a revolution within Australian school libraries.

Marj Kirkland, national president, Children's Book Council of Australia, on behalf of Australian teacher librarians, March 29, 2010



Marj Kirkland

What teacher librarians would like to see achieved

RECOMMENDATIONS from The Hub, the teacher-librarian advocacy site, include:

- Collect national data on school library staffing, funding, and scheduling.
- Tie funding so that states can and must adequately staff and fund school library programs and services.
- Require that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognise the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy

- attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success.
- Develop national school library standards.
- Increase teacher librarian training positions in university programs.
- Develop and publish a national information literacy curriculum.
- Provide research funding to study the effect of library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning.

- Provide grants for improving literacy through school libraries.
- Facilitate national licensing of online databases to enhance access for school libraries.
- Declare a national school library day.
- Declare a National Information Literacy Awareness Month.

SOURCE: The Hub: <http://hubinfo.wordpress.com>

THE School Library Association of Queensland and the International Association of School Librarianship conference will be at Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre from September 27

to October 1. Keynote speakers include Dr Nancy Everhart, president of the American Association of School Librarians, and Professor Erica McWilliam, of the Australian Research Council Centre

of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology. Early bird registration www.slaq.org.au/events/2010/registration.htm